

# RETROSPECTIVES ON PARENTAL PRESSURE AND SUPPORT

Retrospectives on the Experience of Parental Pressure and Support by Male Participants  
that Withdrew from Competitive Youth Hockey: A Phenomenological Investigation

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of parental pressure and support for males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey. A phenomenological approach was used to explore this phenomenon and develop meaning from the participants' experiences. Data for this study was collected by conducting one in-depth interview with each of the seven participants. Fourteen themes emerged as a result of the data analysis. These themes were grouped into three clusters: (1) Description of parental involvement: "I want them to be there and help me"; (2) Perceived impacts of parental involvement: "I felt like he actually cared"; and (3) Impact of parental involvement on commitment: "I kind of miss hockey now". The descriptions provided by the participants in this study, and the themes that emerged, offer insight into what it is like for young males to experience parental involvement in competitive youth hockey.

*Keywords:* support, pressure, competitive youth hockey, commitment, phenomenology

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Due to the prevalence of youth sport participation in today's society, concerns have arisen regarding the benefits and drawbacks of youth engagement in competitive sport (Turman, 2007). Margenau (1990) claims that early exposure to sport helps make children physically and emotionally healthier, and often results in children that grow up to become relatively healthy adults. Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker and Hegreness (2009) state that youth sport participation is associated with many aspects of development including "identity development, personal exploration, initiative, improved cognitive and physical skills, cultivating social connections, teamwork and social skills, extending peer networks, and improved connections to adults" (p.4). Parents may support their child's participation in sport, leading to greater enjoyment, self-esteem, and commitment to sport (Averill & Power, 1995; Scanlan, Russell, Beals, & Scanlan, 2003). Despite the obvious benefits of youth engagement in sport, concerns have arisen regarding the potential drawbacks, particularly those relating to the impact of parental involvement in youth sport.

Thomas (1977) suggests that the "popularity of competitive sports for children does not mean that the programs are free of controversy, as a frequent criticism of youth sports programs is that they are organized by an adult – for adults" (p.43). While competitive youth sports are becoming more popular (Coakley, 2006), participation may be detrimental to the individuals involved. Parental involvement in youth sport seems to be one of the areas of greatest concern. There have been a number of stories in the media regarding aggressive parents in youth sports. The sport of ice hockey has faced the greatest criticism, with the term 'hockey parent' being linked to aggression and violence in youth sport (Laucius, 2005; Gold, 2008). While a great deal of research has been conducted on this topic, parental involvement in youth hockey and its impacts are not fully understood.

### **Personal Experiences**

At the age of seven I started to play ice hockey. While growing up I participated in many sports, but my passion was hockey. I played hockey at both a competitive and a non-competitive level. I spent a great deal of time training for and playing the sport. Unfortunately, the joy that I received from competitive hockey declined due to the

pressure I experienced from my father. This pressure eventually led to my withdrawal from the sport.

My mother and father did not play competitive sports when they were younger; however they did enroll all of my brothers into hockey. I first began playing hockey recreationally with friends and family as a child. I then began to play non-competitive house league hockey at the age of eight and competitive hockey at the age of 12. Although I enjoyed playing competitive hockey, I felt that the pressures I faced from my parents, particularly my father, were too great. I still enjoyed playing hockey, but I was unable to handle the pressure associated with playing at a competitive level.

The pressure that I experienced while playing competitive hockey came mostly from my father. Although I believe that my father simply wanted me to perform to the best of my ability, he often placed excessive pressure on me. It seemed as though the hard work that I was putting into the sport was not for me, but instead for others. As a result I gained less enjoyment from my participation in competitive hockey. The pressures that I experienced from my father included being yelled at during a game and lectured following a game. I felt that I was constantly criticized for everything that I did while playing competitive hockey. I believe that my father felt he was helping me to become a better hockey player; however, the pressure did more harm than good.

The excessive parental pressure continued for the three years that I played competitive hockey and had a negative impact on my life. At times my relationship with my father was not as positive as it might have been and the pressure eventually led to my withdrawal from competitive hockey. While experiencing parental pressure, I felt angry and resentful towards my father and gained little enjoyment from my participation in hockey. As some authors suggest, playing hockey became more of a job than a fun recreational activity (Smoll & Smith, 1996).

Despite the pressure that I experienced, my parents supported my participation in competitive hockey by purchasing the necessary equipment, paying all associated costs, and attending practices, games, and tournaments. My parents attended most games and practices in order to show support and cheer me on. While this support was encouraging and allowed me to participate in competitive youth hockey, the benefits were outweighed by the negative impacts of pressure.

My parents invested a great deal of time, emotion, and money into my participation in competitive hockey. I believe that this large investment led to the excessive pressure I experienced, as my father wanted to ensure he was making a worthwhile investment. He did not necessarily expect me to become a professional hockey player, but he wanted me to be a good player on a winning team. My belief that a large parental investment in sport leads to pressure is supported by the work of Coakley (2006), as he claims that parental investment in sport may serve as an underlying cause for the pressures that exist for youth sport participants. However, more research needs to be completed in this area to determine the relationship between parental investment and parental pressure in youth sport.

Parental involvement had an impact on my participation in competitive hockey. After playing competitive hockey for three years, I quit playing competitively and began to play for fun in a house league organization. I believe that this occurred as a result of the pressure that I faced from my father while playing competitively. I was 18 years old when I began to realize that I regretted my decision to withdraw from competitive hockey at the age of 15. I still contemplate about the decisions I made regarding my participation in hockey and whether or not it was appropriate to withdraw from the competitive aspect of the sport.

The topic explored within this study is parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts that it has on the individuals involved. Through this study, I was able to examine and understand the experiences of other individuals that experienced parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. This study focuses on males between the ages of 18-25 that participated in competitive youth hockey for 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, and dropped out of the sport between the ages of 14-17. Within the context of this paper, competitive youth hockey is defined as ice hockey played by youth aged 7-18 on a representative team that travels to play other representative teams. Youth must tryout for a team and be selected by coaching staff in order to participate.

With a growing number of youth participating in competitive sport each year, it is clear that competitive sports for children are likely here to stay (Humphrey & Yow, 2002, p.4). Research shows that parents have a strong influence on their child's sport

experiences (Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). As a result, parents can be a source of support and enjoyment, but also can contribute to the stress and burnout of a young athlete (Stein et al.). Parental involvement that is too low or too high may create a less optimal environment, which is likely to increase stress and reduce enjoyment associated with sport participation (Stein et al.). Parental involvement in sport may have both positive and negative impacts on the individuals involved. The issues surrounding parental involvement and the resulting impacts were explored using a phenomenological approach within this study.

A great deal of research has been completed on parental involvement and the impacts that it has on youth in sport, with many studies outlining the negative impacts of parental pressure. Hoyle and Leff (1997) and Turman (2007) define parental pressure as behaviour perceived by children as indicating expectations of unattainable levels of accomplishment and commitment. In his book titled *Sports without Pressure*, Margenau (1990) states that parental pressures have done much to destroy the basic joyful pleasure of sports participation for children. He also states that these negative impacts can take a heavy emotional toll on both parents and youth (Margenau).

Studies conducted by Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2008) and Humpries (1991) show that parental pressure may lead to drop-out in competitive sport, and that youth may sometimes prefer to 'play' rather than 'win'. Playing rather than winning is a major factor for youth when they engage in sport, as they often participate to have fun, interact with teammates, and develop new skills (Margenau, 1990). However, pressure from parents may indicate to a child that "performance is more important than participation, winning is more important than how you play the game, and there is nothing wrong with winning at all costs" (Margenau, p.3). As a result, the pressure that parents put on children in competitive sports portrays the message that games are work and not fun. For example, Smoll and Smith (1996) found that the two main pre-competition worries from youth participants were 1) what my parents will think and 2) letting my parents down. This demonstrates the impact that parental pressure may have on youth participation in sport. Most of the literature related to the topic of pressure in youth sport focuses on parents, and sometimes examines the gender roles that exist

between parents. The issue of gender differences in terms of pressure is discussed within the literature review.

While much of the research on parental involvement in sport focuses on its negative impacts, there is evidence to support the claim that parental involvement also has positive outcomes for youth in sport. Averill and Power (1995) suggest that “parental support plays an important motivational role in affirming the child’s efforts, in building feelings of acceptance and self-worth, and in giving the child confidence to persist in the face of failure” (p.265). Hoyle and Leff (1997) and Turman (2007) define parental support as behaviours by parents perceived by their children as facilitating athletic participation and performance. Positive parental support may lead to greater enjoyment, self-esteem, and commitment for youth in sports (Averill & Power, 1995; Scanlan et al., 2003).

The level and type of parental involvement that is appropriate will vary with each youth sport participant (Stein et al., 1999). It is possible that some youth may thrive off of parental pressure and continue to engage in competitive sports as a result. It should also be noted that not all parents pressure their children. Averill and Power (1995) found that some parents view their child's involvement in sport as pure fun and believe that the child should only play at a level that he/she is most comfortable with. On the other hand, some parents feel that their child should strive to be one of the best players on the team, and believe that their child does not always play to his/her full potential (Averill & Power). It is important to note that the parental involvement experienced by an individual should not be framed exclusively as either pressure or support. Parental actions can be interpreted in multiple ways, with varying levels of both pressure and support occurring in most situations.

Parental involvement in sport is likely to impact young sport participants in a variety of ways. This study adds to the body of knowledge that exists on parental involvement in youth sport and the impacts it has on the individual’s adult life pertaining to sport. Based on previous studies, it appears that parental involvement may have a significant impact on an individual’s commitment to sport (Weiss & Weiss, 2007; Scanlan et al., 2003). The Sport Commitment Model (SCM) developed by Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler (1993) can be used to describe the factors that

impact an individual's commitment to sport. The SCM is used within this study to explore the phenomenon of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and to understand the impact that it had on the participants' commitment to hockey.

The majority of the studies relating to the topic of parental involvement and youth participation in sport have been based on objective quantitative research. Some studies also use mixed methods, utilizing both interviews and surveys to collect data. Although past studies have mainly focused on quantitative data or mixed methods, this study consists of purely qualitative data and offers subjective meaning. Within this study, the term subjective refers to having multiple meanings with no right or wrong answer.

As a researcher, this topic is familiar to me as I have experienced it firsthand; therefore I was interested in learning more about it and bringing subjectivity to the study. This is known as heuristic inquiry, which uses self exploration and then shifts to explore the nature of other's experiences (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). For example, Coakley (2006) experienced pressures in sport and conducted a study pertaining to this issue in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. As stated by Moustakas (1994), "in a phenomenological investigation, the researcher has a personal interest in what he/she is seeking to know" (p.59). As I have personally experienced parental involvement in competitive youth hockey, I was interested in examining the experiences of other individuals in order to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Importance of the Study**

This study adds to the current body of knowledge that exists within scholarly literature relating to parental involvement in competitive youth sport. This research benefits individuals by giving them insight into the meaning of their perceptions of their lived experiences in regards to the parental involvement that they faced in competitive youth hockey. Participants may obtain a sense of satisfaction in knowing that by sharing their experiences they may reduce negative parental involvement in sport for children in the future. This study may also raise awareness about the impacts of negative parental involvement on youth within the domain of competitive sport. The findings show that children are both positively and negatively impacted by different types and levels of parental involvement. Therefore, if parents are aware of this, it may help to reduce

negative parental involvement from occurring and encourage positive parental involvement.

The lived experiences relating to parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the meaning of these experiences for males aged 18-25 that withdrew from the sport are not yet understood. This may be considered as a strong rationale for a qualitative study. There is a lack of literature regarding the perceptions and meaning of the lived experiences associated with the parental involvement faced by youth in competitive hockey and the resulting impacts. Many of the studies related to parental involvement in youth sport are based on quantitative methods (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002; Hellstedt, 1990; Kanters, Bocarro, & Johns, 2008; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Stein et al., 1999). The qualitative studies that have been completed to date have not involved males in the age range of 18-25 reflecting on past experiences in youth hockey. The majority of the studies related to parental involvement in youth sport have used parents and/or children as participants (Dunn et al., 2003; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Hellstedt; Holt, 2008; Kanters et al.; Lavoie & Stellino; Sagar & Lavalley, 2010; Stein et al., 1999). Using qualitative methods, this study provides a detailed description and understanding of the parental involvement faced by male participants that withdrew from competitive hockey in their youth.

This study is informative for parents who currently have children participating in sport, particularly competitive hockey. It seeks to motivate and encourage parents to engage in appropriate levels and types of parental involvement. The study provides an understanding of the impacts of both positive and negative parental involvement. A quantitative study from Kanters et al. (2008) found that children and parents perceive parental involvement in sport differently. It was found that children often view their parents' behaviour as pressure, while parents believe that their involvement in their child's sport is appropriate (Kanters et al.). By describing the experience of parental involvement and outlining the associated impacts, this study may encourage parents to examine their own involvement in their child's sport. Parental education programs may be necessary due to the lack of good role models for parents in competitive sport. If parents are aware of this issue, it may encourage them to start a conversation with their child to determine if they are engaging in appropriate involvement. This study helps to

expose parents to the pressures that exist within competitive youth hockey as the findings outline real life experiences of participants who have experienced this phenomenon.

### **Purpose of the Research and Research Questions**

Using a phenomenological approach, this study explores the lived experiences of males aged 18-25 who played competitive youth hockey for at least 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, and withdrew from competitive youth hockey between the ages of 14-17. Phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences; it aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (Creswell, 1998). The age range of 18-25 years was chosen because individuals within this age range may be able to recall aspects of their childhood perceptions more clearly than older individuals. These individuals should be able to reflect upon recent experiences that occurred while participating in competitive hockey during their youth.

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences related to parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts it has on the individuals involved. It is important to examine the different impacts to show the possibility that both positive and negative outcomes may be experienced as a result of parental involvement in competitive sport.

The research questions that are examined within this study are:

- 1) How do males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey perceive and describe the experience of parental involvement in the sport?
- 2) What are the significant impacts of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey for the individuals involved?
- 3) What impact does parental involvement have on the individual's commitment to the sport of hockey?

### **Scope of the Study**

The phenomenon under study is parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts it has on the individuals involved. Through interviews with individuals that participated in competitive hockey in their youth, this study attempts to understand the meaning of others' experiences in relation to this phenomenon. To maintain the focus of this study, it relates to experiences that pertain specifically to

parents, rather than coaches, siblings, friends, and teachers. Parents are seen as main contributors for leisure opportunity and sport involvement for children; therefore parental behaviour toward a child's involvement in sport is critical (Margenau, 1990; Smoll & Smith, 1996; Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003).

By exploring the lived experiences of individuals in regards to the parental involvement they faced, my goal is to understand the meaning of the phenomenon under study. Lived experiences can be described as a certain event or moment in an individual's life that they experienced first hand and are able to relive by describing it. It is important to uncover the lived experiences of individuals who have faced parental involvement in order to understand how the involvement impacted their participation in competitive hockey, and to understand the reasons for the choices they made (i.e. what did they do and what was their reasoning). It has been suggested that questionnaire data can be intuitive and superficial (Lindner, Johns, & Butcher, 1991). The use of a phenomenological approach avoids this problem as the interview allows for thick descriptions and probing questions to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

During the interviews, participants were asked about their perceptions and they provided a thick description of their experience. Perceptions can be defined as descriptions that an individual gives regarding a phenomenon which allows the individual to reflect on their personal experience (Moustakas, 1994). In his book on Phenomenological Research Methods, Moustakas states that "new perceptions always hold the possibility of contributing knowledge regarding the object" (p.53). Perceptions are also seen as the most original act of consciousness (Moustakas). Therefore, the perceptions of the individuals allow them to describe in detail their lived experience. Participants were also asked to comment on how they dealt with parental involvement and if they continued to play hockey at a non-competitive level.

The methodological approach used in this study constructs an understanding of the parental involvement that males aged 18-25 experienced while participating in competitive youth hockey, and the resulting impacts. Details on this study, including sample criteria, participant recruitment, and the interview process are discussed within Chapter 3: Methodology. This study aims to uncover the reasons for the decisions the

participants made regarding participation in competitive hockey, descriptions of parental pressure and support, and how they dealt with parental involvement. The researcher used a phenomenological approach to describe the perceptions of the individuals' experiences and develop an understanding and meaning from the raw data collected.

The issue of parental involvement in competitive sport, particularly competitive hockey, is an important concern associated with youth participation in sport. Despite the large amount of research that has been conducted on this topic, individual perceptions of parental involvement in sport and its impacts are not clearly understood. This study adds to the existing literature on this topic and provides new insight into the experiences and impacts associated with this phenomenon. The information obtained from this study may benefit parents who are interested in enrolling their child into competitive hockey by helping them to better understand the phenomenon. It is hoped that this will reduce the negative experiences and impacts associated with parental involvement for youth in competitive hockey.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to review current literature relating to parental involvement in competitive youth sport and the resulting impacts. The chapter reviews literature on youth engagement in competitive sport, parental involvement in youth sport, parental pressure and support, the Sport Commitment Model, and the impacts that parental involvement has on individuals in terms of their sport participation. Finally, this chapter also reviews retrospective studies that have dealt with the issue of recall.

Many youth participate in sport during their childhood, with 90% of children taking part in some form of organized sport between the ages of 5 and 17 (Turman, 2007). Margenau (1990) states that “sports are one of life’s important growth experiences and the parent and the child will both grow together in the experience” (p .2). Due to the prevalence of sport in the lives of youth, it is important to ensure that sporting experiences are as positive as possible for the children involved.

Despite the growing popularity of competitive youth sport, it is not necessarily healthy or beneficial for the children involved (Coakley, 2006). Thomas (1977) suggests that the “popularity of competitive sports for children does not mean that the programs are free of controversy, as a frequent criticism of youth sports programs is that they are organized by an adult – for adults” (p.43). Thomas claims that some parents believe that winning is everything, which sometimes leads to parents engaging in violent and ugly behaviour. An example of this type of behaviour is when a parent yells during or after a child’s game. As a result of these parental behaviours, negative impacts may occur for the individuals involved, such as withdrawal from sport, interparental conflict, and resentment towards parents (Smoll & Smith, 1996; Lareau & Weininger, 2008).

However, some studies have found that parental involvement may also have positive outcomes for children in competitive sports. For example, Averill and Power (1995) suggest that parental support provides motivation for a child’s efforts and builds feelings of acceptance and self-worth, giving a child the confidence to continue despite failure. The outcomes of this type of parental support include access, enjoyment, self-esteem, and continued commitment to sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Averill & Power).

While parental involvement may sometimes have positive outcomes, Hellstedt (1990) suggests that the influence that parents have on their children and the competitive environment that they create, may not be positive or promote healthy development in sport for children. Hellstedt claims that there is a need for parental education programs to help parents better understand their role as the parent of a young sport participant. Parental education programs may assist parents in understanding their role and show them how to identify when they have exerted excessive pressure on their child (Hellstedt). The line between pressure and support may be difficult for many parents to identify; however, this literature review makes a clear distinction between pressure and support in the following sections.

Throughout this literature review, the studies involve a variety of samples used to collect data on the topic of parental involvement in sport and the impacts that it may have on youth. Some studies used samples of young children who were in grades 3-6 (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009), while others used participants who were in high school in grades 9-12 (Butcher et al., 2002; Hellstedt, 1990; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Stein et al., 1999). In addition, other studies used samples of both the parent and the child (Kanters et al., 2008) or undergraduate students in a university (Norton, Burns, Hope, & Bauer, 2000). The wide range of different samples used by the scholars within this literature review provides greater depth and understanding for the topic under study.

### **Engagement in Sport**

Within Canada, approximately 51% of children aged 5 to 14 regularly participate in sports (Clark, 2009). According to Coakley (2006), youth sports are popular within society because they have predictable schedules, provide parents with measurable indicators of their children's accomplishments, and enable children to gain status among peers and in the larger community. Organized sport is often viewed as a learning environment for acquiring values and work habits as much as sport skills (Humpries, 1991). While different motivations for engagement in sport exist, it is clear that sport plays a large role in the lives of many youth. Sports offer many benefits to youth, parents, and society, but there are also many drawbacks that may occur.

**Stages of Youth Development.** According to Turman (2007) and Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008), participant motivations for engagement in youth sport and the need

for parental involvement vary based on the stages of youth development. Reasons for participation have been found to differ based on three developmental stages. In the sampling stage (6–12 years of age), an athlete's primary motivation to engage in sport is to have fun. In general, these young athletes do not have a desire to win or to be competitive. At this stage, friendship is an important factor for wanting to continue participation (Fraser-Thomas et al; Turman). During this stage of development, parents are often needed in a leadership role, enrolling their child in sport and providing them with necessary guidance. Specializing (13–15 years) is associated with youth who have shifted from wanting to have fun to wanting the thrill and challenge of competition and winning (Baker, 2003; Turman; Fraser-Thomas et al.). At this stage, parents generally become less involved, providing more financial and emotional support (Fraser-Thomas et al.). Finally the third stage, investment (16+ years), refers to a significant increase in the number of hours spent each week practicing or competing. These athletes are more likely to participate in sport solely for the competitive environment (Fraser-Thomas et al; Turman). At this stage, parents typically engage in a following and supporting role (Fraser-Thomas et al.). Research shows that parents often need to alter their type and level of involvement as their child progresses through these stages of development. Fraser-Thomas et al. found that parents of dropout youth often continued to offer coaching tips and place pressure on their children, even in the later stages of their development. As youth progress, their needs and desires for parental involvement will change. Parents need to adapt their involvement accordingly in order to ensure that they are not engaging inappropriately in their child's sport.

The potential benefits of engagement in sport for youth are numerous. Stein et al. (1999) believe that sport plays a significant role in children's lives and that sport participation is enjoyable for many children. Dunn et al. (2003) claim that self-esteem, teamwork, a sense of pride and accomplishment, and a greater level of confidence through active participation were commonly achieved in activities such as sports or specialized lessons. Similarly, Margenau (1990) and Baker (2003) state that early exposure to sports helps make children physically and emotionally healthier, leading to children that will often grow up to become relatively healthy adults.

Parents often encourage their children to participate in sport in order for the children to experience enjoyment, establish new relationships, stay in physically good health, and develop lifelong skills, such as team work and cooperation. Arthur-Banning et al. (2009) indicate that youth sport participation is associated with many aspects of development, which include identity development, personal exploration, improved cognitive and physical skills, teamwork and social skills, and enhanced connections to adults. Some authors argue that sports are fun and should be kept fun as they lead to personal fulfillment for an individual (Thomas, 1977; Martin, 1997). Thomas states that parents must “be sure they are turning athletes on to sport rather than turning them away” and that “when athletes feel positive about themselves they will be motivated toward a lifetime involvement in sport” (p.86).

Through research completed with college students using a mixed methods framework, Martin (1997) provides examples that demonstrate how engagement in sport can benefit an individual. In Martin’s study, a female research participant states that she maintains her participation in sport because it helps her to keep in shape and teaches her that hard work and long hours pay off. In addition, a male research participant reveals that he feels competition makes him a better person (Martin). Other responses from research participants indicate that sports provide a stress release from worries and give them the opportunity to engage in a form of exercise and experience enjoyment (Martin). This demonstrates the benefits of continued participation in sport for adults. Therefore, if youth remain committed to sport, they may receive lifelong benefits from participation in sport.

According to Margenau (1990), “sports create a reason for people to come together, for sharing a communality of experience, for developing self-esteem, and for enriching the inner life through fantasy” (p.13). Research shows that sport programs may have an impact on increasing positive sportsmanship and decreasing negative sportsmanship if planned appropriately (Arthur -Banning et al., 2009). These authors also claim that youth sport is one of the most important activities in a child's life. It is stated that “youth sport programs can be used to foster positive development and to build character” (Arthur-Banning et al., p.4). Therefore, sport participation can be an important and healthy aspect of youth development.

There is a great deal of literature that examines the benefits and drawbacks of youth engagement in competitive sport versus recreational sport. Many authors claim that youth in competitive sport face greater pressure than youth in recreational sport (Margenau, 1990; Kanters et al., 2008; Baker, 2003). This may result from many different factors, including the greater investment required from parents of youth in competitive sport (Coakley, 2006; Kanters et al.).

**Competitive sport.** Butcher et al. (2002) define competitive sports as “structured programs sponsored by school, community or private clubs, and provincial or national sport organizations” (p.148). Competitive sport often emphasizes the importance of “winning at all costs” (Margenau, 1990, p. 14-15). This attitude towards winning may lead to increased pressure for the athletes involved. The physical strains and pressure to perform well in competitive sport may also be difficult for youth to handle (Margenau).

In some instances, a child may specialize in playing a single competitive sport, investing a great deal of time and energy. Specialization may occur due to the child’s passion for the sport, or the parent’s desire for the child to excel in one sport (Baker, 2003). Parents often expect that if a child specializes in one sport, the child will develop advanced skills and potentially become an expert or a professional (Baker). Some youth may even strive to become a professional athlete and thus engage in competitive sport to achieve an ultimate goal in life – for example, to become a player in the National Hockey League (NHL). Specialization in sport and parental involvement are key components for an individual who wants a life in sport, as parents provide support for a young athlete through financial assistance and encouragement (Holt & Dunn, 2004).

The strains of competitive sport are particularly high when a youth pursues a professional career in sport. According to Margenau (1990), “a professional career is only for the strong-willed, the exceptionally talented, and those willing and able to spend the time and money to get the desired results” (p.111). While the number of youth pursuing a professional career in sport is limited, the psychological and physical pressures on these youth are heavy and it is essential that both the youth and the parents are completely dedicated to sport (Margenau).

Overall, literature tends to support youth engagement in sport due to the many benefits it provides (Martin, 1997; Stein et al., 1999; Baker, 2003; Dunn et al., 2003; &

Arthur-Banning et al., 2009). However, negative parental involvement, particularly in competitive sport, has been shown to be a growing concern (Margenau, 1990; Laucius, 2005; Gold, 2008; Kanters et al., 2008; & Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Negative parental involvement may diminish the positive benefits associated with sport participation.

Therefore, the role of parents and the impacts of parental involvement in youth sport is an important area for research.

### **Parental Involvement in Youth Sport**

According to Smoll and Smith (1996), “parents are the most important socializing agents in shaping children’s psychological development through sport during early childhood” (p.113). Lavoì and Stellino (2008) and Stein et al. (1999) also claim that parents are the first and most significant sport socialization agents for children. Research shows that parental involvement will impact an individuals overall engagement in sport (Dunn et al., 2003; Coakley, 2006; Kanters et al., 2008; Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Parents will likely have a strong influence on whether a child will participate in sport and which sport the child will participate in. In his book, *Sports without Pressure*, Margenau (1990) states that parents should offer options for sporting opportunities to a child, but not choose for the child as he/she will likely have preferences of his/her own. Preferences may include wanting to participate in a different sport or wanting to compete at a different level. By offering a child options for sport participation, parents give the child some control, which may increase the level of enjoyment that the child gains from sport (Margenau).

Humphrey and Yow (2002) suggest that the role of parents in sport is to help children find their way through an experience at their own rate. Parents must also help youth to understand the meaning of the experience and assume “the role of a guide who supervises and directs desirable sport learning experiences” (Humphrey & Yow, p. 120). These authors also state that parents should consider how sport may contribute to the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the child (Humphrey & Yow). Research also shows that both parents serve a valuable role in the socialization process. Turman (2007) claims that the father is most likely to serve as the role model for boys and influence their sport participation, while the mother is likely to do the same for girls.

Research shows that when children excel in sports their success is often credited to parents, especially fathers, by members of the community (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Coakley, 2006). Fathers are often expected to actively promote their children's success, which means that the role of a father is to support and guide his child in sport. However, "some fathers take this expectation seriously and serve as teachers, coaches, managers, agents, mentors, and advocates for their child athletes" (Coakley, p. 154). Coakley claims that "if a child fails in some visible, measurable way, parents are believed to be responsible for the failure. If a child succeeds, parents are deemed to be meeting expectations" (p.160). Therefore, a child's performance in sport is often seen to be a reflection of the parent. Given this, it is not surprising that many youth experience pressures from their parents, especially fathers, to be successful in sport.

In order for youth to participate in sport, parents need to provide some level of support. Coakley (2006) states that parental commitment is an important factor in youth sport participation because it relies on parental investments of money, time, and energy. Coakley interviewed the parents of elite youth ice hockey players and found that on average parents spent between \$5,000 and \$20,000 per year to support their child's participation in hockey. In addition, activities such as paying registration fees and purchasing equipment, providing transportation, and attending games and practices are often interpreted by children as positive support for sport participation (Kanters et al., 2008). Therefore, parents have an important role as the providers of this financial and physical support for youth athletes (Hoyle and Leff, 1997; Stein et al., 1999).

Parents also have an important role in providing emotional and psychological support to youth sport participants. Hoyle and Leff (1997) claim that parents tend to assume the role of a motivator, facilitator, or even coach in the life of the young athlete. Parents provide emotional support and encouragement through pre/post game talks, motivating a child, and creating a balance between competition and fun (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). This type of emotional support from parents may lead to greater self-esteem and commitment to sport for youth athletes (Stein et al., 1999; Scanlan et al., 2003).

According to Coakley (2006), Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005), and Kanters et al. (2008), parents will enroll their child in sport, and make the required investments, because that is what they are expected to do as parents. However, sport participation can

be very costly and time consuming for parents, especially the sport of hockey. Therefore, parents may use reasoning and logic to convince themselves that it is a worthwhile investment. In some cases, parents may hope that their investment will lead to the child excelling in sport and becoming a professional athlete (Margenau, 1990; Dunn et al., 2003). Therefore, pressures may occur due to parents seeking compensation for the investment they have made into their child's sport (Coakley). For example, parents may expect high levels of performance from their child due to the high financial investment. More research needs to be completed in this area to determine if there is a significant relationship between parental investment and pressure for youth in sports.

Parental involvement in youth sport can have both positive and negative impacts (Hoyle & Leff, 1997). In research completed with college students, Martin (1997) found that parents can influence their child's participation or nonparticipation in sport during the child's lifetime. It was found that if parents were involved in sport when they were younger, or if they enrolled their child in sport, the child would continue to engage in sports throughout postsecondary school. Martin also found that if parents do not have an interest in sport, then their child is not likely to have an interest in sport. It was found that these children are likely to prefer school work over sports (Martin). This research shows that parental involvement may have a significant impact on a child in terms of his/her interest in participating in sport.

Researchers have demonstrated that parents also have a strong influence on children's sport experiences (Stein et al., 1999; Norton et al., 2000; Coakley, 2006; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Parents can be a source of support and enjoyment, but may also contribute to the stress and burnout of an athlete (Stein et al.). As a result of quantitative research conducted with children between the ages of 13-14, Stein et al. argue that the effects of parental involvement levels that are too high or too low are very similar. Both low and high parental involvement typically creates a less than optimal environment, which is likely to increase stress and reduce enjoyment levels associated with sport participation (Stein et al.).

In their quantitative study completed with males between the ages of 10-16, Lavoie and Stellino (2008) found that fathers are perceived by children as being more involved in the child's sports than mothers. They also claim that maternal involvement does not

significantly impact enjoyment or perceived competence within the sport, whereas paternal involvement does (Lavoie & Stellino). Through their study on the competitive environment of youth male hockey players, Lavoie and Stellino found that “fathers are more influential and more involved in the hockey participation of their sons than are mothers” (p. 489). According to the authors, these findings are consistent with other literature showing that fathers are often referred to as an athletes’ most significant other in sport (Lavoie & Stellino).

Although it was found that the majority of people in attendance at organized leisure activities and sporting events are fathers, Lareau and Weininger (2008) state that women’s lives are much more heavily intertwined with children’s organized sports than fathers’ lives. In their qualitative research completed with parents, Dunn et al. (2003) found that many mothers had routines that consisted of spending late-afternoon and early-evening on most weekdays completing activities to aid children in their sport participation, such as driving children to their after-school activities or cleaning uniforms. Lareau and Weininger also claim that mothers often “signed their children up for activities, figured out how to transport children to their practices, reminded them to rehearse their instruments, pressed their clothes or uniforms, and found out where the traveling team would be playing the next Sunday” (p. 427). Fathers often become heavily engaged in their child’s sport through verbal comments and coaching (Holt et al., 2008), while mothers handle the behind the scenes work (Dunn et al; Coakley, 2006). Due to these different parental roles, pressures that arise for youth in sport often come from the father rather than the mother.

Due to the father’s typical role as advisor or coach, he may engage in pressure-like behaviours such as negative and derogative comments during and after a game (Holt et al., 2008). In addition, Sagar and Lavalley (2010) found through qualitative research involving families that fathers sometimes engage in “parental punitive behaviour” (p.181), such as parental criticism, punishment, and threats. Sagar and Lavalley state that maternal involvement is often neutral; however mothers may also engage in some forms of pressure. Sagar and Lavalley found that some youth receive criticism from both parents for their performance in sport. One example is provided by a youth who states, “they shouldn’t criticize me so much... because it creates more problems between us”

(Sagar & Lavalley, p. 182). This youth is describing experiences where both parents criticize her performance in sports. This response shows that both mothers and fathers may pressure children in sport, resulting in negative outcomes for the parents and the child. This study does not show that equal pressure is applied by both parents in youth sports; it simply shows that mothers may also pressure their children in sport.

Findings from literature show that children's sport enjoyment tends to increase with average levels of parental involvement (Stein et al., 1999; Scanlan et al., 2003; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008). However, research also shows that children who perceive their parents as being too involved usually report less enjoyment (Woolger & Power, 1993; Stein et al.; Wuerth et al.). According to Stein et al. a tipping point of too much parental involvement in youth sport is dependent on what the child perceives as too much. Therefore, optimal levels of parental involvement will vary for each youth athlete.

In their quantitative study on youth aged 13-14, Stein et al. (1999) found that most youth athletes perceived that both their mothers and fathers were moderately to highly-involved in their sport participation and considered this involvement level appropriate. This demonstrates that high levels of parental involvement may be beneficial depending on the child's preferences and the quality of the involvement. Stein et al. state that a level of parental involvement which is perceived by the youth as too much or too little is often associated with lower enjoyment levels for the youth. Stein et al. provide an example of two youth athletes who perceive their parents as being highly involved. One athlete views this involvement as the proper amount, and the other athlete perceives this involvement as too high. Therefore, one athlete may feel that high parental involvement places excessive pressure on him/her, while the other may enjoy a high level of parental involvement and perceive it as a source of encouragement and support. Stein et al. also state that low involvement levels may be viewed as optimal. Some young athletes may enjoy their parents' low involvement levels because it gives them a sense of independence, while others may prefer their parents to be more involved and find it stressful that they are not (Stein et al.). Children that perceive parental involvement as encouraging and supportive are more likely to adopt a positive attitude toward sport and exhibit higher perception levels of competence. On the other hand children who perceive

parental involvement as negative may have lower perceptions of competence and lose interest in the competitive sport they are playing (Kanters et al., 2008).

Stein et al. (1999) claim that all athletes will view parental involvement differently and will therefore respond to parental pressures differently. The degree of parental involvement may be perceived by the youth as too little, just right, or too much (Stein et al.). In essence, each young athlete will have a different perception of the optimal level of parental involvement. To find an adequate balance between too little or too much parental involvement, a parent and child should communicate with one another to identify appropriate levels of involvement (Stein et al.). This is an important consideration for parental education programs as parents should be encouraged to start this conversation with their child. Parents should discuss their involvement in sport with their child in order to determine whether their involvement is appropriate. The simplest and most direct way to find out is to ask the child a series of questions such as: To what degree do you want me (your mother or father) involved in your sport experience? It is important to note that before asking, parents should first accurately describe the various ways they are involved in their child's sport (Stein et al.).

Although this study focuses on the sport of hockey, literature on various competitive sports was reviewed in order to obtain a greater understanding of the impacts of parental involvement in competitive youth sport. For instance, some of the competitive sports in which parental involvement has been studied are swimming (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008); rugby (Scanlan et al., 2003); volleyball (Stein et al., 1999); tennis (Hoyle & Leff, 1997); baseball, softball, soccer (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008); and ice hockey (Coakley, 2006; Kanters et al., 2008; Lavoie & Stellino 2008).

In their qualitative study, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) interviewed male and female competitive swimmers aged 13-18. The sample included ten dropout swimmers and ten engaged swimmers. The researchers did not differentiate based on the gender of the parents or the youth; they simply referred to participants and parents throughout the paper. It was found that the swimmers who dropped out of the sport spoke of "early peak performances, limited one-on-one coaching, pressuring parents during adolescence, lack of swimming peers during adolescence and sibling rivalries" (Fraser-Thomas et al., p. 646). Engaged swimmers spoke of personal development, support from coaches and

parents, siblings and friends, and the positive influence that each of these individuals had on their swimming career. This study found that parental pressure is a major factor linked to dropout in competitive sport. It also found that open communication and support from parents leads to continued participation in competitive swimming (Fraser-Thomas et al.). This study is important because it shows that the type of parental involvement experienced during childhood has an impact on an individual's commitment to competitive sport. While this study focused on competitive swimming, it is possible that this may also be true for competitive hockey.

Using a mixed methods framework, Scanlan et al. (2003) used data collected from 15 New Zealand adult male competitive rugby players and the sport commitment model to explain how a competitive sport becomes enjoyable for an individual. It was found that from a young age these elite rugby players devoted a great deal of time to the sport of rugby. The authors state that parental involvement was a key factor for each of the participants in pursuing the sport of rugby at this elite level. Parental support led to high levels of enjoyment and contributed to commitment of the sport. For example, a participant in the study stated, "my parents have been encouraging and supporting me since I was 5. This consisted of a parent coming to games, giving me advice, picking me up... things like that" (Scanlan et al., p.396). This shows that positive parental involvement may lead to an individual being committed to sport from youth through to adulthood.

Stein et al. (1999) sampled 13 and 14 year old, male and female participants who were involved in volleyball, soccer, and football. They used a survey that consisted of two Likert scales to measure 'involvement' and 'stress and enjoyment'. These categories were used in order to allow the participants to identify how they perceive the involvement levels of their parents regarding the sport and how they feel in regards to the level of involvement. Some athletes reported higher amounts of stress when their parents were not involved enough or too involved with the sport. A key finding from this study was that most athletes perceive their parents as being moderately to highly-involved in their sport and consider this level of involvement appropriate (Stein et al.). The results were the same for parental involvement levels from mothers and fathers.

Stein et al. (1999) claim that an athlete's sport enjoyment increases with the level of parental involvement, but decreases once the child perceives the parent as being too involved (Stein et al.). The authors identify three ways that parents may alter their involvement within their child's sport: 1) make no changes and maintain an adequate level of involvement; 2) increase the level of their involvement through attending more games and/or practices, becoming a coach, and discussing a child's sport participation more frequently; and 3) decrease the level of their involvement by attending less games and practices, no longer being a coach (or changing from a head coach to assistant coach), and by discussing the sport less (Stein et al.). Depending on the child's desired level of parental involvement, a parent may need to adjust involvement levels to benefit the child and increase the child's enjoyment. This demonstrates the importance of parental education that encourages parents to have this conversation with their children.

Hoyle and Leff (1997) conducted a quantitative study on female and male tennis players between the ages of 9-17 years of age. The authors found that parental support from both mothers and fathers was significantly related to participants' enjoyment of tennis, their performance (i.e. state rank), and the importance of tennis in their lives. It was found that parental pressure is related to the gender of a participant and that female tennis players reported higher levels of parental pressure from both parents than male tennis players (Hoyle & Leff). These findings are important as they indicate that in some competitive sports parental pressure may vary depending on gender. However, more research needs to be completed in this area to determine if this occurs across all sports.

Hoyle and Leff (1997) also found that pressure from parents may help to improve the performance of a tennis player, but lessens overall enjoyment. They claim that players with lower performance enjoy the sport more and are likely to recognize the support of their parents compared to higher ranked players (Hoyle & Leff). This finding is important as it suggests that parental pressure may improve youth performance, which may be perceived as a benefit of engaging in parental pressure. However, the negative impacts associated with pressure, such as lack of enjoyment, may lead to dropout.

Wiersma and Fifer's (2008) qualitative study examined the positive and negative aspects of parental involvement in youth sports from a sample of 10 focus groups with 55 parents. Within this study, the authors did not differentiate between the involvement of

mothers and fathers. It was found that encouragement and financial support are supporting factors for a child involved in sport, while competitive demands and over-involvement are pressurized behaviours. Wiersma and Fifer claim that parents often enrol their child into sport for their own enjoyment, as well as the enjoyment of the child. The authors indicate that parents experience enjoyment when their child plays well and develops life skills or matures through sport.

Wiersma and Fifer (2008) claim that parents receive benefits from enrolling their child into sport, such as being satisfied as a spectator (i.e. observing enjoyment of their child, observing improvement, or encouraging their child). In addition, parents experience satisfaction from their child's engagement in sport because they are able to spend more time with their child or other parents on the team. Parents believe that their children receive benefits from being involved in sport such as being physically active, developing self esteem and self competence, learning life skills, and becoming involved with the team and being socially connected (Wiersma & Fifer).

Wiersma and Fifer (2008) found that challenges exist regarding parental perceptions of their involvement in youth sport. The key findings related to instrumental support and emotional support. It was found that investments of time and money are viewed as forms of instrumental support that a parent offers regarding youth sport. It was found that emotional support was more difficult for parents, as it related to pre/post game talk, motivating a child, and to also striking a balance between competition and fun within the sport (Wiersma & Fifer). To conclude, this study found that parents have a clear understanding of their role in youth sports, and how they should behave at youth sport events. The participants, however, discussed the difficulty of "acting appropriately at times and in a manner consistent with the philosophy they discussed" (Wiersma & Fifer, p.525). Even though the parents in this study were aware that their behaviour was not ideal during sporting events, they felt as though they engaged in pressuring behaviours due to being in the heat of the moment (i.e. if the team was losing, or if the child was not playing to his/her full potential). Therefore, parental education is important in order to teach parents how to minimize the negative aspects of their involvement in youth sport.

Kanters et al. (2008) conducted a quantitative study, with 9-11 year old children and their parents, to determine whether the views of a parent and child were congruent in regards to the pressures and support in youth hockey. For example, parents were asked to respond to support questions that included: without pushing too hard, I do all I can to help my child become the best hockey player he/she can be; I am proud of my child's participation in hockey no matter if he/she wins or loses. Similarly, child subjects were asked: without pushing too hard, my parents do all they can to help me become the best hockey player I can be; my parents are proud of my participation in hockey no matter if I win or lose (Kanters et al., p. 70). This study found that pressures from both parents are prevalent in hockey and that youth perceive this type of involvement as pressure; whereas parents often view it as an adequate level of involvement. This study also found that the majority of pressures come from fathers rather than mothers because a mother's involvement in sport is often hindered by other obligations such as assisting with homework and preparing meals (Kanters et al.; Dunn et al., 2003; Coakley, 2006).

Lavoi and Stellino (2008) conducted a quantitative study on the interactions between youth athletes in competitive hockey and their parents. The sample for this study consisted of 259 male hockey players between the ages of 10-16 in the United States. Lavoi and Stellino found both good and poor sport behaviours resulting from parental involvement in minor hockey. The first two behaviours are poor sport behaviours, while behaviours three and four are good sport behaviours (Lavoi & Stellino). The first is "play and talk tough" (p.77), which consists of behaviours such as trash talking, arguing, and fighting on and off the ice. The second behaviour is "complain and whine" (p.78), and includes complaints regarding penalties, playing time, and poor sportsmanship. The third behaviour is "concern for opponents" (p.78), and reflects an athlete's willingness to congratulate or apologize to opponents. The final behaviour derived from the study is "graciousness" (p.78), and relates to an athletes' willingness to be considerate to others, such as thanking coaches and referees after the game.

The authors found that mothers, not fathers, contributed to the good sport behaviour of "graciousness" (Lavoi & Stellino, 2008, p.78). It was also found that father influence, not mother influence, significantly predicted poor sport behaviour (Lavoi & Stellino). Lavoi and Stellino found that parental involvement in youth sport, such as

pressure and support, has an impact on the child's level of enjoyment, stress, intrinsic motivation, and participation. The authors state that parental involvement should consist of offering positive responses to good performance, encouraging mastery of skills, and emphasizing that mistakes are part of learning (Lavoie & Stellino).

Coakley (2006) claims that in minor hockey fathers are more involved in the child's sport than mothers; however the mother does most of the domestic/preparation work for the child's participation in sport. Coakley identifies a mother's role in sport as engaging in tasks such as laundry, driving, and meal preparation; whereas a father's role in sport consists of critiquing his child, consulting with coaches, selecting coaches, and selecting equipment. In addition, a father is expected to support and guide his child as he/she learns to play sports. Coakley states however, that some fathers take this expectation very seriously and serve as teachers, coaches, managers, mentors, and advocates for their child athletes. Fathers often encourage their son's involvement in sport with hopes of turning their boy into a "tough young man that can succeed in a man's world" (Coakley, p.157). It is interesting to note that the same is not said for fathers and daughters. Coakley states that fathers often pressure their daughters in sport but encourage them to be polite and ladylike outside the domain of sport. Therefore, it appears that both male and female youth experience pressure in sport, but it likely occurs in different forms.

Using a mixed methods framework, Turman (2007) found that "male athletes viewed their fathers using more forms of pressure when compared to their mothers, while female athletes in their investigation perceived similar amounts of pressure from both parents" (p. 155-156). Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1984) state that parental support provided by mothers is more likely to increase athlete enjoyment compared to support provided by fathers. Turman also found that "fathers produce the most stress, while mothers with more involvement produced higher levels of enjoyment than less involved mothers" (p. 155). This study, along with most other literature on this topic, shows that the level of involvement and the impacts of involvement vary for mothers and fathers; however, fathers tend to be more involved and engage in more pressuring behaviours (Scanlan & Lewthwaite; Turman).

Hoyle and Leff (1997) suggest that parental involvement in sport can be categorized as either positive or negative. In general, if parental involvement consists of 'support', the involvement of the parent is considered positive; whereas if parental involvement consists of 'pressure', the involvement of the parent is considered negative (Hellstedt, 1990; Smoll & Smith, 1996; Hoyle & Leff). Literature regarding the difference between parental pressure and support and the associated impacts will be discussed in the following two sections of the literature review.

### **Parental Pressures**

Hellstedt (1990) defines parental pressure as the amount of motivational influence the parent exerts on the child-athlete to compete in sports, perform at a certain level, and continue sport participation. Hoyle and Leff (1997) view parental pressure as being associated with discontent with sport participation, stress associated with evaluation of performance outcomes, and negative or uncertain appraisals of self-worth. Hoyle and Leff and Turman (2007) define parental pressure as behaviour perceived by children as indicating expectations of unattainable levels of accomplishment and commitment. Overall, parental pressure has been operationalized as the discrepancy between parents' and the young athlete's expectations (Hoyle & Leff). According to the literature reviewed, the most common form of parental pressures consisted of comments that corrected child play or performance. Other forms of parental pressure took the form of scolding and contradicting statements (Turman).

Sagar and Lavalley (2010) outline three types of parental pressure in youth sport and explain what each type of pressure entails. Parental punitive behaviour is one form of parental pressure; it has three components. The first component is parental criticism in the form of comments after a game pertaining to a lack of effort and mistakes on the part of the youth athlete (Sagar & Lavalley). The second component is parental punishment which relates to a withdrawal of privileges (i.e. loss of television, deprivation of friends for a short period of time) and love withdrawal. Love withdrawal occurs when a parent walks away from the sport that the child is engaging in, and temporarily isolates the child by not speaking with him/her (i.e. a breakdown in communication) (Sagar & Lavalley). The third component is parental threat which refers to withdrawing an athlete from the sport altogether (i.e. not paying for the child to play the sport) (Sagar & Lavalley). The

second parental pressure is controlling behaviour, which relates to attending daily training and competitions for the child and giving instructions on what to do and what not to do (i.e. micro coaching) (Sagar & Lavallee). The third parental pressure is known as parental high expectations. This occurs when parents expect their child to always “invest maximum effort, to have a good attitude and show sportsmanship when playing, to avoid mistakes and play well, and attain sporting and academic achievements” (Sagar & Lavallee, p. 183). Sagar and Lavallee linked these three types of pressure to fear of failure in young athletes. Fear of failure has been associated with high levels of stress and anxiety for both male and female youth, leading to decreased sport enjoyment (Sagar & Lavallee). Therefore, it is important that parents avoid engaging in these forms of pressure as it will likely have a negative impact on the child’s sport experience.

In a quantitative study with 13 year old male and female participants, Hellstedt (1990) found that parental pressure can also result in parent-child conflict. When parent-child conflict occurs, it may result in discouragement, burnout, and eventual withdrawal from competitive sport. In the study on parental pressures in the sport of alpine skiing, Hellstedt found that 50% of children felt their parents were ‘not upset’ when they performed poorly, while 38% felt their parents were ‘somewhat upset’ and 12% felt their parents were ‘very upset’. It was found that as parental pressure increases, athletes will have greater negative reaction to the pressure, but feel more pressure to remain in the sport rather than choose another sport or leisure time activity (Hellstedt).

In their quantitative study, Kanters et al. (2008) found that a child’s general feelings about hockey are negatively correlated with pressure from fathers and positively correlated with their perception of hockey. The researchers found no correlation with pressure from mothers. Within this study, perceptions of both the parents and the child athlete were taken into consideration to determine the extent of parental pressures in minor hockey. It was found that pressures from both parents are prevalent in hockey and that youth perceive this type of involvement as pressure; whereas parents often viewed this as the appropriate level of involvement.

Norton et al. (2000) believe that “parental pressure to perform well at sports may lead to greater concern about performance or fears of being negatively evaluated” (p.194). Parental pressures in sport may also lead to fear of failure (FF) for both male and

female youth involved in sport (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). “In sport, FF has been associated with high levels of worry, stress, and anxiety and has been shown to affect adolescent athletes’ interpersonal behaviour, schoolwork, sporting performance, and wellbeing” (Sagar & Lavalley, p. 177). Smoll and Smith (1996) state that “young children are especially sensitive to comments and reactions by adults, sometimes in ways that adults do not realize” (p.82). Youth may perceive constructive mild criticism from adults as evidence of failure rather than helpful advice (Smoll & Smith).

Green (1997) states that “critics of youth sport have argued that competitive pressures engendered by adult supervision robbed sport of its play and socialization values” (p. 29). As the work by Green shows, pressure does not always have negative impacts. The pressure to win is an underlying factor for all competitive sport and many young athletes thrive off of it. In her quantitative study involving parents and children, Green found that if children were given the option to play soccer for fun with no competition or to play to win, they were more likely to choose to play to win. While some youth may thrive under pressure, most research shows that pressure has negative impacts for youth involved in competitive sport.

A qualitative study involving both parents and children completed by Holt et al. (2008), found that parents are sometimes cognizant of the pressures they place on children because they experienced it themselves in their youth. In result, parents empathize with their children but assure themselves that the child will learn from pressuring behaviours. These parents often feel that they have knowledge and expertise of the sport that they can pass on to their children (Holt et al.). Although some parents are aware that they pressure their children, most parents view their involvement in youth sport as support, whereas children actually view it as pressure (Kanters et al., 2008). Kanters et al. found that young athletes often view over-involvement from a parent as pressuring behaviour, while parents do not view their involvement as pressure. Therefore, parental education programs should teach parents about the potentially negative impacts of pressure on youth athletes and show them how to identify and minimize pressuring behaviours.

Smoll and Smith (1996) claim that individuals tend to carry their interests and desires with them into adult life and subsequently pass them along to their children.

Therefore parents may have certain expectations for their children in sports. These high expectations may lead to pressure for youth, as well as negative parental behaviours such as derogatory or abusive comments made to children (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Wiersma and Fifer (2008) found that some parents are aware of the negative behaviours that they engage in while attending children's sporting events, but these parents often insist that they only engage in "competitive behaviour such as this because they are caught up in the heat of the moment" (p. 522). To minimize the negative impacts of high parental expectations, Stein et al. (1999) suggest that parents should attempt to ensure that they are not over-involved in their child's sporting activities. Parents may achieve this by having a conversation with their child to determine the appropriate level and type of involvement.

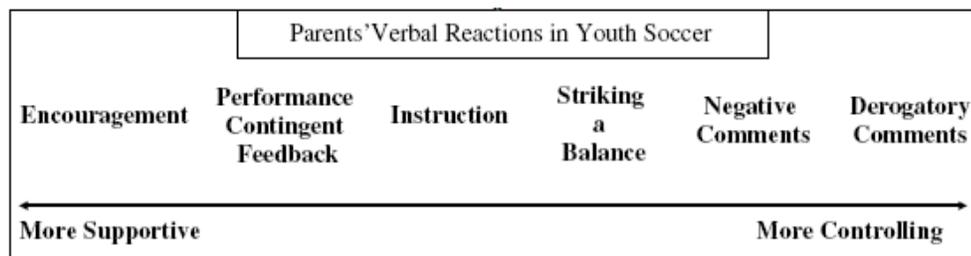
In order for parents to encourage their child to participate in sports, they may use certain techniques that pressure them to continue their engagement in sport. Some of these techniques include: (a) "rewarding activity" - requiring the manipulation of the environment using positive methods such as making promises; (b) the use of one's own "expertise" - which could be both negative or positive and will produce certain results if the individual complies; and (c) the "activation of impersonal commitments," - messages are solely focused on an individual's self-esteem (this relates to the idea that others will be proud of you if you perform well) (Turman, 2007, p.155). These techniques may be detrimental to youth because they may result in individuals participating in sport for the wrong reasons. For example, none of these techniques focus on the enjoyment of youth in their sport participation.

In youth sport parents may use rewards and punishments to intentionally increase or decrease the likelihood of their child engaging in a particular behaviour by providing positive (reward) or negative (punishment) consequences contingent upon the child's behaviour (Woolger & Power, 1993). The use of rewards and punishments may increase pressure for youth in sport (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Rewards include social consequences (praise, affection) and nonsocial consequences (material goods, money, special privileges) (Woolger & Power; Gold, 2008). According to Gold, offering rewards, such as money, to a youth in sport may be detrimental to the individual because a reward may encourage individual play rather than team play. However, Woolger and Power

state that rewards from parents are important to most youth. They claim that many youth would possibly quit, or play less if there were no rewards (Woolger & Power). Therefore, while the use of rewards may increase pressure for youth, it may be an important part of sport participation for some youth.

Through qualitative research involving parents and children, Holt et al. (2008) found that many parents feel as though they need to share their knowledge in sport; therefore parents often make comments and critique their children. The study by Holt et al. pertained to competitive soccer and the behaviours that parents engage in such as: 1) encouragement (viewed as general supportive comments); 2) performance contingent feedback (viewed as useful criticism); 3) instruction (direct commands or commands that provoke action); 4) striking a balance (comments were often controlling, but varied in positive and negative tones); 5) negative comments (controlling comments); and 6) derogatory comments (damaging comments that are directed toward youth). Holt et al. used these findings and developed a continuum (Fig. 2.1) that can be applied to the parental behaviours that exist within the domain of children's sport.

### 2.1. Continuum of Parents' Involvement in Youth Soccer (Holt et al., 2008)



This continuum reflects the two types of involvement that parents may have in regards to youth sport. The left side of the continuum is associated with supportive behaviours, while the right side of the continuum contains more controlling behaviours or pressures. A key finding from this study was that “supportive parental actions are associated with positive outcomes like achievement, whereas controlling parental actions are associated with negative outcomes like aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse” (Holt et al., p. 679). This study provides useful findings regarding the different levels and types of parental involvement and the associated impacts. Pressure is often described as a negative form of parental involvement. The typical impacts associated with

parental pressure include parent-child conflict, discouragement, reduced enjoyment, and withdrawal. While parental pressure often has negative outcomes, literature shows that parental involvement can be positive when it occurs in the form of support.

### **Parental Support**

Hoyle and Leff (1997) and Turman (2007) define parental support as behaviours by parents perceived by their children as facilitating athletic participation and performance. According to Woolger and Power (1993) support is defined as: (1) providing opportunities for practice and involvement in sport, and (2) providing unconditional emotional support for the child's performance. In contrast to parental pressures that exist in competitive sport, parental support is often viewed as a positive interaction from a parent. Parental support is often linked to encouragement and therefore “provides opportunities for repeated exposure to feared situations, resulting in a reduction in social anxiety around participating in sports for the child” (Norton et al., 2000, p.194). Parental support has been shown to enhance the relationship between people's athletic self-perceptions and sport participation (Martin, 1997).

Parental support encourages youth sport engagement and may contribute to success in sport, leading to greater confidence for the youth. Researchers have found that people with high levels of confidence in their athletic abilities are most likely to participate in sport (Martin, 1997). It was found that male wrestlers who experienced positive parental reactions and a high level of parental involvement experienced greater enjoyment than their counterparts who did not experience this (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Negative parental involvement, such as pressure, will likely have the opposite effect on an individual, and result in reduced enjoyment from sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite).

In their quantitative study with children aged 9-11, Anderson, Funk, Elliott, and Smith (2003) found a positive correlation between parental support and athlete enjoyment, and claim that supportive parents are likely to have children involved in a greater number of sports. Averill and Power (1995) state that “parental support plays an important motivational role in affirming the child's efforts, in building feelings of acceptance and self-worth, and in giving the child confidence to persist in the face of failure” (p.265). Within their study, Averill and Power examine five parenting constructs

that are related to parental sport involvement: unconditional support, performance goals, directiveness, perceptions of child effort, and perceptions of child enjoyment.

Within this study, an example of unconditional support is provided by a parent who claims that “after the game, no matter how poorly my child played, I try to point out something positive he did” (Averill & Power, 1995, p.268). In regards to performance goals both positive and negative examples were derived from the study: “I believe my child should strive to be one of the best players on his team” (pressure); “I don’t think my child should put anymore effort as long as he is having fun” (support) (Averill & Power, p.268). Directiveness responses from the participants of the study relate to telling a child how to improve certain parts of his/her game (resulting in both encouragement and pressure), while perceptions of child effort and perceptions of child enjoyment incorporate both pressure and supportive statements from parents (Averill & Power).

Using a mixed methods framework, Averill and Power (1995) found that parental support was positively associated with parent ratings of child enjoyment in sport. It was also found that mother performance goals were positively correlated with child enjoyment, while father performance goals were unrelated to child enjoyment (Averill & Power). The authors also claim that fathers, not mothers, often engage in pressure and directiveness, which often results in reduced effort and enjoyment for the child. This study found that parental involvement impacts youth enjoyment in sport and that parental support leads to greater enjoyment (Averill & Power).

It is evident that pressure and support are two forms of parental involvement that occur in competitive sport for youth. These different forms of involvement will likely impact young athletes in a variety of ways. Overall, the findings regarding parental pressure and support suggest that parental influence is a strong predictor for sport involvement. Parents act as agents within the family to provide youth with the resources required to play sports (Dunn et al., 2003). One major impact related parental involvement in youth sport is commitment. This can be explained through the Sport Commitment Model.

### **The Sport Commitment Model (SCM)**

It has been suggested that commitment can be assessed with respect to a particular program or even a particular sport, such as hockey (Alexandris, Zahariadis,

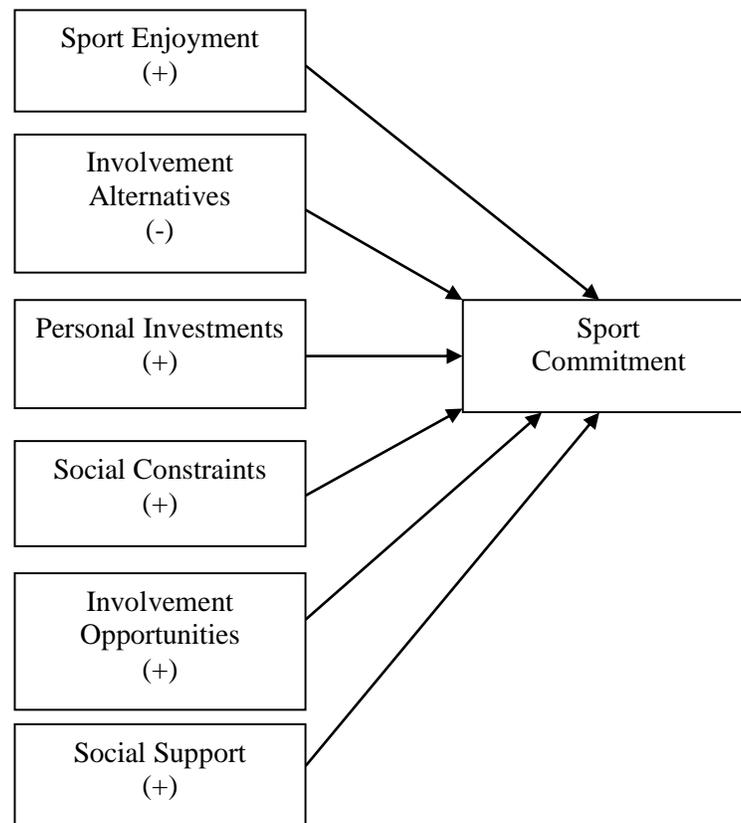
Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2002). The Sport Commitment Model (SCM) was originally introduced by Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler (1993). According to Alexandris et al., the SCM is used frequently in research with youth in sport and it is “one of the few models that exist in sport literature” (p.218). The SCM may be utilized to examine current/ongoing engagement in a sport within a study. The SCM is used within this study to explore the phenomenon of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and to understand the impact that the parental involvement faced by participants during their youth had on their commitment to the sport.

The purpose of this study is to have participants aged 18-25 years old describe the experience of this phenomenon. The SCM is used to describe how commitment levels were influenced by parental involvement. The SCM is considered the foundation in research with elite athletes and youth competitors in highly competitive sport environments (Jess, 2009); therefore this model is well suited to the phenomenon under study.

The SCM provides a framework for studying the motivational reasons as to why individuals choose to continue their involvement in sport; therefore it includes various factors that can be derived from the sport setting. Scanlan et al. (1993) state that there are five components included in the SCM, and often a sixth can be added. The SCM has separate components that all relate to the commitment of an individual in regards to a sport (Scanlan et al.). The components are as follows: 1) Sport Enjoyment is viewed as a positive response to the sport experience that reflects generalized feelings, such as pleasure, liking, and fun; 2) Involvement Opportunities, which means that valued opportunities are present only through continued involvement; 3) Involvement Alternatives refers to the attractiveness of the most preferred alternative to continued participation in the current endeavor; 4) Personal Investments, which refers to resources that are put into the activity that cannot be recovered if participation is discontinued (such as money and time that cannot be replaced); and 5) Social Constraints, which are social expectations that create feelings of obligation to remain in the activity (Scanlan et al.). Scanlan et al. (2003) claim that a sixth component, known as social support, can also be used within the model. Social Support is defined as “the support and encouragement the athlete perceives significant others provide for their involvement in sport” (Carpenter,

1993, p. 59; cited in Scanlan et al., 2003). It is interesting to note that in relation to this sixth component it has been found that “parental support strengthens the sport commitment of adolescent athletes” (Scanlan et al. 2003, p.379). Therefore, it is likely that parental involvement does have a direct impact on commitment to competitive hockey. The following is a diagram (Fig. 2.2) of the Sport Commitment Model that can be used when applying it to a study.

*Figure 2.2. Six Factor Sport Commitment Model (Scanlan et al., 2003)*



In relation to sports, Scanlan et al. (1993) define commitment as “a psychological construct that reflects the desire and resolve to persist in a sporting endeavor over time” (p.18). Scanlan et al. state that the SCM can be used when “examining the motivation underlying continued sport involvement” (p.17). Therefore, an individual will demonstrate sport commitment when they are highly engaged in a sport and participate frequently even with obstacles such as social life, part time work, family pressures, and school. This study describes how commitment to sport may be impacted by parental involvement. As previously outlined, Scanlan et al. (2003) provide a sport-specific

theoretical model of commitment that shows how sport commitment can occur through six separate categories. Five of the six components are positively associated with sport commitment. These five components are: 1) sport enjoyment, 2) involvement opportunities, 3) personal investments, 4) social constraints, and 5) social support. The sixth component - involvement alternatives, has a negative relationship to sport commitment (Scanlan et al., 2003).

Studies using the SCM have been completed on a variety of different sporting activities, including youth sports (Carpenter, 2001; Weiss, Kimmel & Smith, 2001; Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis & Alexandris, 2006), high school competitive sports (Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998), adult sports (Jeon & Ridinger, 2009; Scanlan et al., 2003; Weiss & Weiss, 2007) and adult fitness activities (Alexandris et al., 2002). Each of the determinants within the model has been found to significantly predict sport commitment levels. Enjoyment and involvement opportunities, which may be impacted by parental involvement, have “consistently emerged as the strongest predictors of increased commitment in sport-related research” (Casper & Babkes Stellino, 2008, p.97). The majority of the research related to the SCM has been quantitative, with very few studies using qualitative methods.

One example of a study that incorporated qualitative methods was conducted by notable researchers Scanlan et al. (2003) when they used a mixed methods approach within their study on elite amateur rugby players in New Zealand. In this study, interviews were conducted with rugby players in order to determine how the SCM could be used to explain each player’s commitment to the sport of rugby at a competitive level. Given that this aspect of the study was qualitative, each of the participants’ responses adds meaning as to why rugby is an important part of their lives. Scanlan et al. (2003) analyze each of the six components of the SCM and show that the experiences of the participants represent these components. Unfortunately, quantitative studies do not allow for this as they are very objective in nature. For example, within this study the authors state that “qualitative data analysis revealed what the numbers alone could not: that the players perceived different forms of ‘feeling encouraged’ and ‘supported’ from different providers” (Scanlan et al., 2003, p.398). The questions that Scanlan et al. (2003)

incorporated into their interview guide were subjective in nature and therefore allowed for an array of responses with multiple meanings and truths.

Scanlan et al. (2003) found that parents of the competitive rugby players offered encouragement and support to their children and therefore positively impacted the sixth construct of the SCM – social support. An example of a statement that outlines parental support is “they’ve sort of been behind me, you know, since...when I first started playing at 4 and they haven’t given up hope or anything” (Scanlan et al., 2003, p. 396). In essence, feeling encouraged and/or supported by a parent strengthened the overall commitment of the competitive rugby player.

Weiss and Weiss (2007) considered parental involvement and the SCM in their study on competitive female gymnasts. The participants in this study consisted of individuals between the ages of 8-18 years. Within the study, Weiss and Weiss define sport commitment as the “desire and resolve to continue participation” (p.90). In order for an individual to be committed to a sport, he/she should experience high levels of enjoyment and also be personally invested in the sport. Enjoyment and investment in sport may be achieved by a youth athlete through the commitment that is displayed by a parent, such as social support, unconditional encouragement and positive regard (Weiss & Weiss). Weiss and Weiss state that “during early and middle childhood, parents are a primary source of competence information” (p.91). Parents are socializing agents for their children in regards to sport, and the quality of social support that they provide a child is strongly linked to commitment levels in the SCM.

In the work completed by Weiss and Weiss (2007), social constraints and social support seem to be the most significant aspects of sport commitment related to parental involvement in youth sport. Within this study an example of social constraints was provided when a participant stated, “I have to stay in gymnastics because my parents have done so much for me” (Weiss & Weiss, p. 93). Weiss and Weiss found that social support from parents was mostly linked to the youngest gymnasts who reported greater companionship, admiration, and intimacy support than early/middle adolescents. In addition, early/middle adolescents reported greater reliable alliance than older adolescents. The two younger groups reported higher instrumental aid than the oldest group (Weiss & Weiss). Weiss and Weiss also found that parental social support for the

lowest competitive gymnast level (Level 5-6) reported higher companionship, intimacy, and admiration support than athletes in the highest competitive gymnast level (Levels 8-10).

Weiss and Weiss (2007) claim that “gymnasts in middle to late childhood and early adolescence associate feelings of obligation to parents to continue participating in a negative light” (p. 98). Weiss and Weiss found that younger gymnasts experienced greater pleasure and fun, while the older participants had lower enjoyment, thus resulting in lower levels of commitment to sport on a competitive level. The authors state that lower level competitive gymnasts report higher enjoyment and involvement opportunities compared to gymnasts in a more elite class (Weiss & Weiss). It is important to note that as athletes begin to play at a more competitive level in sport they will often require greater involvement and investment from parents, leading to greater pressure for the athletes to be successful and continue participation in the sport (Weiss & Weiss). This study demonstrates the impact that parental involvement may have on various components of the SCM. While parental involvement is not the only significant factor that impacts commitment to sport, it appears to be an important one.

Literature shows that parental involvement may have a significant impact on youth enjoyment in sport (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008). According to the SCM, this will likely impact youth commitment to sport. Parental involvement may also be linked to other components of the SCM, such as involvement opportunities, social constraints and social support. Therefore, it was anticipated that parental involvement would have an impact on sport commitment for youth in competitive hockey. This was examined through the use of the SCM within this study. The impact on an individual's commitment to sport is only one of the many potential impacts of parental involvement in youth sport. Literature relating to the impacts of parental involvement will be further discussed in the following section.

### **Impacts of Parental Involvement**

Hellstedt (1990) believes that very little is known about the specific contributions that parents make to their son's and daughter's involvement in sport. While the exact mechanisms are still unclear, research has started to identify certain ways in which parents impact their child's participation in sport. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) indicate that

children often rate parents as the most significant source of influence for participation in organized sports (relative to the influence of coaches, peers, or even the child's own decision to become involved). Therefore, the impact that parental involvement may have on youth in sport needs to be understood.

There are a variety of impacts resulting from parental involvement in competitive youth sport. The impacts may be positive or negative depending on the type and level of parental involvement, as well as the child's desired level of parental involvement. Parental involvement may impact the child's level of sportsmanship, enjoyment, performance, engagement, and commitment to sport. It may also impact the child's self-esteem as well as the relationship between the parent and child.

Arthur-Banning et al. (2009) state that the "behaviours demonstrated by the significant individuals in a person's life (such as a parent or a coach) have a great impact on that person's behaviour" (p.5). Arthur-Banning et al. and Turman (2007) claim that young athletes are often affected by their parents' negative behaviours and may adopt similar behaviours. For example, "the perception might exist that one of the coaches' roles is to argue with referees so when they do, players are less likely to notice. When parents, however, argue with referees, it is more noticeable because it is outside the expected role of the spectator" (Arthur -Banning et al., p. 13). It is evident that negative sporting behaviour by a parent, such as yelling at a referee, an opponent, or even another parent, can influence a child. A child may adopt similar behaviours, which ultimately results in poor sportsmanship. An example of poor sportsmanship from a parent is placing a large emphasis on winning and individual play rather than teamwork. This may lead to the child focusing only on his/her own performance rather than that of the team. When parents display negative behaviours, it may also cause their child stress or anxiety and lower the level of satisfaction that the child gains from the sport (Turman).

Hoyle and Leff (1997) completed a quantitative study to examine the relationship between parental involvement and enjoyment, performance, and self-esteem of young tennis players between the ages of 9-17 years. Support was identified as parental behaviour perceived by children as assisting athletic participation and performance (Hoyle & Leff). Pressure was identified as parental behaviour perceived by children as demonstrating expectations of unlikely or unattainable levels of accomplishment (Hoyle

& Leff). It was found that players who identified a high level of parental support reported greater enjoyment of the sport, but performed at a lower level than those experiencing parental pressure. Whereas athletes experiencing greater parental pressure performed better but enjoyed the sport less (Hoyle & Leff). It is interesting that this study links pressure with improved performance, as this may be perceived by some as a benefit of pressure. This study indicates that parental involvement may impact both the enjoyment and performance of young athletes.

Woolger and Power (1993) also claim that there is a positive correlation between parental support and the level of engagement in sport by an individual. Woolger and Power state that adult athletes believe parental behaviour during their childhood (ages 5 - 12) was more influential than parental behaviour during their adolescence. They claim that a positive relationship exists between athletes' perceptions of the amount of parental support and involvement in the sport. Therefore, parental support may impact an individual by leading to prolonged engagement in sport.

While children are participating in sport, parents serve as models to provide experiences, encourage participation, and interpret experiences for their children (Lavoi & Stellino, 2008). As a result, children develop beliefs regarding their abilities as their skills progress and also maintain certain expectations that are based largely on the influence of their parents (Lavoi & Stellino). Lavoi and Stellino state that parental encouragement and support enhance children's perceptions of their athletic ability and enjoyment and in result positively influence their overall involvement in sport. Research indicates that parental expectations and pressures that are unrealistic are related to lower enjoyment and interest in the sport, less intrinsic motivation, and more stress among youth athletes (Lavoi & Stellino; Sagar & Lavallee, 2010). A parents' focus on winning and losing often lead to feelings of 'unworthiness' by many young athletes (Turman, 2007).

An important aspect of Lavoi and Stellino's study was the inclusion of the six subscales of perceived parental influence measure that was used by Babkes and Weiss (1999). The subscales were as follows: (1) encouragement - parents' encouragement or discouragement of their child's participation in organized sport; (2) beliefs about competency - parents' attitudes and related to their perception of their child's athletic

ability within the sport; (3) positive contingent responses to success – refers to behavioural reactions demonstrated by parents following children’s successful display of specific sport ability and/or skill set; (4) negative contingent responses to poor performance - behavioural reactions demonstrated by parents following children’s lack of successful display of specific sport ability and/or skill set; (5) expectations - defined as the parents’ desire for their children to perform at their highest level (potential); and (6) involvement - the extent to which parents engage in their child’s sport participation either directly or indirectly (Babkes & Weiss; Lavoie & Stellino).

These subscales allow researchers to examine the parent-created sport climate and its impacts on youth. Using these subscales, the researchers found that the climate parents create through their involvement in youth sport may not be positive or promote healthy development for children in sport (Lavoie & Stellino, 2008). It was found that poor parental behaviour is common in youth sport, with many young athletes reporting background anger from parents (Lavoie & Stellino). This negative environment impacts youth by lowering the enjoyment level that they receive from participating in the sport.

Within their qualitative study, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) aimed to understand the positive and negative impacts of parental involvement in youth sports from a sample of 10 focus groups with 55 parents. Wiersma and Fifer presented the benefits that parents may expect to gain from having their child participate in sport. A significant finding that was revealed in this study was that of parent joys. The joy that a parent receives from having their child involved in a sport benefits the parent and the child. Parents gain satisfaction through observing their child’s enjoyment in the sport and observing improvement and success in the sport. Parents also benefit from their child’s sport participation because they have a chance to meet other parents within the community, and get the opportunity to spend more time with their child. The benefits that a parent perceives that their child experiences from being involved in sport consist of: life skills (i.e. learning sportsmanship, teamwork, and perseverance); affiliation (i.e. team involvement, social interaction); and self esteem (Wiersma & Fifer).

Kanters et al. (2008) claim that children who view parental involvement as supportive are more likely to have a positive attitude towards sport and a higher perception of their own competence level. However, children that perceive parental

involvement as negative often have lower perceptions of competence and lose interest in sports (Kanters et al.). With positive parental involvement, children are likely to maintain involvement in sport and exhibit the responses they perceive as expected by their parents. However, after dealing with too much negative parental involvement regarding sport, a child is likely to dropout of the sport (Kanters et al.). When athletes feel that their parents are pressuring them, they have higher dropout rates and may experience increased sport anxiety (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010).

**Dropout.** There is a great deal of literature regarding the issue of youth dropout in sport, or withdrawal. Smoll and Smith (1996) indicate that the “effects of sport participation on children and adolescents frequently resulted in the conclusion that sport involvement was highly stressful for many youngsters and that the competitive focus of youth sport programs was responsible for many to drop out of sport” (p.115). Dropout is common in sport, as Arthur-Banning et al. (2009) state that up to 70% of children will cease participation in organized sport before they reach the age of 13. It has also been estimated that over one-third of all participants between ten and seventeen years of age withdraw from a sport that they are involved in every year (Lindner et al., 1991).

Both external and internal factors may lead to youth drop out from sport. An example of an external factor that may contribute to youth disengagement from sport is a parent losing a job and no longer being able to pay for the activity (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Coakley, 2006). This relates to the parents willingness or ability to support the child’s participation in sport. In contrast to this, internal factors for youth disengagement may include negative experiences associated with feelings of incompetence, a lack of fun or enjoyment in the activity, or simply needing a break from a particular sport (Arthur-Banning et al.; Butcher et al., 2002). Negative parental involvement may exacerbate these negative experiences and feelings for youth, leading to dropout from sport.

In their quantitative study involving students in grades 7, 8, and 10, Butcher et al. (2002) found that withdrawal from sport tends to increase with grade level and that the most important reason for withdrawal is lack of enjoyment. In their study, Butcher et al. revealed that most withdrawals from hockey occurred in grades 9-10. Within this study the authors identified 2272 instances of ‘dropped out of sport’ from the 1387 individuals used within their study and found that “males had higher values than females on total

sports participated in and dropped and years participated” (Butcher et al., p.150). As the most important reason for withdrawal from sport is lack of enjoyment, both parents and coaches should be “aware that enjoyment is more important for younger athletes and therefore should make their programs as enjoyable as possible to enhance long-term retention” (Butcher et al., p. 160). As previously mentioned, parental involvement impacts the level of enjoyment a youth experiences, and therefore also impacts youth withdrawal from sport.

According to Butcher et al. (2002), Martin (1997), and Lindner et al. (1991) the main reasons for dropout in sport are: lack of enjoyment, wanting more time for non-sport activities, not being good enough, too much pressure to perform, more time needed for studying, too expensive, and discouragement/lack of support from parents. It is interesting to note that there are studies that show that athletes who are successful, able, and who perceive themselves as highly competent, still drop out of sport (Lindner et al.). This is likely due to these athletes experiencing other negative factors, such as parental pressure or time constraints.

Each of the dropout factors stated above can be related to the Sport Commitment Model (SCM). These factors directly oppose the components of the SCM and therefore logically lead to a lack of commitment to sport. According to the SCM, individuals that choose to withdraw from a sport may not be positively experiencing the six components that are associated with the model, resulting in a lack of commitment to the sport. An individual should experience enjoyment from the sport, have the opportunity for involvement, be able to personally invest his/her time in a sport, and also experience social support from external parties. As previously mentioned, parental involvement may impact many of these factors, particularly enjoyment and social support. Therefore, parental involvement in youth sport is likely to impact commitment to sport and dropout.

Dropout may also be explained by the burnout theory, which can be related to parental involvement. This theory was introduced by Smith (1986), and describes burnout as a psychological stress disorder with distinct behaviours. Individuals who are most at risk are athletes with characteristics such as: high energy, lack of assertive personal skills, and seekers of social approval (Smith). These individuals often experience a build up of a heavy training load, diminishing returns from practice, and a loss of confidence (Smith).

As previously mentioned, parental involvement may negatively impact the self-esteem levels of youth in sport, potentially leading to burnout. Individuals experiencing burnout often withdraw from sport. This once again links negative parental involvement to youth dropout from sport.

Parental involvement in youth sport impacts many different areas including sportsmanship, performance, self-esteem, enjoyment, engagement, commitment, and dropout. Parental involvement may have positive or negative impacts, depending on the type and degree of involvement and the child's desired level of parental involvement. Most literature on this topic shows that parental involvement within youth sport should consist of encouragement and support, rather than pressure.

In order to develop an understanding of parental involvement and its impacts, retrospective interviews were used. The following section will review literature on retrospective studies in order to determine successful techniques for increasing participant recall during interviews. These techniques may help to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Retrospective Studies**

In regards to the issue of recall, Hassan (2006) believes that people may find it difficult to accurately remember events that occurred in the past because memory in humans mainly represents poor versions of the original experience. Therefore, the validity of information within a retrospective study can be lacking (Bifulco, Brown & Harris, 1994; Hassan). However, there are some techniques that researchers may utilize to overcome these concerns.

One technique recommended by Hassan (2006) is that the researcher should use detailed probing questions regarding the experience to help the participants report accurate recalls. Law, Côté, and Ericsson (2007) also suggest probing to gain more in-depth responses from the participants, claiming that participants should be asked probing questions in order to effectively recall past experiences. Hassan also states that it is important to give the participants time to reflect and think through an event in their life before answering each question. Bifulco et al. (1994) state that in order to increase recall, participants should be "encouraged to recreate the context in which the experience occurred" (p. 1422). They claim that recall is greater when there is continued attention to

the topic with few distractions. They also state that more retrieval attempts will result in a more successful eventual retrieval (Bifulco et al.).

Law et al. (2007) conducted a retrospective study on elite and sub elite gymnasts. This study used mixed methods including structured interviews and questionnaires to uncover the full experience of the athletes. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain retrospective information from each of the participants (Law et al.). Introductory questions were used to help participants recall their earliest sport experiences and to help the recall process (Law et al.; Côté, Ericsson, & Law, 2005).

Côté et al. (2005) used retrospective interviews in their study on the characteristics of athletes' experiences of activities and the changes in the athletes' perception of their physical effort, mental concentration, and fun over their development. According to the researchers, athletes were able to accurately recall many aspects of their development even after decades had elapsed (Côté et al.). The authors also claim that, "when individuals answer interview questions based on recall of past episodic experiences, individuals will be more accurate and reliable than when they are forced to infer and reconstruct answers to general questions" (Côté et al., p.4). The researchers also state that within a retrospective interview, it is essential for the interviewer to ask probing questions to enhance the recall of the participants' experience and to aid in the reconstruction of one's experience (Côté et al.).

Within their study on injuries in beach volleyball, Bahr and Reeser (2003) compare data between a prospective study and a retrospective study. While a limitation was the issue of recall in the retrospective portion of the study, the authors used a structured interview to help improve recall. Bahr and Reeser state that the prospective study and the retrospective study had similar findings; thus claiming that recall did not adversely impact the study. Wright and Côté (2003) completed a retrospective study on the development of varsity male athletes. In this study, participants were found to have had similar patterns of development. Therefore, the researchers claim that retrospective interviews can serve as an effective tool in research (Bahr & Reeser; Wright & Côté). This literature demonstrates that researchers can successfully complete retrospective studies and overcome the issue of recall.

I incorporated the techniques discussed by Law et al. (2007), Côté et al. (2005), Hassan (2006) and Bifulco et al. (1994) when conducting retrospective interviews for my study. I allowed each participant adequate amounts of time to answer, used probing questions to aid in the recollection of the experience, and allowed for silence (with no distractions) throughout the interview process. I included introductory questions within my interview guide to ease the participant into the interview and to set the stage for the rest of the interview (Law et al.; Côté et al.). By bringing the beginning of the individual's sporting experience to the forefront, it aided in recollection of past events throughout the interview. Interviews were structured, as each participant was asked the same questions regarding their experience with parental involvement in competitive ice hockey as a youth. The interview guide that I created acted as a step by step tool in helping participants recollect their childhood experiences and describe their perceptions about the phenomenon under study.

### **Conclusion**

Through analyzing the literature pertaining to parental involvement in sport, topics emerged that were associated with this phenomenon. This chapter reviewed literature on youth engagement in competitive sport, parental involvement in youth sports, parental pressure and support, the Sport Commitment Model, and the impacts of parental involvement on youth. Although a great deal of research has been completed on these topics, there is still much to understand and therefore continued research is needed to clarify the nature of the impacts of parental involvement in competitive youth sport (Hellstedt, 1990; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Norton et al., 2000).

The literature review revealed that while participation in competitive youth sport is popular, it may not necessarily have positive outcomes. Participation in sport has many benefits for youth, but it also has many potential drawbacks. There is a great deal of literature regarding the role of parents in youth sports and the impacts of parental involvement. Opinions regarding the role of parents in youth sport vary greatly. The general areas of parental involvement are parental pressure and parental support. Pressures tend to be viewed as negative parental involvement, while support tends to be viewed as positive. The literature review revealed that parental involvement impacts

many areas including youth sportsmanship, performance, self-esteem, enjoyment, engagement, and commitment.

Negative parental involvement, or pressure, was often linked to dropout. With dropout rates in youth sports increasing rapidly (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008) administrators must seek new and innovative ways to make their leagues more inviting to participants. By recognizing how parents can impact participant behaviour, we have the knowledge necessary to begin making changes to improve the atmosphere and experience for the young athletes (Arthur-Banning et al.).

Parents may be unaware that their involvement, expectations, or ways of motivating the child are actually hindering his/her enjoyment and ultimate achievement (Woolger & Power, 1993). If negative parental patterns are recognized, they can be changed before they inhibit an individual's desire to compete in sports altogether. When considering the influence of parental involvement on athletes' sport experiences, researchers, practitioners, and parents need to think beyond involvement level and consider the quality of parental involvement in terms of involvement degree (Stein et al., 1999).

The existing literature related to parental involvement in youth sport confirms that it may have both positive and negative impacts for the individuals involved. This literature provides valuable information about the different types and levels of parental involvement and the related impacts. However, there are no retrospective studies examining this phenomenon from the perspective of young adults that previously participated in competitive youth hockey. There is a lack of literature regarding the perceptions and meanings of the lived experiences associated with the parental involvement faced by youth in competitive hockey and the resulting impacts. Many of the studies related to parental involvement in youth sport used quantitative methods (Butcher et al., 2002; Hellstedt, 1990; Kanters et al., 2008; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Stein et al., 1999). The qualitative studies that have been completed to date have not involved males in the age range of 18-25 reflecting on past experiences in youth hockey. Most of the studies related to parental involvement in youth sport have used parents and/or children as participants (Dunn et al., 2003; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Hellstedt; Holt, 2008; Kanters et al.; Lavoie & Stellino; Stein et al., 1999; Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). The aim of

this study was to use qualitative methods to understand the experience of parental involvement for males aged 18-25 who participated in competitive youth hockey for 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, and withdrew between the ages of 14-17. In order to develop an understanding of this phenomenon, the participants in this study were asked to describe their experiences and provide the researcher with in-depth details regarding the parental involvement experienced and the impacts it had.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter reviews the theoretical perspective on which this study is based and explains the methods used. The purpose of this chapter is to provide clarity for the reader regarding the research process for this study.

#### The Research Design

**Paradigm/ theoretical perspective.** Qualitative researchers approach a study with a certain paradigm or worldview and a basic set of beliefs that help to guide their investigations (Creswell, 1998). As Crotty (1998) and Patton (2002) have stated, a theoretical perspective or a research paradigm serves as a worldview and philosophical stance in research. This philosophical stance relates to how a researcher chooses to complete his/her research and impacts how the researcher goes about the research process. While quantitative methods typically use a positivist philosophical stance for conducting research, researchers using purely qualitative methods tend to take an interpretivist philosophical stance (Kingsley, 2008). Moustakas (1994) states that “interpretation unmask what is hidden behind the objective phenomena” (p. 10). Interpretivism portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing, while positivism seeks to discover an objective reality (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Newman & Benz, 1998; cited in Kingsley).

As previously stated, many of the studies on parental involvement in youth sport use a quantitative framework, and therefore have research that is based on positivist methods. These positivist methods are objective in nature and findings are seen as ‘true’ and therefore leave less room for interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Although the “interpretive paradigm is not the dominant model of research today” (Willis, 2007, p. 97), it is gaining influence in the field of research. An interpretive worldview was used for this study, as I interpreted the meanings that stemmed from the interviews with the research participants. An interpretive worldview is used to understand a phenomenon in its context and to understand the lived experiences of an individual. Within the interpretive paradigm, knowledge is created by interaction between the researcher and the individual(s) under study (Willis).

**Interpretivism.** This study used an interpretivist theoretical approach. An interpretivist approach was used as a framework for this study as I reflected on my

understanding of the phenomena being studied by using a subjective writing style (Willis, 2007). An interpretive approach allowed participants to tell their stories from an insiders' perspective, as the participants have experienced parental involvement in competitive youth hockey at some point in their lives. Interpretivism allows the findings from the participants "to reveal subtleties and nuances that traditional positivist methods may not uncover" (Hyatt, 2003, p.4; cited in Asselstine, 2006).

According to Patton (2002) a theoretical approach, such as interpretivism, helps researchers to uncover what a story may reveal about a person and explain the phenomenon that has occurred in an individual's life. For this study, an interpretivist worldview helped the participants to reveal their story about the parental involvement they faced in competitive hockey and the impacts that it had. The data gathered contributed to the understanding of this topic from the standpoint of other individuals, and in result I derived meaning from the responses of the participants.

The work of Patton (2002) and Willis (2007) indicates that in-depth interviews (semi or unstructured), a life history narrative, observational field notes, visual material, and creative non-fiction are methods that can be used in order to collect data and understand the lived experience of a research participant. Similar to the work by Patton and Willis, I used semi-structured qualitative interviews in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon at hand. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to recollect their experiences relating to parental involvement and provided the researcher with a thick description. The interview questions that were used for this study focused on perceptions of the individuals and therefore served as a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a methodology that is often used within the interpretive paradigm and therefore the researcher interacted with what is being researched and engaged in not only interpretation, but also exploration (Willis).

The rationale for choosing the interpretive paradigm for this study was to reflect on the understanding of the phenomenon being researched. The epistemological and ontological views that are associated with the interpretive paradigm are important to me as the researcher. Epistemologically, I used the subjectivist nature of knowledge and created meaning from the data collected from the interview participants in my study (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). As ontology is "the study of being" (Crotty, p.10), I am

interested in understanding more about what it is like to experience something. Epistemology refers to the relationship of the researcher and the research participants, therefore a researcher will try to minimize the distance between him and the research participants (Creswell, 1998).

This was done by relating and interacting with the participants to provide new knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Ontology refers to the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher; reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research. One must consider that multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, the individuals in the study, and also the realities of the audience interpreting the study (Creswell, 1998). Interpretivists use phenomenological approaches in an attempt to explore what something is “really” like, and what the nature of that lived experience is like (van Manen, 1998).

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity is a process in which the researcher reflects on their assumptions, their choice of methodology, and on their role within the research setting. Within phenomenological research, reflexivity is a vital component (van Manen, 1990). As discussed in Chapter One, my personal experiences with parental involvement in competitive youth hockey led to my decision to complete the study on this topic.

## **Methodology**

**Phenomenological Approach.** To engage in phenomenological research is to “question something phenomenologically” and also to address the question of what something is “really” like. In addition, a researcher’s aim is to figure out what the nature of this lived experience is (van Manen, 1998, p.42). The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences related to parental involvement for males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey and the impacts it has on the individuals involved. The perspective of American phenomenology is most suitable for this study as it incorporates descriptions of the experience and the participants’ thoughts and interpretations of the experience (Caelli, 2000). In phenomenological research, in all its stages, it is important to be constantly mindful of one’s original question, and thus be consistently oriented to the lived experience that makes it possible to ask the “what is it like” question (van Manen, p.42). Revealing the essence of the experience of some phenomenon is of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable, or

subjectively felt (Patton, 2002). For this study, the participants discussed their real life experiences and interpretations and my analysis brought subjectivity to the study, as meanings were derived from the responses of the participants.

Phenomenological approaches focus on exploring how human beings make sense of an experience and transform that experience into consciousness, both individually and as a shared meaning (Patton, 2002). It requires a researcher to thoroughly capture and describe how people experience a certain phenomenon. According to Patton, this is related to how they perceive it, describe it, feel it, remember it, talk about it to others, and make sense of it. As van Manen (1998) states, “a good phenomenological description is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the life world - it resonates with our sense of lived life” (p. 27). The phenomenological approach that was used in this study allowed the participants to explain how they perceived parental involvement by describing their experiences and recollecting the thoughts or feelings they had regarding the phenomenon.

“In phenomenology, inner perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (Moustakas, 1988, p.31). Perceptions are an integral part of a phenomenological approach; therefore I analyzed the research participants’ perceptions of parental involvement and the impacts that involvement had for them. The focus of a phenomenological approach is to develop an understanding of the essence of experiences about a phenomenon. Therefore, it describes the meaning of the lived experiences for the individuals within a study regarding a specific phenomenon. A phenomenological approach within a study aims at examining things (i.e. experiences of an individual) from many perspectives until a unified vision of the essence of the phenomena is achieved. Ultimately, a phenomenological approach seeks meaning from the perceptions and then develops an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) also states that “phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses” (p.58). As a researcher, I viewed the description that an individual gave regarding a phenomenon similar to an individual’s perception, because both allowed the individual to reflect on his personal experience. Therefore meaning was derived from this. “The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” (van Manen, 1998, p.25) and falls within

the interpretive paradigm. van Manen also makes a distinction between two senses of interpretation: 1) in its original meaning – interpretation is pointing to something; and 2) interpretation is pointing out the meaning of something.

Moustakas (1988) claims that there are acts of memory relevant to a phenomenon that reawaken feelings and bring past meanings of the phenomenon into the present. I achieved this through my study, as I was able to develop meanings from the rich information that was obtained through the in-depth interviews with the participants. The structure of these interviews will be further discussed in the Interviews section within this chapter. Phenomenology can be a description of a lived experience and can also be a description of meaning of the expressions of lived experiences (van Manen, 1998).

In his work, Creswell (1998) indicates that multiple individuals who have experienced a phenomenon are traditionally studied when a phenomenological approach is being utilized. For this study, I interviewed seven individuals in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their life experiences in regards to the parental involvement they have faced in competitive youth hockey and the resulting impacts.

In regards to human science research, a phenomenological approach is concerned with wholeness and examining things from many sides, angles and perspectives, and is committed to descriptions of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It has also been suggested that a researcher will use a phenomenological approach when conducting a study because he/she may have a personal interest in the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). As previously mentioned, I not only have an interest in the phenomenon of parental involvement and the impacts it can have, but I have experienced the phenomenon first hand.

### **Ethics**

To ensure that my research followed ethical procedures, I followed Brock University's ethical guidelines – Research Ethics Board (REB) when conducting my research. Before any research began, an REB application was submitted and met the requirements of an ethical study. According to Fontana and Frey (2005) extreme care must be taken in order to avoid any harm from happening to the participant of the study. To be specific, I avoided any type of psychological harm within this study by allowing participants to withdraw from the interview (if need be), and allowed them time when

responding to the questions given in the interview guide. I also provided participants with a list of local resources that aid in psychological distress (see Appendix F).

In relation to a ‘Conflict of Interest’ within the proposed study, the researcher and/or their partner or immediate family members did not receive any personal benefits related to this study such as financial gain, patent and ownership, employment, consultancies, or board membership. Additional queries associated with the REB at Brock University can be found in Appendix H.

### **Informed Consent**

A consent form was distributed to and signed by each research participant within the study. With an informed consent form – participants have the right to be protected against vulnerability in the process of interviews and in how the results from the interviews are shared (Seidman, 2006). As the primary researcher, I ensured that participants remained anonymous and were able to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendices B-D). It is important to note, that there was one participant who dropped out of the study due to his fear of being audio recorded. This particular individual and I set up an ‘initial meeting time’ and then rescheduled to do the actual interview. When the actual time arrived to conduct the interview at Brock University, the individual was unable to start, even before I started the recorder. I told him we did not need to complete the interview if he was uncomfortable, and the interview did not take place.

Prior to the start of an interview, participants were reminded of their rights as a research participant and the verbal script was read aloud (see Appendix C). As an investigator, I provided detailed information regarding the nature of the study and its purpose (see Appendices A-D). The study included interviews that used open-ended questions, thus the interviews were conversational. The conversational interview cleared up any misunderstandings that arose within the interview (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Participant Rights**

Participation in this study was voluntary. A participant may have declined to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, a participant may have decided to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which he or she is entitled. If a participant had decided to withdraw at any point, all data collected during the interview would have been destroyed. Withdrawal

from the study would not have resulted in any penalty or consequence. All participation was voluntary as described in the consent form (see Appendix D).

### **Participant Confidentiality**

In using the guidelines set by Brock University's REB and Seidman's (2006) major forms of informed consent, all research participants were treated in an ethical manner. One concern however, was the issue of psychological harm; given that the research that was being collected for this study was related to a sensitive topic (i.e. parental relationships and the home). Seidman claims that a researcher should first state exactly what the study is for and the purpose of it. Secondly, any risks that are associated with the study should be outlined. Third, the rights of the participants must be apparent as well as any benefits. The next part should indicate confidentiality of records and ensure that the researcher will keep the identity of the participant confidential. All information provided in the study is considered confidential; names were not be included or, in any other way, associated with the data collected in the study. Pseudonyms were used in the study instead of the real participant names. The pseudonyms for the participants are Randy, Owen, Gary, Blair, Brian, Greg and Paul. The next stage is known as dissemination and here the researcher should mention how the information from the research participants will be distributed (Seidman). Appendices C, D, G, and H indicate how I used Seidman's suggestions and the guidelines presented by Brock University's REB.

### **Information Storage**

According to the REB, an explanation is needed regarding how written records, video/audio tapes, and questionnaires will be secured, and details of its final disposal or storage, including how long the materials will be secured and the disposal method to be used are to be provided. Data collected during this study, including audio recordings and transcribed interviews, were stored electronically on the password-protected personal computer of the researcher, with all names removed from the written document and replaced with pseudonyms. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed electronically by the researcher and then deleted from the recording device; only the researcher and the thesis supervisor (Dr. Trent Newmeyer) had access to the recordings. The researcher personally transcribed each audio taped interview into a separate

transcript of data before the analysis of the data began. Access to this data was restricted to the researcher and the thesis supervisor, and only for the purposes of analysis and research interpretations.

### **Associated Risks & Benefits**

The REB also outlines any possible risks or benefits that are associated with a research study. When conducting research with other humans, guidelines such as this are imperative to follow. By using the REB template from Brock University, I have provided any possible risks and benefits that may arise from the study (See Appendix H, sections 2 & 3).

In the case that strong emotions related to bad experiences had arisen during the interview, it was imperative to ensure that the participants did not experience harm in any way (i.e. psychological harm). It is apparent that most interviews tend to be emotional experiences for participants and that “qualitative interviews share similarities with therapy as both are based on empathy and listening skills’ giving space for participants to talk about personal issues to someone who wants to listen” (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008, p.35). Differences exist as well, because a therapist will listen and try to help a participant, whereas a researcher uses the information from the participant for his/her study, and offers little feedback to the participant (Mitchell & Irvine).

As I am not trained in the field of psychology, I did not act as a therapist in any way because I was not able to offer adequate support. To lessen the chance of a strong emotional reaction, I allowed the participants to set the pace of the interview by giving them extended periods of silence to think about a response or to recompose if they were struggling with a response. If it had been needed, I notified them that the recording device would have been turned off and I would leave the room to let them have a moment to themselves. If this were to occur, the interview would have ultimately been suspended for a short period of time, but resumed once the participant was able to do so (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). In addition, I would refer the participant to external counseling services that exist within the City of St. Catharines and the Niagara Region (see Appendix F). I believe this was most effective in helping these individuals as these services are offered by trained professionals.

## **Method**

**Development of data collection method & rationale.** The method that I used for this study consisted of in-depth interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded; therefore an audio recorder was present during all interviews with participants. I used an interpretive research paradigm; therefore the interview was used to gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. As stated within the methodology, I used a phenomenological approach; this is another reason as to why interviews were used as the method. In a phenomenological study, reflective interpretation of the text is needed to achieve a fuller, more meaningful understanding – this can be achieved through research that is collected through interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Interviews**

“Typically in the phenomenological investigation, the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). A phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere for the research participant. This was achieved with each of the research participants, as I tried to build rapport with them and gain their trust (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the first research interview, a pilot interview was conducted in order to hone the researcher’s interview skills and ensure that no changes to the interview guide were necessary. The pilot interview helped identify that the researcher needed to probe for more details during the interviews; however, no changes were required for the interview guide. Interviews were used as the primary method to collect data for this study because it is an effective way to learn about the lived experiences of individuals. This occurred by asking a series of questions over the course of the interview for each participant within this study. This resulted in the research participants being able to recall specific moments in their life when they experienced parental involvement in hockey and explain how it impacted their lives. Therefore, interviews were an appropriate method to collect data for my study because, as van Manen (1998) states: “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience; it aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p.9).

In order to gain an in-depth understanding and meaning of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts it has, an adequate sample was needed. This

study involved participants who played competitive youth hockey for 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, and withdrew between the ages of 14-17. The sample consisted of seven males between the ages of 18-25 that experienced this phenomenon. It should be made clear that although the participants are aged 18-25 years old, I was looking for experiences that these participants had during their youth. I gained an understanding of positive and negative parental involvement through this sample.

Given that these experiences occurred in the past, the issue of recall was dealt with in order to ensure that this study generated useful and accurate information. Participants needed to be able to recall past experiences that they had regarding this phenomenon because it is an aspect of the participant criteria for this study. The use of the 18-25 year age range for participants aided in recall for this study, as respondents likely faced parental involvement in the recent past. Prior to the interview, each participant was given a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) which contained details of the interview process and specifics of the study. This aided participants in the recall process as they were able to draw upon their past experiences prior to the start of the interview. During the interview I allowed each participant adequate amounts of time to answer, used probing questions to aid in the recollection of the experience, and allowed for silence (with no distractions) throughout the interview process (Hassan, 2006; Law et al., 2007). I also included introductory questions within my interview guide to ease the participant into the interview and prepare them for the rest of the interview (Law et al.; Côté et al., 2005). The interview guide that I created acted as a tool in helping participants recollect their childhood experiences and describe their perceptions about the phenomenon under study. If needed, the interviewee was also be given the option to have a follow up interview as a form of member checking to ensure that his/her responses were truthful and accurate.

The participants that were included in this phenomenological study were only asked to participate in one interview. Creswell (1998) recommends interviews with up to ten participants for a phenomenological study; while Boyd (2001) claims that two to ten participants are sufficient to reach saturation. Seven participants were interviewed for this study; I believe that this provided adequate data, as the lengthy interviews provided a thick description of each the participants' lived experience. If I had interviewed fewer

research participants, I would have certainly considered the three-interview structure that is outlined by Seidman (2006). To be realistic, it would be difficult to arrange three separate interviews with three different people. This is due to time constraints (when analyzing data), scheduling conflicts, and the amount of time that it would take out of the individuals life (each interview would be purely voluntary and Seidman suggests spacing the interviews out from 3 days a week to a week apart). Although Seidman mentions that if a researcher only conducts one interview with a person that they have never met before, they “will be treading on thin contextual ice” (p.17), I believe that I avoided this. In-depth interviews with each participant allowed me to obtain the thick rich description I was looking for, so I was able to develop an understating of this phenomenon. Therefore I was able to expose the details of the experience and also reflect on the meanings that were derived from the interviews (Seidman).

Seidman (2006) claims that “interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry” (p. 8) and the purpose of it is to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. In-depth interviews were used as a method to collect data for this study because I wanted to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of parental involvement and the impacts it may have on an individual in the sport of hockey. An interviewer uses open-ended questions when interviewing a research participant; therefore his/her major task is to build upon and explore a participant’s responses to those questions. The ultimate goal of each interview is to have the participant reconstruct his experience within the topic under study and reflect on that experience (Moustakas, 1994). Two descriptive levels of the empirical phenomenological approach are: 1) the original data is compromised of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue; 2) the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participants’ story (Girorgi, 1985; cited in Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data collection procedures**

**Recruiting participants.** Participants were recruited through posters, word of mouth, and/or a letter of invitation. Posters were placed at Brock University and at a local hockey arena, such as the Seymour-Hannah Sports & Entertainment Centre which is

located in the City of St. Catharines. Both house league hockey (non-competitive hockey) and men's hockey (recreational hockey) are played at this arena. After speaking with the participants, it was discovered that each form of recruitment was successful as two individuals read my poster at the arena, two were recruited by word of mouth and three individuals were recruited from posters at Brock University. It should be mentioned that it was difficult to recruit participants who fit all the required criteria for my study. Although there was a lot of interest, and I received many emails and conversed with multiple individuals regarding my study, many did not meet the guidelines of my study and therefore participant recruitment became challenging at times. As outlined below, other recruitment challenges consisted of an individual withdrawing from my study (prior to the start of an interview) and also coordinating interview dates.

Before selecting participants for an interview, the interviewer established access to them and made contact. Interviewing involves a relationship between the interviewer and the participant; therefore how interviewers gain access to potential participants and make contact with them can impact the beginning of that relationship and all other steps in the interviewing process (Moustakas, 1994). I did this by recruiting participants for my study, building a rapport with them during the interview and also by the use of gatekeepers (which is discussed in the following section). I made contact with each participant myself and did not rely on third parties to contact potential research participants. Building the interviewing relationship begins the moment the potential participant becomes aware of the study (Seidman, 2006). When conducting this study, I considered this statement provided by Seidman, “the more care and thoroughness interviewers put into making contact, the better foundation they establish for the interviewing relationship” (p.46).

Before the process of any interview began for my study, each participant had contacted me via email (which was attached at the bottom of all recruitment posters that were posted around Brock University and Seymour-Hannah Sports & Entertainment Centre). Multiple emails between myself and each of the interviewees was required in order to arrange a mutually agreed upon place, date, and time for the interview. Of the seven interviews that were completed, two took place in the individuals' home at the

request of the participants, while the other five were done in a research room at Brock University.

By recruiting participants at Brock University and local arenas, it was hoped that the sample would include individuals that still engage in recreational hockey, as well as those that have completely withdrawn from the sport. After interviewing the seven participants from my study it is interesting to note that Randy, Blair, Owen and Gary no longer play ice hockey at any level; while Greg, Paul and Brian now play in recreational men's league organizations for fun.

In relation to the criteria that were required for each of the research participants for this study, the sampling that is best for phenomenological research is purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998; Seidman, 2006). "The individual must have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their conscious experiences" (Creswell, p.111). According to Neuman and Robson (2009), purposeful sampling obtains all possible cases that fit particular criteria, using various methods. For this study, the only method that was used to collect data from the participants was interviews. Individuals were selected based on meeting the criteria of the study and had to have experienced the phenomenon under study.

### **Participants**

Seven males, who self-identified that they met all of the criteria for this study, participated in in-depth interviews with the researcher. All of the participants perceived that they experienced parental pressure when they played competitive youth hockey. While the experiences described by these individuals reveal many similarities, each of the participants perceived the level of parental involvement he experienced and its impacts differently.

Randy experienced a great deal of pressure from his father while he participated in competitive youth hockey. As a child, he was afraid that his father would be angry or disappointed if he did not play well each game. His parents would often fight after his hockey games, as his mother would try to defend him against his father's criticisms. Randy explained that the car ride home after a hockey game was the worst because he experienced so much negativity from his father, such as yelling, criticism and the silent treatment. Randy claimed that he was also supported by his mother and father, as they

attended most of his games and practices. A motivating factor for Randy to continue to play competitive hockey as long as he did, was the fact that his father was willing to take time out of his day to always be there for tryouts, practices, games and tournaments. He believed that despite the criticism and yelling, his father truly enjoyed being involved in his sport and wanted nothing, but for him to excel at the sport. Randy explained that a number of factors contributed to him withdrawing from competitive hockey in his mid-teens, including pressure from his father and the desire to spend more time on school and work.

Owen became involved in the sport of ice hockey because it was the sport that his father played and enjoyed. Owen began to dislike playing ice hockey once the level of parental support he received began to decline. In particular, he did not enjoy playing if his parents were not in attendance at a game, or if they were unable to drive him to a game because of other obligations. The relationship between Owen and his father during the hockey season was strained compared to the relationship they had during the off-season in the summer months. The negative experiences Owen faced when playing competitive youth hockey stemmed from a lack of parental involvement, and also the criticisms that he would receive from his father when he actually did attend games. Owen cited these as the reasons for his withdrawal from competitive hockey. He left the sport in his mid-teens to pursue another sport in which he received more support and less criticism from his parents.

As a child, Gary always had a desire to play ice hockey and believed he was capable of playing at an even higher level of competitive hockey. He explained that his father held him back from playing at a higher level of hockey because his father wanted him to play for his hometown. Gary's father also wanted him to play the same position as he did in his youth. In essence, Gary felt that his dad held him back from playing to his full abilities, so that he could be the 'town star', and make his dad proud. Gary believed that his father cared more for the sport than he did; which led to him solely playing for his father. The pressure that Gary experienced from his father typically occurred during games or in the car ride home after a game. When playing competitive hockey, he could never feel relaxed because of pressure from his father. Gary withdrew from competitive

hockey in his mid-teens to play a different competitive sport, one in which he did not experience pressure from his father.

Brian was influenced by both his father and his uncle to play hockey. Brian began playing at a house league level and eventually joined an all-star team, which eventually led to him playing competitively for his hometown. Both of Brian's parents were actively involved with his hockey and he felt supported while playing competitive youth hockey. Although Brian often felt encouraged by his parents and their involvement in his sport, there were times when he felt pressure from his father. Brian believed that these pressures helped him to be a better hockey player and contributed to his personal success as a star of his team. Brian felt he was micro-coached after each game by his father. His father would give him pointers and criticisms after each game. Although Brian did not always appreciate these pressures in the moment, he now believes that he thrived off of them and was able to become a better hockey player. Brian believes that feedback from parents should be delivered constructively, not through yelling or derogatory comments.

Blair received support from both parents while participating in competitive youth hockey, including transportation to games, registration and the purchase of new equipment. Blair also experienced a lot of pressure, as he was often yelled at by his father during or after games. Sometimes the pressures that his father put on him caused arguments between Blair and his father. Blair explained that his mother would try to act as a mediator between him and his father. When Blair did not play well, he believed that he disappointed his parents and knew that there would be an argument with his father. Despite the pressures that he faced, Blair believes that sometimes parents need to engage in aggressive pressuring in sport in order to get the message across quickly. He explained that his love of competitive hockey declined as a result of parental pressure, but he had to continue playing for another year because his parents had spent money to buy him new equipment. Eventually he made the decision to completely withdraw from the sport because his team was losing too much and he did not enjoy playing anymore.

When Greg started playing recreational youth hockey his parents gave him the choice to move up and play more competitively; he chose to play at a competitive level. Greg described experiencing support from his parents as they were very involved, attended most of his hockey games and delivered supportive comments during and after

games. Greg experienced pressure from his father when he did not play well, as he felt he was disappointing him. There were times when Greg felt pressure to perform better so that he could make his parents happy. He would often push himself and take his father's advice into consideration in order to improve his skills for himself, but also to impress his parents. Greg described that he continued playing for as long as he did partly because he knew his parents liked watching him, eventually financial difficulties held Greg back from playing hockey at a competitive level.

Paul's father was part of the coaching staff when he played competitive youth hockey. Paul described experiencing a lot of pressure on the bench throughout games. He would argue with his father during games. Altercations such as this often led to Paul wanting to leave halfway through games because he felt defeated and discouraged. There were also times where Paul felt supported because of the praise he would receive from his father after a good performance. The pressure that Paul experienced also occurred in the car ride after the game and once he got home. Paul stopped playing competitive hockey in his mid-teens, but continues to play recreationally because he enjoys playing the sport just for fun. He explained that he stopped playing competitively because he knew he was not going to play professional hockey and he did not want to "waste mom and dad's money".

**Gatekeepers.** A researcher studying the experience of people at a particular site must gain access through the person who has responsibility for the operation of the site. In order to begin any form of data collection, or even the recruitment process I needed to establish some kind of a relationship with a gatekeeper. According to Seidman (2006), "when interviewers try to contact potential participants whom they do not know, they often face gatekeepers who control access to those people" (p.43). For my study, a gatekeeper was the individual who was in charge of the local arenas in St. Catharines, as well as the individual in charge of postings at Brock University. I needed to contact these gatekeepers before I began the recruitment process of my study as I was going to be putting up posters within the arenas and at Brock in order to begin the process of finding participants. A gatekeeper may also be any individual that knows of someone who has experienced parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. Through word of mouth, these gatekeepers provided access to participants for the study.

**Sample.** This study was unique as male participants that dropped out of competitive youth hockey were asked interview questions based on their past experiences in the sport and the involvement that they experienced from parents. This is unique because most studies related to parental involvement have involved children and/or parents directly, while they were involved in the sport. For example, Humpries (1991) used participants from grades from two-ten in her quantitative study to examine their opinions about competitive sport. As previously mentioned, the sample for this study consisted of seven males who identified themselves as being between the ages of 18-25 years old, playing competitive youth hockey for a minimum of 1-5 years, experiencing parental pressure at some point, and dropping out of competitive youth hockey between the ages of 14-17.

**Interviews.** The interviews were held in a research room at Brock University. Two of the participants felt they were more comfortable at their own homes; therefore these interviews were conducted in the participant's home. Upon arrival at the interview, confirmed participants were given verbal scripts (see Appendix C). A consent form was distributed to the interviewee and they were encouraged to thoroughly read it over and sign it (see Appendix D). The interviews were digitally recorded and each lasted approximately 1 hour (see Interview guide, Appendix E).

### **Purpose of the Interviews**

According to Fontana and Frey (2005), the most common form of interviewing involves face-face contact; this is the type of interview that was used when collecting data from each participant for this study. The purpose of the interview was to obtain a rich, in-depth experiential account of an event in the life of the respondent (Fontana & Frey). Similar to what other authors have discussed, my interviews consisted of open ended questions that provided in-depth detailed information regarding the phenomenon. As previously stated, the interpretive paradigm explores the lived experiences of an individual and in result meanings can be derived from these uncovered experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to develop an understanding of the phenomenon in context (Patton, 2002).

van Manen, (1998) proposes the idea that patience and silence can serve as effective ways of gathering research in an interview, as it allows the interviewee to gather

recollections and proceed with a story. I used this strategy when conducting interviews for this study. If it seemed as though a person being interviewed began to generalize about the experience, I inserted a question that helped them relate it directly to their experience such as ‘can you give me an example?’ or ‘what was it like?’ (van Manen, p.68).

### **Data Analysis**

**Length of study.** The timeline of study was as follows: data collection began in December 2010 and finished in February 2011. The study was completed in September 2011.

Data analysis began by developing a transcript of each of the interviews conducted. After each interview was transcribed, they were thoroughly read multiple times in order to fully understand the rich context. Although transcribing interviews from a tape recording can be time consuming (approximately 4-6 hours to transcribe a 90 minute tape), it is an effective way to sift through and analyze the data collected (Seidman, 2006).

**Epoche and phenomenological reduction.** According to Moustakas (1994), data collection and analysis for a phenomenological study begins with the Epoche and Phenomenological Reduction. The Epoche, or bracketing, gives the researcher an original vantage point and therefore clears the mind and allows the researcher to enter a “pure place, an open self ready to embrace life in what it truly offers” (Moustakas, 1988, p.75). The Epoche doubts the scientific facts, the knowing of things in advance, and helps to derive new knowledge and a new experience (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers are able to create new ideas, new feelings and also new understandings (Moustakas, 1988). Many researchers, particularly in American phenomenology, acknowledge that this is difficult to achieve; instead researchers attempt to temporarily suspend their beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon (Caelli, 2001; LeVasseur, 2003). For example, when conducting the interviews and analyzing data for this study, I did not assume that any type or amount of parental involvement was positive or negative.

Phenomenological reduction refers to describing in textural language just what one sees; such as the experience and the relationship between the phenomenon and self (Moustakas, 1994). One dimension of Phenomenological Reduction is horizontalization.

Horizontalization of perceptions indicates that every perception counts and that every perception adds something important to the experience; “The entity is never exhausted in properties and meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p.53). I used this technique when analyzing the data, as all of the information obtained describing the lived experiences of the research participants was of equal value. Statements that were irrelevant to the topic or repetitive were later deleted “leaving only the Horizons” (Moustakas, 1994, p.97). These Horizons were clustered into themes and organized into a description of the phenomenon of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey (Moustakas, 1994). Within this study, I examined the responses of the research participants and described them in my findings to ensure that the phenomenon was well understood.

I analyzed the data collected from the interviews using the phenomenological methods provided by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007). After the transcriptions were completed, I read through each transcript multiple times in order to become even more familiar with the data. As stated above, I treated all statements as having equal value. I highlighted significant statements and removed irrelevant quotes that were not related to the topic (Moustakas, 1994). I then developed meaning statements for all relevant quotes. I continued the process of horizontalization by grouping these meaning statements into fourteen themes. Related themes were then grouped together into three clusters (Moustakas 1994; Creswell, 2007).

I then began the next step in phenomenological writing, which can be found in Chapter 4. According to Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), this consists of writing a description of *what* the participants in the study experienced regarding the phenomenon of parental involvement in competitive hockey during their youth. This is known as a textural description of the experience and it includes verbatim examples (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007). I also included a description of “how the experience happened”, which is called a structural description (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). After the textural and structural descriptions were developed, a composite description emerged (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), a composite description in phenomenology, is “the ‘essence’ of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (p.159).

**Possible Pitfalls**

There are a number of pitfalls that arose when conducting this study. The first pitfall in my research related to interviewing. Interviews are often time consuming and can be considered as being very labour intensive (Seidman, 2006). The interview process required a great deal of time not only from the researcher, but also from participants. It was difficult to find participants willing to commit up to an hour and a half of time to this study. Another pitfall that could have occurred was an overabundance of poorly managed interviews (van Manen, 1998). I avoided this pitfall by ensuring that no more than seven interviews were conducted for this study (Creswell, 1998). As I conducted the interviews myself, I ensured that the interviews were well managed and stayed on topic. Recall was also a concern as participants were discussing past experiences. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this issue was dealt with to minimize the potential problems that could occur.

**Trustworthiness/Quality**

Trustworthiness is used as a qualitative term and essentially refers to the term validity that is often used in quantitative research. Moustakas (1994), a notable phenomenological qualitative researcher, uses the term validity when seeking trustworthiness within his data. Trustworthiness provides an opportunity to support the quality of one's data collection and interpretation, and by incorporating the subjective nature of qualitative research into its evaluation (Krane & Baird, 2005; cited in Kingsley, 2008). Creswell (1998) states that phenomenologists view verification as being largely related to the researcher's interpretation of the data that is collected and analyzed.

A form of credibility that was used within my study was member checking. After the interviews were transcribed, they were given to the participant via email for them to review. In addition, an optional follow-up interview was offered to each participant, but was declined by all participants. The interview transcript allowed the participant to verify that I accurately portrayed what they said during the interview. In addition, this allowed an opportunity for feedback from the research participants, as all seven participants verified the interview transcript that I provided them (Kingsley, 2008). This is closely tied with the concept of 'validation of data' that is provided by Moustakas (1994). I requested that each participant carefully examine the description that he provided

regarding his perceptions and to notify me of any corrections or additions that needed to be made. After the data analysis process was complete, I also emailed each participant a copy of the Findings. I asked that they review it and notify me if I misinterpreted anything they said or missed any important aspects of their experience. The participants did not notify me of any necessary changes.

An audit trail was also maintained for this study (Sharts-Hopko, 2002). This includes raw data from the interviews, notes made by the researcher, and “data reconstruction and synthesis products including the structure of categories, findings and conclusions, and a final report that connects the existing literature to emergent concepts, relationships, and interpretations” (Sharts-Hopko). The data collection and analysis process has been thoroughly described in this chapter in order to increase the credibility of this study.

### **Dependability**

In qualitative research, the term dependability is often used to refer to reliability (Neuman & Robson, 2009). Due to the nature of qualitative research, reliability can sometimes be problematic. Qualitative research often relies on interpretation, with little opportunity to ensure consistency (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers accept that different researchers using different measures will get distinct results and fear that fixed measures for reliability may neglect important aspects of diversity within the social world (Neuman & Robson).

Triangulation of data sources, such as the researcher’s perceptions, the individuals’ perceptions and current literature, contributed to the dependability of data for this study. It is important to note that perceptions within this study are used to represent the lived the experiences that the individual, and myself as the researcher, have lived through. These sources can be used together in order to further understand the phenomenon of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and how it impacts the individuals involved. According to Patton (2002), triangulation of data sources helps to establish trustworthiness within research. In relation to the interpretivist epistemology and ontology of this study, the trustworthiness of my data will not provide one single truth; instead it will help to structure reality and create new knowledge that represents multiple truths regarding the phenomenon under study (Willis 2007; Patton).

**Researcher's Role**

Ultimately my role as a researcher was to engage in this study by conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with research participants and collect rich data to help understand this phenomenon. My role was to collect data on an individual's perception of parental involvement regarding the sport of competitive ice hockey and to analyze the data. When analyzing the data, I derived meaning from each participant's interview transcript and then interpreted the meaning; therefore bringing subjectivity to the study. "The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical and systematic resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed arrive at essential descriptions of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.47).

As a researcher, I hoped to understand the lived experiences and the meaning that is associated with these lived experiences regarding parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. Therefore, I attempted to accurately portray the story of each research participant. I compared the stories and findings from the research participants and then presented an understanding of this phenomenon under study. As a result, the findings are subjective, as they are not the 'be all and end all'; this allows the reader to relate and interpret the data. Interpretivists do not provide one single answer or truth, they look at things subjectively and articulate a meaning (Willis, 2007). As a researcher I attempted to present the data in a clean, rationalized report that is open for interpretation by readers.

This study adopted a phenomenological approach in order to develop an understanding of the experiences related to parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. It adds to the existing body of literature on the topic of parental involvement in sport. By using a qualitative methodology for this study, it is hoped that deeper understanding and insight were obtained in regards to this phenomenon.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

Fourteen themes emerged as a result of the data analysis. These themes were grouped into three clusters based on the three research questions identified in the first chapter: (1) Description of parental involvement: “I want them to be there and help me”; (2) Perceived impacts of parental involvement: “I felt like he actually cared”; and (3) Impact of parental involvement on commitment: “I kind of miss hockey now”.

The first cluster includes themes which offer insight into the experience of parental involvement for males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey and what it is like to experience this phenomenon. Themes within this cluster seek to answer the question: how do males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey describe the experiences associated with parental involvement in the sport? Most of the participants experienced pressure from their fathers rather than their mothers. Participants described that both mothers and fathers typically invested their time and finances to support their child’s sport, but mothers were perceived as the primary providers of emotional and background support. Within the first cluster there are six themes: not playing for self; facing high expectations associated with parental investment; experiencing pressure during and after games; feeling pressure due to interparental conflict; receiving support from mother; and facing criticism, but preferring feedback.

The second cluster seeks to answer the question: what are the perceived impacts of parental involvement for males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey? All participants experienced both pressure and support from their parents when they played competitive youth hockey. Based on their experiences, participants explained that most of the impacts of parental pressure were negative, except for improved performance. The impacts of parental support were perceived to be positive and support was described by most participants as the ideal form of involvement. Despite the negative impacts of pressure, some participants explained that parental pressure was preferred over no parental involvement at all. When parents were involved in their sport, participants perceived it as meaning that their parents cared for them, even if the involvement was in the form of pressure. There are five themes in this cluster: negative feelings result from pressure; pressure negatively impacts father-son relationship; pressure may improve

performance but reduce fun; positive feelings result from parents making an effort; and support increases confidence and enjoyment.

The third cluster includes themes related to the impacts of parental involvement on commitment. Themes within this cluster attempt to answer the question: what are the perceived impacts of parental involvement on commitment to competitive hockey? Since all of the participants withdrew from competitive youth hockey, their experiences provide insight into why young males leave this sport and what role parental involvement plays in that decision. Participants explained that pressuring behaviours from parents, particularly fathers, reduced their commitment overall, while supportive behaviours increased their commitment. This cluster contains three themes: parental pressure reduces commitment; parental investment may increase commitment; and parental support strengthens commitment.

This chapter will explore each of the fourteen themes within the three clusters, providing verbatim examples from the participants in the study. The explanation of each theme includes a textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how it happened as explained by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Description of Parental Involvement: “I Want Them to Be There and Help Me”**

**Not playing for self.** Participants in this study described the experience of not playing for themselves while they were engaged in competitive youth hockey. The theme of not playing for self means that as a youth, the participant was not playing for his own personal sense of enjoyment; he was playing because he believed it was what his parents, particularly his father, wanted him to do. This occurred when the participant was either forced to play competitive youth hockey or wanted to play the sport just to make his parents happy. In some cases, participants were forced to play hockey because it was the sport their fathers most enjoyed. Brian described this when he stated, “I did it because my dad put me into it. And then my uncle and my dad played as kids – and they enjoyed it, so they thought I would too”. Brian did not ask to play competitive hockey as a youth, his dad signed him up because he thought he would like it. Owen also described his experience of being forced to play hockey as a youth:

I felt like I was playing for others rather than myself because it was always like you had to play a sport and ‘well, we already signed you up for this’. In my last year, it

wasn't even – I don't think I even went to sign up. I think they just went and signed me up on their own. Which is also frustrating finding out they signed you up – and already paid; and that was the reason, 'oh we already paid'.

These participants were not consulted by their parents about wanting to play youth hockey; their parents simply signed them up. Randy wanted to play youth hockey, but he described his father signing him up to play at a competitive level without consulting him:

I think my parents or whomever, or maybe a coach recommended me to try out for a competitive team ... I think that is the first year you could have played competitive hockey, and my father signed me up to try out.

When they were children, these participants accepted the choices of their parents. Their parents typically did not ask them for their preferences regarding leisure or sporting experiences. This contributed to the youth playing for their parents, instead of for themselves.

Participants whose parents did not force them to play hockey still perceived that they were not playing for themselves. These participants described being able to choose which sports they played and at what level. However, they decided to play hockey because they believed it was what their parents, often their fathers, wanted from them. This experience was described by Greg:

Dad has played hockey his whole life... So I would say it was my father's fault that I got into hockey...but it was always my choice, and it was always – 'look, you can play with whatever team you want, um you can tryout for the rep team if you want, or you can just play house league for a while'.

Greg was not forced to play competitive youth hockey, but he chose to play because he knew that his father enjoyed the sport. The participants who chose to play hockey because their parents enjoyed the sport also described playing for their parents instead of for themselves.

**Facing high expectations associated with parental investment.** When parents choose to enroll their child in competitive hockey, a large investment is required. Support in the form of finances and time was perceived by the participants as crucial in competitive youth hockey. Participants explained that as children they relied heavily on parental investment of time and finances in order to be involved in the sport. Mothers and

fathers were both described as providing this type of support. Greg described his reliance on parental investment for his participation in competitive youth hockey:

Like, if my parents were not supportive, if they were not willing to drive me – like I didn't live in town. It wasn't just like – 'oh, I am just going to go and play hockey'. If they weren't financially willing to support me – then no, I would not have played competitive hockey.

Blair also perceived that he relied on his parents for his participation in the sport:

Dad drove me more and then mom would financially support it. But they would both make it to most of the games. Just watching and when it was time to get new equipment – the amount of money that was going into it and time and driving and prep for meals before the game and just – overall preparation and stuff. That was a big support.

Participants perceived this high level of parental investment as a major form of support. Parents often need to invest more time and money into their child's participation in hockey than some other youth sports or recreational activities. Therefore, youth rely much more on their parents to provide them with the opportunity to play this sport.

Due to the high level of investment required from parents in competitive youth hockey, participants often described feeling pressure to continue playing and performing well in the sport. Participants described not wanting to waste their parents' time and money; this resulted in pressure to continue playing well. Blair explained the pressure he felt due to his parents' financial investment in the sport:

It's a league where they have spent a lot of money on me to play and my equipment is really expensive, so if it's not in games – he wants me to learn, and probably the hard way so I learn better. There was always times when they would get too into it maybe and take it a little too serious; but then you realize what's at stake and what's involved and the money and all that.

Brian also described feeling that he had to perform well due to his father's investment:

Well I knew that if he was putting the money out, and he was showing up on time then he was making sure that I had my homework and food and all that, that I wasn't going to just waste his time and not try. Like he was putting in a lot of effort, like just as much off the ice, when I had to put it in on the ice!

These participants felt that they must continue playing youth hockey, and performing well, because of high parental investment in the sport. While high parental investment is necessary for youth to participate in competitive youth hockey, it may lead to increased pressure due to high parental expectations

Participants frequently perceived that their fathers expected them to play well every game. They described never being able to relax and play for fun while they were involved in competitive youth hockey. Gary described feeling like he was never good enough to meet his father's high expectations, even if he played well:

As a kid – I felt crucified, like I hated going to hockey cause even though I knew I was good and that I would put up big points – it was just shitty to come back to know that I still didn't meet his standards, his standards were too high! Like I was good, but he was just one of those guys.

Participants described that when their parents expected them to perform well every game, it led to a feeling of constant pressure to live up to the high expectations of their parents, particularly their fathers.

While most participants described experiencing overt pressure to meet high expectations, some described believing that their parents had high expectations without any specific comments or actions from the parents. For example, Greg described experiencing this type of pressure:

I think like, the pressure would have been to push myself... like, it wasn't - if I didn't want to, they weren't going to say 'well, you have to'. Or, 'you need to do better; you need to be a better player'. It was always in that case, 'you're good, you can be better'... it wasn't them verbally saying it, but knowing that they had high standards and high expectations.

This participant's parents did not openly pressure him to perform better, but the participant still felt pressure to live up to what he perceived his parent's expectations were. The stress associated with meeting high parental expectations was described as being far more intense for the participants whose parents openly put pressure on them to perform better.

**Experiencing pressure during and after games.** The pressure to meet high expectations often manifested itself in negative behaviour from fathers during and after

competitive youth hockey games. Various types of parental pressure were experienced during games. One type of pressure that many of the participants experienced was hearing their fathers yelling from the stands while they were playing. Randy described hearing his father yell during youth hockey games:

I could hear my father from the stands when I let in a goal over anyone and I mean it was bad enough because then I knew it was going to be a long ride home after the game...I mean other parents probably did it as well, but it doesn't mean you have to follow suit or be the leader in that sense.

Yelling during a game was described as the most public form of parental pressure as it is usually witnessed by teammates, opponents, coaches and other parents.

Some participants also described non-verbal pressuring behaviours from their fathers during games. Gary described his father making gestures to him while he was playing. He explained:

Like when I would look up at my dad and he would (*gesture with thumb up and thumb down*). My father he would sit there and wait for me to look and he would give the thumbs up, thumbs down, or in the middle.

While this form of parental pressure is not as obvious as yelling; it is noticed by the youth involved and is a part of the experience of playing competitive youth hockey.

Criticism on the bench during games was also experienced by participants whose fathers were involved in coaching or training. These participants described their fathers criticizing their play from the bench throughout each game. Paul described his experience when he stated:

Probably say one game, when we were on the powerplay or whatever and he didn't like how I was working it and stuff, and it wasn't how I was taught in practice how to do it. And he kind of was talking to me and saying how I shouldn't have done that or whatever and like kind of yelling at me, but not how he would speak to the other guys. And I kind of - yelled at him, like why – 'why are you singling me out like this right now' and stuff like that, and um, didn't want to play the rest of the game because you know – he's putting me down like that, whereas he wouldn't do that with the other guys. It was like 'I don't want to play right now'.

When parents are involved in training or coaching, they have more opportunities to criticize their child during the game. This may lead to more pressure for youth whose parents are in these positions.

Some parents also engaged in inappropriate behaviours towards referees, coaches, or other parents during games. Blair claimed that his father was even removed from the arena during a game. He described his father yelling at referees:

My dad's behaviour sometimes got out of control; he's been kicked out of a couple arenas... We were at a tournament and we were a single A team and we were playing everyone that was double A, so they were double the talent and double the skill level that we were. And we were in the finals and the ref was going for other team and favoring the other team, and he pretty much let him have it in the stands and then the other parents from another team got involved and got up in his face, and pretty much told him where to go, and then the ref told him to leave the building.

This type of inappropriate behaviour from parents was commonly described by the participants in this study; if not by their own parents, by the parents of their teammates. While the types of pressure experienced during games varied, including yelling, non-verbal actions, criticism or inappropriate behaviour, all participants described experiencing at least one form of pressure from their fathers during competitive youth hockey games.

Participants described the period directly following a game as the time when they experienced the most pressure, particularly from their fathers. This pressure typically occurred following a poor personal performance or a lost game. Criticism following each game was the most commonly described form of post-game pressure. Owen described his experience with this type of pressure from his father:

One thing he would say – would be 'oh, you should have stayed on your man more or you should have stayed out there a bit longer because the puck wouldn't have gone out past centre there if you were there' and its like, 'well, the coach said time to shift change, so you gotta shift, like there's other people on the team'. So he'd criticize that, again like something that wasn't my choice...powerplay lets say, like if I let something get by that was always a big, 'how the hell could you let that go by on the powerplay!', which again whether it just comes from the spectator thing or

not, I think everybody says that when you're playing but its like yeah, I figured that, you don't have to tell me about that again.

Another example was provided by Blair who described experiencing criticism from his father after a bad game:

After the game on the ride home, he said nothing but negative stuff about it. 'Lost- You let in a sour goal!' The car ride, it started off with him talking and talking and talking and then it just got quiet until we got home.

Participants felt they were being criticized when their fathers made negative comments about their performance following games. The comments were described as being delivered directly after the game, usually during the car ride home, and were perceived as non-helpful or even hurtful by the participants.

Yelling was another common form of post-game pressure experienced by participants in this study. Randy described experiencing this type of pressure after competitive youth hockey games:

Driving home after games, my father would be angry if we got blown out, or if we lost or if he thought I played poorly, and you know – he would yell and try to point out mistakes that he thought I was making...He would make me feel pretty badly. He would say pretty, pretty rough things to a young kid at the age of 7, 8, 9 years old...He would say in negative terms 'you played like crap (explicative, explicative)'...to that extent and go on and on about it. It would make you feel like you are worth nothing at that point and time; at that age especially, it was very discouraging that's for sure.

This type of post-game pressure also tended to occur during the drive home after a game. It was described by participants as hurtful or derogatory comments about the child's performance delivered in a raised, angry tone of voice by the father.

While yelling was perceived negatively, silent treatment was described as the worst form of post-game pressure by most participants. Gary explained this when he stated:

One thing I knew that I would absolutely get reamed at was when he wasn't in that lobby and he was in the car. That was definitely like a pre-cursor kind of thing. Like when I played my worst games, he wouldn't yell, he would just give that look of

disgust and it was pure silence. If it was a silent car ride home that was usually beyond disappointment I guess I could say. Like, it would be – ‘I don’t even want to look at you right now’.

Randy also described feeling that he disappointed his father when his father did not speak to him after a game:

When my dad yelled, he was mad! If I got the silent treatment, he was even more mad, to the point where he was disappointed. Being mad at your child is one thing, but being disappointed to me is a whole other level, it’s that much worse.

These participants perceived that when their father refused to speak to them after a game, it meant he was disappointed in them. When the child felt that he had disappointed his father, this was worse than angering him. All participants in this study experienced at least one form of post-game pressure from their fathers, including criticism, yelling or silent treatment; while some experienced all of these types of pressure.

**Feeling pressure due to interparental conflict.** When fathers pressure their sons in competitive youth hockey it sometimes leads to conflict between the parents. Some participants described witnessing conflicts between their mother and father as a result of the father’s treatment of the child before, during or after hockey games. Randy described hearing his parents fight after his hockey games:

On rides home there would be arguments between my parents about my play. Heck, I heard them in their bedroom when I was a kid yelling back and forth and her you know ‘he’s just a kid’, supporting me, ‘leave him alone! He tried his best!’ So, yeah I would definitely hear a few arguments.

Participants explained that during these conflicts their mothers would defend them against the negative comments and actions of their fathers. This placed pressure on the youth, because they believed that if they played poorly it would result in an argument between their parents. Participants also described their mothers as mediators, explaining that their mothers would step in to prevent conflict between the child and his father. Paul described his experience with his mother acting as a mediator:

I guess sometimes like if he wouldn’t necessarily address something right at the arena, sometimes it would be more in the car or when we got home. Or sometimes it would get heated, like yelling back and fourth in the van and mom’s obviously there

trying to say ‘why do you guys have to do this’ and trying to stop everything and like just wanting us to leave everything at the rink kind of thing.

Gary also described relying on his mother for mediation when he stated:

Mom would just calm him down if she was there, but a lot of the times she would work night shifts. So a lot of the times it was just my dad at the games, and don’t get me wrong, he wasn’t bad at all of the games, but quite a bit. When my mom came – she would just keep him calm.

These youth perceived that their mothers frequently intervened to reduce hockey-related fighting between the father and son. Based on the experience of these participants, this sometimes led to an increased level of conflict between the parents, as the mother often defended the child.

**Receiving support from mother.** In addition to acting as a mediator between the father and son, participants frequently described that their mothers provided more emotional and background support than fathers during their participation in youth hockey. The description of their mother’s involvement often differed greatly from that of their fathers, as mothers were described as rarely engaging in any type of pressuring behaviour. Mothers frequently provided emotional support through positive comments following games, even when the child played poorly, whereas fathers often did not.

Randy described his experience when he stated:

After a game – you know it didn’t go great and the game was kind of poor. My dad would be in the car waiting, and my mom would meet me first to walk me to the car. I would get that kind of support from my mother before I got support from my father; ‘you played great!, yeah maybe dad is a little mad’ Sometimes I would ask you know, ‘is dad mad?’ Is he...how is going to react to this game? Because, sometimes, I don’t know. So yeah I would get that support from my mother, ‘yeah you did okay, you played well’.

Blair also perceived that his mother would attempt to make him feel better about his performance, while his father often made him feel worse:

Yeah my mom – even though she would know that maybe I would make a mistake, she’d try to turn around and make sure, or make it seem like it wasn’t my fault, or

that I didn't make a mistake. And then my dad would actually go the opposite way with the whole thing.

Participants relied on their mothers for encouragement and supportive comments following youth hockey games, particularly after a poor performance.

Mothers were also described as providing more background support for their child's participation in hockey than fathers. Participants explained that their mothers would often partake in fundraisers and other events for their youth hockey teams. Mothers would also make sure that their child had everything he needed and that he was prepared for each game. Owen described this when he stated:

I experienced parental support more so from my mom if anything just because my dad's work schedule and everything; she seemed to be the one if – she would make more events than he could. Or she would be the one up like making breakfast for you before you had a practice or something. Um, making sure you eat before you go and hit the ice. At the time again, you don't think of it as support-it's just that's what mom does, but looking backing it definitely is support. Um, and I think there was support from my dad, but it was more so again like tactics or driving me to the tournament and stuff like that.

Brian also perceived that his mother provided more background support than his father:

My mom was there all the time. She rarely ever missed anything, but it was more – like she didn't really grow up around hockey, she didn't know much about the sport or anything. But she would do things – like she would be there and help run the parent stuff and do all the fundraisers and that kind of stuff, so she had more of a role in the um...like a parent, but not to deal with the hockey, like as much.

While fathers also provided background support, such as attending hockey-related events and preparing meals, mothers were usually described as being the primary provider of this type of support.

While participants described mothers as the main source of emotional and background support, they often perceived positive comments from their fathers during or after a good performance as support. Even though these positive comments were typically only delivered when they performed well, participants perceived it as support and not simply praise. Fathers would often provide supportive comments in these cases, even

more so than mothers. Randy described his father's support after a good game when he stated:

I can't just sit here and knock my dad the entire time, he did support you know when he could. When I played good, he would be the first one to tell me and support me and even tell me before my mom would, because he cared that much about it. I mean at times, it seemed he cared too much, but you know. That's just how it came off.

Brian also described his experience of receiving supportive comments from his father after a good performance:

Like whenever I did something good he made sure to make that an accomplishment and say it out loud and make a point of pointing out the good things. Just even enhancing it, for what it was- saying like 'wow, that was an amazing goal', or 'that was a nice move' or 'nice hit' whatever it was, he made sure to say it.

Despite receiving positive comments during or after a strong performance, participants described a lack of supportive comments from fathers following poor performances. Instead, they often faced negative, derogatory comments from their fathers when they played poorly. Many participants described an increased need for support following a poor performance. Gary passionately described this when he explained:

The honest truth is – if we did something wrong, we probably know it. We're looking for help, we're not looking to get ripped on to let us know that we suck, or did something wrong...I want them to be there and I want them to be able to help me, not fucking criticize me every time you go".

As demonstrated by Gary's explanation, participants felt that they needed supportive comments the most after a poor performance. Participants received this type of support from their mothers but they often faced negative comments from their fathers instead. Participants often labeled these comments as criticism.

**Facing criticism, but preferring feedback.** Criticism was one of the most common forms of pressure experienced by participants in this study. When describing their experiences in competitive youth hockey, participants often focused on the perceived differences between feedback and criticism from their parents. When describing the differences, participants stated that feedback could be beneficial, while criticism was detrimental. Participants perceived criticism as comments regarding things

that the participant felt they could not control, as well as comments that were not delivered in a calm manner. Randy described feeling frustrated as a result of his dad's negative comments regarding things he could not control:

I mean there is criticism and there is too much criticism. I experienced too much criticism growing up, too much of the same even you know when it is beyond your control, you are doing your best as a kid. You're not trying to do poorly on purpose... I was never to the point where I needed it; I was always trying my hardest.

Gary also felt negatively about the criticism he experienced from his father:

Parental involvement should be helpful...whereas my father in that situation for like hockey, if we were running like a dump and chase and maybe my cycle was off, or I was trying to drive to the net or something like that, it would just be full on –'you did this wrong' and then he wouldn't expand on how we could fix it...another key point would be to discuss like in a calm manner.

Participants explained that criticism often came from fathers. Criticism was perceived as useless, and even harmful, by the participants in this study.

Participants described feedback as comments that were delivered in a calm manner about things they felt they could control. Many stated that they believed feedback helped them to improve their performance, especially when they first started playing. Paul described receiving what he perceived as beneficial feedback:

When my dad gave me pointers about the game in a calm manner, I would view it as support. In most cases it would be like –okay, like maybe I'll try this next game or whatever and stuff like that. It's like he's looking out for you, like he wants you to become better and stuff like that. So, I guess it would be -well like if we just won or something and he's saying well 'you could do this better' kind of thing, but in the end it was just trying to make you see that even though you did win the game, there is stuff that you still can do to improve on for next time.

Brian also described the experience of receiving feedback from his father:

Sometimes I thrived off of the pressure from my dad, like when he gave me lectures, because they were more like pointers in a sense. Like after the game – he told me that I needed to work on releasing the puck while crossing over, or while I was moving. And then, say at the next practice I did it and I was starting to get a hang of it and then

the next game I scored a goal. Doing that, like exactly what I was practicing then, I felt an accomplishment because I reached my goal

When useful comments are delivered in a calm manner, they tend to be perceived as feedback instead of criticism. Most of the participants in this study appreciated receiving helpful feedback from their fathers that helped them to improve their performance. The participants in this study made a distinction between the negative criticism they often received and the helpful feedback they desired.

All participants perceived that they experienced both positive and negative forms of parental involvement when they played competitive youth hockey; however, their definitions of what was positive and what was negative varied. For example, Brian wanted feedback from his father on how to play better, whereas Owen just wanted his parents to attend his games and watch him play. Despite these differences all participants perceived that criticism (including yelling and derogatory comments), interparental conflict, silent treatment, and lack of involvement were negative.

### **Perceived Impacts of Parental Involvement: “I Felt Like He Actually Cared”**

**Negative feelings result from pressure.** The negative feelings brought on by parental pressure from fathers in competitive youth hockey were frequently described by the participants in this study. Participants described being embarrassed when their fathers would engage in pressuring behaviours during games, particularly yelling. Randy described the experience of being embarrassed when his father yelled during his games, “It is embarrassing, like you hear your dad calling you out in the stands – everyone can hear you. All of the other parents, your friends on the bench on your team could hear him”. Greg also described his perception that parental pressure during games is embarrassing when he stated, “being on the ice and something happens and you’re just getting chanted by your father or mother in the stands, like ‘why didn’t you do that’... and you’re embarrassed on the ice”. As demonstrated by the experiences of these participants, when parents engage in pressuring behaviours in a public manner, such as yelling during youth hockey games, it may lead to embarrassment for the child.

Another common emotion associated with parental pressure was fear. Most participants described that they were afraid before, during, and after youth hockey games. They were constantly worried about playing poorly or losing a game because they knew

it would make their fathers angry. Randy described fearing his father's reaction to a poor performance:

If I knew that we were playing a tough team that was way ahead of us in the standings, and there was a good chance that we were going to lose that game – yeah I would be scared! I don't know if that made me play worse or made me play better!?

When describing his father yelling at him after a bad game, Gary stated, "He just had no other means of communication other than the means of yelling. As a kid, when you are that young, you are terrified right!" Yelling was commonly described as the type of pressure that caused the most fear for youth, but participants also described being afraid of disappointing their fathers or causing fights between their parents.

Feelings of frustration and sadness were also linked to parental pressure by participants. This was explained by Randy when he stated:

It made me feel pretty awful; I mean there were times where I would be in tears. I mean when you are 7-10 years old you feel pretty small and you need, I guess encouragement at that age, not to feel defeated or put down to that extent or that often. It was tough and I would be pretty disappointed and sad, and discouraged is a word that would go far there.

Blair also described his feelings about the criticism he faced from his father after a poor performance when he stated, "frustrated, frustrated, even more than I already was. My dad's actions just added to how I felt and made me more frustrated after the game – like negatively". As demonstrated by these participants, frustration and sadness were often experienced as a result of criticism and yelling from fathers during or after youth hockey games.

Participants who felt that they disappointed their parents described this as the worst feeling associated with parental pressure. Greg described this when he stated, "for me to hear that my parents were disappointed in me was a big deal and that's one of those things that stand out. I was like damn, that makes me feel really bad!". Participants described feeling that they had disappointed their father when he gave them the silent treatment after a game. As explained by Randy, "it was the drive home and the silent treatment that I got, that was probably, that was the worst. Like it was beyond...like disappointing my father was worse than angering him at all times". While criticism and

yelling were perceived as signs of anger and frustration, the silent treatment was viewed as a sign that the father is disappointed in the child. The feeling of disappointing a parent was described by the participants in this study as worse than anger or frustration.

A number of participants also described the feeling of having no voice; being unable to defend themselves against the comments or actions of their fathers. Blair described feeling “speechless” when his father yelled at him after a game, while Gary explained, “I wanted to say things at times. But, I just figured he was my father and you gotta respect him at that age”. For these participants, this feeling of speechlessness was associated with the age of the youth. The participants described that as they got older, reaching their teenage years, they were more likely to speak up for themselves. All participants described experiencing some negative emotions, such as embarrassment, speechlessness, sadness, frustration or fear, as a result of the parental pressure they faced while playing competitive youth hockey.

**Pressure negatively impacts father-son relationship.** The negative feelings associated with pressure often had a negative impact on the father-son relationship during the hockey season. Participants described arguing with their fathers more during the hockey season and having a more tense relationship. Paul described fighting with his father during the hockey season:

There was obviously sometimes where arguments in the peak season would happen; even in the bench and stuff. And mom would sometimes have to even jump in and tell us to stop and stuff. And even some of the other coaches would have to pull my dad aside and tell him to relax because even though I’m his kid, he shouldn’t be arguing with me on the bench kind of thing...in the off-season, less arguments occurred.

Owen also described having a difficult relationship with his father during the hockey season:

Peak season was usually pretty edgy. Like you’d try to avoid, well, I would try and avoid him. I had a basement that was a good place to go and hang out and just kind of isolate from him. Ah – going out, like when it came to running to get groceries I would probably go with my mom to get away, because I didn’t want to be in the house alone with him because we would probably argue about something. It was one

of those things where I didn't go out of my way to go hang out with him or anything during the season, it was kind of ah - things where a little confrontational at that point.

Despite having a difficult relationship during the hockey season, participants often described having a better relationship with their fathers in the off-season. Owen further explained:

Come summer, I would kind of work with my dad and we would work on old cars and stuff so, um it was definitely more enjoyable hanging out with him when we weren't playing hockey, because we were working on stuff that we had similar interests...I enjoyed it for a change and not at the skill level that he's at; it's just more of a hobby thing. Um, so yeah off seasons were definitely much better. We still have our little arguments about stuff, but it wasn't to the extent of a hockey debate.

Gary also described having a more enjoyable relationship with his father once the hockey season was over:

In the off-season we did normal stuff – like hang out every once in awhile, or go fishing. That didn't change. But he was more involved. I kind of did what I wanted in the summers for lacrosse and stuff...Oh yea, we'd argue way more in the peak season!

Participants frequently described playing other sports in the summer that their fathers were not involved in. They explained that they did not experience much pressure from their fathers once the hockey season was over. During the hockey season they would get in more arguments, but during the off-season they would spend leisure time together without engaging in as many arguments. This demonstrates that for many of the participants in this study, pressure in youth hockey had a negative impact on their relationship with their fathers.

**Pressure may improve performance, but reduce fun.** Despite the negative impacts of parental pressure, some participants perceived that pressure had a positive impact on their performance in competitive youth hockey. These participants often described performing better as a result of parental pressure, but enjoyed the sport less. Randy described his perception of his experience:

I always worked better under pressure; I guess it kind of fuelled my fire in a sense, but once again – was I doing for the wrong reasons? I was doing it to avoid getting scolded after games, not doing it to have fun”.

Blair also described feeling that he performed better under pressure, citing an example from when his father was kicked out of a game for arguing with referees and other parents. He explained, “We ended up winning that game I think too, winning the tournament. So, maybe that put me over the edge, played a little bit better, got me all pumped up”. While some participants believed that they performed better due to parental pressure, they also explained that due to this pressure competitive youth hockey was not as much fun as non-competitive hockey. Blair described the impact of pressure from his father in competitive youth hockey:

Just the seriousness of it that I was in just created all that. Maybe if it wasn't such a serious league and we didn't step it up into such a serious program, maybe we wouldn't have had all that. Maybe it would have been more about having fun than learning and doing well.

Blair felt that if he were playing non-competitive hockey, the sport would have been more about fun and less about performance. Randy explained his experience with quitting competitive hockey and playing recreational hockey for fun:

Obviously it was completely different. But, I mean they're for fun now! And I don't have any pressure (laughter). So I can just do it and not have to worry and just have a good time. Which you know, I didn't experience as much as a kid, that's for sure.

Participants perceived that they faced more parental pressure in competitive youth hockey than they did when they played non-competitive hockey. When parental pressure was reduced, participants were able to have more fun and play for their own enjoyment.

**Positive feelings result from parents making an effort.** Although pressure had many negative impacts for the participants in this study, some expressed that they would

rather experience parental pressure than no parental involvement at all. Participants perceived effort from their parents to be involved in their sport as support and often focused on the positive impacts of parental effort in competitive youth hockey. Making the effort is described by participants as parents attending games and paying attention to the child's performance during the game. When explaining the importance of his father's attendance at his games, Brian stated:

Any praise or support that I got would make you feel good, and let you know that he was watching the game and that he was paying attention to it. Its better that someone acknowledged say 'when you scored that goal coming off the left wing'; other than 'oh I missed your goal – how did it happen?' It makes you feel better that they saw it and acknowledged it.

The act of making the effort to attend games and paying attention was perceived by the participant as a sign that his parents cared about him. The impacts of perceived parental effort included feeling happy, loved, acknowledged, and encouraged. When describing the impact his father's effort had on him, Paul stated, "Oh I felt like – you know that he actually like cared or whatever; and like would want to see you succeed and try to get you to try to play to your best and stuff like that". Randy also described his perception of the importance of parental effort:

If my parents didn't care and didn't want to come to the games and then just go 'get a ride with this parent to the game because we are busy doing this' - that would be awful, I wouldn't want that. That would be even worse than the yelling in my eyes.

This demonstrates that these participants may have perceived any type of parental involvement, whether it was pressure or support, as an effort by their parents to be involved. Parental effort was beneficial for the participants because they perceived that it meant that their parents cared enough to be involved in their sporting experiences.

**Support increases confidence and enjoyment.** While all participants described wanting their parents to be involved, the type and level of parental involvement had an impact on their confidence and enjoyment. When parents were involved in the child's sport and offered support, it was perceived to increase confidence. Gary described his perception when he stated:

Any support was positive for me, and it obviously helped boost my confidence. It usually consisted of high fives and a 'good job'. Like if I scored that game, my dad would be so excited and he would be able to recite the goals perfectly.

Brian also described the positive impact of supportive comments from his parents when he stated, "it would definitely raise my confidence – it would make you feel good because you were getting acknowledged for it". Participants in this study perceived that when they received support from their parents in competitive youth hockey it led to increased confidence.

Conversely, when participants faced pressure during or after competitive youth hockey games they believed that it reduced their confidence. Randy described his perceptions about the impacts of the pressure he experienced from his father following games when he stated, "it would make you feel like you are worth nothing at that point in time, at that age especially, it was very discouraging that's for sure". When parents, usually fathers, deliver derogatory or demeaning comments to their children in hockey, it may lead to reduced confidence for the child involved.

Participants perceived a similar relationship between parental involvement and enjoyment. They described enjoying competitive youth hockey more when their parents were involved and offered support. When explaining how he felt when his father supported him, Paul stated:

I felt happy obviously, like for doing something well, that they actually did care and they made sure you knew that they were happy with you, know what kinds of things you did – whether you like you score a goal kind of thing, that they actually did like kind of care and wanted you to succeed obviously.

Randy also described enjoying the sport more when he received support from his father. When he was explaining how he felt when he received support, he stated, "happy, very happy, excited, encouraged to play more". When participants experienced supportive

comments and involvement from their parents it increased the enjoyment they gained from playing the sport.

Participants also described not enjoying youth hockey when their parents engaged in pressuring behaviours or were not involved at all. Gary described the impact of parental pressure on his enjoyment:

I hated [playing hockey] because of being yelled at, or it would be like why do something that I would get in trouble for? It just didn't seem right to me. It almost came to the point where he loved the game way more than I did.

Owen also perceived that parental pressure lowered his enjoyment in competitive youth hockey:

It was just one of those things where I enjoyed the sport, but I didn't enjoy it at the time because of my parents. And I find now I – probably played more hockey in the last 3 years – whether it be shinny, or pond hockey, or no equipment kind of hockey just skates and shin pad stuff because my parents aren't weighing in on it or anything like that.

This demonstrates that while the participants often wanted their parents involved in their sport, the negative impacts of pressure on enjoyment and confidence can outweigh the benefits of involvement. However, participants expressed that supportive involvement resulted in higher enjoyment and confidence levels in competitive youth hockey.

### **Impact of Parental Involvement on Commitment: “I Kind of Miss Hockey Now”**

**Parental pressure reduced commitment.** In this theme, participants described being less committed to competitive hockey as a result of parental pressure. As previously discussed, participants expressed that parental pressure lowered confidence and enjoyment in competitive youth hockey. These participants explained that this often resulted in lower commitment to the sport of hockey. Owen described the impact of pressure on his commitment to hockey:

The pressure impacted my commitment and enjoyment to hockey for sure – yeah 100%. I think maybe if um – there was the mention when I was 13, I'd debated going down to house league, um maybe if I would have done that it could have been better cause obviously the pressures of winning aren't really there, or parental pressure to be the next Wayne Gretzky.

Some participants described that due to reduced enjoyment and confidence, they quit competitive hockey to participate in different sports or other recreation activities where their fathers would not exert as much pressure.

Other participants described experiencing stress and burnout from constant parental pressure to perform well, leading to their withdrawal from the sport. Randy described this experience when he stated:

As I got older, it [pressure] definitely impacted my commitment. I became a teenager, you know, I started to speak a little more for myself at that time ...and by that time, like I was – I guess you can say I was getting kind of fed up with the yelling.

When Gary described his experience of quitting hockey due to pressure from his father, he stated, “Now as I look back- I wish I would have put up with his bullshit a bit more cause I kind of miss hockey now, that’s for sure. But in the moment, as a kid - I hated it!” The participants often explained that they enjoyed playing competitive hockey, but were fed up with the constant pressure to perform well. Parental pressure lowered commitment to competitive hockey by reducing enjoyment and increasing stress and burnout.

A specific form of pressure that may reduce commitment occurred when the participants were forced to play competitive hockey as a youth. Participants who were forced to play described experiencing many negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, and resentment. They described feeling that they had little choice about their participation in competitive youth hockey. For these participants, the negative emotions associated with being forced to play did not subside over time and it eventually contributed to their decision to withdraw from competitive hockey. While these participants may have been more committed to hockey during their youth due to pressure to play, in the long-term it resulted in lower commitment to the sport. Owen described his experience with being forced to play youth hockey:

I was livid with them when they forced me into it and sign me up for my last season. Pretty much just kind of ranted and raved about how it should be my choice and all that. Um, but yeah it was just one of those things, where you went around me and didn’t tell me so I was really mad... I was really frustrated in that sense, and then

they're putting me into a situation where again you leave your team and they are going to be kind of mad at you for leaving whether you like it or not.

Owen explained that he rebelled against his parents that season by skipping practices and games. He completely withdrew from competitive hockey after that season in order to pursue a sport of his choice. Gary also described his father forcing him to play hockey at a competitive level in a certain city, which eventually led to him dropping out. When describing how he came to play competitive hockey, Gary stated, "definitely my father. He was involved in hockey. A big reason – I think, is that he kind of imagined me as the hometown hockey star. That was definitely a huge part". During his childhood, Gary explained that he played for his father and not for himself. He looked forward to the off-season when he would be free to play other sports without his father's involvement. In his teens, he dropped out of competitive hockey to pursue these other sports. He explained, "I've done like cross country, badminton and all that... like I played football for a couple of years too. So he definitely was not involved as much. So, I was not shied away from other sports at all". However, Gary also described that he now misses playing competitive hockey and regrets dropping out of the sport.

These participants expressed feeling some enjoyment during their engagement in competitive hockey, but explained that it was diminished by the negative emotions associated with pressure and feeling powerless to choose what they wanted to do. The participants who were forced to play competitive hockey often described rebelling against their parents by quitting the sport in their early teens.

**Parental investment may increase commitment.** Whether the participants played competitive hockey by choice or were forced to play, they described the need for parental time and financial resources in order to participate in the sport. Participants described that high parental investment increased their commitment to competitive hockey, but some felt that it also created pressure to perform well at all times. Randy described the need for parental investment when he stated:

My father always made the time, whether he had to get off work a little earlier that day, or get up for work several hours early to drive me to practice. You know he would sacrifice his weekends to take me to tournaments or out of town to take me to

hockey games, so I mean he was always the figure who was there for hockey. He always wanted us to play hockey. It was the number one sport in his eyes. Brian also believed that he was successful in hockey due to his father's investment of time and money:

I feel that my dad had a hand in me being an elite hockey player. Like, always making sure that I was on time and with the equipment and always had the best – well maybe not the best, but the best that I could afford at the time and um- always made sure that I was ready to play.

Some participants described wanting to play at a higher level of hockey, but being unable to because their parents were unable or unwilling to commit the needed resources for the participant to play. For example, Greg explained that he was not allowed to play AAA hockey one year because his parents could not afford for both him and his brother to play. He stated that when he asked his parents how much they were spending, they said “we probably dropped like 12-grand that one winter so that you and your brother could play AAA hockey on the same team. And it was just like - we couldn't do it again. Like financially, it wasn't there”. Due to the high costs, his parents were unable to support him and he was not able to play hockey at this level. This demonstrates the importance of parental investment in competitive youth hockey.

The significant investment required by parents increased youth commitment to the sport of competitive hockey. Participants described feeling that they should continue playing due to parental investment of time and money. For example, Blair described feeling pressure to continue participating in hockey due to his mother's financial investment:

She just dropped probably like two grand in new equipment and I probably had a bad game and I was threatening saying that I didn't want to continue after the year was over and she was upset and complaining. That felt like a little bit of pressure, like if I didn't play I would upset her because she spent all that money.

Paul also described feeling obligated to play due to the money his parents had invested into the sport. He explained:

Like if we were sick or something or if we didn't really want to go to practice, it would be 'you're wasting our money' kind of thing, 'like if you're not going to put

the effort in' - then it was, 'you're not going to play next year' kind of thing. So just kind of make you kind of think about it again. Like yes they are paying for it, so maybe I should go to practice and stuff like that.

High parental investment is needed for youth in competitive hockey and it may increase commitment. However, it may reduce commitment if youth burnout due to pressure to perform. Many participants described feeling constant pressure to play well because of the high investment of their parents. Brian described the pressure to perform that he experienced when he stated, "It was almost like a deal, that if he's going to put all the effort out and pay all the money and want to see me get better as a hockey player that my end of it is to get better as a hockey player". While parental investment is needed for youth to participate in competitive hockey, the high level of investment may also lead to reduced commitment if youth experience pressure and stress as a result.

**Parental support strengthens commitment.** Beyond the investment of time and money, youth also need emotional support from their parents. Participants frequently claimed that they would have been more committed to competitive hockey if they had received more support from their parents. When participants experienced parental support and involvement they enjoyed playing more, had more confidence, and felt more committed. Paul described his perceptions of the impact of parental support when he stated:

That would make you want to keep playing, like to know that they are supporting you and that they are there. They are not just there because they have to be there, like they are paying attention and trying to help you, like kind of point out- you know what things you have done well and stuff so you know, you can keep doing that.

When describing the impacts that parental support had on his commitment to hockey, Blair stated, "If they weren't so much, then I wouldn't be as psyched to play. So they are probably the main reason as why I did play. If they didn't attend games, practices, etc. - that would have brought my commitment and desire and - just all around interest in it would just have totally dropped". When parents were involved and offered support to the participants, they reported feeling more committed to competitive hockey.

However, this feeling was often diminished by pressure or lack of parental involvement. When describing his experience with pressure from his father, Gary stated,

“there were games where I had a lot of fun, but there was a hell of a lot of times where I can remember being in that car and just getting reamed out”. Owen, who said he quit competitive hockey because he was forced to play and did not have enough support from his parents, stated:

Their actions made me want to quit in a sense because they weren't showing up to anything anymore, and they were very limited when they did. Um, it was almost like they only came to like travel tournaments when you're staying in a hotel or something, and even that was kind of limited.

Participants described that as a youth they needed support and involvement from their parents, but they also needed their parents to avoid engaging in pressuring behaviours. In most cases, excessive pressure from the father was described as a reason for withdrawal from competitive youth hockey.

Parental involvement in competitive youth hockey is a complex phenomenon to understand. Based on the description of their experiences, participants in this study showed a desire for parental involvement in their sport participation. Participants perceived that their parents cared about them when their parents were involved in their recreational activities. While the type of parental involvement significantly impacted many aspects of the youth's sport participation, they believed that parental involvement of any kind, even if described as negative, is preferred to no involvement at all. Supportive involvement from parents was described as having the greatest benefits, such as increased enjoyment, confidence and commitment. Lack of parental involvement was perceived as having the most negative impacts on enjoyment and commitment, even more so than pressuring behaviours such as yelling and criticism.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The themes that emerged in this study are largely supported by existing literature. This study provided a qualitative approach that added to the many quantitative studies that have been completed on the topic of parental involvement in youth sport. Many of the findings within literature relating to parental involvement in youth sport and its impacts are derived from a quantitative or mixed methods approach. While this study used a qualitative approach, existing literature is consistent with the findings from this study and the themes that emerged. Some studies did utilize qualitative methods and these findings were more in-depth than those that used strictly quantitative methods. The following sections will draw connections between the findings within this study and the current literature relating to the topic of parental involvement in competitive sport and its impacts.

This chapter includes a discussion of the three clusters of themes and the relationship with existing research, the essence of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey, recommendations for future studies, limitations and challenges, and implications for parents and young hockey players. Literature supports all of the themes that emerged within this study. Some themes have a great deal of related literature, whereas other areas would benefit from further research.

### **Description of Parental Involvement: “I Want Them to Be There and Help Me”**

**Not playing for self.** The theme of ‘not playing for self’ is widely found within the existing literature. This theme relates to the concept of social constraints, as introduced by Scanlan et al. (1993) as a component of the Sport Commitment Model (SCM). Social constraint is a term used to describe “social expectations or norms, which create feelings of obligation to remain in the activity” (Scanlan et al., 1993, p. 7). Weiss and Weiss (2007) provided an example of social constraints in their study when a participant stated, “I have to stay in gymnastics because my parents have done so much for me” (p. 93). According to Smoll and Smith (1996) the two main pre-competition worries from participants in youth sport are 1) what my parents will think and 2) letting my parents down. This signals that the youth were playing for their parents instead of for their own enjoyment.

Many of the participants in this study were forced to play youth hockey or wanted to play the sport just to make their parents happy, particularly their fathers. Participants whose parents did not force them to play hockey still described feeling that they were not playing for themselves. These participants were able to choose which sports they played and at what level. However, they decided to play youth hockey because they believed it was what their parents wanted from them. Literature supports the finding in this study that youth experiencing parental pressure in competitive hockey may feel that they are not playing for themselves.

**Facing high expectations associated with parental investment.** An abundance of literature exists on the importance of parental investment in youth sport. Coakley (2006) claims that parental commitment is important in youth sport participation because youth rely on parental investments of money, time and energy. Coakley states that on average parents spend between \$5,000 and \$20,000 per year to support their child's participation in youth hockey. Kanters et al. (2008) claim that activities such as paying registration fees, purchasing equipment, providing transportation, and attending games and practices are also required of parents in youth sport. Therefore, parents have an important role as the providers of this financial and physical support for youth athletes (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Stein et al., 1999). This is consistent with the findings in this study, as participants described relying heavily on parental investment for their involvement in competitive youth hockey. Without this investment from parents, youth would not be able to participate in youth hockey.

Literature also supports the finding within this theme that high parental investment may lead to more pressure for youth. According to Coakley (2006), Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) and Kanters et al. (2008), parents may try to convince themselves that it is a worthwhile investment. Therefore, parents may exert pressure on the child in an effort to seek compensation for the investment they have made into their child's sport (Coakley). As described by some of the participants in this study, parents may expect high levels of performance from their child due to the large investment of time or finances. Some participants in this study felt pressure to perform at a high level simply because they knew how much their parents had invested in the sport. These parents did not openly pressure the child to perform at a high level, but the participant felt that they

would be wasting their parents' time and money if they played poorly. More research needs to be completed in this area to determine if there is a significant relationship between parental investment and pressure for youth in sports.

Much of the literature related to parental expectations in youth sport focuses on why parents have high expectations. For instance, Coakley (2006) claims that parents may have high expectations because the child's performance in sport reflects back on the parent. Margenau (1990) and Dunn et al. (2003) state that parents may invest in youth sport in order to see their child perform well, which results in pressure for the child to consistently perform at a high level. Ample research has also been conducted on the impacts of high parental expectations. For example, research indicates that unrealistic parental expectations are related to lower enjoyment and interest in the sport, less intrinsic motivation, lower confidence and more stress among youth athletes (Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Sagar & Lavallee, 2010; Turman, 2007). This research is consistent with the findings in this study, as many participants believed that their parents had high expectations due to the large parental investment in the sport or because the child's performance reflected back on the parent.

While it is important to understand why parents have high expectations and the impact of these high expectations on the youth involved, it is also important to understand what it is like for youth to experience this phenomenon. Sagar and Lavallee (2010) explain that parental high expectations are a consistent expectation that a child will devote maximum effort, make no mistakes, and perform well in youth sports. Literature appears to be lacking in the description of what it is like to experience high parental expectations. This study shows that while youth may experience overt parental pressure to perform well, they may also feel pressure to perform at a high level even if their parents do not openly express unrealistic expectations. Some participants described feeling that due to high levels of parental investment in the sport, they felt that they needed to consistently perform at a high level.

**Experiencing pressure during and after games.** Literature also shows that youth most commonly experience parental pressure during games or directly following games. According to the literature, the most common form of parental pressure is negative comments about the child's play or performance. Other forms of parental

pressure are scolding and contradicting statements (Turman, 2007). This is consistent with the findings in this study as participants explained that they commonly experienced criticism and yelling from their fathers. Literature also supports the finding that it is often fathers that engage in these pressuring behaviours. According to Holt et al. (2008), due to the father's typical role as an advisor, he may engage in pressuring behaviour such as negative comments during and after a game. In addition, Sagar and Lavallee (2010) found that fathers sometimes engage in "parental punitive behaviour" (p.181), such as parental criticism, punishment, and threats. Lavoie and Stellino (2008) offer further support when they claim that poor parental behaviour is common in youth sports, with many young athletes reporting background anger from parents.

While most of the literature relating to parental pressure in youth sport highlights the time following a game as a period in which youth are likely to experience pressure, there is a lack of research describing what this experience is like for a child. In this study participants described that they typically experienced the most intense pressure during the car ride home after a game. While in the car, they described feeling that they were forced to face the pressure from their fathers as it was not possible to seclude themselves or walk away. When the participants were in the arena or at home, they explained that they could isolate themselves from their father in order to avoid the pressure.

Another interesting finding that is not well explored in the existing literature relating to pressure in youth hockey is how young males experience silent treatment from their fathers after games. Participants in this study explained that when their fathers did not speak to them after a game, it was worse than when their fathers yelled or criticized them. They believed that their father was so disappointed in them that he could not speak. This is interesting because one might assume that it would be better to just say nothing than to yell at or criticize a child. However, the experiences of these participants show that when their fathers yelled or criticized them after a game, they interpreted it as anger; while when their fathers gave them the silent treatment they perceived that their fathers were disappointed or disgusted with them. These participants explained that they felt worse when they disappointed their father than when they angered him.

**Feeling pressure due to interparental conflict.** A limited amount of research has been conducted on the theme of interparental conflict experienced as a result of

parental involvement in youth sport. According to El-Sheikh and Cheskes (1995), youth are more distressed by anger expressed between adults, particularly their own parents, than they are by anger expressed between an adult and a child. Youth perceive conflict between parents as a threat to their sense of security, leading to feelings of shame and fear (Cummings, Zahn-Waxier, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). The impacts of witnessing interparental conflict may include depression, aggression and withdrawal from sport, especially among young males who blame themselves for the conflict (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles, & McDonald, 2000). Literature shows that interparental conflict has negative impacts on children in general, but it does not often explore the causes of the conflicts in youth sport and what it is like for the youth involved. In this study, it was found that interparental conflict in youth hockey frequently occurred as a result of the mother interceding against the father on behalf of the child. This may lead to the child blaming themselves if they believe that their poor performance is the cause of the conflict. More research needs to be conducted in this area to explore the causes and impacts of interparental conflict occurring as a result of parental involvement in youth sport.

**Receiving support from mother.** The role of the mother acting on behalf of the child relates to the finding that young males receive support from their mothers. Existing literature shows that mothers tend to engage in more supporting behaviours and less pressuring behaviours in youth sport than fathers. Participants in this study described receiving more emotional and background support from their mother than their fathers. Turman (2007) found that in youth sport, involved mothers produce greater levels of enjoyment, while fathers often produce more stress. Research shows that fathers tend to be more involved and engage in more pressuring behaviours than mothers (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984; Turman).

This study, along with the literature on this topic, shows that the level and type of parental involvement in youth sport often varies for mothers and fathers. Consistent with the findings in this study, research shows that mothers tend to provide support by engaging in more of the behind the scenes work than fathers (Dunn et al., 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Trussell, 2009). This includes administrative type work, such as

fundraising, volunteering and being the team manager, as well as preparation work prior to games and practices (Trussell).

While mothers were identified as consistent providers of support in this study, participants perceived that their fathers provided more support than their mothers following a strong performance. According to the definition provided by Woolger and Power (1993), parental support should be unconditional. However, for most participants in this study, paternal emotional support only occurred after a good performance, and was replaced by negative comments when they did not play well. Therefore, this perceived support from fathers was not unconditional; it was given only if the child performs well. Nonetheless, the participants in this study often perceived these positive comments from their fathers after a strong performance as support.

The lack of emotional support after a poor performance is discussed in the existing literature. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) found that in the heat of the moment (i.e. when losing a game or when a child is not performing well) parents find it difficult to refrain from making negative comments and engaging in pressuring behaviours. In addition, Wiersma and Fifer also found that emotional support is difficult for parents, as it relates to pre/post game talk, motivating a child, and striking a balance between competition and fun. While Wiersma and Fifer did not differentiate between mothers and fathers, participants in this study identified that fathers expressed more difficulty than mothers in providing emotional support. It is also important to note that the participants in this study expressed that they wanted and needed emotional support after a poor performance, but they often faced negative, derogatory criticism instead. The existing literature is consistent with the findings in this study that youth commonly experience a lack of emotional support from fathers after poor performances.

**Facing criticism, but preferring feedback.** This theme is somewhat supported by existing literature. The literature makes a distinction between the different types of comments made by parents in youth sports, but does not specifically highlight the child's level of control and the tone of the comments as significant factors. Holt et al. (2008) describes the different types of parental comments as 1) encouragement; 2) performance contingent feedback; 3) instruction; 4) striking a balance; 5) negative comments; and 6) derogatory comments. The types of parental comments outlined by Holt et al. have some

similarities to the feedback and criticism described by the participants in this study. Performance contingent feedback is similar to what participants in this study described as feedback, while negative comments and derogatory comments are similar to criticism. Participants in this study often highlighted the tone of parental comments and the content (i.e. whether they found the comments useful) as the distinguishing features between criticism and feedback. Consistent with the literature, participants in this study perceived feedback as positive parental involvement and criticism as negative parental involvement.

### **Perceived Impacts of Parental Involvement: “I Felt Like He Actually Cared”**

**Negative feelings result from parental pressure.** Extensive literature supports the theme that negative feelings are associated with parental pressure in youth sport. For example, Sagar and Lavalley (2010) linked parental pressure to fear of failure and high levels of stress and anxiety for youth. Kanters et al. (2008) also found that youth develop negative feelings about hockey when they experience pressure from fathers. Research also shows that parental pressure may lead to feelings of unworthiness for young athletes (Turman, 2007). The existing literature describes the negative impacts of parental pressure in youth sport, but it does not explore what it is like for the youth involved.

Participants in this study explained the feelings they had as a result of the pressure they experienced in youth hockey, such as embarrassment, fear, frustration and sadness. As previously discussed, some participants perceived that the silent treatment was worse than yelling. These participants attributed that their father was disappointed in them when he did not speak, while they believed he was angry when he yelled. The feeling of disappointing a parent was described as worse than angering a parent. The descriptions provided by these participants offer additional insight into the experience and the specific emotions youth feel when they face different types of parental pressure in youth hockey.

**Pressure negatively impacts father-son relationship.** Some literature exists on the impacts of paternal pressure in youth sport on the father-son relationship. Research shows that fathers tend to be more involved in their child’s sport through verbal comments and coaching (Holt et al., 2008), while mothers handle more of the behind the scenes work (Coakley, 2006; Dunn et al., 2003). Due to these different parental roles, pressures that arise in youth hockey often come from the father. However, limited literature exists on how the pressures exerted by fathers in youth hockey impact the

father-son relationship. Research has been conducted on the impact of pressure on the parent-child relationship, but not specifically on the father-son relationship in competitive youth hockey. Hellstedt (1990) found that parental pressure often results in increased parent-child conflict. When parent-child conflict occurs, it may lead to discouragement, burnout, and eventual withdrawal from competitive sport.

In this study, participants often described having a better relationship with their fathers during the off-season. This is interesting as one might suppose that the common interest of hockey shared by the father and son might lead to a closer relationship. However, some participants described tension filled relationships with their fathers during the hockey season, even while at home. Participants in this study did not perceive that their relationship with their fathers was permanently damaged; it was only more difficult during the hockey season. The impact of pressuring behaviour in youth hockey on the father-son relationship is an area that may benefit from further research.

**Pressure improves performance, but reduces fun.** Literature supports the theme that parental pressure may lead to improved performance but lower enjoyment for the child. Hoyle and Leff (1997) found that pressure from parents may help to improve the performance of a tennis player, but lessen overall enjoyment. They claim that players with lower performance enjoy the sport more and are more likely to recognize parental support than higher ranked players (Hoyle & Leff). Athletes experiencing greater parental pressure performed better but enjoyed the sport less (Hoyle & Leff). Margenau (1990) states that pressure from parents may indicate to a child that individual performance and winning are more important than participation and fun. The pressure that parents put on children in competitive sports may portray the message that games are work and not fun (Margenau).

This is consistent with the findings in this study, as some participants described that parental pressure helped them to perform better, but resulted in lower enjoyment. Participants felt that they faced more parental pressure in competitive youth hockey than they did when they played non-competitive hockey. Some participants dropped out of competitive hockey due to parental pressure, but still played recreational hockey with friends for fun. When parental pressure was reduced, these participants were able to have more fun and play for their own enjoyment.

**Positive feelings result from parents making an effort.** This theme also has a great deal of supporting literature. Research shows that when parents are positively involved in a child's sport, it provides motivation for a child's efforts and increases confidence and enjoyment in the sport (Averill & Power, 1995; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Stein et al. (1999) found that a level of parental involvement that is too low or too high is likely to have negative impacts on a child's sport participation. While the optimal level of parental involvement will vary with each child, the participants in this study often expressed that they would prefer negative parental involvement, such as yelling or criticism, over no parental involvement at all. These participants felt that while parental pressure led to negative feelings, such as frustration and anger, a lack of parental involvement was an indicator that parents did not care about their child. Based on their experiences, these participants believe that the feeling that parents do not care is worse than the negative feelings associated with parental pressure. More research may need to be completed on the relative impacts of a perceived lack of parental involvement versus negative parental involvement in youth sport.

**Support increases confidence and enjoyment.** Existing literature also supports the themes that parental support increases confidence and enjoyment in youth sports. Averill and Power (1995) found that parental support builds feelings of acceptance and self-worth, giving a child the confidence to continue in sport. Research also shows that outcomes of parental support include access, enjoyment, self-esteem, and continued commitment to sport (Averill & Power, 1995; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Lavoie and Stellino, (2008) state that parental support enhances children's perceptions of their athletic ability and enjoyment and positively influences their overall involvement in sport. This is consistent with the findings in this study as participants described enjoying competitive hockey more when their parents were involved and offered support; this was perceived as a sign that their parents cared about them.

However, research shows that children who perceive parental involvement as pressure often have lower perceptions of competence and lose interest in sports (Kanters et al., 2008). Stein et al. (1999) found that parental involvement that is perceived by a child as being too high or too low is likely to increase stress and reduce enjoyment levels in youth sport. Participants in this study also described lower enjoyment and confidence

when their parents were not involved in their sport or engaged in pressuring behaviours. Therefore, existing literature supports the finding that parental pressure reduces enjoyment and confidence, while parental support and ideal levels of involvement increase enjoyment and confidence in youth sport.

### **Impact of Parental Involvement on Commitment: “I Kind of Miss Hockey Now”**

The Sport Commitment Model (SCM) can be used to better understand the findings within this study relating to commitment (Scanlan et al, 1993). It is interesting to note that the SCM has continued to evolve and that many researchers use this model when conducting research on commitment levels of individuals involved in sport. The SCM is often used in research with youth in sport and is “one of the few models that exist in sport literature” (Alexandris et al., 2002, p. 218). Some of the researchers who have also helped increase the understanding of the SCM due to their use of it within their studies include Carpenter (2001), Jeon and Ridinger (2009), Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986), Weiss and Weiss (2007), and Zahariadis et al. (2006). The latest version of the SCM was introduced in 2009 by Scanlan, Russell, Magyar, and Scanlan. The SCM was used within this study to further understand the commitment levels of the participants.

**Parental pressure reduced commitment.** There is great deal of research supporting the theme that parental pressure reduces commitment in youth sports. Studies conducted by Fraser-Thomas, Cote and Deakin (2008) and Humpries (1991) found that parental pressure is linked to drop-out in competitive youth sports. Kanters et al. (2008) also found that negative parental involvement is likely to lead to withdrawal from a sport. One reason for this drop-out is the increased sport anxiety associated with parental pressure (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Butcher et al. (2002) found that withdrawal from sport tends to increase with grade level and that the most important reason for withdrawal is lack of enjoyment.

Participants in this study typically withdrew from competitive hockey in their teens, due in part to the pressure they experienced from their fathers. These participants described experiencing negative emotions and reduced enjoyment and confidence as a result of parental pressure. In the Sport Commitment Model (SCM), Sport Enjoyment is a factor that is positively correlated with commitment. Therefore, the findings within this theme are supported by the SCM; if parental pressure may reduce sport enjoyment, then it

logically follows that it may also reduce commitment. Existing literature also links parental pressure to lack of enjoyment in youth sports; this supports the finding that parental pressure reduces commitment (Kanters et al.).

Participants in this study expressed that when they were forced to play competitive hockey it lowered their commitment to the sport. This includes participants who described being forced to play the sport of hockey or being forced to play hockey at a certain level (i.e. competitive). This finding is somewhat supported by existing literature. Research shows that as parental pressure increases, youth will have greater negative reaction to the pressure, but feel more pressure to remain in the sport (Hellstedt, 1990). This research appears to contradict this theme. However, some participants in this study expressed that during their childhood they were more committed to youth hockey due to parental pressure, but eventually reached a point (usually in their early teenage years) where they rebelled against their parents and quit the sport.

This finding is somewhat supported by the Sport Commitment Model (SCM). In the SCM, Social Constraints are positively associated with commitment (Scanlan et al., 1993). Being forced to play appears to be an extreme form of Social Constraint, which may have a unique impact on commitment for youth moving from children to teenagers. Pressure to play may increase sport commitment during childhood, but decrease commitment during teenage years when youth may quit because they resent being forced to play the sport. Trussell (2009) argues that “organized sport as a site of contested terrain between parent and child may be particularly heightened during the teenage years” (p. 30). This was discussed by a number of participants in this study who explained that as they reached their teens, they began to speak up for themselves against the pressure they were experiencing from their parents to play hockey. Even if they enjoyed playing the sport of hockey, they quit because they were angry with their parents and wanted to exert control over their own lives. As youth reach an age where they feel able to stand up to their parents and make their own decisions, the negative feelings associated with being forced to play may lead to drop-out.

**Parental investment may increase commitment.** Literature supports the theme that parental investment of time, money and effort increases youth commitment in sport. Parental investment is another form of social constraint, as youth feel obligated to

remain in the sport due to a high level of parental investment (Scanlan et al., 1993). Youth rely on parental investment to participate in sport and may be unable to remain committed to a sport during their childhood without parental investment (Coakley, 2006). Some participants in this study expressed that they were unable to play at a certain level of competitive hockey because their parents could not or were not willing to make the required investment. Other participants described that they felt they needed to continue playing competitive hockey because their parents had already invested a great amount of time and money into the sport. Literature is consistent with the finding that parental investment may lead to increased commitment in youth sport.

However, some participants in this study also described feeling pressure to consistently perform well due to high parental investment. These participants explained that they always wanted to perform well because they knew their parents had spent a lot of time and money and they did not want it to be wasted. Coakley (2006) supports this finding as he claims that high parental investment may be an underlying cause for the pressures that exist in youth sport. This pressure may reduce sport enjoyment and eventually lead to withdrawal. As previously stated, more research needs to be completed in this area to determine the relationship between parental investment and parental pressure in youth sport and the impacts it has on commitment.

**Parental support strengthens commitment.** There is a great deal of literature on the theme that parental support increases commitment. The research that has been conducted relating to the Sport Commitment Model (SCM) shows that Social Support is a factor which positively impacts commitment. For example, Scanlan et al. (2003) found that parental support increases commitment in elite rugby. When participants in this study felt that they were not receiving support from their parents, especially their fathers, they described wanting to withdraw from the sport.

As explained by the participants in this study, parental support also leads to increased enjoyment and confidence in youth hockey. Participants enjoyed the sport more when their parents were involved and offered support; they often perceived this as a sign that their parents cared about them. As previously discussed, Sport Enjoyment has been shown to be a strong predictor of increased commitment and is a factor within the SCM that is positively associated with commitment (Casper & Babkes Stellino, 2008; Scanlan

et al., 1993). There are a number of studies that also show that parental support leads to greater enjoyment and self-esteem in youth sport; leading to increased commitment (Averill & Power, 1995; Scanlan, Russell, Beals, & Scanlan, 2003). For instance, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) found that open communication and support from parents leads to continued participation in competitive swimming. Therefore, literature supports the finding within this study that parental support increases commitment.

### **The Essence of Parental Involvement in Competitive Youth Hockey**

Based on the findings in this study it is clear that young males want parental involvement in their sport, but the type and level of involvement may have positive and/or negative impacts on the youth involved. The pressure young males experience during and after competitive hockey games typically comes from fathers and includes yelling, derogatory comments, useless criticism, unrealistic expectations, and silent treatment. Pressure typically leads to negative feelings for the child, such as anger, fear, sadness and discouragement and may negatively impact the father-son relationship. Despite the negative impacts of pressure, it may lead to improved performance for youth in competitive hockey. The support these young men experience often includes financial support, attendance at games and practices, and background support. However, emotional support from fathers is often lacking, with mothers being described as the major source for this type of support. Parental support often has positive impacts, such as enjoyment and confidence. However, the high investment required from parents may lead to increased pressure for the youth to perform at a high level. The impact that parental involvement has on a child's level of enjoyment, social constraints, and social support will influence his commitment to the sport of competitive hockey.

The type and level of ideal parental involvement will vary for each child, as youth experience pressure and support in different ways. Within this study, some participants wanted their parents to give them advice, while others just wanted their parents to attend games and offer support. There is not one right answer for how parents should be involved in a child's sport; this is something that must be determined on an individual basis. However, there are some types of parental behaviour that are likely to have negative impacts for a child, including yelling, derogatory comments, useless criticism, silent treatment and lack of involvement. Every participant that experienced one of these

forms of involvement described it negatively. Parents should openly discuss this issue with their children to determine the child's ideal parental involvement.

It is important to highlight that within this study many of the experiences associated with parental involvement related to relationships within the family. This study found that when a male child is involved in competitive hockey, it may have negative impacts on some family relationships. When a father pressures his son, the mother may attempt to defend the child, thus causing an argument between the parents. This not only creates pressure for the child, but it also creates a situation in which the father is positioned against the mother and child; the mother is supporting and defending the child, while the father is criticizing and yelling at the child. This relates to the negative impacts that participation in this sport may have on the father-son relationship. During the hockey season pressure often strains the relationship between father and son. The child may fear and avoid his father during the hockey season as a result of pressure. It is interesting to note that this relationship typically improved during the off-season, meaning that much of the damage to the relationship was not permanent. Many participants described that they enjoyed spending time with their fathers during the summer when the pressure associated with hockey was removed.

The potential for a negative impact on family dynamics is interesting because it is often perceived that a child's participation in organized sport may "strengthen family relationships, create opportunities for positive communication, and develop a strong sense of family" (Trussell, 2009, p.247). While these positive outcomes may still be possible, parents need to work to ensure that they are engaging appropriately in their child's sport. If both parents are aware of the type of involvement their child wants and are able to act accordingly, the negative impact on family relationships may be minimized.

As previously mentioned, parental involvement may also have serious impacts for youth in terms of their commitment to competitive youth hockey. All of the males in this study withdrew from the sport and the description of their experiences offers insight into why males leave the sport. Parental involvement was only one of the factors impacting their decision to withdraw; other factors included the desire for more time with friends outside of hockey, other sporting opportunities, financial constraints, and school or work

obligations. While parental involvement is not the only factor impacting commitment, it is an important one. Within this study, parental involvement was shown to impact many components of the Sport Commitment Model, such as enjoyment, social support and social constraints.

Within this study, parental involvement was commonly linked to enjoyment by the participants. They expressed that pressure often reduced enjoyment, while support and involvement increased enjoyment. All participants experienced a combination of pressure and support from their parents, with some facing more pressure than others. The participants that experienced a great deal of pressure or a lack of parental involvement were the ones that described getting the least enjoyment from the sport. Several participants described higher levels of enjoyment when their parents attended games, paid attention to their performance, and offered supportive comments after the game.

When participants felt encouraged or supported by their parents, they described feeling a greater desire to remain in the sport. Social support from parents strengthened their commitment to competitive youth hockey. However, for many participants this was outweighed by the negative impacts of pressure from their fathers. Only one participant described a lack of involvement from his parents when he played competitive hockey. His parents rarely attended his games, and when his father did attend he would criticize his son's performance. This participant explained that a lack of social support from his parents was the main reason for his withdrawal from the sport. He withdrew from competitive hockey in order to participate in a sport in which he felt he would get more support from his parents.

Some participants in this study also described feeling obligated to play competitive hockey due to pressure from their parents. Scanlan (2009) states that in the absence of personal control, social constraints will lead to greater commitment, but less enjoyment. This is true of the participants when they were younger, as they felt they had to stay in the sport due to pressure from parents. But as participants reached their mid-teens, and felt a greater sense of personal control, they felt less constrained by their parents and made the choice to leave the sport. This personal choice to withdraw from the sport was often linked to a lack of enjoyment resulting from parental pressure.

If parents are aware of the impacts that their involvement has on their child and his commitment to sport, they may attempt to engage more positively. Parents often enroll their child in youth hockey due to the perceived benefits of sport participation. However, parents may contribute negatively to the sporting experiences of their children. When parents, particularly fathers, pressure their sons to consistently perform at a high level, they may actually be reducing their sons' commitment to the sport.

### **Masculinity in Competitive Youth Hockey**

It is important to emphasize that within this study, fathers were found to be the main source of pressure for males who withdrew from competitive youth hockey. Fathers often offered financial support, attendance at games and practices, and some background support, but they rarely provided emotional support after a poor performance. Instead mothers were described as the main provider of this type of support. Participants described that their fathers often criticized them and appeared to be angry when they did not meet expectations. Within this study, the role of fathers may be linked to the issue of masculinity.

This can be examined through a sociological lens, as many researchers argue that the involvement of fathers in organized youth sport is related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity; which is the version of masculinity that dominates within a group or society (Dewar & Ingram, 1999; Trussell, 2009; Coakley, 2006). Knuttila (2004) explains that hegemonic masculinity includes “a range of traits, behaviours, practices and relations that serve to legitimate, reinforce, naturalize, support and generally maintain patriarchal society”(p.95). These are transmitted and strengthened through nearly all social institutions (Knuttila, 2004). In Western society, it incorporates the idea that ‘real men’ are “assertive, aggressive, competitive, lustful and violent” (Dewar & Ingram, p.17). Since this form of masculinity is considered to be the preferred version, men and boys can acquire status by conforming to the ideal type (Dewar & Ingram). Knuttila (2008) argues that men receive a patriarchal dividend by engaging in social practices that conform to this ideal. These benefits include greater income levels, more access to positions of power and higher social status (Knuttila, 2008).

Over the past few decades, cultural expectations of the role of fathers have changed. Fathers are now expected to participate more actively in their child's lives and

engage in a more involved style of fathering (Trussell, 2009). This has created a conflict for many fathers, as they attempt to meet this new expectation while also conforming to traditional ideas of masculinity (Trussell). Research shows that youth sports provide an opportunity for fathers to parent their child in a setting in which they feel secure and capable as a parent, while also allowing them to maintain their masculinity (Coakley, 2006; Trussell). In the youth sport setting, especially in traditionally masculine sports like hockey, fathers can utilize their knowledge of sport and take part in child rearing in a way that is consistent with traditional views of masculinity (Coakley). This is important because it allows men to meet parenting expectations, while still conforming to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

The importance of hockey in Canadian culture may also influence the level of pressure young male hockey player's experience. When fathers are interested in the sport their child is playing, they tend to be more involved (Trussell, 2009). This may be one reason why participants in this study experienced more pressure from their fathers in hockey than in other sports such as swimming, soccer, badminton, baseball, and lacrosse. Participants often explained that their fathers also played hockey or that hockey was their fathers' favourite sport. If a father is interested in hockey, he is likely to become more involved and exert more pressure on his son to perform well.

Sport also plays an important role in "the definition of a young boy's masculinity and status within their peer group" (Trussell, 2009, p. 18). This creates a desire for some fathers to ensure that their sons' sporting experiences are positive (Trussell). While one might assume that youth sports would contribute to the development of positive social norms, research indicates that many of these programs "promote masculinity, aggression, and competition" (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2005, p.30). A father may utilize his son's sport participation as an opportunity to teach the values of strength, competition, and aggression (Harrington, 2006). Therefore, through their involvement in their son's sport, fathers may reinforce attributes associated with traditional views of masculinity (Trussell).

When a father is engaged in his son's sport, he may perceive that the performance of his son reflects back on him, not only as a parent, but also as a man (Coakley, 2006). Through their participation in sport, "boys are trained to be men, to reflect all the societal

expectations and attitudes surrounding such a rigid role definition” (Messner, 1992, p.20). If the child fails to meet these expectations, by playing poorly, giving up, or being weak, the father may engage in pressuring behaviours in order to encourage his son to act more manly. This may be one reason for the pressure young men experience from their fathers in competitive youth hockey.

Competitive hockey is considered to be more violent and aggressive than some other sports. Trussell (2009) found that fathers often guided their sons into sports traditionally considered to be masculine, such as hockey. She argued that fathers wanted to create the ‘right’ image for the family because the type of sport involvement reflected “the family’s values and underlying beliefs related to gender” (Trussell, p. 244). If the child does not express a high level of interest in the sport, or wants to participate in a different sport, it may lead to feelings of frustration or disappointment. This situation may lead to parents, especially fathers, pressuring their child to remain in the sport; if the child fails to meet expectations it may lead to negative parental behaviours, such as verbal or even physical abuse (Trussell).

Due to changing cultural expectations for fathers, the role of hegemonic masculinity, and the popularity of hockey in Canadian culture, fathers are often very involved in competitive youth hockey. Fathers may unintentionally contribute to their sons’ withdrawal from the sport by exerting pressure to perform well at all times. If fathers are aware of the impacts of their involvement, they may be compelled to engage in more positive involvement.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

While there is a great deal of literature relating to the phenomenon of parental involvement in youth sports, more research needs to be done in some areas. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding into the perspective of individuals who experienced parental involvement as a youth when playing competitive hockey. I would recommend a few areas in which future research could expand on the findings within this study.

The impact of interparental conflict that occurs as a result of parental involvement in youth sport is one area that appears to be lacking in research. While many studies examine the impacts of interparental conflict in general, there are few studies that explore

the causes of interparental conflict in youth sports and the impacts it has on the children involved. For example, some participants in this study described conflicts caused by the mother intervening against the father on behalf of the child. It would be interesting to further examine this topic on a larger scale.

More research should also be conducted to determine if there is a significant relationship between parental investment and parental pressure for youth in sports and the impact on commitment. Some researchers, such as Coakley (2006) and Kanters et al. (2008) discuss this topic but do not thoroughly examine the relationship. This is an important issue, particularly in competitive hockey, because the investment required from parents is so great. It would be interesting to determine if youth often face more pressure in sports that require a greater parental investment. In this case, a quantitative or mixed-methods approach may be beneficial to determine if a relationship exists between these two factors.

The impact of pressuring behaviour in competitive youth hockey on the father-son relationship is another area that would benefit from further research. Some studies explore the impact of youth sport participation on the parent-child relationship, but there is a lack of research on the impacts of pressure on the father-son relationship in hockey (Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). The participants in this study were all males; the relationship with fathers may have been different if the participants were females. The father-daughter relationship in competitive youth hockey is another area that may benefit from further research.

Overall, the area of research relating to parental involvement in youth sport and the impacts is well researched. However, some topics would benefit from further study. An increase in the amount of qualitative research in this area would also be beneficial to provide a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Limitations/ Challenges**

While conducting this phenomenological study on retrospective experiences of individuals who participated in competitive youth hockey, some challenges and limitations occurred. This study was limited in that it was confined to the Niagara region. The specific recruitment locations consisted of Brock University and the Seymour Hannah Entertainment Centre. All seven participants from this study were recruited from

these two establishments; two individuals were recruited from the arena, while the remaining five participants were recruited from Brock University. While the findings were consistent with existing literature, some may question the validity of my study due to this limited sample population. Unfortunately, if the project would have used a broader sample, another challenge would have arisen as the researcher was limited to completing the study within the Niagara Region due to financial and temporal constraints.

With this, another limitation associated with this study was that all participants were Caucasian males with similar backgrounds. By using a homogenous sample, it allowed the researcher to develop a more in-depth description of what it is like for these individuals to experience parental involvement. However, it would be interesting to discover if there are differences in parental involvement experienced based on the race, gender, or socio-economic class of the individual.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I sent both the transcripts and the findings to my participants. I also suggested follow up interviews to all participants if they felt they had more to share about their experiences. I was limited in that not all participants responded to my requests. All participants verified that the transcripts were accurate and stated that they did not need a follow-up interview. It is difficult to determine if the participants simply turned down the follow-up interview because they did not have time for another interview. Only five of the seven participants verified that the findings accurately portrayed their experiences; it was not possible to reach the other two participants. As a researcher, I attempted to reach all participants, but in the end it is up to the participants to respond. While member checking is certainly important, it was only one of the methods used to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of the study; the use of multiple methods helped to improve the validity of this study.

In the beginning of data collection, another challenge that had to be overcome while conducting interviews was trying to derive rich responses from participants. It was evident that some participants were holding back with their responses, but the researcher could only probe so far without violating their rights and compromising rapport. Some participants opened up more than others during the interview process, but all interviews provided useful data for the study.

My interviewing skills were a challenge at first, as I had not formally conducted an interview for some time. Therefore, prior to data collection, I completed a pilot interview to enhance my interviewing skills and improve on any bad habits I had as an interviewer. Some of these bad habits consisted of not letting someone finish a thought (i.e. cutting them off during a sentence), not giving them enough time to answer the questions, and allowing the individual to get off track. However, after listening to the pilot interview, I was well aware of these mistakes and was able to correct them while interviews were carried out for my study. I found that as each interview occurred, my skills as an interviewer progressed.

After data collection, I began data analysis and became overwhelmed by the amount of data that I had collected from the lengthy in-depth interviews that were conducted. It appeared that participant statements often contained more than one meaning, and I was unsure of how to sift through the copious amounts of data. After consulting Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), I began to feel more comfortable with the data analysis procedures recommended by these researchers and I was able to overcome this challenge.

As a researcher who personally experienced the phenomenon under study, I faced some unique challenges. As previously mentioned, the issue of bracketing my experiences was particularly difficult. I often found it difficult to fully bracket my understandings and personal experiences, as I could relate to most of the participants' stories that came out during the interviews. According to Creswell, (2007) and LeVasseur (2003), bracketing is often difficult for researchers to implement. Creswell (2007) argues that "an interpretive approach to phenomenology would signal this as an impossibility for the researcher to become separated from the text" (p.62). LeVasseur suggests a new definition of bracketing that involves suspending our understanding of a phenomenon in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity. I was able to suspend understanding of my past experience of the phenomenon, but it was never fully absent. I engaged in a constant process of self-reflection and maintained notes throughout the research process in an attempt to bracket my assumptions and beliefs.

I often had to restrict myself from making comments or starting conversations with the participants about our similar experiences. I never discussed my experiences

with the participants, but I had to be constantly aware of what I was saying to ensure that I was bracketing myself as much as possible. For example, when a participant said that he dreaded going to the car after a poor performance in a youth hockey game, it reminded me of my own experiences so vividly that I could hardly stop myself from remembering what it was like for me. Sometimes, I found it difficult not to share my experiences with them. I felt a desire to share my experiences with the participants at certain points because I instinctively did not want them to feel that they were the ‘only one’ who faced this as a youth. Instead I would try to focus completely on what the participant was saying and probe for more details about his experience and forget about my own experience during the interview. The interview guide served as a tool to ensure that I was asking appropriate questions and not allowing my own experiences to influence the direction of the interview. Given that this topic is so personal, I felt that I could relate to all participants at some point during each interview. After each interview, especially after interviews with participants that had experiences very similar to my own, I often found myself thinking about and remembering my experiences in competitive youth hockey. I made notes after each interview regarding my thoughts and feelings about the interview.

After the interview process was complete, and I sifted through the data from my participants, I was able to draw connections between each of the participants’ experiences and my own. Some of the stories from the participants made me remember my own experiences, thus certain emotions were automatically triggered. My firsthand experiences have helped me to learn more about myself, as well as others who have experienced this phenomenon. I was able to gain a sense of how these individuals felt when facing parental pressures in the sport of competitive hockey. I had to be wary during this process to make sure that my own personal experiences and feelings had a minimal impact on the data analysis process.

One benefit I gained as a researcher who had experienced the phenomenon was that I was able to understand the slang and jargon that the participants used during the interviews while they described their experiences. This was important for me as a researcher because I could better understand their perceptions of their experiences and more accurately interpret what they were describing.

### **Implications**

It is hoped that this study will raise awareness about what it is like for young males to experience parental involvement in competitive hockey and the impacts for the youth involved. The findings may aid in encouraging appropriate levels of involvement from parents in competitive youth hockey. It is clear that children often perceive parental involvement differently than their parents. Therefore, parents need to talk to their child to identify what he wants in terms of involvement from his parents. Findings from this study indicate that parental education is needed for parents who enroll their sons in competitive hockey.

Parental education appears to be lacking for competitive youth hockey organizations in Canada. A number of these organizations, such as Oshawa Minor Hockey Association, have recently instituted a code of conduct for parents. These rules forbid negative parental behaviours, such as yelling or abusive actions during games or practices (Parent Code of Conduct 2011-2012). Hockey Canada provides educational materials for parents on its website and has also developed public service announcements to deter negative parental involvement in youth hockey. Despite these efforts, more needs to be done to raise awareness about the impacts of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. In order to promote widespread cultural change, this issue needs to be examined through a sociological lens. It is recommended that league administrators should offer educational sessions for parents at the beginning of each competitive youth hockey season. Hockey Canada should provide a guide for administrators to use during these sessions, including presentation slides, handouts, and other such materials that may be useful for educating parents.

These sessions should focus on helping parents to understand the negative impacts associated with inappropriate involvement in their child's sport. It is not enough to simply forbid certain behaviours during games and practices, as a great deal of negative pressure occurs before and after games. If parents, especially fathers, understand the negative impacts that their involvement may have on their sons' participation in hockey, they may attempt to engage in more positive behaviours.

It is important to note that league administrators may need to make an effort to ensure that fathers are included in any parental education that is offered. Since research

shows that mothers often provide more behind-the-scene support than father, such as attending hockey-related events, fathers may inadvertently be left out of events in which parental education is offered (Dunn et al., 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Trussell, 2009). In households with two parents or guardians, league administrators should invite both to attend the educational sessions and sign the code of conduct prior to the start of the season.

This study will have implications for parents because if they have a better understanding of what it is like to experience this phenomenon, it may help to reduce negative forms of parental involvement from occurring and encourage positive parental involvement. It is hoped that key aspects of this study will motivate and encourage parents to engage in appropriate levels and types of parental involvement. This will benefit the youth involved and likely reduce negative impacts, such as lack of enjoyment, conflict within the family, and withdrawal from the sport. Therefore, this study will be informative to parents who currently have children participating in competitive sport, particularly competitive hockey.

This phenomenological study sought to understand what it is like for youth to experience parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts on the youth and their commitment to the sport. Through the analysis of the interviews, fourteen themes emerged that represent the essence of this phenomenon. These findings added to the understanding of this phenomenon and provided in depth descriptions of relevant experiences. It is hoped that this study will help the reader to better understand both the positive and negative aspects of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey, and what it is like for the youth involved. All participants in this study experienced both positive and negative involvement from their parents while playing youth hockey; however, for these participants the negative often outweighed the positive. Sport participation has many positive benefits for youth, but parents need to ensure that they are supporting their child in the appropriate manner. The findings from this study, along with parental education, may be valuable in helping parents to better understand the experiences of youth in sport and the impacts of parental involvement. This may encourage parents to reconsider their negative behaviours and open a dialogue with their children about what type and level of parental involvement the child desires.

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Poster (Appendix A)

**ATTENTION**

**Looking for males between the ages of 18-25, who played competitive youth hockey**

If you played competitive youth hockey for 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, stopped playing between the ages of 14-17 and would like to share your experiences regarding parental involvement, please READ the “*Letter of Invitation*” below, and consider participating in a Graduate Thesis research project.

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- Looking for 7 participants.
- Interviews may take place at Brock University or a different location upon request.
  - Duration of interview – approximately 90 minutes.
  - All participants will receive a \$10 Tim Horton’s gift card.

## Letter of Invitation (Appendix B)

Dear Potential Participant:

I am conducting a research study entitled “Retrospectives on the Experience of Parental Pressure and Support by Male Participants in Competitive Youth Hockey: A Phenomenological Investigation”. Please read the project description that follows, and consider participating in an interview.

This study is being conducted by Dan Schonewille, and will be under the supervision of Dr. Trent Newmeyer through the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University. You are being invited to participate in a graduate MA (Master of Arts) thesis project in which I am investigating the perceptions of individuals aged 18-25 regarding the parental involvement they experienced while playing competitive hockey as a youth (under 18 years of age). The researcher aims to interview eight males between the ages of 18-25, who experienced parental pressure at some point while playing competitive youth hockey, and withdrew between the ages of 14-17.

The interview in which you are being invited to participate will take approximately one hour to ninety minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Please feel free to accept, postpone or decline participation in this study. Should you decide to participate, feel free to refuse to answer any of the questions asked or to withdraw from this study at any time.

All information collected from participation will be treated as confidential. Thus, your name will not appear in any report, publication or presentation resulting from this study. All data with identifying information will be retained separately and will be securely stored in a locked location. The researcher will be transcribing the interviews, and will keep all information confidential.

Given that the topic under study is somewhat personal, interviews may become emotionally charged if participants reflect on negative past experiences. To minimize any issues relating to psychological harm, the researcher will allow you to continue the study or to disengage. In addition, a list of external resources will be provided at the beginning of the interview should any participants require psychological assistance. Other than this, there are no foreseeable risks to your well being through participation. The information obtained from this research may benefit parents who are interested in enrolling their child into competitive hockey because the impacts of pressures and support from parents will be better understood. It is hoped that this will make the sport more positive for the individuals involved, leading to greater enjoyment for youth in competitive hockey.

Data collection will begin upon approval from the Research Ethics Board and the project will be completed by September 2011. At your request, a summary of the findings will be provided.

This project has been reviewed and received clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board. In the event that you have any questions or concerns about your participation please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035.

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this study. If you are interested in participating, and will be available, please contact the researcher (as described below) to arrange for an interview.

Researcher Name: Dan Schonewille  
Contact: [ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca](mailto:ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca)

Faculty Supervisor: Trent Newmeyer, Ph.D., (905) 688-5550 ext. 5118 or at [tnewmeyer@brocku.ca](mailto:tnewmeyer@brocku.ca)

## Verbal Script (Appendix C)

Thank you for your consideration and verbal agreement to participate in the proposed research study, entitled “Retrospectives on the Experience of Parental Pressure and Support by Male Participants in Competitive Youth Hockey: A Phenomenological Investigation”. This study is designed as a graduate thesis project to investigate how individuals aged 18-25 perceive the parental involvement that they experienced while playing competitive youth ice hockey. My aim is to interview individuals ages 18-25 to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the parental involvement that occurred when they played competitive youth hockey. Your involvement in this study requires one digitally audio-taped interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.

As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Additionally, should you wish to withdraw at any point, all data collected during your interview will be destroyed. All information from this study will be interpreted confidentially. Thus, your name and any other personal identifiers will not appear in any report, publication or presentation resulting from this study. All data with identifying information will be kept in a secure location. Also, there are no foreseeable risks to your well being through participation. If needed, a list of local counselling resources will be provided to each participant at the beginning of the interview.

Your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential, and transcribed by myself. This transcript and the interpretations from the interviews will be summarized in the final thesis document. You will be contacted with this information to conduct a member check of your data, verify your commentary, and request feedback on our interpretation of your responses.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in the study outlined above. Once you have read the letter of information, and voluntarily signed the consent form, the interview will begin.

## Letter of Information and Informed Consent (Appendix D)

December 2010/February 2011

Project Title: “Retrospectives on the Experience of Parental Pressure and Support by Male Participants in Competitive Youth Hockey: A Phenomenological Investigation”.

Principal Student Investigator:	
Dan Schonewille	Faculty Supervisor:
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences	Trent Newmeyer, PhD., Thesis Supervisor
MA candidate at Brock University	Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
<a href="mailto:ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca">ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca</a>	Brock University
	(905) 688-5550
	<a href="mailto:tnewmeyer@brocku.ca">tnewmeyer@brocku.ca</a>

### **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

The purpose of this MA Thesis study is to explore the perceptions of males aged 18-25 regarding the experience of parental involvement in competitive youth hockey and the impacts related to this phenomenon. By responding to the questions in the interview guide, individuals may become more informed and aware of their perceptions by exploring their experiences in regards to parental involvement. In addition, participants will be able to bring their past experiences to their consciousness and therefore become cognizant of how forms of parental involvement in competitive hockey have impacted their lives (if at all).

### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to be part of a semi-structured interview that will consist of questions regarding parental involvement in competitive youth hockey. A digital audio-recorder will be used for respondent accuracy, and to assist the research with the analysis of data. Participation in this interview will take approximately one hour – one and a half hours of your time.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

This research will benefit individuals by giving them insight into their perceptions of the impacts of parental involvement in the sport of ice hockey. Participants may obtain a sense of satisfaction in knowing that their opinions and recommendations will possibly benefit youth in competitive hockey in the future. A potential risk that can be associated with this study is that of psychological harm. Given that some forms of parental involvement may have been traumatic for some individuals, such as excessive pressures, a list of counseling resources (professional services) will be distributed to each participant prior to the start of each interview.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information you provide is considered confidential; your name will not be included or, in any other way, associated with the data collected in the study. Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of names. Data collected during this study will be stored temporarily by the Thesis Supervisor and transcribed electronically by the researcher (myself). Data will be kept until the end of the study in electronic format. Access to this data will be restricted to the researcher (Dan Schonewille) and the Thesis Supervisor (Dr. Trent Newmeyer).

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

**PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and/or presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available through the Researcher, by phone or by email, and should be available by September, 2011. It is hoped that this study will provide youth sport leaders, practitioners, and researchers with an understanding of the concerns youth have in regards to parental conduct at youth sport events, and to lessen the negative aspects of parental involvement that exist (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

**CONSENT**

- I agree to participate in this study described above.
- I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this Letter of Information and Consent.
- I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future.
- I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Interview Guide (Appendix E)

Interview Guide for males aged 18-25 who played competitive youth hockey for 1-5 years, experienced parental pressure at some point, and withdrew from competitive hockey between the ages of 14-17.

## Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a research study based on perceptions of parental involvement that exist within the competitive youth hockey setting. This project has been reviewed and received clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board. In the event that you have any questions or concerns about your participation please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035. Thank you for your time and interest, which are very much appreciated.

Your responses are being digitally recorded, and each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

## 1. Can you tell me about your family life?

Probe for:

- Additional siblings; oldest, youngest, or middle child
- Sport interests within your family
- What sports did other family members engage in (if any)

## 2. How did you come to play competitive hockey?

Probe for:

- Influences- did mom or dad play?
- Willing or forced into the sport?

## 3. Where did you play competitive youth hockey?

Probe for:

- Why this league/organization?

## 4. Were there times when parental involvement (or lack of involvement) led to you feeling negative after a hockey game as a youth? If so, please describe

Probe for:

- Details and description of the experiences

## 5. Were there times when parental involvement (or lack of involvement) led to you feeling positive after a hockey game as a youth? If so, please describe

Probe for:

- Details and description of the experiences

## 6. Please describe your perceptions of parental pressures in regards to competitive hockey.

7. Please describe your perceptions of parental support in regards to competitive hockey.
8. Did you ever experience parental pressure when playing competitive youth hockey? What types of pressures did you experience from your parent/guardian?
  - Probe for specific descriptions of the experiences
9. If you ever experienced parental pressure in competitive youth hockey, how did you react?  
Probe for:
  - What he would “actually do”, a reconstruction of their experience (Seidman, 2006); how did he feel?
10. Did you ever experience parental support while playing competitive youth hockey? If so, what type of support did you experience from your parent/guardian?
  - Probe for specific descriptions of the experience
11. If you ever experienced parental support in competitive youth hockey, how did you react?
  - What he would “actually do”, a reconstruction of their experience (Seidman, 2006); how did he feel?
12. Please talk about your relationship with your parents during the off-season and peak season of competitive youth hockey.  
Probe for:
  - Difference in relationship
  - Arguments that occurred (if any)
13. Did parental involvement impact your commitment to competitive hockey? In what way?  
Probe for:
  - Impact on factors in the SCM (i.e. enjoyment, social support, social constraints)
  - Did parental involvement in competitive hockey have any other impacts on you?
14. What role do you believe parental involvement should have in competitive youth hockey?

## Participant Resources (Appendix F)

**Brock University Personal Counselling**

*This service is offered at no cost for Brock University students*

Address: 500 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, ON

Phone Number: 905-688-5550, extension 4750

Office Hours: 8:30 - 12:00, 1:00 - 4:30

Website: <http://www.brocku.ca/personal-counselling>

**Family Counselling Centre Niagara**

*Fee assistance available for Counselling and Therapy services*

Address: 82 Hannover Drive, St Catharines, ON

Phone Number: (905) 937-7731, extension 3345

Website: [www.fccniagara.on.ca](http://www.fccniagara.on.ca)

**Reclaim**

*Counselling and Wellness Centre*

Address: 110A Hannover Drive, Suite 102, St. Catharines, ON

Phone Number: (289)-479-5155

Website: [www.reclaimcounselling.com](http://www.reclaimcounselling.com)

**Niagara Counselling Services**

*A private counselling service providing confidential services*

Office Hours: Monday – Friday, 9am – 8pm

St. Catharines Address: 47 Scott Street West

Phone Number: (905)-988-5758

Niagara Falls Address: 5017 Victoria Avenue

Phone Number: (905)-988-5748

**Distress Centre of Niagara**

*Provides a free, confidential, 24-Hour Distress Line to assist callers and provide information and referrals*

Address: 221 Glendale Ave, St. Catharines, ON

Phone Number: (905)-688-3711

Website: [www.distresscentreniagara.com](http://www.distresscentreniagara.com)

## General Feedback Letter of Appreciation (Appendix G)

*Date: TBD*

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your voluntary participation in the study titled “Retrospectives on the Experience of Parental Pressure and Support by Male Participants in Competitive Youth Hockey: A Phenomenological Investigation”. This MA graduate thesis study was designed to investigate the perceptions of males aged 18-25 regarding the parental involvement that they faced while playing competitive hockey as a youth and the impact it had. The interviews with participants will lead to greater understanding of the experience of parental involvement and its impacts from the perspective of young adults that played competitive hockey as youth. Findings from this study may help parents to recognize the positive and negative impacts of their involvement.

If requested a summary of the findings should be available in September 2011, and will be provided.

This project has been reviewed and received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. In the event that you have any questions or concerns about your participation please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035, or the researcher (Dan Schonewille), at [ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca](mailto:ds06ib@badger.ac.brocku.ca).

Your willingness to take part in this research and your co-operation was greatly appreciated. Thank you once again for your interest and involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Graduate Student Investigator

Dan Schonewille

## Additional Ethical Queries (Appendix H)

**Section 1:**

*In regards to the ethical guidelines provided by the REB, I will ensure that the following guidelines are met.*

- 1) I will report any serious adverse events (SAE) to the Research Ethics Board (REB)
- 2) Any additions/changes to research procedures after approval has been granted will be submitted to the REB for revision.
- 3) I agree to request a renewal of approval for any project continuing beyond the expected date of completion or for more than one year.
- 4) I will submit a final report to the Office of Research Services once the research has been completed.
- 5) I take full responsibility for ensuring that all other investigators involved in this research follow the protocol as outlined in this application.

**Section 2:**

*Possible risks that are outlined in Section C, (15) of Brock University's REB*

- a) The participants for this study will not experience any physical risks (including any bodily contact, physical stress, or administration of any substance).
- b) Given the nature of past negative experiences, there is a possibility that participants for this study may experience psychological risks such as becoming upset or experiencing emotional stress. If this occurs, the participant will have the choice to continue his/her participation in the study, or withdraw from the study. In addition, a resource handout will be distributed to each participant that includes the contact information for the local counselling services within St. Catharines and the surrounding area- the Niagara Region.
- c) The participants for this study will not experience or be subject to any social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy, and / or reputation).
- d) Other than what has been previously stated, there are not any possible risks to participants greater than those that the participants might encounter in their everyday life.
- e) There is absolutely no deception involved in any aspect of the study.

- f) There is no potential for participants to feel obligated to participate or coerced into contributing to this research. According to the informed consent that they will have received, they can withdraw from the study at any point they choose.

**Section 3:**

*Possible benefits that are outlined in Section C, (16) of Brock University's REB*

- a) Participants may become more informed and aware of the parental involvement they experienced, as well as the impacts it may have had on the individual. It is hoped that each participant will resist passing any form of negative involvement on to their future children.
- b) Participants' perceptions of parental involvement in minor hockey will become known.
- c) Parents may be better informed of the repercussions of the negative forms of involvement (i.e. pressures) that they put on their children in minor hockey.