

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF PARENTAL SUPPORT IN
ELITE MIDGET AAA HOCKEY**

by

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ABSTRACT

Eleven parents in the Canadian Maritimes involved with Midget Triple A teams, the highest possible league before Major Junior (i.e., the Canadian Hockey League), were interviewed to explore the various ways they provided support in elite youth hockey, and rationale for the support. A descriptive phenomenological framework was used to explore the experiences parents had supporting elite youth hockey. The findings suggested that the following support mechanisms exist: *Managing Internal and External Pressures*, the *Transition from Coach to Parent Spectator*, *Preparing for Life After Hockey*, and *Sacrificing for Your Kids*. However, many parents struggled with the sacrifices that were needed to be made regarding the costs and time commitments, and the pressure that comes with increased competition. These findings provide a critical insight into the experiences of Midget Triple A hockey parents regarding the support mechanisms they have in place for their children.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Parents support their children in a variety of different ways (e.g., financial, and emotional) through different situations that their child encounters (e.g., sport, recreation, education, and/or family). More specifically, types of parental support provided to their children in a recreational and sport setting include playing with their children, teaching them how to play a certain sport, offering advice/feedback on how to improve, and encouraging them to participate in outdoor sports (Beets, Cardinal, & Alderman, 2010; Cutrona & Russell, 1980). Therefore, parental support can be identified in two ways: intangible and tangible support. Intangible support can be provided through verbal encouragement, which can enhance the motivation to continue participation in the activity (Beets et al., 2010). While tangible support can be defined as “overt behaviours by parents that directly facilitate the involvement in activity” (Beets et al., 2010, p. 9). For example, parents must be willing to pay the financial costs associated with sport participation, as well as offering transportation to the events (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011; Beets et al., 2010; Coakley, 2006). Thus, the general purpose of this thesis research was to explore parental support (i.e., tangible and intangible support) in a competitive sport setting.

A competitive sport setting has unique characteristics and has been highly visible in the sport of minor hockey in Canadian society. One such unique characteristic involves these players being drafted into a professional league as early as 14 years old

(Edwards, 2016; Hockey Canada, 2013). Scholars have suggested that hockey is a part of Canadian identity and a critical facet of Canadian culture (Earle, 1995; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Hockey Canada, 2013; Mason, 2002). In popular press (Campbell & Parcells, 2013; Brady, 2011; Cole, 2015; Macgregor, 2012; Mirtle, 2013; Rutherford, 2009; Traikos, 2015), as well as academic literature (Coakley, 2006; Cole, 2015; Edwards, 2016; Hyman, 2012; Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008; Ogden & Edwards, 2016), minor hockey has been identified as one of the most expensive youth sports to play in North America. While the financial costs of playing minor hockey can vary depending on the level of play, the types of expenses remain consistent at each level of competition. The expenses of minor league hockey typically include registration, team fees, equipment, gas, accommodations, meals, team apparel, and private instruction (Campbell & Parcells, 2013). These children have dreams of playing hockey, and their parents are required to pay the high financial costs associated with the sport. As these children grow older, they are involved at different competitive levels of hockey (i.e., recreational versus elite levels).

Minor hockey in Canada consists of age groups: Tyke (age 6), Novice (ages 7-8), Atom (ages 9-10), Peewee (ages 11-12), Bantam (ages 13-14), and Midget (ages 15-18). Within these age groups, players are also divided by competitive or elite categories: Single A, Double A, and Triple A (Hockey Canada, 2013). Triple A is considered to be the highest level of competition in youth hockey (i.e., elite level). Elite minor hockey involves leagues and divisions that are considered competitive; where a player must try out in most regions throughout Canada, including Midget Triple A (Hockey Alberta,

2007). Tyke, Novice, Atom, Pee wee, and Bantam age groups have been extensively studied in regards to their specific age groups (Chard, Edwards & Potwarka, 2015; Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Jeffery-Tosoni, Fraser Thomas, & Baker, 2015; Neely & Holt, 2014; Wall & Côtè, 2007). However, there is limited research that has explored the Midget age category at the Triple A level, which was the focus of this thesis research.

Midget Triple A hockey in Canada is considered a major “stepping stone” that is used in a Canadian athlete’s pathway towards making it to major junior hockey in Canada (Edwards & Washington, 2015). Hockey Canada (2013; the governing body for minor hockey in Canada) identified that the Major Junior Leagues involved in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) consist of the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), Western Hockey League (WHL), and Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL). These leagues are global leaders in developing talent for the National Hockey League (NHL) and other professional leagues (Hockey Canada, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the WHL was not included in this study as these players are drafted out of the Bantam (14 years old).

Previous research surrounding hockey parents have focused on the Tyke and Novice level (Chard et al., 2015), Bantam level (Ede, Kamphoff, Mackey, & Armentrout, 2012), Pee wee level (Jeffery-Tosoni & Fraser-Thomas, 2015), or a variety of age groups (Davies, Babkes-Stellino, Nichols, & Coleman, 2016; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008). To illustrate different types of parental hockey support, two recent stories emerged within the media regarding the fathers of NHL players: Patrick O’Sullivan, and Matt Duchene.

(O’Sullivan, 2015; Traikos, 2015). These stories demonstrate two ends of a spectrum where there are positive and negative forms of parental support. Alternatively, the story of Jaret Anderson-Dolan breaks the ideals of a hetero-normative family structure in hockey, and shows how his mothers are equally supportive. This thesis research explored forms of support parents are willing to provide in order for their child compete in the highest competitive level (e.g., Triple A) possible throughout their minor hockey league career.

Patrick O’Sullivan

The first example is a negative example, where Patrick O’Sullivan was an OHL star playing for the Mississauga Ice Dogs, surpassing 80 points a season all four years that he played. O’Sullivan was drafted in the second round, 56th overall by the Minnesota Wild in 2003. Having spent time playing for the Minnesota Wild, Los Angeles Kings, Edmonton Oilers, and Carolina Hurricanes, O’Sullivan surpassed 300 games, scoring 160 points (hockeyDB.com, 2011). Recently, O’Sullivan reflected on his past and how he got to the NHL in an article written in the *Player’s Tribune*.

Patrick O’Sullivan’s father was violently abusive towards Patrick. O’Sullivan (2015) stated that his father “would throw punches. Not like he was hitting a small child...but like he was in a bar fight” (para, 1), then he would whip Patrick shirtless with a heavy leather rope or an electrical cord. Furthermore, O’Sullivan, then, states “he would put cigarettes out on me. Choke me. Throw full soda cans at my head” (para, 4). O’Sullivan (2015) posed the question: “Why in the hell would anyone do this to their own son?”; to which he answers:

My father was a low-level pro hockey player who never made it past the minor leagues. He was living his failed dream through his child. As twisted and insane as it sounds, in his mind, everything he was doing was justified. It was all going to make me a better hockey player – and eventually get me to the NHL. (para. 7)

As a 15-16-year-old, who ended up being the first overall pick in the OHL draft, and an eventual second round pick in the NHL, O’Sullivan was aware of his dad’s intentions of making him an NHL player through his abuse. While Patrick’s father may have believed it was this abuse that made him the player he was, it was the time on the ice, having fun, away from his father where O’Sullivan learned the hockey skills needed to excel to the NHL (Sullivan, 2015).

O’Sullivan had his own reasons for writing his story. O’Sullivan states that, “I’m not writing this article for my father. I’m writing it for the people in the parking lot” (O’Sullivan, 2015, para. 49). The idea for his article was to highlight those that were “in the parking lot” watching, not doing anything to change it, who perhaps are thinking “well his dad’s a nutcase, but he’s the best player on the ice, so it can’t be that bad. Hell, maybe that’s what it takes to be the best” (para. 25). O’Sullivan hopes that his story encourages these types of parents to speak up, and perhaps adjust their thinking away from solely focusing on their child’s on ice success, which the Canadian major junior hockey “meat market” (O’Sullivan, 2015, para. 23) currently demands. While O’Sullivan’s story reveals the negative sides of parental support within minor hockey, the story of Matt Duchene shows the supportive side.

Matt Duchene

The second example, which is a positive example, is Matt Duchene who is a forward that plays for the Colorado Avalanche. From Haliburton, Ontario, Duchene was drafted in the first round, third overall, out of the Brampton Battalion of the OHL. Duchene has played seven seasons for Colorado, having competed in 495 games, and surpassed 350 points (NHL.com, 2016). While a very successful player, Matt Duchene's father was an important influence toward his successful hockey career.

Matt Duchene's father, Vince, estimated that throughout Matt's 13-year minor league hockey career, he invested over \$300,000 in his son's development (Traikos, 2015). Vince Duchene's minor hockey league expenses included tournament and registration fees, equipment costs, gas, food, hotel accommodations, personal trainers, and a personal loss of income due to missing work at an estimate of \$20,000 a year (Campbell & Parcells, 2013). The financial investment into hockey made by Vince Duchene allowed for his son Matt to earn \$40.6 million in the first 10 years playing professional hockey (Campbell & Parcells, 2013).

Vince Duchene indicated that he spent \$23,000 in Matt's Midget Triple A year, the most he has spent for a single year of hockey. (Campbell & Parcells, 2013). Given the expenses associated with Midget Triple A, parents may be willing to spend more, or continue to spend, given the nature of what is anticipated to come for their children (i.e., making it to the CHL). The story of the Duchene's exemplifies the expenses associated with elite minor hockey in Canada, as well as the commitment and sacrifice parents are willing to make to allow for their children to reach the NHL.

While the motives for his financial commitment are unknown, Vince Duchene can be perceived as a supportive father by doing whatever it took to see his child's dream come true. This is an exemplary story of parental support because Vince Duchene spent an extraordinary amount on his son's junior hockey career in order to see him prosper. While Vince spent \$23,000 in Matt's final year of Midget, other parents spent \$12,000 for their Triple A Midget child, thus showing the commitment level Vince made to his son (Campbell & Parcels, 2013).

Jaret Anderson-Dolan

Jaret Anderson Dolan was drafted into the NHL in 2017 by the Los Angeles Kings, after previously spending his junior years with the Spokane Chiefs of the Western Hockey League (NHL.com, 2017). Anderson-Dolan was raised by his two mothers, Fran and Nancy. Jaret believes that from Fran, he learned great leadership skills from her, as she was a former captain of the Calgary Canadiens. While from Nancy, he gained a perspective on the bigger picture of life (NHL.com, 2017). Being raised by two mothers has allowed for Jaret to overcome some on ice incidents, and grow further as a person based on his upbringing (NHL.com, 2017). Jaret Anderson-Dolan defies the stereotypes surrounding the family support structure in youth hockey, and shows that support in youth hockey can be provided by someone other than the father.

Purpose Statement

Based on the above examples, parental support can be examined through positive and negative means. Therefore, the specific purpose of this thesis research was to explore the parental support that exists within elite minor league hockey in Canada, by

exploring the lived experiences of the parents of adolescent players involved in Midget Triple A in the Canadian Maritimes. Furthermore, this thesis research gained an understanding of the various forms of support they have offered (e.g., tangible, intangible) in the final year of their child's minor hockey career. This thesis research addressed the following research questions:

- 1) How do parents describe the Midget Triple A experience?
- 2) Building on the parents Midget Triple A experience, how do parents of the Midget Triple A age group (15-16) describe the type of support they provide to their children?
- 3) How does a parent's support in hockey change from the Tyke and Novice age groups (6 - 8), to the Midget age group (15 - 16)?
- 4) What benefits do parents receive from supporting their child in elite level hockey, and why do they continue to support youth hockey?

The proceeding section of the thesis research will review the literature on the development of elite youth athletes, and will address the lack of literature that surrounds adolescents ages 15-16. It will then offer definitions and examples of ways that parents have provided support for their children to play in sports. Next, this thesis research provides a methodology section, explaining qualitative research, and descriptive phenomenology. This thesis research will then discuss the methods that were employed for collecting data, the findings that arose, and a discussion based on those findings. A conclusion that includes contributions, limitations of the study, and areas for future research will be addressed following the discussion.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As indicated above, the literature surrounding elite level hockey of players aged 15 - 16, as well as the parents involved with this age group, is limited. However, there is extensive literature surrounding an athlete's development throughout the ages within three key groups where an athlete's growth will change (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011; Coakley, 2006; Côté, 1999; Juntumaa, Keskivaara & Punamaki, 2005). These groups consist of: sampling years (ages 6 - 13), the specialization years (ages 13 - 15), and the investment years (ages 15 - 18). This literature review will further examine parents in sport, their involvement levels, and the style of parenting used through tangible, and intangible forms of support.

Athlete Development – Sampling Years

Côté (1999) identified three stages of an athlete's development: the sampling years, the specialization years, and the investment years. The sampling years occur between the ages of 6 - 13. In this age group, parents are first known to provide sporting opportunities for their child; they focus on the fun and enjoyment of sport, while also first recognizing their child's potential gift in a certain sport (Côté, 1999).

The literature surrounding the sampling years is substantial (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Neely & Holt, 2014; Wall & Côté, 2007; Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004) with some of the literature specifically focusing on hockey players (Chard et al., 2015; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Jeffrey-Tosoni et al., 2015). For example, Dunn and Dunn (1999)

found that young athletes who act with their ego, which means they prefer winning over skills mastery, are more inclined to use aggressive behaviours to get the end goal they desire. Alternatively, those who were considered task oriented, which means they prefer fair play, talent, and skill development over winning, offer a greater understanding of sportsmanship. Dunn and Dunn (1999) called for coaches and parents to further reward their children “who have clearly tried hard or who have performed to the best of their abilities” (p. 196). This would lead children aged 6 - 13 to have a greater understanding of sportsmanship and reduce the importance of winning.

Jeffery-Tosoni et al. (2015) interviewed Peewee hockey players, aged 11 - 12, to uncover what the children think of their parents’ involvement level. This study found that these children appreciated the instructional feedback their parents provided in a one-on-one environment, but did not enjoy it while they were in a crowd (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015). Children enjoyed having conversations about all aspects of hockey with their parents, and typically these conversations increased as the season went on, and got closer to the important playoff games (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015). Parental involvement and support of children’s sports was looked at in greater detail in this thesis research.

Finally, Chard et al. (2015) examined the Tyke (aged 6) and Novice (aged 7 - 8) divisions in youth rep hockey (competitive hockey) to determine why parents put their children in elite level hockey leagues. The findings from Chard et al. (2015) concluded that parents will put their children into elite level sport at a young age because of the structure of the league, the competition, and the challenge that is provided within the rep leagues and team environment. Furthermore, structure teaches life lessons about

commitment, discipline, work ethic and accountability when it comes to practice and life in general. These rep leagues allow the Tyke and Novice aged children to be challenged, where development of their skill set is crucial while also introducing them into a team environment where cooperation is key (Chard et al., 2015).

The main reason for parental involvement in elite youth hockey at these young ages was to develop the child into a “good person” that works hard, is accountable, can commit, has discipline, and can work well in a team (Chard et al., 2015). An interesting point that did not emerge from the findings in Chard et al. (2015) was what the children wanted or needed was almost never mentioned from the parents. The parents interviewed stated that, “I don’t want my child to go through life without being challenged.... this is something I wanted...The main reason for me doing it...” (Chard et al., 2015, p. 29). Personal pronouns such as “I” and “me” consistently appear within the findings, as parents focused on what they wanted as opposed to consulting with their children first to see what they wanted (Chard et al., 2015). As outlined by Chard et al. (2015), parents wanted their children involved in elite sports for their own reasons, but does this continue in the investment years?

Athlete Development – Specializing Years

The second stage of Côté’s (1999) developmental model is the specializing years, which consists of athletes between the ages 13 and 15. Côté (1999) highlights five important factors that make up the specialization years:

- 1) The athlete makes a commitment to one or two sports;
- 2) Parents emphasize school and sport achievement;

- 3) Parents make a financial and time commitment to their child-athlete;
- 4) Parents develop a growing interest in their child-athlete's sport; and,
- 5) Older sibling acts as role model of work ethic. (pp.404 - 407)

This stage of development shows that a child's athletic pursuits begin to take a more important role in the parent's life. The research that has been specific to the specializing years, similar to the sampling years indicated above, is also widely examined (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Knight, Neely & Holt, 2011; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005) with hockey participation at this stage also being extensively examined (Ede et al., 2012; Wall & Côté, 2007).

Coakley (2006) hypothesizes that the American family consists of dual income, working parents. The author finds an increase in single parent households which may limit the time parents get to support their child in sport. Therefore, children may be dissatisfied with their parents' involvement levels as they would prefer them watching than working. However, due to the expensive nature of hockey, as has previously been stated, it may take a dual income household to truly afford the sport.

Wall and Côté (2007) examined Bantam Triple A players aged 13 - 14 to evaluate why players chose to dropout of sport, due to the amount of sports they did, or did not play. It was demonstrated that both the active players and dropouts seemed to have played the same amount of sports, while also spending the same amount of time in on ice hockey training practices. Those players that dropped out did so because they spent more time engaging in off-ice training at 13 years old (Wall & Côté, 2007). This shows that a focus on specialization is detrimental to an athlete's development, and interest in a sport.

Furthermore, Ede et al. (2012) examined hockey players in the Bantam age group (ages 13 - 15), to understand how they view their parents' involvement level. The scholars concluded that the athletes preferred the praise and understanding aspect of their parents' involvement instead of a direct or active participation in their sporting lives (Ede et al., 2012). However, the athletes were found to be dissatisfied with how much their parents were involved, but this did not affect the athlete's overall enjoyment of the sport of hockey. Ede et al.'s (2012) study shows that although the children may want more praise and attention from their parents, they still find hockey enjoyable.

The theme of dropout or attrition in sport has been investigated within hockey literature (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011; Coakley, 1992). Wall and Côté (2007), previously identified the dropout age for children in hockey at 13 years old. Conversely, Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) discovered that on average, children began to dropout at 10 years old, particularly in the sport of hockey. The top five reasons for dropout in hockey were "too much time, wants to do other things, financial, not fun anymore, and lack of interest" (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011, p. 128). Wall and Côté (2007) and Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) demonstrated that players are dropping out of hockey before entering the Midget age category of their careers. The reasons for the withdrawal from hockey primarily included a lack of time or finances. This thesis research sought to understand why parents continue to support their adolescent child with their hockey dreams.

There are a variety of reasons why an athlete may wish to dropout of sport. Coakley (1992) identified one that found that an athlete's dropout of sport has to do with

“power relationships in and around sport that seriously restrict young athletes’ control over their lives” (p. 276). Athletes perceived a lack of control due to the commitments that parents and coaches place upon their shoulders (Coakley, 1992). While Coakley (1992) finds that some of these children may make the decision themselves to become elite athletes, it is the parents who are guiding the athletes towards their goals. What is important for parents to realize, however, is that “parents and other adults should not take them so seriously that they deprive the young people of chances to make new decisions, claim and construct new roles and identities, and abandon old ones” (Coakley, 1992, p. 279). If a child’s goal is to be an elite athlete, parents and other adults should not strictly keep them to that goal, but allow them to create other goals and desires for themselves.

Coakley (1992) claims that these children are aware of the time, money, effort, and resources that their parents put into their athletic pursuits. While none of the children said they were living their parents’ lives, most talked about how their parents were happy when they succeeded, and how they did not want to let their parents down (Coakley, 1992). This thesis research investigated how involved a parent becomes in the child’s youth sport dreams, and looked to determine if parents are living their lives through their children.

Athlete Development – Investment Years

Finally, Côté (1999) addresses the years that was the focus of this thesis research. The investment years are from ages 15 - 18. These are the years when an athlete becomes committed to being elite in a single sport (Côté, 1999). Côté (1999) identified five main factors of what separates elite athletes focused on a single sport (e.g.,

gymnastics, and figure skating) comparatively with a group who participates in sports recreationally. The first is that the athlete increased his or her commitment to one sport, meaning general play activities is replaced by sport specific practices. Côté (1999) noted that some sports, such as gymnastics and figure skating, force their athletes to specialize earlier than the investment stage.

The second factor is that parents show a greater interest in the child's sport (Côté, 1999). Parents began to provide directions and guidance while not interfering with the role of the coach. The third factor is that parents will help the athlete fight back against anything that may hinder their training. Parents will help their children deal with stress, training, lack of interest in the sport, injury, pressures, and failures that come along with elite level training. This means that instead of other goals or plans the child may have, the parents are instead focused on their success in sport only (Côté, 1999).

The fourth factor is that parents demonstrated different behaviours toward each of their children (Côté, 1999). Family members found that the elite athlete was treated differently, partially because of the financial investment that is needed to supplement the athlete's training. Côté (1999) stated that "although parents were consciously aware of this uneven distribution of resources between their children, their belief about the high level of talent in their child-athlete was strong enough to determine and validate differential behaviours between children" (p. 411). Finally, the fifth factor claims that the younger sibling or twin shows bitterness and jealousy due to their sibling's attention and achievements. Due to the focus on the child-athlete, the other sibling(s) will become

bitter and jealous as all of their parents' attention and finances shift to the athlete (Côté, 1999).

The research surrounding the investment stage is limited (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Juntumaa et al., 2005). Some of the research that has been conducted discusses a variety of age groups that includes the investment stage (e.g., Davies et al., 2016; Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010; Lavoie & Stellino, 2008; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995; Weiss & Weiss, 2013). Of the research identified above, only the two prior studies have specifically focused on the investment stage (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Juntumaa et al., 2005). While Davies et al. (2016) and Lavoie and Stellino (2008) focused on how parents use an achievement goal theory to examine how they created a motivational climate, which promoted either "good" or "bad" sport behaviours (respect for others/lack of respect for rules) for their children, both articles focus directly on the players and their perceptions of the environment. Both Davies et al. (2016) and Lavoie and Stellino (2008) sampled hockey players ages 9 - 17, but did not highlight the attitudes or beliefs of the parents themselves within hockey.

Juntumaa et al. (2005) examined parenting styles and the effect these styles have on the player's overall satisfaction while playing hockey. This study concluded that those players who come from a household which creates a positive motivational climate offer a higher degree of mastery-oriented behaviour, meaning they wished to win and continue to develop their skills, but not at the cost of fair play (Juntumaa et al., 2005). However, those parents who offered a rather negative household, or were associated with parental stress, gave their children an environment to which winning at the cost of fair play was

acceptable (Juntumaa et al., 2005). The study's primarily focused on the players and the style of parenting their parents undertook that lead to a task or ego oriented way of approaching ice hockey. While Juntumaa et al. (2005) did focus on specific parenting styles, and how some parents may choose to raise their children, they did not answer the questions as to why they enroll their children in hockey or why they continue to fund and support their children's hockey endeavours as this thesis research explored at the investment stage.

Parents in Sport

The research surrounding parents in a sporting and recreational environment has been extensively researched (e.g., Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003; Fredericks & Eccles, 2004; Harwood & Knight, 2015; Hellstedt, 1987; Knight et al., 2011; Shannon, 2014; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). This research explored areas that includes: participant involvement levels (Hellstedt, 1987; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Wuerth et al., 2004); parental influence (Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003; Côté, 1999; Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995); and to various forms of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1978; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). To uncover a greater understanding of how parents may act with their child in youth sport, scholars have given insight into different forms of parenting techniques and different ways that parents support their children. Throughout the parenting research, within tangible and intangible support, are four key modes of support: financial, logistical, emotional, and informational. Before these four modes of support are examined, understanding parental involvement is discussed.

Parental Involvement. The research on parental involvement is important because it discusses how active a parent is in their child's life. Parental involvement has been defined as "the extent to which a parent is interested in, knowledgeable about, and takes an active role in the child's life" (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989, p. 114). In a seminal piece by Hellstedt (1987), three parental involvement levels were identified: under involved, moderate, and overinvolved. Hellstedt (1987) explained that the "under involved [level] refers to a relative lack of emotional, financial, or functional investment on the part of parents" (p. 153). Under involved parents may not attend games, not invest any money into their child, refuse to volunteer at events, or have no real interest in the child's sport (Hellstedt, 1987). Moderate parents are supportive and engaged with their child in sport, but the primary decision maker regarding the sport belongs to the athlete (Hellstedt, 1987). Parents will allow the coach to do their job, and they will set realistic goals for their athlete, while not investing heavily in the sport and allowing the child to cover some of the costs (Hellstedt, 1987).

Overinvolved parents, however, are the most heavily involved with their child's athletic pursuits. Hellstedt (1987) claims that parents are satisfied through their child's participation, and hope that their success provides opportunities later in life, but are unable to separate their own desires from their children's. These parents are found attending every game or practice, usually disagreeing with the referee or the coach and they will be hoping that the team wins above all else (Hellstedt, 1987).

Involvement levels can change depending on who is offering what kind of support. For example, compared to mothers, fathers are typically devoting less time to

emotional and physical care of the child, instead they are the ones spending time with their children in play and outdoor activities (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Women are typically assigned the childcare and household responsibilities, while the father is assigned the role of play and participation in activities (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Regardless of the way support is provided, the study completed by Trussell and Shaw (2012) demonstrates how having their child participate in sport allows the parents to believe that they are meeting societal expectations of being a good parent by juggling both work and family time. If other parents were not actively involved in their child's sport, other parents would judge them, reflecting their beliefs on what it means to be a good parent (Trussell & Shaw, 2012).

Similarly, another study completed by Trussell (2016) explored young people's beliefs on the volunteer roles of parents in youth sport. It was found that children often recognized and appreciated the visible roles of the father (coach, game announcer), while the mother's roles (assistant coach, board of directors, fundraiser) were left underappreciated (Trussell, 2016). While both parents commit similar amounts of time and energy into their child's involvement in sport, one was found to be more appreciated than the other. While the involvement levels of parents may vary, it became apparent how necessary they are to not only the child's youth sport experience, but to the opinions of other parents as well. This thesis research explored how involved parents are with their child's youth hockey career by gaining an understanding of how they support their child in an elite setting that is based on their commitments to the game (i.e., hockey). The ways that parents offer support are discussed further below.

Parenting Styles. Baumrind (1978), and Maccoby and Martin (1983) addressed two primary forms of parenting styles: authoritarian and authoritative. Parenting style is defined as “a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent’s behaviours are expressed” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 488). As outlined in Darling and Steinberg (1993), Baumrind (1978) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) there are two ways to examine parenting styles: the number of demands that the parents make, and the contingency of parental reinforcement. This becomes responsiveness versus demandingness, where responsiveness allows the parents to foster individuality from their child while also being responsive to their needs, contrastingly demandingness has the parents controlling and placing claims on the children (Holt et al., 2009).

To get a better understanding of what an authoritarian parent is, Baumrind (1978) offers qualities that this style of parent will display. The authoritarian parent is one who will force a child to act the way a parent thinks is correct. The parent discourages independent thinking and freedom, and the child should believe that the parents are always right (Baumrind, 1978). It is clear that an authoritarian parent is one who will use their child as a means toward their selfish ends (Baumrind, 1978).

Alternatively, Baumrind (1978) identifies the different set of qualities that an authoritative parent values. The authoritative parent will explain their choices to the child, while allowing them to speak and to object with what the parent believes. Furthermore, authoritative parents will allow their child to develop their own individual interests by not restricting their freedom, and will still exert control when the child

becomes disobedient (Baumrind, 1978). An authoritative parent tends to listen to his/her child more, while still offering parental guidance (Baumrind, 1978). Parents want their child to succeed and develop, but they will offer more supportive measures rather than those of discipline. Alternatively, in a study of parenting styles and their effects on young athletes, Juntumaa et al., (2005) found that when hockey players aged 14 - 16 had authoritative parents, the athletes showed higher levels of mastery and satisfaction in hockey, while those with authoritarian parents showed higher stress levels and rule breaking behaviour.

The involvement spectrum within parenting is widely publicized, as are the parenting styles of authoritarian and authoritative. While offering similar characteristics to those described in the overinvolved and authoritarian style, the specifics into why parents act in this rather aggressive style is unknown. All of these styles were examined during data collection, and stood as a framework as to why parents act the way they do. How parents offer tangible and intangible support must first be examined before undergoing an investigation as to why they offer their support.

Tangible Support

Types of tangible support can include transportation, direct involvement with the child in the activity, and the purchasing of equipment and fees (Beets et al., 2010). These forms of tangible support as identified by Beets et al. (2010) can be understood as financial, and logistical support for the purpose of this thesis research. These types of support are discussed further below.

Financial. The primary form of support that will be investigated within this thesis research is the financial support that parents offer their elite level athletes. Given the expense of hockey, the financial commitment by parents to support their children is necessary if they are to have a future in the game. Coakley (2006) finds that fathers are typically those deciding where their family's money goes when it comes to youth sport. While the father may not drive his child to practice, the father is typically involved in selecting the equipment required for the sport, as well as finding the coach and personal trainers necessary for his child to succeed (Coakley, 2006). Sometimes, the financial costs for parents including administration, equipment, and training can range from \$10,000 – \$40,000 per year. In the case of youth hockey, administration costs can financially cost families \$5,000 to \$20,000 per year.

While Coakley (2006) explains parental commitments to sport and the benefits they expect their children to receive from participation, Coakley's findings "did not explain why at this point in time in US culture, parents felt so totally responsible for the development of excellence among their sons and daughters" (p. 159). Coakley (2006) explained how support is given to the child, but did not explain why it is given. One reason that Coakley (2006) hypothesizes why, is that "talented child athletes, become valuable moral capital in neighbourhoods, communities, and the subcultures associated with high performance youth sport programmes" (p. 160). This means parents may feel obligated to continue to support their child given their excellence in sport. If parents do not make the investment, or are unable to, they could be considered failures as parents, which leads to the belief that parents in low income families are already failures

(Coakley, 2006). This research explored the reasons why parents commit to supporting their adolescent child, and Coakley (2006) offers a starting point for suggesting that parents might feel obligated to financially support a talented child.

Logistical. Tangible support does not simply consist of the money that parents put towards their child's athletic pursuits, but it also refers to the time commitment required by the parents, given how the time parents put into sport directly impacts the child's involvement. Beets et al. (2010), includes participation of the activity with the child, watching and supervising the child in their sport, as well as the transportation required. In a study of gymnastics parents, a majority (70%) that were sampled suggested that their home life revolved around the sport with 72% believing that even their personal life involved gymnastics (Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). Furthermore, the time commitment for parents included: driving to arenas; attending practices, games, and tournaments; rearranging family schedules because of the sport; watching and reading more about the child's sport; among others (Weiss & Hayashi, 1995).

In hockey, the above time commitment issues were echoed as reasons for youth attrition (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). The top two reasons that parents were found to be dissatisfied with the hockey organization was that "it required too much time to participate and travel and that it was too expensive" (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011, p. 127). Parents agreed that the season was too long, there were too many practices, it was too time consuming, and too much distance travelled, along with the sport being too expensive (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). Given these examples of time restraints, the idea of tangible support can be defined as a parent's commitment involving money or

one's time towards their child's youth development; whether that is through sport or another means. The financial investment in sports can include: equipment, registration or administration fees, team travel expenses, and private training lessons depending on the child's age group. Conversely, time commitments, refers to the hours dedicated to the sport, including travelling to games, attending practices, and learning about the sport. Not only is the price of minor league hockey high, but its time commitment level is also high.

Intangible Support

In order for the parents to motivate their children, they must be aware of the emotional demands of athletes (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Along with managing emotions, parents are involved in providing performance contingent feedback; informational support (Beets et al., 2010; Jeffrey-Tosoni & Fraser-Thomas, 2015; Holt et al., 2009). Intangible support is understood within the context of this thesis research as emotional and informational support.

Emotional. Another form of support that parents offer is emotional support. Emotional support is the ability to rely on others for security and comfort during stressful times (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Most notably, this emotional support comes in the form of empathy. Empathy can be defined as “an emotional reaction based on apprehension of another's emotional state which is consistent with the other's state” (Holt et al., 2009, p. 676). Parents typically experience the emotions that they believe their children are experiencing. As one parent stated: “when they are expecting to do well and they don't, you feel the pain they feel...when they're disappointed, you're disappointed”

(Holt et al., 2009, p. 676). When a parent is aware of how their children might be feeling, it is easier to manage their emotional state and offer their support.

In a study of child anger during sports competitions, parents were surveyed about their experiences due to the emotional outrages of sport that arise from factors such as unjust coaches, referees and parents, and uncaring behaviours from these participants as well (Omli & Lavoie, 2012). Parents are expected to manage their child's emotional demands during competition according to Harwood and Knight (2015). Parents are asked to be empathetic towards their angry child. They must be able to comfort and feel for their children when one becomes disappointed or upset due to a poor performance, or losing a game. (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Harwood and Knight (2015) stated that "a parent's ability to manage these emotional demands of competition will impact upon their personal enjoyment, quality of experience, and engagement in optimal support practices" (p. 28). Parents play an important role in handling the emotions of their child during their sporting careers. If the parents can manage these athletes' emotional demands, they typically allow their children to be engaged in sport rather than have their children dropout.

Parents of children engaged in youth sport typically provide unconditional support, even if they may not follow the sport itself (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). This exemplifies that regardless of a parent's knowledge or passion for the sport, an engaged child's parent will offer unconditional support towards their sporting lives (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). When their child has finally had enough of sport and wishes to

move on, an engaged child's parent will not pressure them to continue in the sport, but will provide other options for them (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008).

In a study by Fraser Thomas et al. (2008), surrounding swimmers and their parents, one child considered dropping out of swimming, but the parents suggested that they stay with the club and swim once per week, rather than continuing to engage in the sport full-time. Even when faced with an emotional decision to quit, parents are still offering emotional support by providing alternatives to quitting. Parents must be empathetic and be able to control the wide range of emotions that an athlete can feel, including disappointment and anger. Finally, parents must be willing to confront the idea of dropping out with alternative solutions to keep their child engaged in sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Through these examples, it can be seen how parents are able to provide emotional support but not why they are willing to do so.

Informational. Informational support is typically seen when parents attempt to offer instruction to their child athlete on how to play the game, or how to play better (Jeffrey-Tosoni & Fraser-Thomas, 2015; Holt et al., 2009). It provides individuals with advice regarding possible solutions to certain problems (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Instruction refers to direct commands from the parents in the stands offering comments such as “shoot,” “skate,” “kick it,” “get back,” among others (Holt et al., 2009; Jeffrey-Tosoni & Fraser-Thomas, 2015). Holt et al. (2009) found that while 35% of their observed comments were instructional based, most often, they found the instructions to be wrong or misguided by providing examples of parents yelling at their children to cover a player not currently on the field. The idea of misguided instruction continues within

Jeffrey-Tosoni and Fraser-Thomas's (2015) research. They suggested that the child's own ideas of what to do get lost in the comments being yelled from their coach, teammates, and parents. However, some athletes studied stated that they will not know what to do until their parent says something, offering support and instruction (Jeffrey-Tosoni & Fraser Thomas, 2008).

While the idea of instruction during games appears problematic, it is important to consider that these children have awareness of the comments coming from the parents in the stands (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). These children can be influenced by the comments from the audience (e.g., parents or other family members) and this can affect their performance or overall enjoyment of the sport (Jeffery-Tosoni & Fraser Thomas, 2015). While comments during the game may confuse, comments and feedback after the game offer a more positive learning experience. These comments are referred to as performance contingent feedback (Holt et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2011).

Performance contingent feedback typically occurs after a game has concluded and offers the child instruction on how to improve their performance (Holt et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2011). After the games, parents will try to offer their children tips on how to improve their performance. For example, a father telling his son, a goalkeeper in soccer, that he needs to improve his throwing (Holt et al., 2009). Athletes will appreciate the positive feedback not only from their parents but their teammates' parents as well (Knight et al., 2011). Knight et al. (2011) found that athletes preferred parents to offer positive feedback, followed by areas of improvement, and conclude with more positive feedback. This provides confidence to athletes, while also providing feedback to improve

their game. Parents provide informational support by offering their child feedback on their performance. While the comments shouted from the stands and the benches may confuse the children, it shows how aware and conscious they are of the feedback that parents offer them. After the games, the athlete hopes to receive realistic and positive feedback followed by areas where they can improve. Informational support is important as it allows the parents to highlight what the athlete may be unaware of and, thus, further support their athletic careers.

Summary

The research above highlights the parental support in youth sports. Côté (1999) highlights the stages of development that a child athlete undergoes throughout three key age groups. Côté (1999) identified the sampling, specializing, and investment stages, and the key developmental differences between the three. This thesis research explored parents with adolescent children in the Midget age group of elite minor league hockey, as there appears to be a gap in the literature that examined the investment stage of an athlete's career.

Furthermore, parents in sport are then investigated through parental involvement levels (Hellstedt, 1987) as well as parenting styles (Baumrind, 1978; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parents can be seen as under involved, moderately involved, and overly involved (Hellstedt, 1987). Overinvolved parents will operate under a hidden agenda by being actively involved in their child's sporting careers in order to progress their own needs and desires. Similarly, the authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles offer comparisons to parenting involvement levels, as

authoritarian parents offer their child little control of their lives, while the authoritative parent will allow the child to make their own decisions (Baumrind, 1978; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). By examining how parents raise their children, it can be understood how they might act when raising an elite child athlete.

Finally, the above research highlights the many ways in which parents provided tangible and intangible support for their children in sport. This support comes in the form of financial, logistical, emotional, and informational, and are all offered to a child athlete. Financial support consists of paying registration fees, and equipment costs that allowed the child to participate in sport (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). Logistical support identifies the time needed to engage a parent's young athlete in sport (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). Emotional support consists of parents managing the emotional demands of the child athlete, as well as offering empathy to their struggling child (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Lastly, informational support shows that parents offer their child advice on how to improve their game and offers realistic feedback on how they performed (Knight et al., 2011).

This literature review has demonstrated that there is an extensive amount of research that has been conducted within the younger hockey age groups; however, there has been limited research conducted on the investment years of a child's development beginning at age 15. Finally, while many studies have identified how support is offered by parents, there has been limited research that addressed the question on why support is offered. This thesis research discusses how and why support is offered to elite level hockey, and describes the experiences of parents within the sport.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To reiterate, the purpose of this thesis was to explore the parental support that exists within elite minor league hockey in Canada by exploring the lived experiences of the parents of adolescent players involved in Midget Triple A in the Maritimes. As a means of exploring these lived experiences, a qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research uses subjective meanings and context to understand how these meanings can be linked to a larger social context (Smith & Caddick, 2012). These meanings are derived from data that is collected through interviews, observations, focus groups, and/or content analysis (e.g., media analysis). Hence, qualitative researchers are “interested in the multiple meanings that people attach to their subjective experiences and seek to identify, describe and interpret the social structures, spaces and processes that shape meanings” (Smith & Caddick, 2012, p. 61). Therefore, through a qualitative research approach the thesis participants discussed and explained their Midget Triple A hockey experiences. These lived experiences are understood through a phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology

To guide the research design, a phenomenological approach was used as a methodology. Phenomenology is understood to be the study of phenomena through the lived experiences and events of an individual that make up the social world in which they live (Henderson, 2006). The focus of phenomenology explores how a certain group of

individuals experience a phenomenon, how they describe, perceive, judge, and make sense of the phenomena being examined (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2007) indicated, “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon...the basic purpose...is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a universal essence” (pp. 57-58). The term essence is understood to be “the view that there is an essential structure to a phenomenon and the intentional relations that characterize that phenomenon” (Vagle, 2014, p.29). Furthermore, “These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experience” (Patton, 2015, p. 116). Thus, the phenomenon that was explored in this thesis research was the parenting experience in Midget Triple A, and the type of support that existed for male adolescent hockey players (i.e., parents’ sons). There are essentially two types of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretative phenomenology. For the purpose of this thesis research, descriptive phenomenology was used.

Descriptive phenomenology is valuable in this area as there is little existing research regarding the topic. Clarke and Harwood (2014) explained that, “Descriptive phenomenology seeks to provide rich, textured descriptions of phenomena, to understand more about how the world is perceived and what it means to people” (p. 530). A descriptive phenomenological analysis “is concerned with revealing the essence or essential structure of any phenomenon under investigation...those features that make it what it is, rather than something else” (Morrow et al., 2015, p. 643). This allows the researcher to focus on how the participants describe the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this thesis provided an opportunity for the participants to provide full rich

descriptions of their experiences supporting their child in youth hockey, and the support that they specifically have provided at the Midget Triple A hockey level.

Previously, phenomenology has been used as a methodology within the context of sport by examining topics that have included: the experience of parents in elite youth football (Clarke & Harwood, 2014); Paralympic athletes and their experiences related to sports injuries (Fagher, Forsberg, Jacobsson, Timpka, Dahlstrom, & Lexell, 2016); community sport coaching (Cronin & Armour, 2015); and, the freedom in extreme sports (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013). In addition to being used in a general sports context, phenomenology has been also used in hockey specific research that included: discussing concussions in female players (McGuckin, Law, McAuliffe, Rickwood, & Bruner, 2016); body checking in youth hockey (Fraser-Thomas, Jeffery-Tosoni, & Baker, 2014); concussions of retired NHL players (Caron, Bloom, Johnston, & Sabiston, 2013); and, rookie transitions into elite level hockey (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008). While phenomenology has been demonstrated to be used within sport generally and hockey-specific research, phenomenology as a methodology has not been used to look at the experiences of parents involved within elite level hockey. Scholars that have used phenomenology as a methodology have used interviews as the means for collecting data (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009), which was used for this thesis research.

Methods

In order to explore the parents' experience in Midget Triple A hockey, the researcher identified a sample population that would best describe the phenomenon being studied. The question that was asked when selecting participants was: "Do you have the experience that I am looking for" (Englander, 2012, p. 19). Furthermore, the task of the researcher "will be to find and select participants who report having had a specific experience(s) of the phenomenon" (p.19). As a result, the sample population selected for this thesis research was parents who had a child or children involved in Midget Triple A hockey.

In order to select participants that had the specific experience(s) of the phenomenon, purposeful sampling was employed. Patton (2015) explained that selecting specific participants can garner information "of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful sampling*" (p.264). By employing purposeful sampling, the researcher can "gain insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (Patton, 2015, p.264) of the phenomenon. The criteria used for participant selection included the following:

- 1) Was your son involved with a Midget Triple A hockey team this year?;
- 2) Was the team located in the Maritimes in Canada?; and,
- 3) Are you willing to participate in the study?

Prior to the recruitment of parents, an application was submitted to the University of New Brunswick Research Ethics Board (UNB REB). Once the thesis research was reviewed and approved by the UNB REB, the recruitment of the sample population

commenced by contacting a Midget Triple A team representative through email. Once contact was made, the thesis research was explained to the team representative by the principal researcher and permission was sought to speak with some of the parents. Recruitment began with a focus on the New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island Triple A League. The initial contact was typically with one of the coaches of the teams. Fredericton, New Brunswick (NB) and Saint John, NB coaches both sent the recruitment letter to their parents on behalf of the researcher (see Appendix A). Parents, then, responded if they were interested in volunteering to participate in the study. Contact was attempted, but not successful with Midget Triple A team representatives from Miramichi, Moncton, and Kensington, Prince Edward Island. Parents from the Moncton and the Nova Scotia region who became participants were recruited at a Midget Triple A tournament in Miramichi, using recruitment posters (see Appendix B). These posters were visible to every parent in the arena as they were placed on every desk, wall, and concession stand, but only two parents contacted the researcher.

Recruiting research thesis participants proved to be a challenge as only two teams that were contacted were willing to send out the information regarding the research. Of the six teams in the Maritime Triple A league, contact was made only with teams in Fredericton, Saint John, and Moncton. After the interviews with parents who became participants were completed, these parents provided recommendations to other parents to volunteer as participants for the thesis research. This approach proved to be successful for recruiting participants in Fredericton but was not as successful in other cities.

In similar sport studies using phenomenology, the sample sizes varied from 5 to 35 participants (Bruner et al., 2008; Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013; Caron et al., 2013; Clarke & Harwood, 2014). In this study, 11 parents involved with Midget Triple A hockey in the Canadian Maritimes participated. Patton (2015) indicated that, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p.311). Seven parents participated from Fredericton, two from Saint John, and one from Moncton and Nova Scotia (see Table 1). All parents who participated were married, and three of the participants indicated that they had not played hockey growing up. To ensure anonymity for ethical reasons, the names of the participants were removed from the transcripts and thesis document and pseudonym names were assigned (i.e., John, Stacy, and James). Table 1 provides a description of the pseudonym names assigned to the study participants, limited demographic information, and interview process information. Prior to recruiting the participants from New Brunswick, a pilot study was completed.

Table 1. A description of the sample population for this study

Pseudonym Participant Names	Relationship to the Player	Interview Type	Played Hockey or Spouse Played Hockey	Length of Interview	Team Location
Stacy	Mother	In person	Yes	67 mins	New Brunswick
John	Father	In person	Yes	63 mins	New Brunswick
Ron	Father	In person	Yes	55 mins	New Brunswick
James	Father	Phone	No	50 mins	New Brunswick
Emily	Mother	In person	Yes	50 mins	New Brunswick
Nathan	Father	Phone	Yes	52 mins	New Brunswick
Ben	Father	Phone	No	58 mins	New Brunswick
Erin	Mother	Phone	Yes	43 mins	Nova Scotia
Mary	Mother	Phone	No	71 mins	New Brunswick
Paul	Father	In person	Yes	52 mins	New Brunswick
Mark	Father	In person	Yes	67 mins	New Brunswick

Pilot Study

A pilot study consisting of two trial interviews took place prior to the start of data collection. The pilot study took place with two parents in Ontario. Conducting a pilot study allowed the researcher to test the interview guide to ensure the questions were worded correctly, to see if there was clarity in the questions for the participants, and if the order of the questions flowed throughout the interview process. In addition, this process

allowed for the researcher to gain more experience with interviewing, and make changes to the interview guide.

Questions that were removed after the pilot study included those that asked the parents about what opinions their children had (i.e., What does your child think about the support you provide?; and, What does your child think about his coach?). Questions such as the ones indicated above, were removed due to their relevancy. They did not discuss the parent or their experiences providing support which was not conducive with descriptive phenomenology. Completing the pilot study created the most final version of the interview guide, and allowed for a natural conversation to produce a rich data set.

Interview Processes

Prior to the start of the interview process, the researcher reviewed an information letter with the study participant (see Appendix C). This information letter described the thesis research and some of the questions that would be asked. Furthermore, upon the review of the information letter, the thesis research participants were asked to complete and sign a consent form. The data were then collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Generally, interviews are understood as “two or more persons actively engaged in embodied talk, collaboratively constructing knowledge about the world and about themselves” (Smith & Caddick, 2012, p. 64). More specifically, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and in-depth discussion in order to achieve a rich data set (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

In the context of this thesis research, semi-structured interviews enabled parents to participate in open dialog regarding their past experiences within the youth minor

hockey system and explain why they have stayed supportive throughout their child's minor league career. Furthermore, it also provided an opportunity for the researcher to ask probing questions, and explore concepts and themes further with the study participant.

Open-ended questions were used in the interview process to enable a conversational format. By creating a conversational format, it is believed that trust was established between the researcher and the study participant where a rapport was built that allowed for the description of the "true feelings, thoughts, and intentions" (Thomas et al., 2015, p. 376) of the study participant. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questions not only allowed for a two-way conversation between the researcher and the participant, but also allowed for the study participant to provide in-depth answers through an expression of their experiences and opinions (Shank, 2002). The open-ended questions used in the interview asked the participants to describe a situation in which they had experience supporting their son's involvement Midget Triple A. These situations where the phenomenon had been experienced were pivotal for data analysis, as the experience of support needed to be connected within a specific context (i.e., Triple A hockey) to determine the essence of the phenomenon (Englander, 2012).

The interview guide was developed consistent with a descriptive phenomenology approach, as the study participants were asked for descriptions of their experiences with specific events and feelings associated with supporting their child's involvement in youth minor hockey. Englander (2012) indicated that "it is not a traditional question that initiates the interview, but the interviewer who asks the participant for a description of a

situation in which the participant has experienced the phenomenon” (p.25), which is important for descriptive phenomenological research. The interview questions examined the parents’ experiences in supporting their son’s elite youth hockey participation, what types of support were provided, and what benefits were received from this support (see Appendix D). Furthermore, during the interview process, probing questions were used to further discuss the responses by the study participants. For example, a question that was posed was: Tell me about the sacrifices you have made? Probes: Emotional? Financial? In the case of this question, the probing questions that were asked of the study participant dealt the sacrifices of the parents with regards to emotional and financial experiences.

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted varied in length depending on the conversation between the researcher and study participant. For example, Mary’s interview was longer than Erin’s because Mary was more descriptive and engaging. Most interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. Interviews were face-to-face for those in Fredericton, New Brunswick (NB), and over the phone for those in Moncton, NB, Saint John, NB, and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. In the case of face-to-face interviews, the study participants were offered the option of where they preferred to have the interview be conducted. Most interviews were done at various coffee shops in and around Fredericton, NB. As indicated in Table 1, there were five interviews conducted over the phone. All interviews were audio recorded during the interview process with the permission of the study participant.

Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation was reached when the study participants involved in the study offered no new information and

when coding for new themes was no longer possible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Furthermore, Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that, “If one has reached the point of no new data, one has also most likely reached the point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation” (p. 1409). For example, within the context of this thesis research, data saturation occurred when the study participants were asked the reason for supporting their adolescent child, and the common answer was that the child loved to play. Alternatively, parents consistently discussed the social differences between the younger and older years (e.g., younger hockey players stay in hotels more often than older players). During the coding process, data saturation began to become apparent after the eighth interview, as no new themes were emerging. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, (2006) suggest that depending on sample size, data saturation can be reached in as little as six interviews. After completing the coding process of all 11 interviews, the researcher moved on to the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

This study used a phenomenological descriptive data analysis method that involves seven steps as developed by Colaizzi (1978) and discussed in the work of Morrow, Rodriguez, and King (2015). Figure 1 depicts the seven-step process used to examine the first-person experiences, through face-to-face interviews, and online interviews, in order to produce a rich description of the phenomenon (Morrow et al., 2015). The seven stages consist of: “familiarisation, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing an exhaustive description, producing the fundamental structure, and seeking verification of the fundamental

structure” (Morrow et al., 2015, pp. 643-644). The first stage of familiarization involved the researcher being immersed within the data by reading over the transcripts several times and listening to the interviews. The transcripts were transcribed by the researcher, which took between three to four hours each to complete.

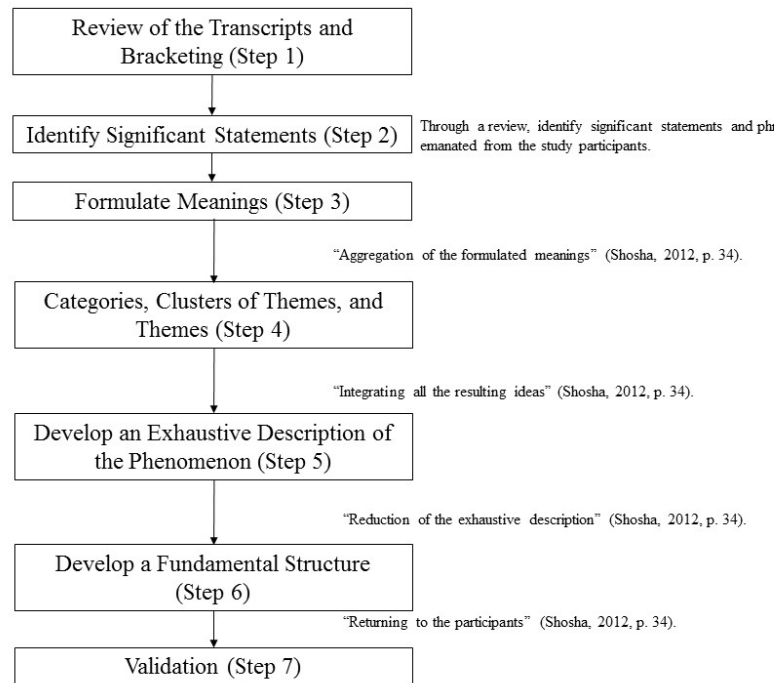


Figure 1. A summary of descriptive phenomenological data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978; Shosha, 2012)

The second step of the data analysis process was to identify significant statements which required the researcher to identify all statements that were directly related to the phenomenon. Once the significant statements were recognized, meanings relevant to the phenomenon were identified after careful consideration of the statements gathered (Morrow et al., 2015). The third step (i.e., formulating meanings), was completed when

meanings were provided to understand the identified statements. After all the statements were gathered and given meaning, themes were created based on the meanings. For example, a statement was identified when parents would discuss pressures their child puts on himself, as well as pressures from outside sources. This statement identified an understanding that in order to provide support in youth hockey, parents needed to manage internal pressures. This would then lead to the fourth step, the clustering of themes.

The fourth step involved clustering meanings into common themes. Morrow et al. (2015) explained that, “The researcher clusters the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts” (p.3). Furthermore, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) indicated that, “form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis” (p. 82). The goal of the fourth step was to produce a smaller number of categories that captures the most important themes with the research questions in mind (i.e., exploring parental support in Midget Triple A; Thomas, 2006). To accomplish this step a computer software program, NVivo 10, was used to cluster the meanings into themes that are based on the significant statements. Table 2 below, provides an example of steps two through to four within the context of this thesis research.

Table 2. An example of the data analysis used for this current thesis research

Significant Statements (Step 2)	Formulated Meanings (Step 3)	Themes(s) (Step 4)
<i>“...but it’s pressure that he...largely, I think he puts on himself because of what he maybe believes or what his environment is...”</i>	Child puts pressure on himself based on surroundings	Managing Internal and External Pressures
<i>“The parents are like, ‘man you’re getting to the NHL kid’, once parents start getting competitive, even when they’re young some parents are really into benching kids and keeping your top line out there, it’s all about winning.”</i>	Parents put the pressure of success on players, and bench others for the purpose of winning	Managing Internal and External Pressures
<i>“So, I think that it's the prospect of a [Major] Junior team ... There are scouts in an audience or you know that there are going to be scouts around at tournaments, trying to manage your emotions so that you're not gripping the stick too tight and those kinds ... that puts pressure on somebody.”</i>	Scouts in attendance add pressure to the players performance	Managing Internal and External Pressures
<i>“His cousins would ask: do you play hockey, and he was like oh no my parents won’t let me play hockey, and so my wife and I were like, oh my god okay, were not.”</i>	Parents felt pressure from family to place child in hockey	Managing Internal and External Pressures

Once the themes were identified, the researcher then completed the fifth step which involves writing a full description of the phenomenon containing all the themes found in the fourth step. The results of the fourth step can be found in Chapter Four of this document (Findings), as these results address the initially posed thesis research questions. All the themes that emerged in step four of Colaizzi's method, produce the exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Furthermore, step five of Colaizzi's research method involved the researcher writing a "full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced at step four" (Morrow et al., 2015, p.644). The exhaustive description that was identified highlights the essence of the parental support in Midget AAA phenomenon. These findings were reviewed by a research supervisor to confirm that the description reflected the beliefs of the parents

After the exhaustive description was written, the sixth step (i.e., producing the fundamental structure) involved creating a short, dense statement based on the exhaustive description that highlights the essential aspects of the phenomenon being examined (parental support in elite youth hockey; Morrow et al., 2015). This dense statement was a short paragraph that contained the fundamental themes explored in order to understand the parenting experience in Midget Triple A. In order for the findings to be considered trustworthy, different strategies were implemented, which involved the seventh step of Colaizzi's method (i.e., seeking verification of the fundamental structure).

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis process, trustworthiness strategies were employed. Trustworthiness is defined as "an attempt to

assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). Creswell (2007) outlines eight trustworthiness strategies and recommends that qualitative researchers use at least two. The first trustworthiness strategy used in this thesis research and the seventh step of Colaizzi’s method was member checking. This process involved returning data to the participants to ask whether the experience is captured fairly. If needed, modifications were completed upon review. Parents received a copy of their transcript once completed and did not offer any changes or issues.

A second trustworthiness strategy that was used is the concept of bracketing and is integral part of conducting a phenomenological analysis of data. Bracketing involved removing any biases or presuppositions, so the researcher is as close to the phenomenon experienced as possible (Morrow et al., 2015). Colaizzi (1978) uses bracketing in steps three and four of the descriptive phenomenological method in order to develop meanings and themes without any influence of existing theory (Morrow et al., 2015). In the case of this thesis research, a theme that was uncovered and removed because of bracketing was the idea of “promotion”. This theme referred to the parents bragging about their child when the question did not ask them too. This was removed as it was deemed a presupposition of the researcher that the participants were unnecessarily preaching about their child’s athletic ability even though a question of their talent was not asked. Bracketing was done to further reduce bias, which Creswell (2007) would suggest that clarifying bias further validates the researcher’s study.

Limitations and Bias

This study was limited by the few teams available within the province, and the few parents willing to participate. While reducing all bias is impossible, it is possible to address them in order to offer a more honest narrative (Creswell, 2003). The researcher is neither a parent, or an elite hockey player. Thus, the researcher does not know what it takes to provide the level of support these children needed, due to lack of experience of being involved in high level sport. Hockey is an expensive sport and it is the belief of the researcher that more should be done to make it more affordable. In order to reduce the bias and apply a phenomenological approach, bracketing was completed during the development of themes to question if a theme was necessary to the experience or put in to preach a biased narrative on the expense of youth hockey.

Chapter 4

Findings

The data analysis revealed that parents offered support for their adolescent, elite minor league hockey players involved in Midget Triple A in the Canadian Maritimes in a number of different ways for various reasons. More specifically, four research questions were posed: 1) How do parents describe the Midget Triple A experience?; 2) Building on the parents' Midget Triple A experience, how do parents of the Midget Triple A age group (15-16) describe the type of support they provide to their children?; 3) How does a parent's support in hockey change from the Tyke and Novice age groups (6-8), to the Midget age group (15-16)?; and, 4) What benefits do parents receive from supporting their child in elite level hockey, and why do they continue to support youth hockey?

The data below highlights four themes that were discussed that related to the parent's support experience at the elite Midget Triple A level. These themes are: *Managing Internal and External Pressures*, *the Transition from Coach to Parent Spectator*, *Preparing for Life After Hockey*, and *Sacrificing for Your Kids*. After the themes behind the support experience were discussed, themes related to the benefits parents received from this support were discussed. These included: *A Shared Enjoyment of the Game*, *Social Involvement*, *Passion and Hard Work*, and *Life Lessons*. At the Midget Triple A level, the adolescent children involved are between the ages of 15-18. This becomes a pivotal step in the Maritimes, as some players may be drafted into Major Junior (or the CHL), which is considered a developmental league for the NHL (Edwards

& Washington, 2015). Midget Triple A is an important step in an athlete's pathway to making it to the CHL; thus, parents provided assistance to their children on how to manage the internal and external pressures that are associated with playing elite level hockey. The findings identified below create the exhaustive description necessary to understand the phenomenon investigated, in accordance with Step 5 of Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis method. These findings discuss the phenomenon of parental support in elite youth hockey, describe the ways support was given, and the benefits parents received from providing their support.

Managing Internal and External Pressures

A key method of parental support in Midget Triple A hockey was managing the athlete's internal and external pressures. Internal pressure refers to the pressure that the child puts on himself. This primarily involved the pressure to achieve personal goals (i.e., make a team, get drafted in higher levels of competition such as the CHL), or the pressure to maintain a high level of play. Mark identified this pressure that his child was putting on himself, "as he has progressed and gotten older, he puts more pressure on himself. The environment, not the team so much as this desire to try and go somewhere, it creates pressure on a person." The idea of "going somewhere" typically referred to being drafted into a CHL team. Only two of the parents involved with this study mentioned that their child was already drafted into the QMJHL (Erin, and Ben). When asked about where the pressure of playing hockey comes from, Emily states:

I think just from himself, He was always trying to be at the top and stay at the top,

and as you get older, there are scouts around different games, and he has never said anything, but I think that puts pressure at that level. It is a high level and you know there are people watching you...so his absolute dream was to get drafted into the Q draft [Quebec Major Junior hockey league], and this year was his draft year, so that has not happened yet.

During this year of elite level hockey, players begin to put pressure on themselves to perform at the highest level, so that they have a chance to be drafted into the CHL. Emily recognizes that “there is this pressure that he needs to keep performing, and be at the top, and keep those points up.” If a player cannot maintain a high level of play, his chances of being drafted will decrease over time. This pressure to perform, and maintain a high level of play are internal pressures that parents will need to manage while supporting their child in Midget Triple A.

Parents managed internal pressures by allowing their child to make their own decisions on their hockey career. While discussing pressure, Ben mentioned the experience in their family, “we do not over do it with making him think he has to make it. If it is going to happen, it is going to be totally on him, and we will do what we need to do to make it happen for him.” Parents avoided putting more pressure on their child and allowed them to face their own challenges. Erin mentioned a similar story, discussing that:

I think the main pressure he would've put on was for himself. I think for us to support him, if he really wanted to do this, then you really need to get to the gym,

I am not going to drag you to the gym kicking and screaming, but if you are going to go and tryout for the team, you need to go and say, 'okay I did everything I could do to get in shape for this', and if you are not going to be upset for not making it then that's your decision and your choice. I will give him friendly little reminders, but ultimately, it's his choice. He's driven.

Parents supported their children by allowing them to make their own decisions regarding their elite hockey goals. By supporting their adolescent child, parents avoided adding more pressure onto their child as they understood the pressures that the athlete was putting on himself. As players continued to place pressure on themselves, parents were challenged with managing this internal pressure to ensure emotional stability. Parents not only managed these internal pressures, but external ones as well.

External pressure refers to those that come from sources outside of the athlete's own mind. These included sources like scouts, other teammates, as well as their own parents, and other parents at the games. One of the external pressures discussed by parents were the scouts who watched and evaluated a player's talent for the purpose of bringing them into a CHL team. Mark described the pressure his son feels in this scenario,

So, I think that it's the prospect of a [Major] Junior team ... There are scouts in an audience or you know that there are going to be scouts around at tournaments, trying to manage your emotions so that you're not gripping the stick too tight and those kinds ... that puts pressure on somebody who is thinking, 'Geez, I hope I do a good job.' So, you know what I mean? It's pressure he's putting on

himself... There's nobody out there contacting him saying, 'Hey we're interested. We're going to put some pressure on you.' But it's pressure that he largely puts on himself because of what he maybe believes, or what the environment is.

The above quote identifies that these players are aware of the scouts in attendance at the games, which adds more pressure onto the athlete.

Scouts work for CHL franchises and are typically responsible for finding players that are able to compete at higher levels. To succeed, and to advance to different leagues, players need to impress those that are watching (i.e., scouts), which puts pressure on these players (Emily, Mary). Scouts often concentrate on players' statistics as a means of measuring performance. Mary mentioned that her child did not play Bantam Triple A in New Brunswick, so her child was unfamiliar with the scouting process:

[T]he whole scouting thing, all of that madness was really new for us. There were so many hockey families all up on the stats, and the websites, and the points, which kids were scoring, and we are out of that.

Players are aware of their environment, and while the scouts may not directly pressure the players, it is an external factor that placed pressure on the adolescent player as these players were aware that they were being watched during games. To manage this pressure, Mark explained how he provided support:

I always keep an eye on how things [life, hockey, and school] are going without trying to get too much into it. I really wanted to kind of just, you know, swoop in, let him know that I'm here, that I care about it if he cares about it, and that it's all about him.

Mark gave his son the option to discuss the situation if the player needed someone to talk to as a means of providing emotional support.

Because of the level of competition and the fact that Midget Triple A is typically the “feeder” league for the CHL franchises, scouts often attended these hockey games to identify the most talented potential players and advised managers of these franchises as to which players should be drafted. Parents found that scouts at the Midget Triple A level added pressure onto their adolescent athlete. At the Midget Triple A level, parents experienced and managed this pressure, which is often a new learning experience for them. Parents involved in this thesis research offered their support by providing an outlet if their athlete needed to talk but would typically leave them to handle the pressure themselves.

Another example of an external pressure placed on these athletes was their own teammates. As one parent mentioned, teammates applied pressure on his son to come back from an injury, “they [teammates] should have said, ‘hey get better and come on back’, but they put a lot of pressure on him, like a real lot, and it was kind of sad actually” (Paul). The teammates of Paul’s son added pressure by being unsupportive of his injury. Paul’s son was an important player to the team’s success, and his teammates did not give him the opportunity to recover without pressuring him to come back sooner. This pressure could contribute to a player feeling as though he was letting the team down, and was being forced to come back and risk further injury. Paul explained how this pressure was handled, “I just tried to keep his head on straight when he came back and he was great. He kept in shape. He could bike, so when he came back, he was good. I just

tried to keep him motivated.” Parents can support their child through injury by keeping them working out and motivated so that they can return to the ice in top shape.

Paul also discussed how one of his son’s teammates was depressed, and that the player was “confiding in my son and that added to the pressure.” Paul is referring to the pressure that the other teammates applied to Paul’s adolescent. Dealing with a teammate’s mental health issues added more pressure to the already bad year Paul’s son was having. Paul’s son took a leave of absence from the team due to some anxiety he experienced during the year, “he didn’t play playoffs because of the anxiety. It all started when the billet came.” These anxiety issues providing emotional distress was tough on Paul’s adolescent who was trying to be a “voice of reason” to the peer confiding in his son. Paul had a hard time managing this situation as this was a new parental experience for them to endure. The approach that Paul employed to manage the pressure that this teammate provided was by telling his son: “try to stay away from him, were going to try to deal with it, we got [the coach] involved, we got his parents involved; the parents were just kind of non-existent.” The focus became to attempt to shift his child’s focus elsewhere, and Paul asked for help from the coach and other parents to intervene with this unique situation.

Parents were another external pressure that parents had to manage. Emily described pressure from parents in the stands:

the parents are like, ‘man you’re getting to the NHL kid’, once parents start getting competitive, even when they’re young some parents are really into benching kids and keeping your top line out there, it’s all about winning.

Paul self-identified as one of those parents who believed their son could play in the NHL, saying that, “I pushed him pretty hard quite honestly. Like most dads, I think he was a good player. Unfortunately, when you become a decent little player you find yourself pushing more because you see potential there.” When discussing putting pressure on her child, Emily said that “you do it and it seems crazy so you just stop doing it. It’s embarrassing for these kids.” Parents learned how to manage these pressures by recognizing how damaging it was for their child’s development.

As the children got older, parents also had to deal with the idea that their children were becoming young adults. This meant that parents needed to learn how to manage the pressures of a young adult. In order to manage the pressures of youth hockey, four of the parents mentioned that their adolescent children typically were able to solve their own emotional issues. However, that did not stop the parents from trying to provide guidance. As Mark explained,

I'll ask him how things [school, work, and hockey] are going and that kind of thing, but if he doesn't want to talk about something, I don't probe too much unless I see something that I feel ... If I'm getting indications that he needs to talk about something, that's fine, but, no, I tend to leave him alone when it comes to all that stuff.

The above quote discusses how Mark would handle his child having an issue. Mark shows that he would be there for him, but understood that his adolescent child was able to handle the problems on his own.

The parents that were interviewed understood that their children were becoming young adults and going through a maturity process. Paul provides an example of this process,

He was aggressive young, doing immature things, and I felt like I was always at him, ‘don’t do that, you can’t do that, you can’t say that.’ I was always worried he was going to say something or do something, and the older he gets, you just got to sit down grab a coffee and watch the game. It’s much easier. It’s a maturity thing for sure. And you see that their game changes so much. Its maturity at the end of the day.

The above quote described a maturation process for one of the adolescent children throughout minor hockey. In the later years, the adolescent begins to mature and handle his own issues on or off the ice.

As the child matures, a parent’s way of providing support must change. During the development years, parents were there to offer advice on how to handle emotional situations. John stated that “you give him the tools, to say you know what, if you have an issue with the coach, ...you say, ‘you know coach I have an issue and here’s what it is.’” The tools John was referring to were the ability to stand up for yourself, or the confidence to challenge a coach. As the children got older, parents involved in this study helped manage and support any emotional needs of their children by talking about any issues they may have had with the coach or other teammates. Parents managed these emotional issues by providing an outlet if their athlete needed to talk, and allowed them to deal with their own issues as they matured.

Parents were aware of the external pressures on their children and handled it when asked. To avoid putting more pressure on their children, parents like Mark acknowledged that they needed to recognize when to step back, “I don’t ever want to be the one that’s creating pressure...my job is to help him deal with it or help him figure out how to get through it or put some perspective on it.” Parents involved with this study were aware of the pressures involved with Midget Triple A hockey, which included scouts in attendance, as well as pressure from teammates. These types of external pressures were found not to manifest in the development years.

In the development years, the pressure of having scouts in attendance or making a CHL team, did not exist as scouting takes place at 12 years old (Edwards, 2012). Five of the parents interviewed (Mark, Stacy, Mary, Erin, and Ben) did not experience dealing with external pressure when their sons were younger, as much as they did in the later stages of their hockey career. As Mark explained about his experience,

When he was younger, there was less seriousness about [hockey] ... When they're younger, I felt like they don't feel ... they're not putting pressure on themselves, they're not looking too far ahead about serious goals that are starting to come in reach and that applies pressure and so, what I found is ... What was easy when he was younger was it was almost always a happy experience, but as he's progressed and gotten older, he puts more pressure on himself. The environment, not the team so much as this desire to try and go somewhere, it creates a pressure on a person. So what was pure fun starts to bleed a little bit between pure fun and work. I think that's what I see as part of the difference through his evolution, is

that it's like anything. ... if they're thinking of a window narrowing, that applies pressure.

When the children are younger, they participate for the enjoyment of the sport with very little pressure. The above quote by Mark identifies the evolution of how parental support changes as it pertains to the emotional pressures associated throughout a player's youth hockey development, and how pressure management becomes an inherent part of the Triple A experience.

Parents had other reasons for enjoying the development years more than the Triple A years in relation to pressure. Erin discussed how she enjoyed attending her son's games more at the younger age because their child had seemingly more fun without the pressure of scouts and performance:

I think I appreciated the game and the way the game is played more when they're older. I think there was more enjoyment when they were younger because the kids didn't have the pressure on them, on themselves you know like 'how do you think I played'...I enjoy it all, but I think I enjoy it at different levels. I think it was more fun and exciting when they were younger.

In the development years, those five parents (i.e., Mark, Stacy, Mary, Erin, and Ben) seemed to enjoy hockey more because it was fun due to the lack of pressure, as the children focused on skill development and enjoyment of the sport, before the pressures of scouts and statistics is applied (Stacy, Mary, and Emily). Parents such as Erin appreciated the game of hockey without all the pressure.

Pressure was created internally through the players own beliefs placed upon themselves, and externally through parents, teammates, and scouts. These pressures were managed by parents who were able to keep their child focused on what they could control, limit their child's distractions, offer advice, and give them the tools to succeed. As players got older, parents identified that they needed to step back and avoid putting their own pressure on their young athlete allowing them to fight their own battles. Parents were willing to offer advice and support to help manage any issues their athlete had, but ultimately realized that it was their child that needed to manage the pressure. These parents learned that they were no longer in charge of their adolescent, and that they needed to step back and be more of a parent than a coach.

Transition from Coach to Parent Spectator

The transition from coach to parent occurs at the Midget Triple A level when parents are no longer responsible for teaching their children how to play hockey. Instead, parents shift to a more supportive role, which requires the parent to be there for their child emotionally, and physically. When the research participants' children were in the developmental leagues, most parents coached their children. Seven out of eleven parents were involved with coaching their child at the younger levels, whether that was at the competitive levels of Atom (aged 9-10), Pee wee (aged 11-12) or Bantam (aged 13-14). According to two parents, Hockey New Brunswick (Hockey NB; the governing body for hockey in New Brunswick) has a rule that states:

You're allowed to coach children in New Brunswick up until Bantam then you are not allowed to because of the rules of the league, so at the Midget level you cannot be a parent and coach and have a kid on the team. (Stacy)

Ben further explained that,

At the Midget level, there is no parental involvement at all either as a coach or management cause in [our town] they have their own executive that organizes everything and the only commitment of the parent is you need to volunteer some hours at [our town's] tournament.

Parent-coaches are an active part of the development years and perceive that this type of support is a necessary for their kids on and off the ice. For example, Stacy's husband would "fill the gaps", if their son wasn't receiving the attention they wanted him to have from the coach. Further support is provided to Stacy's son, as there "had been more one-on-one coaching at the kitchen table" if their son wanted to improve. Alternatively, when Mark was a coach in Peewee, Mark would focus on the off-ice "team building, the team bonding, creating a good, positive experience that has lots of fun...and do lots of team things away from the game to kind of create unity." Mark explained what it was like behind the bench,

Part of it was what I felt was my responsibility as the coach to kind of create a good experience for everybody included. I wouldn't have pushed [my son] any harder than I pushed other people. I had high expectations of [my son] and I had equally high expectations of the team in terms of work ethic, teamwork, mutual

respect, those kinds of principles. It wasn't about success on the ice. He happened to be a good player, so we had success on the ice.

This kind of attitude promoted good teamwork, and having fun, more than skill development or winning. As a coach, Mark provided support for his athletes by creating a positive experience for all of them to enjoy.

In the development years, three parents discussed giving instruction to their child. Ben provided an example of what he would tell his son,

When you pass the puck you pass it as hard as you can, because there is no sense in trying to feather a pass to somebody, and if they can't handle the pass, it's on them not you, because if you make a light pass and it gets intercepted, and they end up scoring, then it's on you.

While this parent offered advice concerned with scoring, other parents were more interested in safety. For two of the parents (Paul and Erin), their coaching in the development years primarily involved discussing dangerous plays made by their adolescent child (e.g. hit from behind, or tripping). Paul provided an example of a conversation he would have with his son:

If he took a penalty that I felt was dangerous...if he does something stupid like a hit from behind, if he mouths off to an opposing player, a referee, a parent, a coach, something that you just don't do...that's when I would get upset.

Erin would also get upset if her son did something dangerous on the ice,

I don't think the ride home was ever uncomfortable unless he did something really foolish like aggressive or something, like you can't be doing that. He made

a bad play, well a bad play is a bad play, but if he does something dangerous to another player like trip them...why did you do that, I would then kind of get after him and coach him, scold him. I don't know if you would call that coaching or not, but other than that I didn't really coach I don't think a lot. Maybe a little, but not a lot.

In the development years, parents would offer support by providing feedback that was primarily concerned with the safety of the children playing. Paul and Erin both taught their kids to play safe and avoid plays that would injure other players. While this support was provided during the development years, parents did not discuss providing feedback to their children as they advanced to Midget Triple A. This would suggest an evolution in the type of support that is provided as a player gets older, which also suggests a change in the role of the parent when it is pertaining to a specific competition level.

Despite the active involvement of parents in the development years, three parents believed that parents should refrain from being near the bench of a hockey team (Stacy, Mark, and John). Stacy explained,

I think minor leagues should cut out parents at a young age being involved that's been a major issue. I mean not everyone who has played hockey is a good coach, but he happens to be good with kids. We have seen a lot of nasty coaches, not only put their kids above others [favoritism]. I almost half expect that, but it's the negative behaviours towards other kids which is unacceptable. There is not a lot of rules around that, it's always accepted. So, there is a lot of drama that could be

avoided, because you hear a lot of stories on hockey parents and how intense and involved people could be, if you took parents out of the dressing room 95% of that would go away.

Despite the active involvement of parent coaches in the development years, some parents believed that a parent should have no involvement coaching minor league hockey as issues of favoritism and drama among other parents tend to rise.

Parents involved with this thesis research identified an issue with other parents involved with the team attempting to coach their child from the stands. Coaching from the stands refers to a parent shouting commands at the players on the ice and trying to dictate or influence their play. When discussing “coaching” from the stands, Paul stated that,

I think we realize that it drives the kids crazy; first of all, it drives the coaches even crazier, and when you get to an elite level of hockey there’s nothing that you can say in the stands that the coach doesn’t know better on the ice, or he wouldn’t be there, right.

In Paul’s experience, coaching from the stands was an ineffective way to assist in the development of players. Essentially, by having one individual coaching from behind the bench and one coaching from the stands, there becomes the possibility that there are mixed messages as one coach maybe saying one thing and the parent is saying something else. This also places pressure on the player to meet those different expectations.

Furthermore, at the higher level, the parents interviewed indicated they did not have the experience or background knowledge on the game to comment and provide

advice to their adolescent child. This often meant that the parents needed to rely on the coach's knowledge and experience, and assume that what was being taught was correct.

Paul stated,

But you know stuff now that I didn't know when I was coaching, and they will come off the ice and I'll ask why they did something just out of curiosity, and he will tell me, and I'll have no idea. The game has changed do you know what I mean?

Paul, a former coach, indicated the struggle with certain things the coach would do or say, as they were different than what Paul was familiar with as a coach. At the Midget Triple A level, Paul had to surrender his ability to teach his child to the coach.

At the Midget Triple A level, parents did not continue to provide feedback on their son's performance due to the caliber and level of play. Instead, the parents trusted the coaches with providing their own support to improve their child's performance. The Midget Triple A level began the parent's experience shifting from being a coach to being a parent spectator. This meant that the parent relied on the coach for providing support, which allowed for the coach to provide guidance into the best or most appropriate route for their child's development. The parents would then focus on supporting their child physically, financially, and emotionally by being a spectator rather than being actively engaged as a coach.

While parents supported the coaches, they did provide opinions on how their coach could further their support levels to their adolescent children. Parents wanted their coach to focus on being more disciplined (Paul, and Stacy), with Paul suggesting that

“they are going to have to be a little more hands on. Not make the leaders run the dressing room”. Another example of lack of discipline came from Nathan, who believed that the coaches should focus more on their education, especially on down times like the various bus trips,

We can't get them to do their homework, but instead of showing them a movie for two hours you go, 'okay boys hand all your cellphones over and show me what book you have and you're going to spend an hour or two on the bus doing homework'.

If parents were to rely on their coaches to discipline their children, parents offered suggestions on how they could improve. The parents were no longer able to coach, so they needed to find ways to support them off the ice.

Parents shifted their focus to supporting their child off the ice. Nathan described the shift from coach to parent:

Yeah and not so much to tell him what to do and what not to do - that was up to the coaches, but I would have a bit of advice here and there and the only thing I would try to coach him on really throughout the years was encourage him with the off-ice training and making sure he's going to the gym in the summer and going enough times, pushing him that way, not telling him how to play the game because he is beyond me at that point.

Parents relied on the coaches for their guidance and support as the Midget Triple A was well beyond the parents' expertise. While Nathan focused on his child's off-ice training, Emily described her and her husband's support in a different way,

We try to leave coaching to the coaches, we don't say things to him at home or in the car...the coach said 'let me coach, you be the parents'...I think a big part of supporting him was always letting him know we just want him to follow his dreams, we don't have pressure and expectations; we just want him to be happy, and if that means playing rec hockey tomorrow, then we will sign up.

Emily did not coach her son on the ice, but instead made it clear to him that they supported whatever he wanted to do with his hockey aspirations.

The type of support many parents gave their children was to simply be there for them and watch their games (Mark, Stacy, Paul, John, Ron, Emily, and Ben). Mark described a personal definition of support:

The definition of support, at the end of everything it is all about, as a dad, being there so my kid can know that I'm in his corner and that I support what he does and that I like to watch him play. So, it's the intangibles probably that for a person is very tangible in terms of the way they make them feel, and that's ... I've always believed in it matters not so much what I say or what I do necessarily, but it's how we're making my kid feel.

Mark later adds,

I don't offer any constructive criticism, or I don't offer it very often. If he wants to vent about something, he'll vent to me and I'll offer my opinion to help maybe the conversation, but his coaches are his coaches and I'm his dad. For me, it really has become more about, 'What are you trying to achieve? What are your goals? We're going support you as best we can'.

This quote demonstrates that once the child has made it to Midget Triple A, the parent took a step back and let the coach be the coach. Parents then became concerned with supporting their child in achieving their goals, whether that is hockey or other interests.

Paul echoes the thoughts of Mark, with his own definition, Support would be helping him in situations, whether positive or negative, guiding him, helping him with certain answers, more or less just being there, helping him make decisions really...but I think more this year the support was more listening and going with what he wants to do. That's what I learned this year as a dad.

After coaching both of their sons, these dads developed different ways of supporting their sons away from the rink. Their definitions of support echoed those suggested by other parents who found themselves pushed away from a role in the rink, to the role at home supporting their athlete.

In Midget Triple A, the parent was no longer offering advice and instruction on how to play hockey, as they were once doing in the development years. The level of hockey had increased beyond the knowledge of the parents, who put their trust into the coach for developing their sons as athletes. At the Midget Triple A level parents were no longer involved as coaches, but focused on their role as a parent by supporting their children's physical and emotional needs, and avoided any on-ice instruction. The essence of support at the Triple A level was surrendering a development role to coaches, and instead focusing on supporting their child emotionally. This support included parents beginning to prepare their child for a life after hockey.

Preparing for Life After Hockey

Midget Triple A hockey parents prepared their athlete for what comes next in their lives after hockey is over. As thoughts of success in elite level hockey began to fade, parents (Mark, Stacy, John, Ron, James, Emily, Mary, and Paul) prepared their child for what's next. Parents offered their support by providing them alternative paths, or making sure they had a "Plan B",

We definitely promote Plan B and it doesn't have to be a four-year degree, it can be whatever he wants it to be I just want him to know there is life outside hockey, we just promote being an all-round person and not putting all your eggs in one basket. He wants to be a pilot, and we keep in mind that hockey will only take you so far, his dad is a good example that you can play hockey until you are 36 if you want, but then there is life after, so I think it has been a fair understanding. I would share those dreams with him, but we are very realistic. (Stacy)

Nine out of eleven parents discussed this idea of "life outside of hockey", or the realistic expectations of life at this age group. "Plan B" typically included a reference to education, given how these players are at the age where university or college is the next step academically. John described "Plan B" as "not a democracy, it's a dictatorship, school is always at the forefront." Ron was focused on school because it "is going to elevate your potential income down the road." If school was the focus, parents like Nathan, encouraged their children to look at their aptitudes. In the case where they were not science or math students, then parents had them look at the arts and social sciences.

The study participants were found to have had conversations with their adolescent children about what they would like to do in life if hockey does not work out. One child indicated that they had an interest in music (Paul), one wanted to be involved in business (Ben), but parents involved with the study made sure that they could still take their passion for hockey and apply it to life outside of playing,

Yeah, he has talked about being a lawyer. He is smart. He does well in school, like 80s low 90s. He is focused. He has goals. He will do something. I am sure he will try to tie it in, we keep telling him like if you want to be a lawyer, you can still tie it in to sports, if you want to be an agent or someone that writes up contracts, you can still take your passion and your love and make it a career if the hockey thing doesn't work out. (Emily)

These parents helped support their child by making sure that they had a plan outside of hockey, and by keeping their expectations about the future real and manageable. Parents made sure that their adolescent children viewed themselves as more than a hockey player:

My point to [my son] is that you are a lot more than a hockey player. Hockey does not define him. I have told him that since Atom and Peewee and Bantam, so I try to deal with those anxieties, be upfront about what is coming, but I also say there are a lot of great things too, and I had to make tough decisions because I was put in those positions and it is not bad for him to experience these as well, and he will fail, and he will make some bad choices, but I think he is a good kid and he has the tools to pull through. We can't get protective forever. (John)

By preparing for the future after hockey, parents attempted to make the transition to life after hockey easier for these athletes.

At the Midget Triple A level, the possibilities of success in hockey began to fade as parents and children alike both realize that they may not advance to higher leagues. This is due to the fact that at the Midget Triple A level there became fewer options for players to continue their hockey careers. Parents must be ready by preparing their child for other opportunities where they could find success by using hockey to advance in other areas, such as and education. While the athletes must be willing to give up their hockey dreams for academic ones, parents must also be prepared to give up their time and money in order to support elite level hockey.

Sacrificing for your Kids

Sacrifice can be described as giving up something, for the sake of something else. Sacrificing for your kids refers to the financial and time commitment associated with supporting elite youth hockey. Supporting youth hockey in Canada involves a substantial financial commitment. Parents in the study indicated financial support was a critical aspect in supporting their child's participation in Midget Triple A hockey. As such, financial support was discussed with all 11 parents and they indicated spending anywhere between \$4,000 – \$6,000 in Midget Triple A per year. These costs included registration costs, team fees, meals, facility use, tournaments, and sharing the cost of a bus to travel to the different games around the province. This cost range did not include any additional equipment, summer tournaments and training, or various hotel rooms. Paul, John, and James also indicated that they sent their children off to preparatory schools during the

development years, and their costs were between \$10,000 – \$30,000 per year, which included a high-quality education, coaching, room and board, and ice time. These costs were after a scholarship was already applied, “[My son] was going to get \$32,000 in scholarships because of his marks, [there was] still \$20,000 left to pay” (John). Parents sacrificed with a significant monetary investment to support their child, and often sacrificed their time and other purchases to pay for participation.

When asked about her idea of supporting her child in elite youth hockey, Stacy looked at the financial investment:

In our house, it means financial. And we are very open about financial, we share the costs with our kids, we don’t want them to feel the burden of money, but in our house its all in a spreadsheet so where it says [our son’s] hockey, or [our son’s] extracurricular, goes to a separate spreadsheet where it is all laid out, and we share it so they see that they have given up something else to pursue that. We are here to support you financially, but only as far as you want to take it so if you want to forgo family vacations in order to play hockey that’s cool with us; we are here for you but understand what the cost is.

Stacy tracked her spending to show her children the financial support involved in hockey where they were willing to sacrifice family vacations if their children wanted to continue playing hockey.

Sacrificing family vacations was common for some parents. Ron claimed that “we have sacrificed a lot for our kids, we haven’t been on a vacation for years because we can’t afford it.” Mary echoed these thoughts when talking about how they spent their

money, “Yeah, we could have spent it on other things, gosh we could have gone south on a trip every year probably twice for the amount of money we spent on hockey.” Despite the opportunity to spend money on other opportunities, parents like James did not stop supporting their child. When asked if he ever thought about removing his child from hockey, James said,

Never did. But we did think strongly about...again, why we are doing this right. We could go on a lot of family vacations with the amount of money, but we understood that this was his time do that [play hockey].

Vacations were one of the sacrifices parents made in order to support their child in elite youth hockey. To understand the essence of support in Midget Triple A hockey, parents understood that personal sacrifices needed to be made.

Parents involved with this study identified giving up something of importance (i.e., their time, home repairs, and the quality of life), for their child’s continued participation in youth hockey. Due to the expenses endured in youth hockey, six of the parents interviewed described the sacrifice that they experienced to allow their kids to compete.

One of these sacrifices included home renovations. As Emily mentioned, “Ahh, our house is falling apart (laughs). We have a driveway that’s falling apart, a carpet that needs to be replaced, kitchen cabinets, stuff at the house”. Instead of fixing their home, Emily instead chose to spend her money on supporting elite hockey and other sporting opportunities. Unfortunately for both parent and athlete, these other sporting opportunities also needed to be sacrificed.

Nine out of the eleven parents interviewed identified their child as a multi-sport athlete. These parents discussed their children's experiences with volleyball, baseball, track and field, badminton, soccer, tennis and rugby, and how these fit with hockey. Stacy explained that her son played, "badminton and volleyball on top of competitive hockey, but now at the Midget level, he can't squeeze it in. The commitment level is too big." Four other parents also mentioned that other extracurricular activities needed to be dropped due to the time, and financial commitment required for Midget Triple A hockey (Paul, James, Ron, and Nathan). As Ron explained, they could not afford to have their kids in both hockey and piano lessons at the same time. Due to the costs and time commitments associated with multiple sports and interests, parents discussed a need to drop their children out of other involvements to support elite youth hockey. Parents and athletes both needed to make sacrifices to continue to support the dreams associated with Midget Triple A hockey.

One of the more unique sacrifices associated with supporting elite hockey was the food budget. Ron explained that their family struggled to balance purchasing groceries with playing hockey:

We always have found a way. It was still pretty expensive \$3200 maybe, so we just paid it best we could, a big chunk then a few hundred bucks here and there. So we always made it work, but it's a struggle you know, groceries or hockey...haha you know it's a very expensive sport.

While it appears that Ron could have been making a joke given his laughter, Erin described a similar situation surrounding the analogy as it pertains to purchasing food,

I could say to you I spent this amount of money, we just sort of played it by ear and had money to do it. When you had the money you had steak, and when you didn't have the money, you had ground beef, and that's probably more expensive now, but were not going to have the fanciest of meals but we will get by.

The cost of minor league hockey affected some parents' grocery budget. While only two parents mentioned the sacrifice of luxury food and experiences, these quotes show how far parents were willing to go to see their child play elite hockey. Albeit a specific circumstance, parents involved in Midget Triple A hockey went to an extreme length to support their child in the sport. The sacrifices required by parents are substantial and are an essential part of parental support.

While money, vacations, and groceries were all significant sacrifices in supporting elite hockey, one parent identified a sacrifice they made to further their child's sporting career. James was raised in New Brunswick but lives in the United States. James recognized five leagues, all with twenty plus teams that would consider themselves Triple A in the US. After talking about the lack of talent and expense of elite hockey in the United States, referring to the programs in the US as "pay to play" due to their focus on finances, James wanted his son to come back and play in Canada, but to do that meant needing to make a sacrifice,

So we had to relinquish guardianship, so my brother was actually my son's guardian at the time he was there, and he had to have a transfer from Hockey USA to Hockey Canada, so we had to fill out some forms. We had a lawyer fill out our guardianship form to satisfy Hockey New Brunswick and Canada's

regulations, so then he moved up there in August and played the year with the team. He loved it, had a great time.

James was willing to sacrifice the guardianship of his child to his brother in order for his son to have the best Midget Triple A experience possible. James explained their reason was for a reduction in expense given the higher cost of hockey in the United States. After already sacrificing thousands of dollars in the United States, James found it easier to sacrifice his guardianship and move his son to Canada because of “a reduction in expense” (James), to support his child’s hockey dreams.

Children who live and play hockey away from where their parents live are known as billets, and often live away with other families during the year. Paul, James, John, and Mary all mentioned the idea of being away from their children. These parents sacrificed their time to spend with their children so that they may have the best opportunity to succeed in this elite sport.

Another key method of support provided by the parents typically referred to their time commitment needed to support their child. This primarily involved transportation to and from practices or games, as well as their other sporting commitments. Parental support in youth hockey meant finding the time to balance their child’s sporting commitments, with the parent’s own life commitments.

In Midget Triple A, all eleven parents found it to be a substantial time commitment, especially when it came to juggling work, school, and hockey,

I mean it’s a huge commitment. Midget Triple A is a huge commitment, seven days a week. Monday is dry land training, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, you

are on the ice. Friday is dry land training optional. Sometimes they get it off, Saturday and Sunday is game days. (Ron)

Similar struggles existed for other parents. When discussing the time commitment involved in hockey, Paul mentioned,

Yeah well there is, especially when I had to billet.... there was yeah! I guess I didn't really think about it but yeah there was, every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday they practiced. Monday night was dry land, and Friday was usually video, because we played Saturday and Sunday. So my weekends were usually tied up because I had to make sure they got to the bus, then I had to pick them up from the bus if I didn't go to the game, so if they are coming home from Kensington I'm picking them up at 2am. Yeah and every night I'm picking them up from the rink, they are on the North Side and I live in New Maryland, so I just stayed over there, so that's 3 hours, so it gets a bit...yeah I didn't really think about it but it takes a lot.

According to the study participants there is a substantial amount of time commitment associated with having their son be involved in Midget Triple A. For some of the parents, particularly the ones where their sons did not have a driver's license, parents needed to be available seven days a week in order for their athlete to attend all games, practices, and workouts.

In some instances, during the development years, individual parents were solely responsible for bringing all of their kids to their sporting events,

My husband works away a lot with construction, so it's hard running to the rink a lot with three little kids... It was a lot to drag three kids to the rink for so many practices, so many games and it was expensive. At the time we had three little ones and you're trying to work on your own business and it just didn't seem like it was feasible at the time. (Erin)

The support provided by Erin demonstrates that parents had to sacrifice their personal and working lives to provide a commitment towards youth hockey. When asked, some parents put the time commitment required ahead of the financial commitment in terms of what was more challenging, like Stacy who said that "it's funny I went to financial first because time is a huge one, I would say time before money if I'm putting them in order." Since both Stacy and her husband worked full time, they found it challenging to drive their children to their commitments. These challenges can affect their work schedules and the time that they spent as a family. Because of the time commitment associated with Midget Triple A hockey and the support needed, parents made sacrifices that affected both their personal and work lives.

Throughout their child's minor hockey career, these 11 parents made significant sacrifices while providing an opportunity for their child to compete at the highest level possible. Parents needed to sacrifice their time, money, vacations home renovations, groceries, and even guardianship to continue to support their child's dreams in elite level hockey. After discussing these sacrifices with the parents, the questions asked were: Why did they make these sacrifices? and, what benefits did the parents receive from the commitment they made to their child?

Benefits

In order to answer the above questions, this thesis research sought to understand why support was given as well. Benefits are understood within the context of this thesis research as what is gained from parents supporting their children playing Midget Triple A hockey. The findings found four benefits parents received for their sacrifices, these included: *A Shared Enjoyment of the Game*, *Social Involvement*, *Passion and Hard Work*, and *Life Lessons*. These benefits are discussed further below.

A Shared Enjoyment of the Game

All 11 of the parents provided a rationale for sacrificing for, and supporting their adolescent children. One benefit was the enjoyment they received from supporting their child in hockey. When asked to compare between the development years and the Midget Triple A level, there seemed to be conflicting responses as to which was enjoyed more. As Mark described,

You know what, it's hard, because I really enjoy watching the caliber of the hockey that he plays now. So that's really enjoyable for me and I genuinely love watching him play. I loved watching him play when he was 10, too. Which is easier and harder? I don't know. I see more pure fun when he was younger than now. I think now there's a level of seriousness and it's something I never went through myself, so it's my first time going through it in terms of how serious the environment around the game becomes, I guess. But yeah, I would say it was more fun when he was younger and I bet he would say it was more fun when he was younger.

When asked to further explain why it was more enjoyable when the kids were younger, Mark explained his experience,

Really, for me, it's about ... there's really no tradeoff for the feeling that I get when he comes out of the rink with a smile on his face, or I can see even during the game in one of those lighter moments where something's going on and you see a smile through the face mask, that's all I need to know that I'm doing the right thing for him. So, if this is what he wants to do, I'm going to, like I said, try and support it as best I can. But it's a very soft kind of thing for me. I don't really derive any tangible benefits. The benefit for me is seeing my kid happy.

As the above quote identified, the only thing that mattered to Mark was making sure that his child was happy, and that was a benefit Mark received from supporting youth hockey at this level.

Alternatively, Mary enjoyed talking about her experiences with her child at the young age,

And, I used to describe that there's just nothing like, they're seven years old and they, and you lead them in the direction and they take their helmet and they run their hands through their sweaty hair, and they say, 'did you see me out there?' And, I'm like 'yes, you were awesome.' Oh my gosh; it's like the best feeling ever.

These children are learning how to play the game, and making mistakes (e.g. falling down, missing the puck), during the development years which was particularly important to the study participants such as Mary. John mentions that "there is absolutely no stress

whatsoever at Timbits and Novice, it's beautiful...at Timbits and Novice, I always laugh parents are 'oh so cute, he missed his pass, he falls', it doesn't matter, it's fun they fall..." These kinds of mistakes were mentioned by Erin, saying that

It seemed cuter when they were younger, you know. Fun and it didn't matter, and you see it now-they make a bad play; they know themselves and are chasing themselves back, and are like, okay you got to get back in there. It's taken more seriously at the older level.

Parents enjoyed watching their children grow and develop throughout the younger years as it was stress or pressure free, and "cute" when their child made mistakes. The kids were having fun, and the parents had fun watching them grow and develop.

When further describing the parents' enjoyment, the study participants drew on comparisons between what they experienced with their children from their development years to the older years. For example,

When they are young, they are young. It's different just to see the joy on their faces. They are so innocent as kids, and as parents, the hotel experience is there, you are traveling with your kids. The parents are having some social time on these-trips together all the time. In Midget there are less overnights. You're not all hunkered down in the same hotel necessarily 'cause the kids are on their own, and yeah, not as much social interaction in older ages, but then again, the hockey is at a higher profile, much better level and there is a certain joy and entertainment in seeing them do well at this high level, so there are two different levels of enjoyment. (Nathan)

John, Erin, Mary, and Mark described their enjoyment when their children were younger due to the innocence of it (children making mistakes). Other parents like Nathan, enjoyed the older years due to the exciting level of hockey.

Nathan, Ben, and Ron appreciated the caliber of hockey being played in Midget Triple A. They enjoyed the entertainment value more at this age than years prior. For example, Nathan enjoyed the entertainment Midget Triple A provided him, “To me it was... my hobby was following the team...but we certainly enjoy travelling and watching the games. It’s an entertaining level of hockey. It’s not like watching some of the lower levels.” Two parents explained that they became fans of their child’s team (i.e., Ben and Nathan). For example,

I enjoyed it more as a fan. I know it’s my son, it’s more like watching Toronto [referring to the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL] when they’re your team, and you want them to do well, but that’s just the way it is. (Ben)

Not only were these games a time for parents to enjoy watching their kids, it was a time for parents to enjoy each other in a social context,

I just wanted to be there. I love the game that much that I wanted to be there. Even today, my wife works shift work, so she works two twelve-hour days, two twelve-hour nights, with my schedule, we are just like two ships in the night. If we have a couple hours where we can just sit, in close proximity, and do our favourite thing in the world, to watch our kids play hockey, there is nothing better than that for us. I’d rather do that than go to a movie or do whatever, so for us

that's awesome. It's like date time, we get to hold hands and talk about stuff that we haven't seen each other throughout the week, that's been our place. (Ron)

The participants enjoyed spending time at the rink with their loved ones (spouse, other children, grandparents) as it became a family bonding experience. After not having his family watch him play for years, upon returning to New Brunswick, James son was able to have his aunt, uncle, and grandparents all there at the rink to support him (James). Watching their children play hockey was something that parents got to enjoy with their spouse. These are some of the benefits parents received from supporting youth hockey. Based on the participants of this study, watching the younger ages were enjoyed more because of the lack of pressure and the social aspect involved.

Social Involvement

While supporting youth hockey, parents involved with this thesis research had the opportunity to become friends with the other parents involved with the team. The social involvement refers to the friends' parents made throughout minor league hockey. Seven of the parents interviewed were found to have a greater social connection with parents they met in the development years compared to those in the Midget Triple A years. Stacy described the difference as follows,

I found this is the least I have ever got to know the parents. So, at this level you literally put your kid in a program, hand them the cheque, hand off the kid and that's it. The kids begin to become very self-sufficient in terms of even getting to the rink because most of the kids have a driver's license. So, it is very hands off, and to that extent, I feel I don't know the parents at all. We did not interact

socially. In lower levels, there are team functions where you go with your kids like a Christmas dinner, or start-of-the-year party. We had none of that, so I found a lot of the parents this year to be very cut and dry, here is my cheque, here is my kid and everyone minded their business.

In the Midget Triple A years, Stacy described a disconnect from the other parents because there are no longer any team functions, or need to be around the rink as often. These parents found that they spent more time together at the younger ages due to the nature of the program.

During the development years, parents had to drive their children to all their games and tournaments. These parents were then spending more time together in hotels, Peewee and Bantam-you would travel because you travel with the kid; you would travel in groups with other families, book hotel rooms together, you would be social with parents. Even when the kids went to bed, you would be social with parents on trips in hotels, or we have many parties at the house like team functions. Kids dye their hair for playoffs. That is all gone. (Stacy)

Paul further described the difference between the Peewee and Bantam age groups in a unique way:

When they are younger in hotels and stuff, they go to bed and you are up having beers and stuff, but we are younger. And as you get older, you drive them to the rink with coffee, you go to the rink with a coffee, and you watch them and then you go home, 'see you later guys', that is it. So it does change, but you still do the social thing, but it changes a lot, a lot of fun when they were young.

The connections made at the younger levels were ones that seemed to last due to the tournaments requiring hotel accommodations, and the time parents spent together during these tournaments. As the parents got older, it appears that routines change, resulting in parents spending less time with other parents.

Two parents discussed having these connections helps with other endeavors.

These parents talked about the communities that comprise Eastern Canada,

Yeah, we have friends from one end to the other. Close friends that we do not see as much at the rink cause their kids went off to the Q [Quebec Major Junior Hockey League], but you still keep in touch with them... My oldest boy just took a crane operating course and his teacher, come to find out, he played against his young fellow down in South Shore, so you have connections. If, at a time they need references, you say 'hey remember I played against your son'. Or 'hey that young fellow there is a pretty social guy lets give him a chance'. So those are benefits. (Erin)

It is a benefit for the parent as they are able to make friends all over the East Coast, and to keep in touch with about their life, and the development of their children. With these connections, Erin described the opportunity for her children to get a good reference based on her child's hockey achievements.

Hockey can be a binding mechanism that brings individuals together from all over the country. One of the research participants described her experience,

The linkages, the people, all of these parents and families that we have met over the years and businesses and realizing the social networks. You never know

where in your life that you are going to be somewhere and you are like ‘Oh, I’m so-and-so, I used to work with so-and-so.’ And, you are like, ‘Oh, actually I’m doing a research project, or I am doing...’ And, the province is really small and connected, so I think those networks that you build with people it has been pretty cool for us too. (Mary)

Given the social capital that could form throughout youth hockey, parents were able to meet other parents that they believed could help their family in the future. Parents involved with the study indicated that they made good friends with the other parents on previous teams when their children were younger, “the parents you meet at Peewee and Bantam that you tend to be closer with, those that you have been around for a few years, I have close friends but ones that [my son] had growing up” (Nathan). These friendships seemed to last through to the Midget Triple A years.

It seemed to be more common that parents did not make friends in the later years, but instead preferred to go home or to be with their families. This could be attributed to the time it took to get to know parents throughout the development years. Furthermore, less social interaction at the Midget Triple A level could contribute to the shift from being actively involved as a coach, to more of a spectator position. The two primary benefits that 11 of the parents interviewed seemed to receive out of their support in youth hockey was the shared enjoyment of the sport between child and parent, as well as the social connections made throughout the years.

The sacrifices made by the parents were worth it because of the benefits they received. Ron summarized these thoughts about the sacrifices he had made for his kids, and why it is all worth it,

We have sacrificed a lot for our kids, we have not been on a vacation for years because we cannot afford it...every year we struggle to keep it afloat, but we do not regret it. We do not regret putting our resources there because we see our kids are pretty well rounded kids, self-motivated, and we think that is all part of it. If we did not support our kids, they would probably be hanging out here and smoking pot or something, so it is a great way for them to stay out of trouble too because they are so busy, but there is a line too, you know, being too busy. If we ever have a time where our whole family is at home its like gosh this is crazy, what happened, but we enjoy that time together too but it does not come around often because they're doing stuff.

When asked if she regretted supporting youth hockey, Emily had a similar response to Ron, by saying,

No. It is all about the kids doing what they want to do and trying to be happy and live the dream if they have one. I think they got so much from sports, I would not trade it for the world. It is just so expensive and it is so time consuming, you know, when you are playing sports all winter 6-7 days a week, and then you go right into soccer that is five days a week, where is your time, where is your down time? You know there is not any. Sometimes I want to take my kids to the beach during the day and I can't because the fog does not lift there until twelve or one

and they have got to be back for five for their practices. So it is really thrown all the family meals and that kind of thing way off. Here is a sandwich, here is a grilled cheese, here is some eggs, because they are different directions all the time almost every night of the week. You know we love it, we go to all the games, that's just our life its just a crazy ride and I am sure I will be sad when it is over.

Despite the number of sacrifices parents needed to make for their children, none of the parents interviewed regret their decision on enrolling their child in elite youth hockey, and maintaining that support to Midget Triple A. Parents not only received personal benefits from supporting elite hockey, but they found that their reasons for continued support revolved around what their children were getting from it.

Passion and Hard Work

All of the parents involved in the study discussed the ideas of passion and hard work as a key reason for continued support in youth hockey. The children of the parents involved in this study loved the game of hockey, and it was hard for parents to stop supporting their child's passion. When asked the question of why they support youth hockey, Emily responded with,

Because it was just an absolute passion. There was no denying that this kid lived breathed and ate anything hockey, hockey, hockey. It made him happy and he was really good at it and he always excelled, and it was just his love and how do you say no to that.

When asked why they continue to support youth hockey, Erin further explained,

I think I'll go with his love of the game. Sense of pride when he was finished.

He enjoyed the game he worked hard at it, it was something he strived for, and to be supportive of a child who is looking to do better I guess.

Not only was passion and love for the game a big part of the reasoning for offering support, but the child had to be willing to work hard as well. When John was asked why he supported youth hockey, John said,

Because he was passionate about it, he always put a great effort into it, and if a kid shows passion and effort, then we will support him in whatever it is, whether that's hockey or saving the world or anything else....

These parents showed that the reason they continued to support youth hockey, despite their sacrifices, was because their children loved the sport, and the parents wanted to give them the best opportunity they could for them to succeed. However, if the parents felt that their child was not as invested as they were, their support would not be given.

For six of the parents involved in this study, support seemed to be described as a deal; if the child puts in the work, they would have their parents' continued support. If the child worked hard, parents did not mind paying the fees,

I don't mind paying the fees if he is putting in his side of the deal, which is to work hard and be committed, ... he still has a goal or a dream, I'm willing to ...

I'm going to do what I can to support him achieving that dream. (Mark)

This idea of effort for payment was common amongst most of the six parents mentioned.

Paul stated that,

He wanted to play. He had a goal to play with the (team), get drafted, and you know when you set a goal, I said I will do everything in my power, do whatever I can to help you out. I mean all I can do is give you the money, if you are going to keep doing it, doing the power skating then I will put you in and do what you need to do.

This quote shows the passion, and the effort that Paul's son had for hockey, and that was good enough for Paul to continue to support him. With Ron putting the effort in to travel, he wanted his son to put the effort in to his play,

But for me, it was about effort, and I was putting in the effort driving back and forth, so that he could play at this level, so show up, give your best effort, that is all I am asking, you do not have to score 50 goals.

Ron believed that because he was taking the time and effort to drive their son to his games, that their son could continue this dedication by working hard.

Finally, one parent described their personal view of the Midget Triple A league, and the idea of supporting hard work,

You have to show an effort and commitment. I do not care if you go 0-32 this year, but when [my son] is on the ice, all I want to see is an effort, if he fails, if he succeeds, good for him if he succeeds but he is going to fail sometimes and that does not bother me, as long as he keeps putting in the effort. So that is why I have no problem supporting him that way, but if he did not put the effort, we would have the discussion saying, 'why are we doing this, cause you can play hockey in the rec and it would costs us less, but if you want to play competitive,

its expensive so you have to show an interest you have to want it, that is why they call it competitive – you have to want it’. (John)

For many of the parents involved in this study, their children had a passion for the game and wanted to continue to excel and play at the highest level they possibly could.

For more than half of the parents interviewed, this support was contingent on their children putting in the effort and showing the parents that they wanted to play. As seen in the quote above, John described the Midget Triple A experience as an expensive one, and that John would not spend the money if his son did not want to succeed. The parents identified above, as well as Mary, wanted their kids “to be able to work hard, and understand what it is to work hard. That you have to work hard for everything”. These athletes learned how to work hard. Hard work was one of reasons that parents continued to support elite youth hockey.

Life Lessons

Along with passion and hard work, parents also mentioned other life lessons that hockey has taught their child. These life lessons were a part of why the parents continued to support their adolescent child’s involvement at the Midget Triple A age for youth hockey. One of the life lessons discussed was the idea of interpersonal skills,

It is learning how to get along with people, figuring out how to work together towards a common goal, comradery, team spirit, leadership, all kinds of characteristics that you acquire through competitive sports that I love and that's important. To me, it is an important thing for kids to be able to get that kind of ... I

don't know if you would call it experience or exposure to ... and develop those qualities that hopefully help them to become good people. (Mark)

Learning interpersonal skills through hockey was another lesson for their children to learn, because when their children get older, they are going to have to understand how to deal with people in the workforce,

Socially he does well. He is a bit of a joker, well-liked by teammates, even by the guys on the high school team, hockey has been good for his development as a person. I see that big time in all sports, people have the opportunity to lead, to chip in, to have a goal as a group of people to get from A to Z to reach that goal, and that is really important. In the working world, that is basically what it is working for a company, you have to pull your weight, you have to show up, you cannot just not do stuff, you have to put in the time and effort. So those are good life lessons really. (Ron)

Hockey taught these adolescent children how to work together as a team for the pursuit of a common goal; an important life lesson needed for future success in the workforce.

While working together was a positive benefit, the study participants found that their child also gained some leadership skills,

He has gained a lot of things I guess, he has certainly learned leadership skills, he has learned a lot of self-confidence, he has had something that...it is his talent, his thing. But others in the community, his peers look up to him because he is a good player, he has got a lot of self-esteem out of it, and he is a very high energy person...and very competitive, and very team oriented. He really likes the idea of

being part of a group and competing together, and I do not know what he would have done if he did not have that. (Nathan)

Not only were children learning how to work as a part of a team, they were also growing themselves as individuals and learning how to become leaders and effective communicators,

I think he has learned social skills at the age of 16. He has had more interviews than I have at 46. You know talking and learning to talk to people and if someone asks you a question, you can look them in the eye and answer them straight up instead of being bashful and saying, 'oh I do not know'...he learns how to communicate better. It's taught him a lot. Leadership, it is okay to stand up and say, 'okay boys let's get it together here', and it has taught him that you do not only have to talk about yourself it is not me, me, me, you can say you know the team worked hard and you play as team, it is not an individual game. They will ask him how have you improved as a player, he will say, 'you know, I am working on my shot, becoming a more defensive player, but you know what, as a team', and he brings back the team and says we work hard as a team, and we are all in this together. (Erin)

Leadership and communication were both lessons that parents believed their child gained from participating in elite youth hockey.

It was understood and experienced by the participants that these players became better teammates and better people because of their involvement in competitive organized hockey. The coach would hold players accountable for things like "personal grooming,

to being punctual...Kids are responsible for keeping the dressing room clean...there is a sense of ownership and a sense of pride that this is [their] room and [they] have a responsibility to keep it clean” (Stacy). Through hockey, these adolescents also “learn to fight [their] own battles...learn that [they are] not always going to win” (John). Based on the experiences of the parents mentioned above, their children learned many different life lessons throughout their youth hockey careers. Parents continued to support youth hockey because their children showed passion, and a willingness to put in the effort. Meanwhile, their adolescent children were also learning lessons like comradery, learning how to become leaders and how to communicate, along with learning a sense of responsibility, and learning how to fight their own battles.

Despite some of the troubles these parents might have faced, none of them had any regrets in having their children involved with elite youth hockey. Mary was once told that “the days are long, and the years are short.” Mary explained this quote, saying that the days are hard and long, and the support may get tough, but when that is all done, the years go by and your children will be away from home. Mary continued to elaborate,

I thought that was such a great quote because we talk about we are just running and you get in the car and you run to practice and then you run here and then you run there and then you are at a tournament, you go and then you are in Boston. And, you get a hotel, and blah blah blah, and it just feels like you are running all the time. And, then suddenly it is like wow, it is all done and they are gone to university. And, wow. So, yeah it feels like yeah days are long and years are short. So we will follow them...

Parents faced challenges in offering support, but the benefits the parents received were worth the support provided. Parents provided support by managing their athletes internal and external pressures, by learning what it takes to be a parent and separating their support from a coaches' role. Parents needed to make numerous sacrifices in order for their child to have an opportunity to play elite level hockey, but then needed to help their child prepare for life after it was over. Despite the sacrifices and the support parents needed to provide their elite athlete, parents received the benefit of a shared enjoyment and bond over hockey, as well as making a few friends along the way. Their children learned the values of hard work, teamwork, communication, comradery, and many more life lessons during their time in elite youth hockey, which made the parental support worth it for all parents involved in the study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The need for parental support in elite level sport changed as the athlete got older and moved from the development to the adolescent years, as this thesis research has demonstrated. In accordance with the methodological analysis developed by Colaizzi (1978), and utilized by Morrow, et al. (2015), a short, dense statement must be presented to summarize the fundamental structure essential to understanding this phenomenon of support in Midget Triple A hockey. This statement is designed to summarize the exhaustive description (i.e., data presented in the findings) that captures the essence of the phenomenon being explored. This statement is as follows:

Parental support is provided by assisting in the management of an athlete's internal and external pressures, which included other parents, scouts, and the pressure to perform at a top level. As the athlete progressed through elite hockey, parents underwent a transition from being a coach in the development years, to being a parent spectator at the elite level, which ultimately affected the way that parents provided physical and emotional parental support, while also preparing their child for a life after hockey. In order for these athletes to have a chance at success, parents needed to make sacrifices which included family vacations, grocery budgets, and even guardianship. Despite these sacrifices, parents did not regret their decision to enroll their son in elite level hockey. The benefits that were received included a shared love and bond over hockey, as well as the social

involvement with other parents. Through Midget Triple A, their child learned the values of hard work, teamwork, communication, and many more life lessons during their time in elite youth hockey. The benefits that parents received from outweighed the sacrifices involved with supporting elite youth hockey.

Based on the dense statement presented above, a model was developed that illustrates the parental support system that exists within elite minor hockey in the Maritimes. The model is based on a combination of the findings and previous literature on parental support (see Figure 2). The themes of parental support that emerged from the findings can be categorized into intangible and tangible support categories. These categories of support were provided during both the development years and the Midget Triple A years. The dotted arrow within the model reflects a player's transition from the development years to the adolescent years (i.e., Midget Triple A). The categories of parental support within the context of this study were found to be sacrifices that parents made for their children to play Midget Triple A and during the development years. The rationale for these sacrifices is based on the benefits that these parents received. The discussion below highlights the relationship that exists between the themes that have been identified in the findings and intangible and tangible support. Next, the sacrifices parents made regarding intangible and tangible support, and the benefits they received from supporting elite youth hockey will be discussed further.

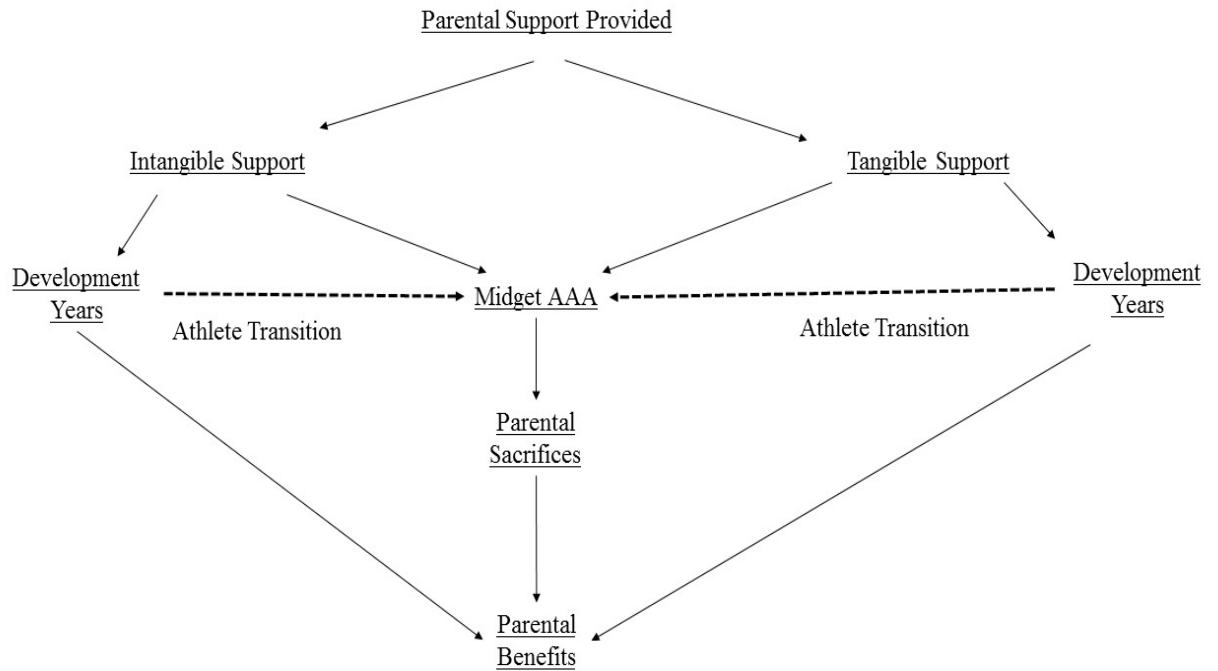


Figure 2. The Parental Support Model for Midget Triple A

Intangible Support

During the development and Midget Triple A years, parents provided intangible support. Beets et al. (2010) discussed the notion of intangible support as the verbal encouragement that enhances the motivation to continue participation in the activity. Intangible support can refer to emotional as well as informational support that a parent can provide to their child. The themes identified from the findings as intangible mechanisms of support included *Managing Internal and External Pressures*, *Preparing for Life After Hockey*, and the *Transition from Coach to Parent Spectator*.

Emotional Support. This method of support refers to relying on others for security and comfort during stressful times (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Hardwood and Knight (2009) indicated, “The salience and frequency of sports participation for children necessitates the availability of emotional reassurance from parents, particularly following poor performances that can negatively affect children” (p. 340). Poor performance was an issue many of these athletes faced and was a challenge for parents to support. Parental support at the Midget Triple A level was assisting in managing both internal and external pressures faced by the athletes. The term pressure “is often referred to as a quality of the environment, such as a competitive situation” (Lee & MacLean, 1997, p.168). Furthermore, Lee and MacLean (1997) also indicated that “the style of parental interaction affected the ability of children to cope [with pressures they encounter]” (p. 167).

Parents involved with this thesis research emotionally supported their child through stressful events during their Midget Triple A years. These stressful events, in the form of pressure, included: other teammates’ emotional issues, scouts watching their games, and/or the ability to maintain performance at the highest level. These pressures were managed primarily by the adolescent child. While parents expressed their role in allowing their child to handle their own issues, they would only intervene in the situation when asked by the child. In the parent’s experience, pressure in the development years often came from the parents themselves. For example, the aggressive nature of other parents in the stands can be a source of pressure. In the Midget Triple A years, parents avoided adding external and internal pressure. If there was pressure, it became the

responsibility of the child to handle the stressful situations on their own. This became a learning exercise for the child as parents gave their child the chance to be defeated or allow them to persevere. These experiences were essentially providing the child with the skillsets needed to deal with pressures as they got older.

A study by Fredricks and Eccles (2004) explained that parents essentially had three fundamental roles that attributed to their child's sporting experience: 1) provider (e.g., finance and transport); 2) interpreter (e.g., a means of providing a way to adapt to the emotional situations that arise in sport); and, 3) role model (e.g., providing an example on the appropriate behaviours in sport). Intangible support is provided primarily through emotional support (i.e., interpreter), as parents often needed to address issues their athlete had during the development years, as well as Midget Triple A. For example, parents supported their child by explaining to them that they needed to be vocal if there is an issue, or talk to the coach in person about more playing time. Playing time is an issue these athletes faced during the Midget Triple A years, as the more ice time a player gets, the more time he has to show his skills and be noticed by scouts at higher levels (e.g., CHL). This is an important consideration as Midget Triple A is the final age level that can be classified as minor hockey. Once reaching the CHL, a player is considered to be playing professional hockey.

The premise around playing time is if they get more playing time, the likelihood of being noticed and drafted into a CHL franchise increased. By parents giving their children the confidence to confront the coach, life skills are developed that teach their child how to deal with situations or challenges that require them to be independent and

solve their own problems. If the player felt that they were being mistreated, and that they deserved to be playing more, the parents involved with this thesis research would challenge their adolescent child to fight for their ice time, and to stand up to the coach by telling him that the athlete has a problem. In terms of intangible support at the Midget Triple A level, particularly with emotional support, there is a “hands off” approach by parents.

Another source of stress described by parents involved in this thesis research were the parents themselves who attempted to coach the players from the stands. Holt et al. (2008), found that “spectators were vocal 12% of the time during games, and being silent for the remaining time” (p.665). Furthermore, Kidman, McKenzie, and McKenzie (1999) indicated that 42.7% of parent’s comments during a game were positive, 34.5% were found to be negative, and the remaining amount of comments were neutral. Thus, coaching from the stands was identified in the findings as an external source of pressure that was experienced by parents in this thesis research. Jeffery-Tosoni et al. (2015) stated that Peewee hockey players aged 11 to 12 did not enjoy hearing feedback when their parents were in the crowd. Based on the findings, it was indicated this type of feedback was described as negative. In a study by Fraser- Thomas et al. (2008), it was found that 36% of parents discouraged the development of their children by overemphasizing winning, criticizing their children, holding unrealistic expectations, and pushing their children to play.

Parents believed that their children had a chance of playing beyond elite youth hockey programs during the development years. Paul mentions being one of the parents

that saw talent early in his son's development, while Emily reported viewing parents that believed their child would make it to the NHL. At this stage, parents began to pressure their children to continue playing elite level hockey as they saw the talent their child had. This is different than the findings of Chard et al. (2015), where the rationale for having their children in elite level sport was to gain life skills. Most parents involved with this thesis research realized that their child was not going to make it to the NHL and stopped applying pressure, instead focusing on their development outside of hockey. These parents would later begin putting their child's goals and aspirations before their own, if the parent once believed that they would make it to the NHL. Parents realized when they needed to take a step back, focus on managing their child's pressure, and not apply anymore pressure onto their child.

Preparing for a future after elite hockey was not found to be discussed in current parental support literature. When a parent is engaged in their athlete's development, they will not pressure their child to continue in that sport, but instead will provide other options for them (i.e., education, playing other sports; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Parents provided other options to their child by discussing having a "Plan B" for their future once minor hockey participation was over. This was most common at the Midget Triple A level, as these children were dedicated to the sport, and were just about to graduate high school. This was expected to be discussed at this level, as this can be considered a pivotal transition point in a player's career as to deciding on whether or not to continue competing at an elite level, pursuing a career, or continue with academic pursuits after Midget Triple A.

Parents seemed to be aware that their child's hockey dreams may soon be coming to an end, and wanted to prepare them for other alternatives, such as music or school. Instead of the parent focusing on the sport and performance, the focus shifted to be more interested in "Plan B" and how they can get their child to achieve "Plan B." The majority of thesis participants were focused on preparing their kids for college, university, or the work force, as though their child's youth hockey dreams were coming to an end.

When discussing a "Plan B", academics were always the first option mentioned by the parents. If their child was successful in Midget Triple A, they may have an opportunity to play for a university/college team at a lower tuition cost. Parents discussed receiving scholarships during the development years that decreased tuition costs at prep schools but was not as frequently discussed in Midget Triple A with university/college. Supporting Midget Triple A hockey and having a focus on "Plan B" could have led to an affordable education, as it is suggested in the work of Edwards and Washington (2015). If parents prepare their children for a career after hockey and not a career in hockey, benefits to both child and parent could increase due to a lack of pressure on the athlete. Deciding what comes after elite hockey is a stressful time for the athlete, and parents provided emotional support by comforting them with an alternative career path they could explore once their time in hockey has finished.

Parental support at the Midget Triple A level meant realizing that there may not be a future career in hockey despite how hard the child may have worked. Despite making it to the highest level prior to the CHL, some of these players simply may not be good enough to advance to the next level in comparison to their peers. Those involved

with the study were emotionally invested in their child's sporting careers by handling the pressures that came with elite sport, being empathetic to their problems, and preparing them for life after hockey.

Informational Support. Another method of providing intangible support discussed by parents was informational support, which refers to parents attempting to offer instruction to their child athlete on how to improve their play (Fraser-Thomas, 2015; Holt et al., 2009). Beets et al. (2010) identify informational support as a form of intangible support, as it involves the discussion on how to be active, and provides advice, information, and suggestions on how to improve. Parents provided informational support such as this, during the development years of youth sport. This method of support is identified in the theme, *Transition from Coach to Parent spectator*, as this method was not as commonly provided at the Midget Triple A Level.

The feedback provided by the thesis participants typically referred to comments like “skate”, “shoot”, “get back”, and other callouts that come from the parents in the stands; this is known as Performance Contingent Feedback (Holt et al., 2009; Jeffrey-Tosoni & Fraser-Thomas, 2015). During the development years, parents discussed coaching their child at the dinner table, or in the car on the ride home. The most common instruction parents gave was the idea of putting in a good effort every night. It did not matter how well they performed on the score sheet (i.e., stats including goals and assists), as long as they were giving their best effort.

At the Midget Triple A level, this form of feedback was not common, as parents typically let the coaches provide the necessary instruction. The parents were aware that

the coaches knew more than the parents. Instead, those involved with the thesis research watched the game and supported their child through emotional and logistical methods (i.e., transportation and time commitment). It is during the Midget Triple A years, that parents find themselves transitioning from the role as a coach, to the role of a spectator.

Parents were behind the bench as a coach in the development years where feedback was able to be provided immediately. After providing this support during the development years, parents shifted to a role as a spectator. As mentioned above, the role of the parent led to dealing with their athletes' emotional issues, as well as being supportive of their dreams in and out of hockey. This is important to note, as parents learned to recognize when to leave sporting advice to the coaches. As a spectator, parents can try to avoid shouting instruction from behind the bench, as this can negatively impact the coach-parent relationship. Jeffrey-Tosoni and Fraser-Thomas's (2015) research suggested that the child's own ideas of what to do get lost in the comments being yelled from their coach, teammates, and parents. In a study of the coach-parent relationship in youth sport, Smoll, Cumming, and Smith (2011) offer advice on what parents must do to improve the relationship between the coach and parent.

Parents were willing to provide informational support in different ways, outside of the role as a coach. Smoll et al. (2011), state that a parent must: 1) be able to share their son or daughter; 2) accept their child's disappointments; 3) show their child self-control; 4) give their child some time; and, 5) let their child make his or her own decisions. In the Midget Triple A years, the findings suggest that parents, in the role of a spectator, were able to offer these five commitments towards their child. Parents understood that the

coach knew what was best for their athlete. They were able to accept their child's disappointments and gave them the space they needed if they had a problem. Those involved with the study recognized the parents who lacked self-control as "crazy", and were able to separate what they wanted, from what their athlete wanted. If the goal of informational support is to provide advice on how to improve, parents can follow this list of commitments to improve their relationship with the coach and increase their child's interest in the sport. By allowing the coach full control over their child's development, and by following the guidelines listed above, parents can be sure that their athlete is getting the best possible advice and experience in youth sport.

While the parents were found to have heavily relied on their coaches to offer feedback and advice to their child, parents frequently discussed their opinions on the coach and their methods. As Chard et al. (2015) explained, "The need for constructive role models to deal with both positive (i.e., winning, community contributions), and negative (i.e., losing, poor officiating calls) sporting situations to teach valued life lessons is paramount" (p.33). As parents relinquished their role as coach, they placed their trust in their coaches to provide support in the development of their youth athlete. Since the parent was no longer the role model for sporting performance, it was expected that the coach needed to show appropriate behaviours that the athletes could emulate. Parents used the coach as a proxy (a decision-maker) to deliver life lessons, and training, to their child based on what the coach thinks is the most beneficial. Parents at the Midget Triple A level found that they were no longer the ones providing informational support.

An essential aspect in the parental experience in Midget Triple A hockey was yielding to the coach and using them as a proxy to provide the most beneficial development strategy. While existing literature frequently discusses the coach/parent/athlete triad (Hellstedt, 1987; Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005), there has been no research found that discussed the specific relationship between parent and coach. Smoll et al. (2011) offered coaches assistance on how to deal with a variety of different parents (i.e., overcritical, disinterested parents) to increase harmony and minimize hassle for all involved. While this study discusses how coaches can deal with parents involved in youth sport, it does not show how parents can help improve the coaching and establish more support for their child. A review of the literature does not show any articles which discussed the coach as a proxy for parents, or how parental opinions may be able to help improve the coaching in youth hockey.

As the role of the parent changed over time, so did the notion of who provided informational support. Previous research has referred to proxy decision-making in the medical sense of making-a-decision for a loved one (e.g., High, 1992; Kapp, 1994; Parks et al., 2011), or in the sense of a purchase decision for recreation services (Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, & Kontinen, 2013). In the case of elite youth hockey, the parent is the purchaser of youth sport (Green & Chalip, 1998), and the coach acts as the decision-maker in terms of the athlete's development. For the support parents provided their child in their youth sport (i.e., financial, emotional, and transportation), parents expected the best decision-making abilities from the coach in

regards to the informational support they provided. The coach is responsible for delivering the service, implementing policies, and playing a pivotal role in the quality of the sporting experience (Green & Chalip, 1998).

One study suggests that at this elite level of an athlete's development path, parents begin to feel isolated and distant from their child due to the increased attachment to the child's coach (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). This became evident in this thesis research, as it would appear that the parenting experience began to involve a release of control to the coach, as they displayed a broader understanding of what the athlete needed to do to succeed at the Midget Triple A level. If a parent was unhappy with the coach, parents would drop their child out of the sport. Studies have shown that a parent's opinion on the coach is a reason for youth dropout in youth sport (Fraser Thomas et al., 2005; Molinero, Salguero, Tuero, Alvarez, & Marquez, 2006). If the coach is to offer support as an extension of the parent, these parents expected their coach to discipline and support the child to a higher standard, otherwise, they would find a different sport, or coach to support.

The coach is responsible for the development of these young adolescents, and the parents wanted to ensure their child was getting the proper development training. After the hockey season concluded, parents were able to submit feedback on their coaches and what the coach could do better to improve the parental experience. Parents discussed wanting the coach to have more control in the dressing room, as well as to focus more on the children's academic needs. If the coach was to be the provider of informational support when developing these elite athletes, the parents in this thesis research wanted

their coach to provide the recommendations listed above. The findings identify suggestions that could improve coaching at the elite level of minor hockey. If minor hockey leagues can hire coaches that display these values, perhaps more parents would be willing to commit to hockey long term. These parents have years of experience in supporting minor hockey league systems, and their recommendations on how to improve should be studied in the development of youth coaches.

Tangible Support

Tangible support refers to direct involvement with the child in the sport or activity, such as paying for equipment, financial costs, or driving them to the venue. Beets et al. (2010), defines tangible support as “behaviours performed by parents which directly facilitate the involvement in activity” (p. 9). Fredericks and Eccles (2004) refer to this parent role as the provider, one who offers finances and transport. The two sub-themes that fit within tangible support, were identified as financial, and a parent’s time commitment (i.e., transportation). Both the financial commitment, and the time commitment provided by the parents were a sacrifice they needed to make in order for their child to have a chance to play at the highest level. This section focuses on the discussion of the theme *Sacrificing for Your Kids* (i.e., financial, and time commitment), identified in the findings above.

Financial Commitment. Coakley (2006) stated that the financial commitment to hockey is essential if children wanted to have a future in the sport. Coakley (2006) claimed that parents can spend between \$10,000 – \$40,000 per year on administration, equipment, and training, where administration costs alone can cost families \$5000 –

\$20,000 per year. Out of the 11 parents interviewed, only three stated that they were over \$10,000 per year, and that was because they sent their children to attend a preparatory school (identified as prep school). The other eight parents had their children play in the Canadian Maritimes throughout their minor hockey development and did not discuss spending more than \$10,000 on administration, registration, training, and equipment.

An interesting situation that was experienced by one of the parents was the contrast in the cost from the US to Canada with regards to playing hockey. Based on Coakley (2006), it appears that minor hockey in the US is more expensive than hockey in the Canadian Maritimes. James, one of the fathers interviewed who was raised in New Brunswick but now lives in the US, described US minor hockey as a “pay to play”, meaning if you can afford the price, you can play on a Triple A team. Due to the amount of teams, players, and leagues in the US, James felt that the US minor hockey system was more of a business than a development league. This is similar to the findings of Edwards’ (2016) study.

Edwards (2016) suggested that a winning team can also increase the price to play. Winning teams attract interest from CHL scouts, and if more players are getting drafted out of these winning teams, more players will be eager to play for that successful team (Edwards, 2016). James discussed five leagues, with twenty plus teams that would consider themselves “Midget Triple A”, all containing players, and parents, that are paying over \$10,000 to play. The price of hockey in the US is more expensive, and that could be attributed to a larger population, and a need to focus on the players willing to pay the price. If parents are willing to send their child to a prep school, parents needed to

be aware of the sacrifices (i.e., high costs, distance from child) associated with supporting elite hockey in the US, as well as prep schools in Canada.

Of the three parents who sent their adolescent child to a hockey prep school, two of them were in the US. These parents indicated that they paid \$20,000 - \$25,000 for school, hockey, travel, and training. If their children did not get scholarships, that would have been another \$20,000 per year. Washington and Edwards (2016) identified the costs of prep schools in Canada, suggesting that these schools will offer scholarships to players they have selected that may not be able to afford the expense, but can compete at this elite level. These costs do cover academics, residency, and the hockey program, but as one executive board member stated “it’s a rich man’s sport” (Washington & Edwards, 2016, p. 8). Identifying hockey as a rich man’s sport shows that hockey is becoming an elitist game. You are either financially fortunate enough to pay the costs of youth hockey, or you have to be willing to sacrifice for the chance at success.

The financial commitment to elite youth sport is important to provide because if parents cannot afford to pay, their children cannot play. As a result of the financial sacrifice required, parents of this thesis research described situations where they would not go on family vacations, do house renovations, get new cars, or even get certain groceries, to allow their children a chance to play. What was interesting about these experiences is that parents found these to be norms that come with playing Midget Triple A hockey. In fact, broader societal expectations are that there is a substantial cost associated with participating in organized sport. But the question becomes: What is too much?

The rising cost of youth sport can be seen as a barrier of entry. In a study of hockey parents, Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) found the expense of youth hockey to be the second largest reason of why a parent is dissatisfied with the organization, behind only the time commitment required. Similarly, Kirk et al. (1997a) found that financial impact of expensive sports, such as hockey, can have a negative effect on sport participation and family life. In the study by Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011), when the study participants were asked what could be done to continue involvement in youth hockey the most consistent answer suggested by parents was to make the sport more affordable. The financial impact of youth hockey is a significant barrier to entry, and as shown in Kirk et al. (1997a), the financial impact can have a negative effect on family life.

This thesis research not only explored the cost of minor league hockey in the Canadian Maritimes, but it also investigated the justification for purchase as a form of understanding parental support, more specifically tangible support. Parents involved in this thesis research viewed the financial commitment or support as a sacrifice. To understand parental support during Midget Triple A, parents should understand the costs associated with getting them this far. While the financial support provided was a challenging sacrifice that most parents needed to commit, some parents referred to the time commitment required as even more detrimental to their elite sport participation.

Time Commitment. Not only does tangible support refer to the money committed by parents, it also looks at the time commitment required, which is referred to in the literature as logistical support (Beets et al., 2010). Sacrificing their time was

difficult for the parents involved in this study, as many struggled with balancing hockey, and other commitments. Kirk et al. (1997b) indicated that the time commitment that is required of parents to support their child's sporting endeavors can hinder on their occupational, social, and family life. Time commitment can refer to how much of their own time a parent may sacrifice. This includes participating in the activity with the child, watching and supervising the child in their sport, along with the transportation required to get them to and from their sport (Beets et al., 2010).

In their child's development years, parents committed more time to youth hockey. They were responsible for getting their kids to the games and practices, as well as going away on road trips and staying in hotels for various tournaments. As their child entered Midget Triple A, parents found that they had more discretionary time. This meant that balancing their social and family lives outside of hockey became easier during Midget Triple A as the parents were no longer expected to be present at all times. Parents had more time to engage in other hobbies and social commitments, rather than commit to hockey.

Parents did not have to go to every game because the adolescent children would now travel by bus. In Midget Triple A, the parents interviewed discussed a separation from travel, as they were not relied on for transportation. At this age, these young adults also began to get their driver's license, furthering their independence at the Midget Triple A level. The tangible support given through travel and supervision is a form of support that decreased as the children become adolescents. Their logistical support provided a balance at the end of the parental supporting experience. While parents were needed to

drive their children to and from multiple sporting events when they are younger, parents no longer needed to be there for their child when they are older. These children gain independence, and other resources become available to them, such as others with driver's licenses, or a team's-chartered bus.

Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) found that a primary reason for youth attrition in hockey was that it required too much time to travel and participate. The study conducted by Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) examined players from ages 4 to 17 and found an average attrition age of 10 years old. Parents involved found the seasons to be too long, there were too many practices, and it was too time consuming (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). While some of the parents mentioned that the time commitment was difficult at times, these parents never thought of taking their children out of hockey. Parents in this study found that the time commitment was difficult, but it did not deter them from supporting elite youth hockey.

However, in order to do that other sports needed to be dropped for the focus to be solely on hockey. Parents had to drop their kids out of summer sports like baseball or soccer so that their child could focus full time on training for the hockey season. Parents provided support by giving their children the opportunities to play multiple sports by sacrificing their time and money. Due to the time commitment required for youth and adolescent hockey, parents and their athlete needed to make the decision to drop out of other sports as they were no longer able to attend both sports. Parents balanced multiple commitments including their work and social lives along with their child's sporting lives.

Parents can manage their athletes' time commitments to avoid potential burnout from specializing in youth hockey.

Throughout youth hockey, parents committed a lot of time towards their child's youth hockey dreams at the elite level, as indicated in Washington and Edwards (2016). Parents mentioned that the time put into hockey was a hard commitment. Athletes begin to drop out of youth sport between the ages of 10 and 13 (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011; Ede et al., 2012; Wall & Côté, 2007). These ages are when athletes involved in multiple sports, begin to specialize in one or two activities (Côté, 1999). Once athletes began to specialize, parents' time commitment decreased as they were only responsible for delivering their athlete to one sport. According to the thesis participants, elite sport participation led to a decrease in their time commitment, leading to more leisure time for the parent in Midget Triple A. If a parent can handle the time commitment involved in the development years, parents will have more time to themselves once their athlete becomes an elite level player. Along with the financial support, and time commitment given, the parents interviewed discussed multiple sacrifices that they need to make in order for their child to participate at the highest level.

Parental Sacrifices

Drawing on the intangible and tangible parental support that was found in this thesis research, as displayed in Figure 2, the overarching outcome found with regards to the tangible and intangible parental support at the Midget Triple A level was parental sacrifice. While existing studies discussed sacrifices parents made to support elite sport (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003; Lauer, Gould, Roman

& Pierce, 2010), they do not explicitly discuss why these sacrifices are made, or what benefits parents received from making these sacrifices. The findings of this thesis research do expand on this gap in the current research.

The thesis began by discussing two extreme examples of parental support involving current and former NHL players: Matt Duchene and Patrick O'Sullivan. The story of Matt Duchene and his father Vince, shows an extreme financial commitment to Matt's dreams of playing in the NHL. Over the course of Duchene's youth hockey career, Vince spent over \$300,000 for his child to have a chance at making it into the NHL. Vince sacrificed time at work, and other investment opportunities to commit this financial support to Matt's youth hockey. Ultimately, Vince Duchene's support led to Matt's success, despite the financial sacrifice needed for him to succeed.

The other story involving former NHLer Patrick O'Sullivan, discussed an extreme case of emotional support, in which Patrick's father was verbally and physically abusive in the hopes that his son would make it to the NHL. Patrick ended up making it to the NHL due to his skill, and the fun he had away from his father. While his father may have believed it was the way he provided "support" which led to his son's success, it was instead the opposite. Patrick's father sacrificed his relationship with his son, because he wanted him to make the NHL more than anything else. O'Sullivan became a successful player, but not because of his father's sacrifice.

While extreme examples, the experiences of the participants for this thesis research outlined their sacrifices as parents in the form of support for their child to continue to compete at the elite level of hockey. What becomes interesting is the idea of

what parents may be willing to sacrifice for the hopes of success in elite youth hockey. Parents involved with this study mentioned sacrifices including home renovations, family vacations, their grocery budget, and even guardianship of a child. The stories of Matt Duchene and Patrick O'Sullivan are just two examples of parental sacrifice that parents should read in the hopes of preventing these extreme cases. If these two failed to make the NHL, these stories may have been viewed more negatively in the media.

Success is often a rationale for why parents make sacrifices for their children. As seen in the cases of Matt Duchene and Patrick Sullivan, the emphasis is placed on making it to the NHL, but if the child does not make it to the NHL, or win an Olympic Gold Medal, is there still a reward for parents? Lauer et al. (2010) suggest that while parents may not communicate their intentions for a reward, parents may often remind their child of the sacrifices they are making, adding additional pressure to their child to succeed. Most of the parents involved in this thesis research recognized that their child was not going to make it to the NHL, despite the sacrifices they made to get their athlete to the Midget Triple A level. Only two children of the parents interviewed were drafted into the QMJHL (a sub league of the CHL). There is a less than a 1% chance that any of these players will make it to the NHL (Cornelius, 2014). If success in hockey is the rationale for continuous support in elite hockey, what are the benefits that parents receive if their child does not make it?

Parental sacrifice is the culmination of the intangible and tangible support in elite youth hockey. While parents will support youth hockey both tangibly (finances, time commitment) and intangibly (emotional, informational) throughout a minor league

hockey career, the idea of sacrifice began to appear during the Midget Triple A level. Parents discussed these sacrifices as if they were inherent norms, as parents accepted what needed to be done to continue to support their child at the elite level. While their athlete's development in the sport is arguably the most important benefit that parents received through elite sport, does it need to come at such sacrifice? The idea of these sacrifices as a norm is a troubling thought for youth sport organizations. If parents have to be willing to go to such lengths for a chance to see their child succeed and develop, the youth sport organizations should be doing more to allow for more parents to afford the opportunity for their children to play youth sport. The expense of youth hockey is highly publicized, and this thesis research furthers the investigation into those who provide the opportunity. Instead of being considered the norm, these sacrifices should be meant for extreme cases, and the norm should be affordability, and benefits for all.

Some parents struggled with what was sacrificed (vacations, home renovations, food budget), while the majority of participants were not concerned with what they gave up. This is consistent with Coakley (2006) who suggests that, "even as youth sports programs have increasingly become privatized and expensive, parents have been willing to alter family budgets to support participation" (p.158). Coakley continues by suggesting that, "although [parents] realized that such expenditures were excessive [parents] explained that the benefits for their sons were worth the money and the time that the family spent travelling to and attending hockey games" (p.159). Despite an awareness of the sacrifices required to support elite youth hockey, parents are still willing to provide their child with the opportunity to play and succeed. By providing both tangible and

intangible support, parents sacrificed for their children in a variety of ways. Given the number of sacrifices parents must make towards supporting their children, it is interesting to explore the outcomes of their commitment.

Parental Benefits

The benefits that children received from playing youth sports have been highly researched (Chard et al., 2015; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Neely & Holt, 2014; Wiersma, 2000). Furthermore, the role that parents play in a child's sporting experience is reflective in a child's ability to "develop beliefs in their abilities, maintain certain expectations of themselves, and acquire sport-related value systems..." (LaVoi & Stellino, 2008, p. 472). Lee and MacLean (1999) go on to explain that,

Parents' commitment to their children's sport has its foundations in both the identity derived from the family membership, which may be evidenced by pride in the performance of their offspring, and their response to the demands made on the family's time and economic resources. (p.168)

Supporting youth sport gave parents the benefit of watching their child develop the skills needed for success. Parents took pride in their athletes' abilities, and the expectations their child puts on themselves to succeed. Similarly, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) identified two main benefits parents received through supporting youth sport: satisfaction with their child's experience, and interaction opportunities.

Satisfaction with Their Child's Experience. Parents enjoyed supporting their child in youth sport, and the outcomes associated with their continued support.

Satisfaction with their child's experiences referred to "the joy in observing a child's enjoyment, improvement, development, and success" (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008, p. 514). After reaching Midget Triple A, parents discussed their enjoyment watching the level of play that their child has attained. This benefit is identified in the findings above as "*Shared Love of the Game*" which discussed their child's continuous development in hockey, and the smiles they have both shared throughout their adolescent's youth hockey career.

During the development years, most parents involved with this study played the role of a coach to their youth athlete. Parents were able to spend more time with their child, as they were around the rink more at this level. Weiss and Fretwell (2005) discussed the benefits that the parent-coach received from coaching their child. These benefits included taking pride in their accomplishments, an enjoyment of coaching their son, and being able to spend quality time with them (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Parents were satisfied with their child's experience at both levels of youth hockey. During the development years, parents were able to spend more time with their athlete through coaching. In Midget Triple A, parents instead enjoyed watching their son play at the highest level and continue to improve. *A Shared Love of the Game*, was expressed at both levels of play, and is a benefit parents will continue to enjoy throughout the years their child is involved in youth sport.

Interaction Opportunities. The second benefit identified in Wiersma and Fifer (2008), was interaction opportunities. This referred to the parent's opportunity to meet others and establish a community. Due to the busy lives of the parents, sporting events

gave these parents the opportunity to meet those they otherwise would not have been able to meet (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

The theme identified in this thesis refers to this parental benefit as “*Social Involvement*”; the friends’ parents were able to make throughout their child’s youth hockey career. This was done mostly during the development years when parents spend time together on the road and in hotels at various tournaments. However, during the Midget Triple A years, this benefit was not as common as parents had less of an opportunity to interact as travel requirements decreased. It appears that the benefits parents received in sports such as baseball, soccer, and basketball are consistent with the benefits parents received in hockey. The rationale why parents continued to support elite level hockey (i.e., life skills, hard work, and passion), are also referenced in existing literature (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008) as well as benefits the child receives from sport participation.

This thesis research not only identifies the support given by the parents, as well as the sacrifices parents made in order to support their children, but it also shows the benefits they received from this sacrifice. Parents involved in sports such as basketball, soccer, or baseball, may not have experienced sacrifices to the extent of those parents involved in elite youth hockey. Due to the cost of minor hockey in Canada, parents began to sacrifice things like luxury food experiences in order for their child to continue to play. This thesis research identified the sacrifices associated with elite participation and the benefits received from these sacrifices. Parents involved with the study never regretted their decision to continue to support their child, showing that despite not making it to

further development leagues (i.e., the CHL), the benefits they otherwise received outweighed the sacrifices. The benefits that a parent received from supporting elite youth sport are seldom explored in existing literature. A part from the benefits their children received, some internal rewards that parents receive are identified above.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis research sought to explore the parental support that exists within elite minor league hockey in Canada by exploring the lived experiences of the parents of adolescent players involved in Midget Triple A in Maritime Canada. This purpose statement, along with the thesis research were guided by four research questions:

- 1) How do parents describe the Midget Triple A experience?
- 2) Building on the parents Midget Triple A experience, how do parents of the Midget Triple A age group (15-16) describe the type of support they provide to their children?
- 3) How does a parent's support in hockey change from the Tyke and Novice age groups (6 - 8), to the Midget age group (15 - 16)?
- 4) What benefits do parents receive from supporting their child in elite level hockey, and why do they continue to support youth hockey?

To answer the above research questions, descriptive phenomenology was used to enable the thesis participants to provide full descriptions of their experiences pertaining the support they provided for their child who is playing Midget Triple A.

The findings highlight four themes of parental support, which address the first three research questions: *Managing Internal and External Pressure, the Transition from Coach to Parent-Spectator, Preparing for Life After Hockey, and Sacrificing for your Kids*. These themes were common to the thesis participants and are identified as tangible

and intangible support. Furthermore, the benefits, and reasons for continued support themes included: *A Shared Enjoyment of the Game, Social Involvement, Passion and Hard Work, and Life Lessons*. As their children progressed through elite hockey, the role of the parent changed from one continuously providing support and advice, to one that had to watch their child grow and develop on their own, with help from their child's coaches. If their child had a goal to continue playing elite hockey, parents needed to make various sacrifices to see them succeed. As that goal faded, parents helped prepare their child for a life after hockey, which included focusing them on other hobbies and interests, or preparing them for school.

The importance of this thesis research is shown through the sacrifices parents needed to make in order to support their child through elite youth hockey. Some of the sacrifices mentioned in this thesis research could be identified as extreme (e.g., transferring parental rights to a brother in order to play in Canada). The parents involved in the study discussed them as if they were common or a norm of playing at the Triple A level, while identifying the bigger issue of the price associated with participation at this level. Seemingly if these sacrifices are seen as normal, the price required to play elite sport might already be too high if parents are choosing between food or hockey. Parental sacrifices required to participate in elite youth sport is not a commonly identified subject in existing literature and warrants further exploration in order to gain an understanding of barriers to entry and retention in youth sport.

Alternatively, this thesis research demonstrated that there were benefits from supporting their child in youth hockey for parents despite the sacrifices they have made.

When asked if parents regret their decision to support elite youth hockey, all eleven parents stated that they did not, because of the benefits identified in this research. The discussion above addressed the idea that success (e.g., wins and losses, and being drafted in the CHL) is a rationale for why parents may commit such sacrifices to their child's youth sport. This thesis identified a list of benefits the parents received that did not include their child's success, demonstrating that parents were not supportive for reasons of seeing success for their child regarding the sport, but rather to see their child develop as a person with life skills. This is an important conclusion as it contradicts the existing literature (Coakley, 2006; Lauer et al., 2010), and modern media (Cornelius, 2014; Traikos, 2015) that recognizes success as a reason for extreme parental support.

When players reach this elite level, there were certain norms recognized by parents regarding the cost to support youth hockey, and the time commitment required to make it to Midget Triple A. The high costs, and the time commitment required by parents needed to be provided for an elite athlete to have a chance at success, and the parents recognized the commitments they need to make as a normality. With these commitments oftentimes comes the expectations of success. Midget Triple A organizations can seemingly appear like professional organizations with their facilities, team busses, and more due to the amount of money being put into the program. Due to the amount of money they provided the organization, the parents could have expected a certain amount of success and exposure for their child in return. Parents acted as a catalyst for inflating the idea of success, thinking that if they provided enough time and money, their child would make it to the NHL.

While the parents in this thesis research identified the norms and the commitments required by them, the benefits they received were different than what is commonly publicized. These parents recognized that their child's success in elite hockey was unlikely regarding making it to the NHL, and instead shifted their adolescents' focus to other aspirations with the goal of gaining life skills that will help them succeed in the future outside the realm of hockey. Parents involved with this study gained other benefits personally, which became part of the rationale for continuing to support their child in elite youth hockey.

Contributions

This thesis research provides eight contributions to existing research on parental support. These contributions are identified as follows: 1) model of parental support in elite sport; 2) identifying the differences between parent coach and parent spectator; 3) support in preparing for life after hockey; 4) benefits different from the idea of success; 5) a comprehensive guideline on support, 6) a guideline for coaches; 7) reasons for continued support in elite youth sport; and, 8) adding to descriptive phenomenology in a sporting context. The contributions are discussed further below.

The first contribution from this thesis research is the model created that illustrates the relationship between the themes identified in the findings with the types of support and the overall benefits of supporting their child in Midget Triple A. This model could be applied to other studies examining parental support to determine if it is applicable in other sports. Other sports may not have Midget Triple A to be exact, but this model could

be modified to fit the development paths of other elite sports, and whether parental sacrifices exist elsewhere.

The second contribution that this thesis research makes to sport parental support research is that through the data that was collected, it became evident that there was an evolution where a parent's support can be understood in the development years as the parent "coach", to the investment years where parents become the "spectator". The contribution this study makes is that it expands on the work of Chard et al. (2015), by exemplifying the amount of engagement that a parent provided in the form of support for their child in a hockey context. This is important as it shows a significant difference in the time commitment required in the Tyke/Novice years, versus that of the Midget age group. While actively involved as a coach in the younger years, and as the primary source of transportation to and from games and tournaments, this engagement level over time decreased significantly. Parents were no longer behind the bench at the Midget level as there were coaches with more years of experience, and greater records of success and development.

Due to the 16-18-year age group of Midget hockey, these adolescents began driving themselves, getting driven by their friends to games, or taking a team bus to tournaments, so parents were no longer involved in transportation. Parents watched the games if they had an interest, otherwise they were no longer actively involved in youth hockey, other than providing financial support. The "spectator" parent becomes more of an emotional support figure than the coach parent who focused on informational support. Parents could now focus on their own child's issues, rather than the management of a

whole team. If parents recognized that in the later years their informational support was not needed, perhaps they could recognize that they could avoid this support in the younger years, as this feedback could affect their athlete's performance and enjoyment of the sport (Jeffery-Tosoni & Fraser Thomas, 2015). Parents could expect a different role in the future, but its possible that parents could embrace the spectator role earlier, and let the coaches develop their players.

The third contribution this thesis research makes is the data collected that is not currently discussed in existing research. For example, the idea of preparing for a life beyond elite support was not found. Parents discussed having a "Plan B" in most cases for their child upon the conclusion of their hockey career. This "Plan B" was identified in the findings as a form of support that was not previously discussed. This form of support is the assistance parents provided their athlete when it came to planning for their future outside of elite sport. If their sporting careers were coming to an end, parents provided alternative suggestions on how they could remain active in the sport, while making money doing something else (i.e., sports agent). This form of support was not discussed frequently in existing literature because the Midget age group (15-18) was also not discussed. During this age, parents began preparing for their child's next step academically (university/college) where their participation in sports may not be as extreme. Exploring this age group of youth sports can lead to a greater understanding of the benefits to sport participation, as the final years could be used as a time of reflection and understanding on the benefits and deterrents of participation.

The fourth contribution is that based on the experiences of Midget Triple A parents as the expectations of the parents and the sacrifices they make are inherently linked. Due to the amount of time and money parents provided elite youth hockey, it is shown in the discussion that they could have expected a certain amount of development, success, or exposure from their commitment. Parent's commitments can add extra pressure to the child, as they may believe that they are expected to reward their parents for the sacrifices they have made. This could be cognitively or not cognitively imposed by the parents to the child. Despite this idea, parents in this study showed that success was not the ultimate goal to come from supporting Midget Triple A. Parents instead found that their child developed into a better person, while competing in a sport that their child loved to play, and had a passion toward. This thesis research deviated from the common idea of parents looking for success, and instead shows that parents sacrifice for their children, so that they can develop into better people, and have a chance to do something they love.

Looking at the practical implications, this thesis research provides a fifth contribution, identified as a comprehensive guideline to parental support in elite sport, specifically elite level hockey in the final years before the junior/professional level. Using data from parents involved in this high level of sport, the information they provided can show other parents multiple methods of supporting their child, and how to provide it. Parents could enhance their athletes' experiences by recognizing their children's independence early, and allowing them to solve their own problems. This

guideline enhances the existing literature surrounding parental support, and adds to an age group left unexplored.

Alternatively, this thesis research also provided a guideline for coaches involved in the elite programs, and how they can improve their teams and the overall experience of all those involved. Parents outlined various issues they had with the coach, such as their lack of presence in the dressing room, and their lack of focus on education. If the parents are happy with the experience they get from the coach of their child's team, parents were more willing to continue to support the team, and their child would be more inclined to continue to play for the coach. A parent is typically not happy if their child is unhappy. If the child is unhappy because of the coach, the parent will be as well. A coaches' role in elite sport is to develop the player into a better athlete, and a better person. If a parent finds that their child is not getting the best coaching available, they will not only be looking for a different coach to be involved with, but possibly a different sport as well. Parents identified how important the role of the coach was throughout the development of their child athlete. Bad coaching, or a bad organization, can be seen as a reason for youth hockey attrition (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). This thesis took into account the parents perspective of the coaches, and what the parents expect from them if they are going to act as proxies in delivering support.

Through their support, parents discussed the seventh contribution, which was the personal benefits parents received from being involved with elite hockey. They shared an enjoyment of the game with their child, whether that included watching them play, or participating with them. Parents expanded their social networks, making friends

throughout youth hockey, while also being able to spend time with their loved ones while watching their child play hockey. Despite the sacrifices parents made, they would continue to support elite level hockey because their child showed a passion for the game, and a willingness to work hard, as well as learning various life skills including teamwork, communication, and independence. This thesis research provides a holistic approach in understanding various methods of parental support, and the reasons why parents continued to provide support to elite youth hockey.

Finally, descriptive phenomenology was used as a methodological analysis which has not been used frequently throughout youth sport literature, specifically in the context of hockey. Using descriptive phenomenology allowed for parents to give their full beliefs, opinions, and experiences on support in elite youth hockey without misinterpretation. As seen in the findings above, descriptive phenomenology allowed for parents to provide full and descriptive quotes to define their support, and their reasons for being involved. Phenomenology has not been used in this specific context before, and using descriptive phenomenology allowed for this phenomenon of support in elite youth hockey to be written in full detail and description, so that others may begin to know what elite youth hockey is like to those providing the support.

Limitations

This study was limited by the lack of participants willing to volunteer for this thesis research from the Maritimes in Atlantic Canada. As flyers were distributed in the arena that hosted the largest Midget Triple A tournament in the Canadian Maritimes, only two parents responded from that tournament, which included five different teams. A

possible explanation for the limited sample size is the language barrier between French and English, as the flyers were displayed only in English, in a bilingual area of New Brunswick. This could have deterred the French speaking population of New Brunswick from responding to the call for participants. The thesis participants were primarily gathered through word of mouth, as parents involved with the Fredericton, and Saint John teams asked for other parents from their respective teams to participate as well. A larger participant base, or one outside of Atlantic Canada, could have led to different experiences, and more data surrounding parental support in elite level hockey, and would allow for a comparison based on geography.

Another limitation of this thesis research was that participants sampled were mainly Caucasian, and came from hetero-normative backgrounds. While a majority of hockey's population comes from a similar background, this study does not provide insight into the experiences of other races, or family lifestyles. It must also be noted that it was impossible to identify the race of the participants whose interviews were completed over the phone, as this was not a question asked during the interview.

Future Studies

As a direct follow up to this thesis research, a study that could be completed if explored phenomenologically would be that of the athlete's involved. While the parents discussed their own experience, they also made statements regarding what the athlete may believe. Hearing the athletes' direct, and descriptive reasons for why they continue to play hockey, and the reasons they got into hockey to begin with could further contribute to the benefits of sport research. Comparing and contrasting the opinions of

parents and athletes could examine the question regarding parental pressure, and whether the athlete experienced it more as a result of the sacrifices these parents were making.

During the interviews, parents also discussed what organizations and governing bodies like Hockey Canada could do in order to improve the parental experience. While not directly related to support in elite youth hockey, these answers could be used for a separate study to discuss improvements that could be made to the minor league structure of youth hockey in Canada. Parents ultimately made the choice on whether their child participated in sport. If researchers can further understand why parents choose to become involved, this could help the organization increase their participant base, and improve how the sport is delivered. These answers discussed issues like cost, coach selection, and politics involved.

Another study could be done on coaching in elite youth hockey in Canada. In this thesis, parents frequently discussed the coach and his role in athlete development. The opinions of parents could lead to a greater understanding of what the parents believe the coach could do better to improve the development of their children as athletes, and citizens. Parents stressed the importance of their coaches, and also discussed the idea of not having other parents involved in the sport organization as coaches at all. This future study could be a start in the development of not only better coaching, but the development of better athletes as well.

It would also be interesting to explore the parenting experience of minority groups in youth hockey to compare and contrast the experiences versus those of the typical Caucasian, heterosexual families involved with youth hockey. As most participants came

from this type of population, the experiences of other groups were not actively explored in this study. This could develop insight into how to get these families involved with youth hockey, and further the growth of the sport.

This thesis research was designed and written for parents thinking about entering their child in elite youth hockey. As the purchaser of youth sport, and as those primarily responsible for their children's involvement in athletics, parents can ask themselves why they are enrolling their child in elite sport. If parents are looking for their child to become a successful athlete, they might want to examine the research that shows negative outcomes for athletes that are pressured to succeed, and the statistics that show the odds of success. If parents are not looking for their athlete's ultimate success, they will be happy with the benefits they receive from supporting their child in elite sport.

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Appendix A

Dear Parent,

My name is Joseph Todd. I am a second year Master of Arts student at the University of New Brunswick studying Sports and Recreation, with a specific focus on hockey. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Jonathon Edwards. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2017-030. Based on your involvement with the New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island Major Midget AAA Hockey League, I am asking you to consider being a participant in my study. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of parents who have provided support in elite level hockey. This study will explore the other ways you have provided support within the sport of hockey, and why you have done it throughout the years. This is a voluntary study which you do not have to be a part of unless you give your permission. I have attached to this email an information letter providing more detail on the study. If you are interested, please reply to this email, or email me separately at joe.nate.todd@gmail.com, or contact me via phone at 289-231-2282.

Thanks for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Joseph Todd

Appendix B



Midget AAA Parent Research Study

Are you a parent of a child involved in Midget AAA?

I am looking for parents to discuss their experiences supporting youth hockey in Atlantic Canada.

I am asking for approximately an hour of your time to sit down with me and talk about your experiences supporting elite youth hockey.

Some of the questions that you may be asked will include the following:

- 1) Describe your experience with youth hockey when your child was younger
- 2) Can you describe the costs of supporting?
- 3) How has your support changed now that your child is older?
- 4) Why have you supported your child in youth hockey?

Contact

joe.nate.todd@gmail.com or 289-231-2282

Research Ethics Board file number: 2017-030

Appendix C

Title of Project: **A Phenomenological Exploration of Parental Support in Elite Midget AAA Hockey**

Dear Parent:

My name is Joseph Todd, and I am a graduate student at the University of New Brunswick in the Sports and Recreation program under the Faculty of Kinesiology. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2017-030

Since you have a child involved within the New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island Major Midget AAA League, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study that focuses on you, the parent, and the support you have provided your child in elite youth hockey. This paper focuses on parental support and the ways you have supported your child throughout their youth hockey career. My hope with this research is to explore reasons for parental support in youth hockey, and the various ways support is offered to elite level athletes. This is a voluntary study, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time if you do elect to participate.

I am inviting you to sit down and talk with me one-on-one for an interview. These interviews will take place either in person, at a location of your choosing, or over the

phone, and will range from approximately 30-60 minutes. Before the interview begins, we will go through this information letter together, as well as a consent form to assure your participation. At any time during the course of the interview, you may pass on a question and you are also allowed to withdraw from the study with no consequence to you. You will have access to the summary of my findings once completed, as it will ensure the accuracy of your response.

Some of the questions that you may be asked will include the following:

1. Describe your experience with youth hockey when your child was younger
- 5) Can you describe the costs of supporting?
- 6) How has your support changed now that your child is older?
- 7) Why have you supported your child in youth hockey?

These, among other questions relating to your support within elite level hockey, will allow me to answer my research questions involved in completing this study.

All of the transcribed data, will be kept confidential on my secure, password protected personal computer. The signed consent forms will be sent to my supervisor, and kept in a locked filing cabinet at the university. Your identity will be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms, and any identifying statements regarding you or your family such as names and your location, will be removed. Raw data will be kept for a 5 year minimum, then will be destroyed. You will be sent a summary of my initial findings, including any common themes that arose as a result of your answers and then later, a final draft of the thesis. For both the summary of findings and the final draft, you will be given 2 weeks to

review and submit feedback before the thesis is submitted for final review, as this will ensure that what you said is accurate.

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences within minor hockey. This research will add to the existing literature surrounding parental involvement in sports and the important role parents play in encouraging and developing elite level athletes.

If you have any questions surrounding this study, you are free to contact Dr. Wayne Albert, at walbert@unb.ca or by phone at 506-453-4576. Dr. Albert the Dean of the Faculty of Kinesiology, has no direct connection to this study. Furthermore, you may also contact me or my thesis supervisor at any time to discuss the study using our contact information provided below.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Principal Investigator: Joseph Todd

MA Sports and Recreation

University of New Brunswick – Faculty of Kinesiology

Joe.nate.todd@gmail.com

289-231-2282.

Supervisor: Professor Jon Edwards

University of New Brunswick Faculty of Kinesiology

Jonathon.edwards@unb.ca

506 453 5139

Appendix D

Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this study is explore the parental motivations for supporting your adolescent children in youth hockey. You have been asked to participate because you are a parent of a child in the NB/PEI Midget AAA hockey league, the age and skill level that is the focus of this research. This is a voluntary research study, if you are ever uncomfortable or do not wish to proceed you are allowed to leave at any time without any consequences. Let's get started.

- 1) Describe your involvement in sports/hockey
 - a. What were your goals when you played?
 - b. Why did you play? What benefits did you gain?
- 2) Describe how your son became involved in hockey?
 - a. How long have your children been playing competitively?
- 3) What are your child's dreams as it relates to hockey?
 - a. What do you think it mean for him to play AAA hockey?
 - b. How do you feel as a parent with him playing AAA?

Research Question 1

- 1) Could you give me your definition of support?
- 2) If you heard the term parental support, how would you define it?
 - a. Why is parental support important?
- 3) Describe the ways you support your child in general?
- 4) Describe your experience in hockey when your child was younger?
 - a. Did you enjoy it?

- 5) How did you support your child when he began hockey in the younger leagues?
 - a. What did you do for them?
- 6) Has there been changes now that they are 15-16?
 - a. What do you do now, that you didn't do then?
- 7) Could you tell me about the costs or sacrifices you may have had to make when they were younger?
 - i. Financially?
 - ii. Time wise?
 - iii. Emotionally?
- 8) How have these changed now that they are playing Midget AAA?
 - a. What do you do now, that you didn't do then?
 - b. What are the different aspects that you as a parent need to pay for?
 - c. How much do you think this season has/will cost?
 - d. Time investments?
 - e. Any emotional challenges?
- 9) Did your child participate in any other sports besides hockey?
 - a. What happened to that sport (s)?
 - b. Describe how important it was for you as a parent to have your child to be involved in more than one sport or just one sport? Why?
 - c. Were you forced to quit? Describe the situation.
 - d. Why did you and your child choose to commit/invest in hockey?
- 10) Is there external pressure (peers, coaches) to commit to hockey?

- 11) Do you enjoy your experience in hockey now that he is older?
- a. Was it more enjoyable then or now?

Research Question 2

- 1) What are your child's dreams as it relates to hockey?
 - a. How does playing Triple A facilitate that dream?
 - b. Describe what you have done to promote this dream?
- 2) What role do you play when your child is on the ice?
 - a. What kind of behaviours do you show at the rink? Try to coach?
Motivate?
 - b. How has your involvement level changed over time?
- 3) When you're at the rink, what do you see other parents doing?
 - a. How do they act? Positively? Negatively?
 - b. What impact has those behaviors had on you as a parent at the rink?
Explain.
- 4) How do you motivate your son? Provide some examples.
- 5) How do you encourage your son's personal/player development?
- 6) Have you ever felt that your son should drop out of hockey?
 - a. Why? Why not?

Research Question 3

- 1) How did you feel being involved in hockey when your son was younger?
- 2) What benefits did you receive from it? Personal Satisfaction? Friendships?

- 3) Now that he is older, have those feelings changed? If so, how?
- 4) Has hockey been worth the time, money, and emotional support you have committed to it over the years? Why?
 - a. Would there be anything else you would be willing to spend that money on? If so, what?
- 5) Can you describe what making this commitment feels like?
 - a. Is that commitment important to you? Why?
- 6) Is there anything that hockey could do better to improve parental experience?
- 7) Why have you supported your child in youth hockey? (ask if not posed in Research Question 1- Question 1a)

Thank you for your time, and I appreciate your willingness to be involved in the study. Is there anything final you would like to add?

Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Joseph Nathaniel Todd

Universities attended (with dates and degrees obtained): Nipissing University, 2015,

Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy

Publications: N/A

Conference Presentations:

Edwards, J.R., & Todd, J. (2016). Understanding the Status of Events Linked with

National Identity: An Analysis of the Status of the World Junior Hockey

Championships. Oral presentation at *The Hockey Conference* in Fredericton, New

Brunswick, Canada, July 6-7, 2016.

Todd, J. (2018). A Phenomenological Exploration of Parental Support in Elite Midget

AAA Hockey in the Maritimes. Oral presentation at *The Hockey Conference* in

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, July 4-8, 2018.