

**The Sidney Effect:  
Competitive Youth Hockey and Fantasy Relationships**

by

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A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Public Issues Anthropology

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2009

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**Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how a group of 17 male youth athletes, and their families, experience competitive hockey. Many of the youths seem to forge fantasy relationships with hockey celebrities, heroes, and stars – e.g. Sidney Crosby – emulating them with regard to the “best” attitudes, equipment, and styles of play to have or use. Their parents invest considerable amounts of money and time into their sons’ participation in hockey, not because they necessarily share their sons’ dreams of athletic stardom, but because they hope that it will help instill community-defined “positive” values into their sons—tools needed to become “successful” youths and, eventually, adults.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the anthropology department's faculty and staff at the University of Waterloo for two great years. I am particularly grateful to my primary supervisor, Dr. Harriet Lyons. Taking her advice to switch thesis topics was one of the best decisions I've ever made. The dedication and support that she gives to her students is second to none. I would also like to thank the two other members of my supervisory committee, Dr. Gray Graffam and Dr. Frans Schryer. Like Dr. Lyons, they helped make this a challenging and rewarding process. I am forever grateful to my committee for their dedication to this project.

Faculty members from the University of Guelph that I had the pleasure to learn from include: Dr. Satsuki Kawano, Dr. Belinda Leach, and Dr. Renee Sylvain.

I would also like to thank Dr. Tom Abler, Dr. Jasmin Habib, Dr. Mary Jackes, Dr. Maria Liston, Dr. David Lubell, Dr. Andrew Lyons, Dr. Robert MacDonald, Dr. Robert Park, Allyson Rowat, Dr. Anne Zeller, and the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo for their help along the way.

Some of my fondest memories over the past few years were had with my classmates. To the department's first graduate students – Consuelo Griggio, Jill Johnson, Scott Moore, Kevin Nixon, and Kayleigh Platz – thank you for the many fun and helpful afternoons at the Grad House. I would also like to thank Heather Alexander, Emily Brett, Kim Campbell, Amanda Clutton, Samantha Devries, Laila Harris, Megan Hine, and Juliet O'Farrell. Best wishes to all current and graduating students of the programme!

I have been fortunate to keep in contact with several faculty members and students at Dalhousie University—Kelly Baker, Jenny Benson, Liesl Gambold, Alex Khasnabish (now at Mount Saint Vincent University), Ari Najarian, and Ian Shelton. Thanks for your help as an undergraduate and now graduate student. Clarence Batan and Dr. Robin Oakley continue to serve as inspirations to me.

Thank you to my parents, Mark and Nancy Theoret, and brothers, Daniel, Christopher, Nicholas, and Jacob. To the rest of my family and friends, thank you for all the support over the last few years. It was nice to be home again. A special thanks is owed to Laura Palmer for always being there.

This project, of course, could not have been possible without my participants. I am especially grateful for their willingness to take time out of their already *busy* schedules for me. Their dedication to this project will never be forgotten. Your feedback is valued and encouraged. Thank-you!

Like with my participants, I have attempted to represent those authors referenced in this thesis as accurately as possible.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the Tigers' players. Thank you for an exciting and informative four months. Keep chasing your dreams.

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**List of Diagrams**

Basic Hockey Rink

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“ Well, he is the one who they market the most. He is the one who is supposed to help turn some of the teams around that [are] struggling, right. They rearrange their schedule just to get him in cities that he normally wouldn't play in, just to get more people into the arena. ” -Participant's comments about Sidney Crosby (National Hockey League player)

## Preface

A research paper that I completed in April 2008 inspired this project. The study consisted primarily of participant-observation and semi-structured interviews with three twelve-year-old male hockey players, with the aim of understanding the degree to which, and in what ways, the NHL and its players influenced the youths' hockey related purchases (e.g. equipment and memorabilia). I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the youths' parents, aspiring to strengthen my understanding of the impact that the NHL's marketing strategies had on these youths. Being an avid sports fan and having played recreational and competitive sports since my childhood, I knew, well before beginning this research project, how influential professional athletes, coaches, and teams can be.<sup>1</sup> Supporting my suspicions, my preliminary research findings demonstrated that the NHL's marketing strategies are indeed working. From autographs and bed-sheets, collector's cards and doormats, posters and videogames, to 'top of the line' hockey equipment, these youths seemed to be strongly influenced by the NHL and its players, and drawn to the products that they endorse (Theoret 2008). These findings, although based on a very small participant sample, shaped *this* project from the outset.

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<sup>1</sup> Growing up, I played a wide range of different sports, including: ball hockey, basketball, baseball, cross-country running, dragon boat racing, golf, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, and a variety of track and field sports, including high jump and some short distance running events. Of these sports, ice hockey was always my favourite.

“ Team jackets, sweatshirts, hats, pennants, and posters are sold in stores. Bedrooms and dens are decorated with sports accessories such as lamps, rugs, and beer mugs with the team’s logo. All of these send out the message that sport is something important. Is it any wonder that *sport heroes are idolized?* ”

-Vogler and Schwartz, 1993, Pp. 21, my emphasis

## Chapter 1: Introduction

To explore how young athletes, and their families, experience competitive sports, I spent four months studying a youth ice hockey team from Southwestern Ontario, called ‘the Tigers’.<sup>2</sup> The focus of this thesis investigates the one-sided ‘social relationships’ that exist between sports fans and professional athletes, in particular, between youth hockey fans and National Hockey League (NHL) players. Such relationships, although sometimes perceived by the fans as ‘actual social relationships’, might be more accurately classified as ‘fantasy’ or ‘imaginary social relationships’ because of the limited, or nonexistent, interaction between the two parties (Caughey 1978; 1984; 1994).<sup>3</sup> Countless adoring sport fans, of all ages, enter into fantasy relationships with professional athletes by turning them into ‘heroes’. Fans are especially drawn to the ‘stars’ – a type of glorified ‘celebrity’ – that is to say, the athletes that excel both on and off the field. Contemporary hockey players like Sidney Crosby, Alexander Ovechkin, and Dion Phaneuf are excellent examples of ‘hockey stars’ – elite players with ‘role model’ personas – that are highly marketable by the NHL and related corporate sponsors.

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<sup>2</sup> The team’s name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the project’s participants.

<sup>3</sup> My use of the concept imaginary or fantasy social relationships is derived from Caughey’s explanations. He (1994: 127; my emphasis) writes: “In several classic articles, A. I. Hallowell (1955, 1960) argued that anthropologists have generally taken a narrow and ethnocentric view of social relationships. In many societies, he argued, *the individual subjectively experiences connections with figures beyond the circle of those persons he or she actually interacts with – and that these connections can be usefully understood as special ‘social relationships.’* What he had in mind was the way in which individuals in some traditional cultures experience vivid interactions with ghosts or spirits in dreams and visions. A similar approach can be usefully taken to contemporary imagination generally and to the modern mass media in particular.”

## **Tiger Hockey**

This team has 17 ‘regular players’, consisting of nine forwards, six defenseman, and two goaltenders; the team also has several associated players (‘AP players’) that play in the absence (e.g. injury) of a regular player.<sup>4</sup> These players, all male, are between the ages of 13 and 14. For their age and locality, the Tigers are considered to be of the highest skill level.

A hockey team is made up of more than just its players. Arguably, like most amateur youth teams, the Tigers could not exist without the help of the players’ parents, some of whom also perform the team’s unpaid coaching, managerial, and training duties. “I don’t think we’re a typical family,” one father said to me, “we’re a *hockey family*” (my emphasis). Like this parent, I think, many other people – mostly the players’ relatives – feel that they are ‘members’ of the ‘team’. Many of these adults, since childhood, have been fans of hockey, which adds an interesting dynamic to how they raise their own children. The world of sport, it seems to these parents, is a trusted and opportune space for child rearing.

For adults and youths alike, the seriousness of ‘Tiger Hockey’ raises some interesting questions about the perceived purpose(s) of playing competitive youth sports. Many of the youths seem to forge fantasy relationships with hockey celebrities, heroes, and stars, emulating them with regard to the “best” attitudes, equipment, and styles of play to have or use, because they are convinced that such ‘things’ will improve their chances of achieving athletic stardom. The youths’ parents indirectly support these fantasy relationships by investing considerable amounts of money and time into their

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<sup>4</sup> I had very little contact with AP players, besides observing one of them playing during an away game. I did, however, have the opportunity to meet and briefly talk to the goaltender’s mother while watching the game.

sons' participation in hockey. The parents do not do this because they necessarily share their sons' dreams of professional hockey careers, though. Instead, they hope that hockey will help instill community-defined "positive" values within their sons—tools needed to become "successful" youths and, eventually, adults.

### **Defining Celebrities, Heroes, and Stars**

Some hockey celebrities are promoted more than others because of their 'star potential', which separates 'sports stars' from 'sports heroes'. *Any* athlete, I argue, can be a hero, but not *every* athlete can be a star. "A sports hero," Archetti (2001: 153) explains, "can be any person admired for given qualities or achievements and regarded as an ideal or model." What is considered a 'quality' or 'achievement' depends on the fan. The categorization of a sports hero, then, is entirely subjective. Therefore, an athlete who is not a model of standard cultural values can still be considered a hero. Take Sean Avery, a professional Canadian hockey player, for instance. Avery is certainly a celebrity, potentially a hero, but I argue, not a star. After four seasons in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) with the Owen Sound Platers and Kingston Frontenacs, Avery began his NHL career in 1999 with the Detroit Red Wings (NHL 2009; NHL 2009a). He was traded from the Red Wings to the Los Angeles Kings in 2003, and then from the Kings to the New York Rangers in 2007 (Hockey Database 2008). In 2008, after two seasons with the Rangers – where he accumulated a total of 23 goals, 30 assists, +17 rating, and 212 penalty minutes in 86 games – Avery signed a lucrative four-year contract with the Dallas Stars, reportedly worth \$15.5 million dollars—approximately \$3.9 million dollars per year (NHL 2009; TSN 2008). Avery's relatively young professional hockey career has been *filled* with controversy. His on-ice antics (ESPN 2008; Zinser 2008), contentious

off-ice comments (TSN 2005; TSN 2008a), and public relationship with ex-girlfriend and Canadian actress, Elisha Cuthbert (24; *The Girl Next Door*), add to his hockey celebrity status (McErlain 2007). Brett Hull, a retired professional American hockey player and now co-general manager of the Stars, once called Avery someone “who goes against the stream” and who has the “ability to play the game with skill and tenacity” (TSN 2008). Some fans might idolize his gritty style of play, making him a hockey hero. It is Avery’s villainous media image, however, that restricts him from becoming a hockey star. In December 2008, Avery received a six-game suspension from the NHL for his indirect comments about former girlfriend, Cuthbert, and her new boyfriend, Calgary Flames’ defenseman Dion Phaneuf (TSN 2008a).<sup>5</sup> “I just want to comment on how it’s become like a common thing in the NHL,” Avery began, “for guys to fall in love with my *sloppy seconds*. I don’t know what that’s about. Enjoy the game tonight” (TSN 2008a; my emphasis).<sup>6</sup> Because of comments like these, in part, Avery is not deemed a role model. Indeed, a crucial factor in an athlete’s rise to stardom is his or her willingness to conform to, and promote, positive cultural values. However, a factor just as essential to reaching stardom – *if not more important* – is athletic ability. I described Avery’s play as ‘skillful’. This is, in my humble opinion as a hockey fan, an accurate assessment of his on-ice skills. While I think Avery is a talented hockey player, I would *not* rank him among the sport’s current best (e.g. Zdeno Chara – defenseman, Sidney Crosby – forward, Roberto Luongo – goaltender, Evgeni Malkin – forward, Alexander Ovechkin –

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<sup>5</sup> Before Avery could return from suspension, he had to undergo an anger management evaluation (ESPN 2008); after being put on re-entry waivers by the Stars, Avery was claimed by his former team, the Rangers (TSN 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Before dating Phaneuf, Cuthbert “had been romantically linked to” Mike Komisarek, a defenseman for the Montreal Canadiens (Sportsnet 2008). Further, another ex-girlfriend of Avery’s, actress and model Rachel Wood, is currently dating Jarrett Stoll, a forward for the Los Angeles Kings (Sportsnet 2008).

forward, Dion Phaneuf – defenseman). These players, unlike Avery, might be considered ‘franchise players’—the type of player that a team builds around because of their elite skill-set and off-ice personality. Admittedly, the concept ‘sports star’ is quite ambiguous. The best example of a current hockey star is Sidney Crosby.

### **The Sidney Effect**

Hockey fans, I believe, most commonly enter into fantasy relationships with players like Sidney Crosby—heavily promoted athletes that are highly skilled and perceived as role models.<sup>7</sup> Crosby (also known as: Sid the Kid, The Next One, Wizard of Croz) serves as the NHL’s unofficial spokesperson or ‘poster boy’. Crosby’s ex-teammate, Georges Laraque, best described what the young phenom means to the league: “Hockey is lucky in the fact [that] Mario [Lemieux] and Wayne [Gretzky] were great *ambassadors* on and off the ice. Crosby is *taking over* from them. He handles himself really good in front of the cameras. We’re just lucky the NHL has such a great kid to be *the face* of the NHL” (Christie 2007; my emphasis). Of the project’s 28 adult participants asked, 96% considered Crosby to be the NHL’s “poster boy.”<sup>8</sup> “Crosby is the poster boy for the ‘New NHL’ ... you know, he’s a clean-cut kid, he looks like a young Clark Kent, you

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<sup>7</sup> I was first introduced to the phrase, “the Sidney Effect,” by Michael Farber, a celebrated Sports Illustrated staff writer (2007/2008). He writes: “Crosby’s Penguins played to 96% of capacity in their 41 road games in 2006--2007, typically exceeding the home team’s average attendance. When the Penguins were on NBC, ratings were up 33%, an increase of about 338,000 households over non- Pittsburgh games. Versus, the NHL’s subterranean cable partner, had a 50% bump from Penguins games, about 80,000 extra homes ... The Sidney Effect has been even more dramatic in Pittsburgh, where the Penguins will most likely sell out every game this season, something that never happened during Mario Lemieux’s Pittsburgh tenure, not even during the Stanley Cup seasons of 1990--1991 and ’91--’92” (Farber 2007/2008). Plenty of other current NHL players – perhaps not to the same degree as Crosby – have the ability to draw in, and captivate, an audience. Also like Crosby, these players – again, perhaps not to the same degree as him – become pervasive media figures because of their elite talent and perceived role model personalities.

<sup>8</sup> Some parents also mentioned other “up and coming” players that might share this label, including: Alexander Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals and Steven Stamkos of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

know (laughter),” one participant began, “... he’s got all that going for him plus a lot of talent and ... he appeals to the youth. Kids look up to him and that’s important.”

It is no secret that Crosby is regarded as the league’s *savior*. The NHL, much like the NBA during the ’80s and ’90s, is in a transformational stage, attempting to revitalize its damaged image and improve its popularity (Jackson and Andrews 1999). In 2003, with the league’s current collective bargaining agreement expiring at the end of the 2003-2004 season, the NHL and the National Hockey League’s Players’ Association (NHLPA) began early negotiations towards a new deal. Unable to reach an agreement by October 2004, the start of the NHL’s 2004-2005 season was delayed; discussions continued from October 2004 through February 2005, with the aim of salvaging the rest of the season. Despite ongoing dialogue between the two sides, on February 16, 2005, the NHL’s commissioner, Gary Bettman, did the unthinkable, by officially canceling the entire season. After finalizing a new deal on July 22, 2005, the NHL’s 2005-2006 season was scheduled to begin that following October (TSN 2009a, 2009b). Jim McKenzie, then 15-year NHL veteran, but now retired, had this to say about the lockout: “our next big step -- winning back the fans,” adding that the league will have their “work cut out for [them]” (ESPN 2005; Hockey Database 2008a). Wayne ‘The Great One’ Gretzky, a retired professional Canadian hockey player and current head-coach of the Phoenix Coyotes, reiterated McKenzie’s concerns: ““At the end of the day everybody lost ... We almost *crippled* our industry”” (ESPN 2005; my emphasis). Before the lockout ended, Michael Farber (2005/2008) guessed that the NHL would turn to a personality, not just a player, to help the league rebound: “When (and perhaps if) the NHL lockout finally ends, an explosion of raw offense isn’t likely to rekindle interest in the league—but a personality

might.” Any uncertainties or repercussions from the lockout seem to have dwindled. According to Commissioner Bettman, Adams (2009) writes: “[the] NHL is holding its own economically.” Many now refer to the league as the ‘New NHL’. The league’s revitalization, in large part, is due to the emergence of players like Patrick Kane, Evgeni Malkin, Alexander Ovechkin, Dion Phaneuf, and the pack’s leader, Sidney Crosby—exceptionally talented and young players touted as role models. In this way, some might argue, the NHL has transformed its premier young talent into stars—commodities used to rejuvenate the league, much like a struggling NBA did with Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, and Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson (Jackson and Andrews 1999).

Crosby, thus far, has lived up to expectations. “Not since Wayne Gretzky or Mario Lemieux,” Poulton (2008: 39) writes, “has one player electrified the imaginations and passions of so many as Sidney Crosby. Although just a few years into his NHL career, the young star has broken away from the comparisons to the former greats and has started to clear a space for himself in the history books.” In addition to Crosby’s outstanding play, his personality meets all role model standards. Here are just some of the ways that the project’s participants described him: attractive, clean-cut, groomed, hard working, influential, inspirational, likeable, modest, nice, relatable, talented, well grounded, and well spoken. He has also been described as “polished, even-keeled, unfazed and unafraid to take advantage of cliches” (Yorio 2005). TJ Madigan (2008), a TSN affiliate columnist, writes: “I actually buy into the idea that he’s a genuinely nice guy. Maybe he overplays the humble, small-town, hard-working, so-Canadian-I-bleed-Maple-syrup gimmick, but despite my usual cynicism for all things sportsmanlike, I find him to be... well... believable.” Madigan’s representation of Crosby, although



exaggerated for the purpose of humour, seems fairly accurate. Crosby's elite talent and role model personality is what has attracted advertisers to him. If athletic stardom is determined by endorsement deals – which, I argue, it is – then Crosby is the sport's *ultimate superstar*. Described as an “industry” by TSN, Crosby endorses (or has endorsed), among others, the following corporations: Frameworth Sport Marketing (which sells official Sidney Crosby memorabilia), Frito Lay's, Gatorade, PepsiCo, Reebok, Sherwood, Telus, Tim Hortons, and Upper Deck (Dvorchak 2008; Farber 2007/2008; Halifax Live 2006/2009; TSN 2005a).

### **The Basics of Ice Hockey**

The purpose of the following sections is to simply outline the very *basics* of ‘ice hockey’, commonly referred to as ‘the fastest game on earth’.<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed description of the sport, see these works (Human Kinetics and Hanlon 2009; Rossiter and Carson 2006; Triumph Books 2008). Much of the forthcoming explanation is primarily based on my personal experience of playing and observing hockey, as an athlete, fan, and, now, researcher.<sup>10</sup> While the Tigers adhere to most of the rules presented here, *some* differences do exist. These differences have been withheld, however, because revealing them would risk the anonymity of the project's participants.

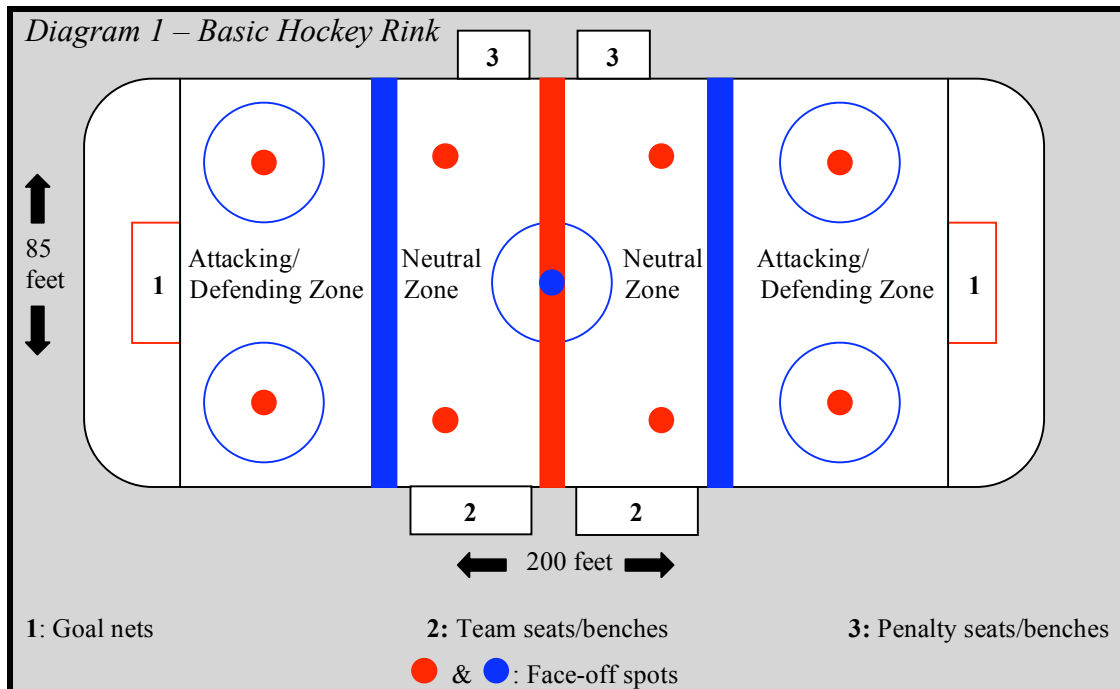
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<sup>9</sup> Other forms of hockey include, but are not limited to: ‘ball hockey’, ‘field hockey’, ‘inline roller hockey’, ‘mini-stick hockey’, ‘pond hockey’, ‘road hockey’, and ‘underwater hockey’. When I discuss ‘hockey’, unless otherwise stated, I am only referring to league organized ‘ice hockey’.

<sup>10</sup> Playing hockey on a backyard ice surface – built by my father – or watching hockey with childhood friends are some of my earliest memories. Since the age of five, both competitively and recreationally, I have played in organized hockey leagues.

## Playing Surfaces

Hockey is played on an artificially made ice surface, called an 'ice rink', which is usually constructed inside a sporting 'arena' or 'complex'. An ice rink, by North American standards, is 200 feet long by 85 feet wide and has rounded corners (NHL 2007: 1). Surrounding the rink are boards and safety glass that extend between, approximately, eight feet and twelve feet above the ice surface, depending on the section of the rink (NHL 2007: 1). Two lines, blue in colour, divide the rink into three sections: 'attacking zone', 'neutral zone', and 'defending zone'. Also, there are nine areas on the rink, marked by blue and red dots, where the game can continue after a stoppage of play, called 'face-off spots' (NHL 2007: 2-3). For a visual representation of a basic hockey rink, refer to *Diagram 1*.



## **Players and Positions**

Players are categorized by three general positions: ‘defense’, ‘forward’, and ‘goaltender’. Defense is subdivided into two specific positions: ‘left defense’ and ‘right defense’. Likewise, forward is subdivided into three specific positions: ‘left wing’, ‘center’, and ‘right wing’. Defensive and forward players are some times called ‘skaters’, to make the distinction between them and goaltenders (more commonly referred to as a ‘goalie’ or ‘tender’).

Only six players, with a maximum of one goaltender, are permitted to play on the ice at one time. While skaters are permitted to play in all three sections of the rink, goaltenders are restricted, for the most part, to the defending zone. There are, in addition to the six players on the ice, 14 ‘reserve’ or ‘substitute’ players – 13 skaters and one (1) goaltender – who watch the game from the team’s ‘bench’ or ‘seat’. The players’ objective is to ‘score’ a ‘goal’ by shooting the ‘puck’ into the opposing team’s ‘goal net’. The team that accumulates the greatest number of goals during the ‘game’ or ‘contest’, which consists of three 20-minute ‘periods’, is declared the winner.

## **Penalties**

A player can be ‘penalized’ for a variety of illegal actions, including, but not limited to: ‘fighting’ or ‘interfering’ with an opponent; ‘slashing’ or ‘tripping’ an opponent; acting in an ‘unsportsmanlike’ manner towards coaches, fans, opponents, or referees. Depending on the type of penalty, the offender must serve a pre-determined amount of time – usually between two (2) minutes and 10 minutes – in the ‘penalty seat/bench’, or as it is more commonly referred to as, ‘the box’ or ‘sin bin’. The offender’s team is then

‘short-handed’ and must continue play with one less player than their competitors until the penalty ends or the fouled team scores.

### **Other General Rules**

All three periods begin by ‘dropping the puck’ on the ‘red line’ at the blue face-off spot, located at ‘center ice’. Play can stop for several reasons, including, but not limited to: an icing, injury, goalie save, penalty, offside, or because the puck went over the boards and/or safety glass. The puck is then re-dropped at the face-off spot closest to where the stoppage of play occurred. Players entering their attacking zone – the opponent’s defending zone – may only cross the ‘blue line’ after the puck. Should one of the players’ skates cross the blue line before the puck, they have committed an ‘offside’ infraction, which results in a stoppage of play. The play then continues at one of the two face-off spots, indicated by red dots, just outside of the breached zone. Further, players cannot shoot the puck into their attacking zone – the opponent’s defending zone – from behind the red line, if they do so, they have committed an ‘icing’ infraction, which also results in a stoppage of play. The play then continues at one of the two face-off spots, indicated by red dots, inside the skaters’ own defending zone. There are, of course, many other rules that govern how hockey is played. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the presented rules will suffice.

### **Association and League Membership**

The community hockey organization that the Tigers belong to is a member of an Ontario association that offers female and male amateur teams competitive leagues to play in, including this team’s Bantam ‘AAA’ league. This association, along with six others, is

governed by a provincial organization, the Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF). Likewise, a federal body, Hockey Canada, oversees the OHF.<sup>11</sup>

### **Canadian Minor Hockey Age and Skill Groups**

The Tigers belong to a community hockey organization that is structured by age and skill. Hockey Canada (2008) has seven age groups: Initiation (ages: 5, 6); Novice (7, 8); Atom (9, 10); Pee wee (11, 12); Bantam (13, 14); Midget (15, 16, 17); and Junior (20 and under). For each age group, participants must be that age “as of December 31<sup>st</sup> of the current season” (Hockey Canada 2008a). A variety of leagues can exist, that are supposedly structured by skill level, for most of these age groups. Leagues might be divided into two general categories: ‘non-competitive’ and ‘competitive’. Non-competitive teams – more commonly referred to as ‘house league’ teams – primarily play against teams from within their own district, which requires little to no travel beyond the community’s borders. Competitive teams – more commonly referred to as ‘travel’ or ‘rep(resentative)’ teams – primarily play against teams from outside of the community’s borders—greater skill level generally means greater traveling distances.<sup>12</sup>

### **Map of Thesis**

While I set out to find more definitive answers to my questions about sports fans and their relationships with sports celebrities, what I found was something more telling about the perceived value of sport in general. My research findings demonstrate the significant role that adults (coaches, parents, and professional athletes) play in how youths experience sport. The project’s adult participants, I contend, support their children’s

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<sup>11</sup> The references for this information have been omitted to protect the anonymity of the project’s participants and greater hockey community.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

involvement in hockey – both as athletes and fans – because they believe that it is *good for them*. In this way, playing hockey and watching hockey goes hand in hand. The remainder of this thesis is organized into six chapters. “Chapter 2” explains the methodological approaches used to investigate ‘The Sidney Effect’ on the project’s participants. “Chapter 3” discusses the literature most influential to my understanding of this topic. “Chapter 4” considers the active role that families play on this team. “Chapter 5” explores how the participants, both adult and youth, are consumed by professional hockey players and teams. The remaining two chapters then deal with the *purpose(s)* of playing competitive hockey. “Chapter 6” considers the youths’ dreams of athletic stardom. To realize these goals, the youths perceive particular objects – such as jersey numbers and hockey sticks – as fetishes. While most of the parents do not consider their sons’ athletic ambitions to be realistic, as explained in “Chapter 7,” they do believe that hockey still serves a valuable purpose—instilling community defined “positive” values. A general theme runs throughout these chapters. I argue that hockey celebrities, who play a large role in how the youths experience the sport, help both adults and youths to achieve short-term (and desirably long-term) individual goals.

“ It is not an overstatement to say that, indeed, now more than ever, sport is a pervasive human behaviour that is made to order for anthropological study and the holistic, cross-cultural, and ethnographic traditions that still define such an endeavor. ”

-Sands, 1999a, Pp. xiv

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This ethnographic study was primarily conducted over a four-month period in a Southwestern Ontario city. In total, 45 people participated in this research, including: 14 of the 17 players on the team, and 31 adults, four of them members of the team’s coaching staff, and all of who, except one, had a child on the team. My own experiences as a hockey fan and player, I strongly believe, simplified the process of developing a strong rapport with these participants. Through the following methodological tasks I aimed to immerse myself into this community, by actively participating in, and/or observing, a variety of activities like playing hockey (electronically, ice, and road), training (on- and off-ice), and watching hockey (amateur and professional). I supplemented these tasks by conducting semi-structured interviews, observing the participants’ sports possessions (equipment and memorabilia), and distributing surveys. These methods, which benefited from close and informal researcher-participant interactions, proved to be reliable ways of collecting rich data.

### **Coach, Parent, and Player Interviews**

I conducted at least one semi-structured interview with *all* 45 participants. The player interviews, which on average lasted about 20 minutes, covered such topics as: career aspiration(s); interest in hockey and other sports; favourite hockey memories; opinions about professional hockey players and teams; jersey number selection; and opinions

about, and preference of, brands of hockey equipment.<sup>13</sup> The parent interviews, which on average lasted about 13 minutes, covered such topics as: family demographics and occupation(s); personal interest in hockey; their son's interest in hockey; opinions about professional hockey players and teams; the financial and time commitments of their son playing community sports, in particular, competitive ice hockey; their son's education; and their son's future ambitions. The coaching staff interviews, which on average lasted about seven minutes, covered such topics as: selection of the team's roster; player attitudes ("good" and "bad"); selection of the team's 'captain' and 'assistant captains'; players missing practices, games, and tournaments for school-related reasons; and drills/exercises performed during on- and off-ice practices (see appendices "1.1," "1.2," and "1.3" for interview guides). A few participants were interviewed twice. For example, because some adult participants have multiple roles on the team (e.g. coach and parent; manager and parent; trainer and parent), I found that it was beneficial to conduct more than one interview with them. In doing so, I hoped that the differences and similarities between their multiple roles would emerge. In other cases, a second interview with a parent or player gave me the opportunity to ask new questions—the participants seemed to welcome these additional interviews because it gave them the chance to expand upon their previous responses. In total, 43 interviews were conducted among these 45 participants. Some interviews, it is important to note, were conducted in a group format (e.g. two parents or two coaches chose to be interviewed together).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The length of these interviews also includes my observations of the participants' hockey and other sports possessions, as explained later in this chapter.

<sup>14</sup> During these group interviews, which never consisted of more than two participants per group, all participants expressed some opinions. Occasionally, however, one participant seemed to speak on behalf of the other; in the absence of disagreement, I coded such cases as a *shared* opinion.



While most of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes (26), the others were conducted in arenas (17).

The team seemed to be genuinely interested in my research and enthusiastically welcomed me into their community. For this, I am indebted to one family in particular. "Good key informants," H. Russell Bernard (2002: 188), an anthropologist, writes, "are people to whom you can talk easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you." This family – consisting of a father, mother, son, and other siblings – helped me from the very beginning. Early on, when I hardly knew anyone else, they stood beside me at games; by the end of my fieldwork, thanks to them, I had met nearly all of the team's coaches, parents, and players (I even had the opportunity to meet some of the players' friends, extended family members, and siblings). From after-game meals, to long road-trips, and countless informal conversations, this family helped show me the world of competitive youth hockey.

### **Player Survey**

Thirteen (13) of the 14 participating youths completed a short survey that asked them to select their favourite NHL player at each position (left wing; center; right wing; defense; and goaltender) and explain their choices (see appendix "2.1" for survey questions). Most of the youths were given the survey immediately after I completed an interview with them. Although some of the youths decided to complete the survey directly after the interviews, most did not. Expecting this, many of them were given a self-addressed envelope (postage included) and were asked to complete the survey and then return it to me, either by mail or in person. While this process offered insight into the NHL's most popular players, and the reasons for their popularity, it also served another purpose. Near

the end of my fieldwork, as explained in greater detail below, I hosted a competitive hockey video-game tournament for the youths. The players that the youths selected on their surveys were then used to construct their individual video-game teams—referred to above as ‘electronic hockey’. While most of the youths – eight – seemed to put a considerable amount of effort into completing the surveys, and did, indeed, return them to me prior to the tournament, the other five youths had to complete them in haste. Of the five surveys completed moments before the tournament began, all listed their favourite player at each position, but none of them explained their choices.

### **Playing Ice Hockey**

By attending the Tigers’ games, I was able to observe the youths playing hockey. In total, I attended seven of the team’s ‘home games’ and three of their ‘away’ games. Most of the games were ‘regular season’ games; the others were ‘tournament’ games. While observing the games, I was also conducting participant-observation of the spectators, which was usually comprised of, from what I could tell, the youths’ relatives (and, occasionally, friends). In these settings, I observed how the coaches and players interacted with each other, the opposing team, the referees, and the spectators. How the spectators interacted with each other, players, coaches, and the referees was also observed. I made an effort to experience each game in different a way. For example, some games I would sit, for others, I would stand. Some games I would watch from the arena’s ‘warm section’, for others, I would endure the ‘cold section’. Some games I would sit close to the ice, for others, I would watch from a far. For the most part, I sat or stood with the same handful of parents during the games. However, because the spectators tended to sit close together, I had the opportunity to watch the games with

*many* of the Tigers' supporters. Attempting to gain a completely different perspective, on a few occasions, I sat quietly among, or nearby, the opposing teams' supporters. Additionally, for nine (9) of the 10 games, I made a rough count of the number of people in attendance (low – 60; high – 100; average – approximately 83 to 84). Anything more than rough counts was not feasible due to the flux of spectators and occasional visibility barriers that existed from where I was seated or standing in the arenas.

### **Playing Road Hockey**

In three groups of four to five participants, I played road hockey with the youths. In a 'shoot-out' format the youths competed against each other, trying to eliminate one another by scoring. For each group, to remain consistent, I played goaltender.<sup>15</sup> Each session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. In these settings, I was able to conduct participant-observation of the youths playing hockey as a leisure activity.

### **On-Ice Practices**

I attended approximately seven of the team's 'on-ice practices'. These practices, it should be noted, were primarily used as a forum to meet and interview the team's parents and coaching staff. When possible, though, I observed how the players interacted with each other, the coaches, and the spectators. Further, participant-observation was conducted of those people watching the practices. During these situations, I observed how the spectators interacted with each other, the coaches, and the players through nonverbal communication (facial expressions, hand signals) and verbal communication

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<sup>15</sup> In a road hockey shoot-out, the goaltender is the most vulnerable to injury because he or she must attempt to stop fast-traveling hard plastic balls—the reason why I played this position and not the participants (although a few wanted to).

(talking, yelling). Particular attention was given to where the spectators were seated, and with whom.

### **Off-Ice Practices**

Because I could not obtain permission from all of the parents, I was unable to participate in any of the team organized ‘off-ice training.’ However, with the permission of his parents, one youth, on a ‘night off’ from hockey, recreated, and included me in, a ‘regular’ off-ice training session. This workout included: 12-13 different stretches, a 2.8-kilometer jog, and two intensive sprinting exercises (with a ‘cool-down walk’ in between them). The youth’s workout was partly documented, with his permission, by a two-component device called ‘Nike Plus’. One part of the device – the ‘receiver’ – attached to an ‘iPod Nano’ (which the participant wore on his arm, using an armband specially designed by Nike); the other part of the device – the ‘sensor’ – attached to one of his shoelaces (Apple Computer, Inc. 2006: 6-7). The sensor tracked the user’s workout performance (e.g. run distance and speed; calories burned) and wirelessly transmitted the collected data to the receiver, where it was stored on the carried iPod. The workout data could then be reviewed directly on the iPod or by uploading it to a secure website (<http://www.nikeplus.com>).

### **Player’s Hockey (and Other Sports) Possessions**

Since the majority of the youth interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes, I was able, for 11 of the 14 youths, to observe some of their hockey commodities, memorabilia, and other sport-related possessions, such as: autographs, awards, bed-sheets, books, collector’s cards, floor mats, jerseys, magazines, movies, photographs,

posters, scrapbooks, and video-games. Many times, during these visits, the youths also showed me their hockey (and, occasionally, other sports) equipment. A few players had a ‘workout area’ in their home (usually an unfinished section of the basement), where they could exercise (e.g. lift weights). On one occasion, a player demonstrated a particular strength training activity and then gave me the chance to try it for myself. Some players could even practice their shot at home, since sections of their basements were setup like miniature hockey rinks (which usually included a net, many pucks and plastic/tennis balls, and, in some cases, plexiglass to mimic shooting on ice).

### **Hockey Highlight Film**

Using a hockey highlight film, in three groups of four to five participants, I conducted participant-observation of the youths watching professional hockey. The film, as advertised, contained “the best hockey action from the 2005/2006 [NHL] regular season and the playoffs” (TPC Productions Inc. 2006: Film). By watching the film in a group format, rather than one-on-one, I believe that the participants experienced a familiar setting—watching hockey with their friends. While watching the film, I observed and recorded the youths’ reactions to the film and its commentator (the often controversial, Don Cherry), each other, and the supervising parents. I looked for the different ways that they reacted to plays verbally (through jokes, laughs, shrieks, sighs, silence) and nonverbally (such as facial expressions like frowns or smiles; hand gestures like ‘fist pumps’, shrugs, or waves; movement and stillness). I also paid particular attention to their comments about players’ equipment and styles of play, noting which brands and styles they approved of, disapproved of, and ridiculed.

### **Hockey Video-Game Tournament**

The hockey video-game tournament, mentioned in a previous section of this chapter (about youth surveys), was played during a lunch party that I hosted for the project's adult and youth participants—while their immediate family members were also invited, none attended. Although the tournament was partly used as a research tool, its primary purpose was to thank all of the participants for their unwavering cooperation in, and dedication to, my project. E.A. Sports' video-game, 'NHL 09' was played using two different video-game consoles, Microsoft's 'Xbox 360' and Sony's 'Playstation 3'. The youths' NHL 09 team rosters consisted of, for the most part, their favourite NHL players—based on the survey answers given. The tournament, which lasted approximately six hours, included a single-game elimination playoff to declare the winner. Each participant played at least three games.

### **Researcher–Participant Rapport**

Some social scientists (Jones, Ferguson, and Stewart 1993: 75) argue that a researcher does not need to have played hockey in order to study it. I agree. Nevertheless, I believe that having participated in competitive and recreational sports as a child and youth – chiefly basketball and hockey – was advantageous to my research. This “closeness,” some might suggest, could skew my objective stance as an anthropologist. Bernard (2002: 349), though, discusses ways of using this approach *without* compromising one's objectivity. Referring to Danny Jorgensen's advocacy for “complete immersion,” he writes: “you must be able to switch back and forth between insiders' view and that of an analyst. To do that—to maintain your objective, analytic abilities—Jorgensen suggests finding a colleague with whom you can talk things over regularly. That is, give yourself

an outlet for discussing the theoretical, methodological, and emotional issues that inevitably come up in full participation field research” (Bernard 2002: 349). Many people served as this ‘outlet’ for me, especially my primary supervisor. With their support, I was able to maintain my objective position.

I knew that my athletic ability might have an influence on the development of rapport with potential participants, both adult and youth. Robert R. Sands, an anthropologist, who has extensively studied college football (1999b) and track and field (1991, 1995), shares this concern:

As it relates to track and field and football, my acceptance was based, in a large measure, on physical prowess and demonstrated skills and on a measure of manhood. In my experience with college football, more than track and field, the physical nature of the sport produced identifiable stages of doors that marked entrance into ‘deeper’ levels of understanding of the culture of football. My first football practice, my first hit, my first injury, my first game, my first selections as cocaptain, my first start, my first completion, my first after-game party all not only produced further acceptance by the players into that culture but also further reduced the effects of the research-informant/anthropologist-player dichotomies. *To really experience organized football, one has to journey from the grandstands to participate in touch or tackle football games in the park* (Sands 1999c: 25-26; my emphasis).

To gain the participants’ approval (in particular, the youths’), like Sands, I felt the need to prove my ‘physical prowess and demonstrated skills’ to them. To do so, instead of just observing their hockey related activities, I aspired to participate in them—to make the ‘journey from the grandstands’. For example, I played road hockey with the youths. Quite naively – being much older and stronger – I had underestimated their skill level and expected to save most of their shots during the shoot-outs. This, however, was not the case. I quickly realized, in fact, that I needed to play at my best, just to be competitive with them. As the games progressed and multiplied, my play improved considerably, which did not go unnoticed by the youths. Their approval, I think, was demonstrated by the banging of their sticks on the cement, in appreciation of “good” saves. Likewise, I

trained with one of the youths, by participating in a recreation of a regular off-ice training session. Although I completed the stretches and jog with much ease, the sprinting exercises proved to be more difficult—I found myself, at times, struggling to ‘keep up’.<sup>16</sup> The youths’ work ethic – of giving 100% – during actual team practices inspired me to do the same in this mock setting. Completing the last sprinting exercise, despite my internal and external struggles to do so, seemed to impress the youth. I believe that with every *save made* or *sprint completed*, I somewhat dissolved the borders between researcher and participant. My ability to prove my physical prowess, I think, was another major reason why I was able to quickly develop a strong rapport with my participants. It enabled me to quickly advance through the various ‘levels of understanding’ that make up the ‘culture of competitive hockey’. Further, because I shared many of the same interests as the participants, both as a hockey fan and player, I was able to effortlessly connect with them. Although I reminded myself, quite often, to keep my emotions out of sight, some of the Tigers’ supporters, on occasion, might have heard or seen me cheer for a goal, gasp at a ‘dirty’ body-check, or snicker when the Tigers’ ‘got away’ with an obvious penalty. These occasional outbursts, though, in retrospect, might reflect my deep immersion into this community. I had, undoubtedly, become a fan of the Tigers—a sentiment that I frequently shared with the participants; as a researcher, I had started to experience “the cultural reality of the native,” as Sands (1999c: 27) put it. My lifelong passion for sport, in essence, helped me gain a deeper understanding of this community, despite the relatively short research period. It is not a stretch to say that, to a small degree, I have been ‘one of them’ my entire life.

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<sup>16</sup> I had to reduce my jogging speed to meet the participant’s.



“ Ethnographers who venture into arenas of sport may risk incurring larger or smaller measures of professional indifference or prejudice, but they also tend to return with vivid accounts and intriguing theoretical insights. ”

-Dyck, 2004, Pp. 3

### Chapter 3: Literature Review

The anthropology of sport is a rather new field (Blanchard 1995: 23; Dyck 2004: 3-4; MacClancy 1996a: 1; Sands 1999d). It has *even* been described as “one of the few remaining frontiers in the discipline” (Blanchard quoted in Sands 1999d: 9). Noel Dyck (2004: 3-4), an anthropologist, summarizes its history:

... ethnographic fieldworkers have been intermittently reporting the popularity of games and sports of many types since the founding of the discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... Paradoxically, although several generations of undergraduate anthropology students were introduced to the filmed intricacies of Trobriand cricket while their teachers puzzled over the implications of the Balinese cock fight, the notion that games and sports might comprise appropriate objects of systematic and comparative anthropological investigation tended to be smothered by a preference for exoticism ... Since the 1980s, however, a set of finely crafted anthropological monographs that explicitly target the study of specific sports in particular settings has appeared.

Dyck (2004: 4) then demonstrates the discipline’s growing interest in sport by generating a long list of anthropological works about the subject (Alter 1992; Anderson 2001, 2003; Archetti 1999; Armstrong and Giulianotti 1997; Armstrong 1998; Brownell 1995; Dyck 1995, 2000, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Klein 1997; Lithman 2000; MacClancy 1996; and Weiss 2000).<sup>17</sup> Sands (1999d: 7) wrote that “only a handful of anthropologists have published on sport and culture.” The anthropology of sport, however, is turning into a vibrant field of study. Dyck (2004: 4) explains: “... [the field] now boasts a small but rapidly growing literature that suffices to demonstrate the potential of both what the study of sport has to offer to anthropology and what, in turn, anthropology can reveal about sport as a facet of social life.”

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<sup>17</sup> Works referenced elsewhere in this thesis have been omitted from this list.

This chapter will cover various aspects of the world of sports, including constructing sports communities and social identities, the pervasiveness of sports stars, fans adulation for celebrities, and sports' "responsibility" to socialize its participants. The following works consider the role that fantasy relationships play in the lives of sports participants (as either observing parents or playing children), by contemplating the perceived purpose(s) that they serve.

### **Constructing Community and Social Identity**

Robert R. Sands spent two years teaching at and playing football for Santa Barbara City College. In his ethnography, *Gutcheck!*, Sands (1999b: xi) describes his experiences during this period as both "prof and jock." Shortly into the book's preface, he explains the diverse makeup of the football team's roster:

...players and coaches, Ukrainians, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Native Americans, Australian, Danish, surfers, gang bangers, leaders and followers, Democrats and Republicans, criminals and ex-cons, fathers, teenagers, middle-agers, intellectuals and those who could give two shits about a college education, drug users, drug abusers, drug sellers and abstainers, those religious and those who didn't know what the inside of a church looked like, those fundamental and those liberal, hunters and pacifists, those fast, those slow, on and off the field, those large, extra large and those freeze-dried (Sands 1999b: xii).

Reflecting on the team's diversity, Sands (1999b: xii) then writes: "Some of these distinctions could be found inhabiting the same player and the same coach and the blending of all these different types and backgrounds into a functioning team."

Noel Dyck and Eduardo P. Archetti (2003: 17), both anthropologists, agree that sport has the powerful ability to unite individuals of varying backgrounds. "The sense of *communitas* (Turner 1969) that is frequently triggered by performance and absorption in sport and dance can suddenly and viscerally connect individuals who would otherwise be unlikely to associate with one another in any manner, let alone in these ways." Whether as observers or performers, members of sports communities share an "escape from the

realities of life,” as Dyck and Archetti (2003: 17) put it. The communities created around sport, though, offer something more than just temporary escape, they also grant “opportunities to contemplate and experiment with new visions and possibilities” (Dyck and Archetti 2003: 17).

Individuals might use sport to ‘contemplate and experiment’ with their social identities. Jeremy MacClancy, in his anthropological edited volume, *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* (1996a: 3), agrees that sport is a space whereby individuals can explore and define ‘who they are’. “Sport may not be just a marker of one’s already established social identity,” he (1996a: 3; my emphasis) begins, “but a means by which to create a *new* social identity for oneself as well.” MacClancy (1996a: 2-4), who describes sports as “vehicles of identity,” explains what sports communities might reveal about their members and their non-sports-based identities.

... what is important about a particular sport is not so much its content, but the category supplied by its creation. This taxonomic function of sport should not be understood in some static, structuralist manner as though people differentiated themselves according to the rigidities of a culturally constructed template located somewhere deep in the unconscious. Sport does not merely ‘reveal’ underlying social values, it is a major mode of their expression. Sport is not a ‘reflection’ of some postulated essence of society, but an integral part of society and one, moreover, which may be used as a means of *reflecting on* society.

MacClancy acknowledges the overlapping boundaries between sports-based and non-sports-based identities, suggesting that sport is also indicative of off-field cultural values.

### **Sports Stars**

To create or recreate one’s social identity, individuals might turn to professional athletes as templates. In Conrad C. Vogler and Stephen E. Schwartz’s (1993: 21) chapter, “Sport as a Mirror of Society,” they claim that many athletes “represent our culture as we would like it to be; happily married heterosexuals who don’t take drugs and are liked by their teammates and fans.” If these athletes are a reflection of an *idealized* American society,

as these two sociologists suggest (1993: 21), then it is no wonder fans treat them as “role models—the people you pattern your behavior after.” Perhaps more interestingly, fans tend to believe that sports stars meet these criteria unless it is alleged otherwise – but once those allegations are made they never quite disappear even if no evidence is found for them.

Athletes that are considered to be role models are often promoted as sports stars (Vogler and Schwartz 1993: 21).<sup>18</sup> “Advertisers,” Sejung Marina Choi and Nora J. Rifon (2007: 304) write, “are well aware of the positive influence that celebrities bring to a persuasive message; approximately 25% of all US television commercials feature celebrities.” In this way, celebrities serve as templates (Choi and Rifon 2007: 308). There certainly is no shortage of contemporary sports stars for advertisers to choose from; Derek Jeter (baseball), LeBron James (basketball), Lance Armstrong (cycling), Peyton Manning (football), Tiger Woods (golf), and Sidney Crosby (hockey), might be considered the poster boys for their respective sports.

The best example of a sports star, though, is retired American professional basketball (and baseball) player, Michael ‘Air’ Jordan. In Sands’ anthropological edited volume, Steven Jackson and David Andrews (1999: 99; NBA 2009) review Jordan’s athletic career:

Clearly, Jordan’s rise to fame and fortune stems from his remarkable athletic achievements, which include [six] NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls, seven seasons as the NBA’s leading scorer, an Olympic gold medal as part of the Dream Team, a brief stint as a semiprofessional baseball player, and an emotional retirement [in 1993] followed by an equally dramatic return to the NBA [in 1995].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> What I categorize as a ‘star’, Vogler and Schwartz (1993: 21) seem to call a ‘hero’.

<sup>19</sup> After retiring again in 1999, Jordan returned to the NBA in 2001. He played two seasons for the Washington Wizards – accumulating 3015 points, 621 assists, 836 rebounds, and 208 steals in 120 games – before retiring for the third and final time in 2003 (NBA 2009).

Like all skillful athletes, Jordan's staggering talent, by itself, was not enough to turn him into a role model and star. To do so, Jackson and Andrews (1999: 104) explain how Jordan's identity was altered: "Through mutually reinforcing narrative strategies employed by Nike, the NBA, and a multitude of other corporate interests (e.g. Coca-Cola, McDonalds), Jordan was constructed as a racially neutered (hence, nonthreatening) black version of a white cultural model who projected an 'All-American' image." Jackson and Andrews (1999: 104) claim that the purpose of repackaging Jordan's image was obvious:

In light of this and to an even greater degree than his immediate antecedent, Magic Johnson, Jordan became a commodity-sign devoid of racial integrity that effectively ensured the subversion of racial Otherness ... but that also—because of his media pervasiveness (he is, after all, referred to as 'the everywhere man')—further ensured the celebration of the NBA as a racially acceptable social and cultural space.

The presentation of Michael 'All-American' Jordan was successful, to say the very least. Jackson and Andrews (1999: 100) even argue that he is now "one of the most recognized people in the world." Like Mickey Mouse does for Disney, Jordan served as the face of the NBA throughout the '80s, '90s, and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The league's commissioner, David Stern, even embraced such comparisons (Jackson and Andrews 1999: 103). "They have theme parks and we have theme parks. Only we call them arenas. They have characters: Mickey Mouse, Goofy. Our characters are named Magic and Michael [Jordan]. Disney sells apparel; we sell apparel. They make home videos; we make home videos" (Swift 1991/2008). Jordan, as the NBA's poster boy, helped the league become what it is today—"In quantitative terms the NBA's gross revenue leaped from \$110 million at the start of the 1980s, to over \$1 billion by the end of the 1993-1994 season and is now a *multi-billion dollar* corporate entity" (Jackson and Andrews 1999: 104; my emphasis).

## Fantasy Relationships

Through repetitive advertisement appearances, Crosby has become the NHL's version of the 'everywhere man'—from promoting sport and soft-drink beverages, to hockey sticks, and even telephone calling cards (Choi and Rifon 2007: 308; Jackson and Andrews 1999; Telus Québec 2005). Because of such marketing strategies, celebrities – like Crosby – gain “popularity and recognition,” as Choi and Rifon (2007: 308) propose, which “motivates the public's acceptance or desire to pursue these celebrities' personalities, lifestyles, appearances, and behaviors.” A substantial body of literature exists to discuss fans' attitudes. Some assert that fans, in the process of emulating their heroes, might become emotionally attached, in turn, forging fantasy relationships with them (Caughey 1984). John Maltby *et al.* (2004: 411), as expressed in their paper about celebrity worship, mental health, and coping methods, raise concerns about such fantasies—their research findings are based on the following quantitative methodologies, as summarized at the beginning of their paper:

The adaptational-continuum model of personality and coping suggests a useful context for research areas that emphasize both personality and coping. The present paper used Ferguson's (2001) model integrating personality and coping factors to further conceptualize findings around celebrity worship. Three hundred and seventy-two respondents completed measures of celebrity worship, personality, coping style, general health, stress, positive and negative life satisfaction.

Maltby *et al.* (2004: 412) claim: “there are three increasingly extreme sets of attitudes and behaviours associated with celebrity worship.” They divide celebrity worshippers into three categories:

Low levels of celebrity worship have *entertainment-social* value and comprise attitudes and behaviour like ‘My friends and I like to discuss what my favourite celebrity has done’ and ‘Learning the life story of my favourite celebrity is a lot of fun.’ This stage reflects social aspects to celebrity worship and is consistent with Stever's (1991) observation that fans are attracted to a favourite celebrity because of their perceived ability to entertain and capture our attention.

Intermediate levels of celebrity worship, by contrast, are characterized by more *intense-personal* feelings, defined by items like ‘I consider my favourite celebrity to be my soul mate,’ and ‘I have frequent thoughts about my celebrity, even when I don't want to’. This stage arguably reflects

individuals' intensive and compulsive feelings about the celebrity, akin to the obsessional tendencies of fans often referred to in the literature (Dietz *et al.*, 1991; Giles, 2000).

The most extreme expression of celebrity worship is labeled *borderline-pathological*, as exemplified by items like, 'If someone gave me several thousand dollars (pounds) to do with as I please, I would consider spending it on a personal possession (like a napkin or paper plate) once used by my favourite celebrity' and 'If I were lucky enough to meet my favourite celebrity, and he/she asked me to do something illegal as a favour I would probably do it'. This factor is thought to reflect an individual's social-pathological attitudes and behaviours that are held as a result of worshipping a celebrity.

Based on their sample, Maltby *et al.* (2004: 424) found that "for those individuals who worship celebrities for intense-personal reasons, there may be consequences for individual mental health." Worshippers of this nature, they continue, "are positively related to neurotic-coping," which means that such individuals "are neurotic, use denial, and mental and behavioural disengagement" (Maltby *et al.* 2004: 423). These psychologists also suggest that such intense-personal feelings are "associated with poorer general health (depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms, social dysfunction) and negative affect (negative affect, stress, and low positive affect and life satisfaction)" (Maltby *et al.* 2004: 423).

Kerry O. Ferris (2007: 375), a sociologist, comments on a string of related studies (Ashe and McCutcheon 2001; McCutcheon 2002; Maltby and McCutcheon 2001; McCutcheon and Maltby 2002; McCutcheon *et al.* 2002; McCutcheon 2003): "The work of Lynn McCutcheon and her associates ... includes a series of articles in which 'celebrity worship' on the part of fans is linked with a host of negative, deviant and pathologized traits."<sup>20</sup> Similar to the Maltby *et al.* article (2004), Ferris (2007: 375) notes "[almost] every hypothesis in this research series proceeds from the assumption that interest in celebrities is an indicator of substandard mental health." In the end, though,

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<sup>20</sup> In Ferris' text (2007: 375), she lists the "McCutcheon 2003" work as "McCutcheon *et al.* 2003." However, in her reference section, there is no record of "McCutcheon *et al.* 2003," but there is one for "McCutcheon 2003." I presume that her in-text listing was an error and that she had meant to list "McCutcheon 2003."

Ferris (2007: 376) contends that McCutcheon *et al.* “rarely reveal strong relationships between these dismal personality traits and celebrity worship,” but then reminds readers that “their choice of topics and construction of hypotheses assume the worst: that celebrity is dangerous and fans are damaged by their contact with it.”

Fantasy relationships, according to Richard Schickel, might also be mentally and physically dangerous to celebrities. In his book, *Intimate Strangers: the Culture of Celebrity* (1985: 1-4), Schickel uses the infamous example of John Hinckley, Jr.’s fantasy relationship with actress Jodie Foster (*Taxi Driver*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Panic Room*) to demonstrate how celebrity obsession can lead to creating high-profile killers. Hinckley mailed thousands of love letters to the actress each month—his attention, though, was “unwanted;” when he began to personally deliver the letters to her dormitory at Yale University, Foster then became “alarmed” and contacted authorities in response (Schickel 1985: 2; Caughey 1984: 4). Hinckley, presumably aware of Foster’s disinterest in him, turned to violence. He called his attempted assassination of President Ronald Regan a ““historic deed,”” used to gain Foster’s “respect and love” (Schickel 1985: 2; Caughey 1984: 4). Schickel (1985: 1; my emphasis), painting a picture of Hinckley, uses stereotypes to describe the now attempted murderer:

... the world is full of *crazies*, who will tear at your clothes, tear at your spirit, given half a chance. There is one of them here today ... He is that lonely wanderer on the fringes of our consciousness, the kind of man we all brush past in our passages through the putrefying light of late night airports and bus stations and instinctively avoid, there being something in the self-absorbed intensity of his manner, some terrible onanistic privacy about him, that repels.

Schickel’s assessment of Hinckley as ‘crazy’ implies that he was mentally ill. For his unsuccessful attack on Regan, Hinckley was later found, in agreement with Schickel’s diagnosis, ““not guilty by reason of insanity”” (Caughey 1984: 5). The Hinckley–Foster story is just one of many other media-hyped tragedies involving fantasy relationships



(e.g. Ruth Steinhagen–Eddie Waitkus; Mark David Chapman–John Lennon) which are discussed in the literature. Although most fantasy relationships, which Schickel (1985: 7) calls “self-deceptions,” do *not* end in violence, he remains uneasy about their increasing regularity—“we live now in an age rife with such falsities.”

Not all social theory suggests that fantasy relationships are harmful. John L. Caughey’s anthropological classics refute the idea that fan-celebrity fantasies might indicate ‘substandard mental health’ or ‘abnormal behaviour’. Caughey (1984: 6), with the Hinckley–Foster case (and two other similar relationships) in mind, asks: “Would these fantasy relationships have been viewed as pathological if they had *not* led to a shooting?” According to many psychiatric and media accounts, the answer is ‘yes’. To these interpretations, Caughey (1984: 6) writes:

Ironically, these brutal shootings are seen as ‘pathological’ largely because they do not seem to have been motivated by ‘normal’ criminal thinking. If Waitkus had been shot by a jealous girlfriend, if Lennon had been killed in a robbery attempt, or if Reagan had been shot by political rivals, the shootings would have been no less tragic, but they would not have been characterized as ‘abnormal’ or ‘crazy’. In the absence of such ‘normal’ motives, the shootings seem senseless and bizarre.

Caughey (1984: 6-7) does not propose that Hinckley, or the likes, are “sane;” what he does suggest, though, is that their behaviour prior to the attacks should *not* be classified as “abnormal.” “It is probable that these three individuals were in some sense psychiatrically ill before they decided to shoot their victims—but this cannot be determined solely by reference to the prior imaginary relationship” (Caughey 1984: 7). The frequency of such fan-celebrity fantasies, as Schickel (1984) acknowledged, is extraordinary. To demonstrate the ubiquitousness of such relationships, Caughey (1984: 7; my emphasis) expands upon the Hinckley–Foster story: “Hinckley was but one of *many* fans outside Jodie Foster’s Yale dormitory. His love letters were merely a *fraction* of the many she received each week from unknown admirers.” Regardless of how

fantasy relationships are categorized – normal or abnormal – they remain “an important, powerful, and pervasive aspect of contemporary American life” (Caughey 1984: 7).

### **Sports Fans**

Chris Rojek (2006: 674), a sociologist, begins by acknowledging that sports stars are treated as role models by sports fans. “The leading Sports Stars, in common with the leading celebrities from celebrity culture, are adopted as role models by fans and their lives are followed as parables of normative behaviour” (Rojek 2006: 674). He then introduces the term ‘invasive egoism’ to “describe the development of fantasy relationships between the fan and the sports star.” Rojek (2006: 674) writes: “Invasive egoism can produce over-close identification between fans and their idols, so that the media representations of the star’s life become the fulcrum for measuring changes and moments of significance in the life of the fan.” Rojek (2006: 686) describes a sports fan affected by invasive egoism:

For the fanatical ‘fan’, the attachment to an external celebrity is both a mark of individual distinction and a furlough from the routines of everyday life. The centre of life becomes the vicarious, imaginary relations between the fan and the idealized object. These imaginary relations become substitutes for real relations at home or work which may be experienced as unsatisfactory. Through vicarious identification with the sports celebrity, fans may compensate for emotional deprivation or a lack of achievement in personal life.

The concept of invasive egoism is extended by various writers beyond fans’ perceptions of celebrities as role models. In regards to Rojek’s point about sports stars as role models, Caughey (1978) agrees. “It is common for an American to know a great deal about hundreds of different sports figures. He knows about their teams, positions, and salaries, he knows about their past accomplishments and medical histories, and he knows about their personalities and off-the-field conduct” (Caughey 1978: 71). Caughey might even agree with some parts of Rojek’s discussion about fantasy relationships and invasive

egoism. “While an American does not have real face-to-face interactions with media figures,” Caughey (1978: 71) begins, “he does have *artificial interactions* with them.” He then suggests that the “intensity of such media relations can be very high,” as demonstrated by one New York Giants fan:

I spent ... Sundays with a few bottles of beer at the Parrot, eyes fixed on the television screen, cheering for my team. Cheering is a paltry description. The Giants were my delight, my folly, my anodyne, my intellectual stimulation. With Huff I “stunted” up and down the room among the bar stools, preparing to “shoot the gap”; with Shofner, I faked two defenders “out of their cleats,” took high, swimming over my right shoulder and trotted, dipsydoodle-like, into the end zone; with Robustelli, I swept into backfields and with cruel disdain flung flat-footed, helpless quarterbacks into the turf (Caughey 1978: 72).

Based on these comments, how might Maltby *et al.* categorize this football fan: (1) entertainment-social, (2) intense-personal, or (3) borderline-pathological? Would Rojek consider this an example of invasive egoism? I cannot say with certainty how these psychologists or sociologist might classify this fan’s behaviour, if at all. Nonetheless, he or she is not alone. “People probably devote different amounts of time to reverie, but for many at least, memories, fantasies, and projections occupy a large percentage of waking consciousness when attention is not taken up by demanding tasks or engrossing actual relations ... Whatever the exact figure may be, most Americans probably spend *more time* in artificial interactions than they do in real ones” (Caughey 1978: 73).

Before accepting or rejecting the thesis that fantasy relationships are harmful, consider 44-year-old psychotherapist Gina and her intense fantasy relationship with actor Steven Seagal (*Out for Justice; Marked for Death; Hard to Kill*). In the past, Gina has worked as a counselor for domestic violence and rape victims; her current job, as a clinical social worker, deals with counseling “victims of extreme violence and abuse” (Caughey 1994: 127). It is important to note that she often experiences ‘secondary victimization’, which is the “process of involuntarily imagining [one’s self as] a witness

to or a victim of violence” (Caughey 1994: 126-127). Because of her circumstances, Caughey, who seems to be a close friend of Gina’s, wonders why she enjoys Seagal’s exceptionally violent films and practicing martial arts (Caughey 1994: 127-130).<sup>21</sup>

Caughey (1994: 133) offers an explanation:

[The] violence of the Seagal character and of Tae Kwan Do has a real aspect for her. While she has an accurate sense of its limitations in the real world, she does feel less vulnerable to the threat of violence than she did before because of the physical strength she has acquired and the martial art techniques she has learned. But even more important and inspiring to her are the qualities of determination, inner strength, independence, and presence of mind which both the martial art and the Seagal character represent for her.

From Gina’s perspective, her fantasy relationship with Seagal plays an important role in her life, one that seems to have improved her mental health, not hindered it (Caughey 1994: 130).

Fantasy relationships, it seems to Caughey, can be particularly advantageous to some—as demonstrated by Gina (1994). For others, as interpreted by Schickel, they can be harmful—as demonstrated by Hinckley (1985). Perhaps, then, the context of these relationships is important to consider. Caughey (1978: 133-134) writes: “As we analyze such connections, whether of admiration, love, envy, or hatred, it is necessary to explore how they work at the level of individual consciousness in terms of the individual’s complex and multiple subject positions and cultural meaning systems.” To illustrate the world of competitive youth sports, Harald Beyer Broch, an anthropologist, explains the seriousness of these oft-regarded ‘leisure’ activities: “the supposedly innocent nature of children’s sport may be less unproblematic than many parents and other observers wish to believe. Sport is not only leisurely fun, but also involves competition, demonstration of skills, popularity, gender and personal identity-related issues” (Broch 2003: 78). The

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<sup>21</sup> Seagal’s character in *Out for Justice* “is vividly shown beating, maiming, and killing some twenty-five villains...” (Caughey 1994: 127).

following works demonstrate some of the different roles that sports celebrities play in this complex setting and how fans often emulate such behaviour.

Leo Braudy (1986: 3) argues that fame limits originality. He writes: “From the beginning fame has required publicity. Alexander the Great ostentatiously imitated Achilles among other gods and heroes; Julius Caesar mourned that he had not done as much as Alexander” (Braudy 1986: 3). Braudy (1986: 4) continues by explaining how anthropologist Edward Hall perceives the media as “‘extensions’ of the man, ways of increasing the scope of senses.” However, he then goes on to write: “But in the history of fame the more elaborate extensions of human images often hinder self-awareness instead of expanding it” (Braudy 1986: 4). In this way, the media weakens personal creativity. “Now that there are so many ways for names and faces to appear in public, the meaning of that appearance seems less and less personal” (Braudy 1986: 4). The result, he argues, are fragmented and unoriginal personalities. “[We] have collage personalities made up of fragments of public people who are, in turn, made from fragments themselves—polished, denatured, simplified” (Braudy 1986: 5). Braudy’s ideas might help explain hockey fans’ adoration of Wayne Gretzky and their longing for his successor. Upon his retirement in 1999, as TSN (2009c) reports, “hockey pundits and fans have been looking out for The Next One.” ‘The Next One’, indisputably, is Crosby. Crosby’s style of play and off-ice personality mirrors many elements of Gretzky’s. Already, after only three complete seasons in the NHL, Crosby’s ‘fragmented’ hockey personality is inspiring ‘The Next Next One’—John Tavares of the London Knights (TSN 2009d). Through Crosby and now Tavares, Gretzky’s playing career continues; his ‘best hockey player of all time’ reputation makes him the ultimate hockey role model to emulate. If a hockey player is

compared to Gretzky, he or she, therefore, ranks among the best, too. Players who do not (or cannot) emulate Gretzky's personality on and off the ice are unlikely to ever rank among the game's best players.

George Gmelch, a retired professional baseball player and now anthropologist, explores the use of "magic" in sports (1999). Using Bronislaw Malinowski's pioneering research about the Trobriand Islanders as a comparison, Gmelch (1999: 191; my emphasis) writes: "Trobrianders used a great deal of magical ritual to ensure safety and increase their catch [of fish] ... Baseball, America's national pastime, is an arena in which players behave remarkably like Malinowski's Trobriand fisherman ... many [players] use magic to try and *control* the chance and uncertainty built into baseball." Gmelch offers many examples of player fetishes, rituals, and taboos. For example, he explains the importance of jersey numbers to some players:

Uniform numbers have special significance for some players. Many have a lucky number that they request ... Occasionally a young player requests the number of a former star, hoping that--in a form of *imitative* magic--it will bring him a similar measure of success (Gmelch 1999: 197).

Gmelch's discussion about 'magical' jersey number selection is just one of many different ways that fans emulate sports stars—other examples include: equipment, playing styles, and training methods.

While youth sports might actually be more problematic than expected, Hajime Hirai, an anthropologist, reminds readers about the 'fun' side of sports by demonstrating Hideo Nomo's passion for baseball (2001). Hirai describes Nomo as "Japanese baseball's most prominent export to the United States and the prototypical transpacific sport star" (Hirai 2001: 188). The early stages of his Major League Baseball (MLB) career are reviewed:

... once he recorded his first win, in June [1995], he proved that he had the potential to be a dominant pitcher at the major league level, too. This fact was confirmed when he was nominated as a member of the National League All Stars. The Tornado Boy, nicknamed after his unique pitching form, had attracted enormous attention from both American and Japanese media. The American media invented a word, “Nomo Mania” while the Japanese used “Nomo Fever” to describe the hyped attention to him and the social and economic ripple effect aroused by him. He was no longer just a rebel. He was a celebrity. The Japanese cheered him as a pioneer, and called him “the man who chased his dream” (Hirai 2001: 192-193).

Nomo did not play baseball to become wildly famous and popular. His reasons for playing professional baseball, Hirai (2001: 197-198; my emphasis) suggests were simpler: “It is the pursuit of pure *joy* in playing baseball. It doesn’t seem to be a big deal for him, no matter where he plays, no matter which team he plays for, or no matter who his teammates are ... It is unlikely that Nomo views himself as either pioneer or defector. Rather, he seems intent on pursuing his dream in the sport he loves.” Many athletes, I suspect, share Nomo’s passion for their respective sports. Nomo’s enthusiasm for baseball reminds fans that sport, above all else, should be about having *fun*.

## **Socialization**

“The functionalism theoretical model,” Kendall Blanchard (1995: 67) explains, “rests on the premise that cultural phenomena are best understood in relationship to their roles in meeting individual human needs.” Malinowski divided human needs into three categories:

... *primary needs* (e.g., the need for food and water), *secondary needs* (e.g., the cultural definition of particular foods as acceptable or unacceptable), and *integrative needs* (e.g., religion) (Blanchard 1995: 68; my emphasis).

In this way, Blanchard (1995: 68) writes, “sport functions in a cultural system to integrate a range of more basic institutions, such as technology and the economy, and thus improves their efficiency in meeting the basic biological needs that are most evident in the adaptive process.” Children and youth, as already discussed, might use sport to meet several needs (e.g. achieve athletic stardom, enjoyment, exercise, popularity). To help

achieve these desired needs, children must rely heavily upon adults from the ‘real social world.’<sup>22</sup> Dyck (2003: 68) argues that adults control youth sports to the point that “it has become impossible for these activities to exist without their involvement.”

In his book *Family, Hockey, and Healing* (2001), Walter Gretzky, Canada’s ultimate ‘hockey parent’, reminisces about his childhood and the joys of playing ‘road’ and ‘pond’ hockey.<sup>23</sup> Describing winters in Southwestern Ontario, he writes: “I can’t remember a time back then when there wasn’t a bunch of kids out there together on the street or on the backyard rink, shooting a puck around, just getting out into the fresh air and having a great time. To me, that’s what it’s all about” (Gretzky 2001: 48). Whether hockey is played in an arena, on the road, or the surface of a frozen pond, to Gretzky, having fun is what’s most important—“You don’t have to win at all costs, or be the most talented player on the ice to enjoy a game,” he writes, “That’s certainly how it was back when I was a kid, and what it was like at its best when my own kids were growing up” (Gretzky 2001: 48). Another type of hockey now exists, one that is a far cry from the principles of road or pond hockey. “Yet beneath the canopy of these romanticized ideals of sport and childhood,” Dyck (2003: 55) writes, “exists a vast complex of formally structured community sport activities, organizations and leagues that are unambiguously shaped and operated *by* adults *for* children and youth in Canada.” What happens to the spirit of hockey—the fun that Gretzky remembers as a child—when adults come into play? Dyck (2003: 55-56) contemplates the purpose of community sports: “The enthusiastic enactment of adults’ work alongside children’s play tweaks an

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<sup>22</sup> “The ‘real social world’ of an American consists of the people with whom he *actually interacts*. Commonly numbering only two or three hundred persons, this group consists of various relatives, friends, and acquaintances” (Caughy 1978: 71).

<sup>23</sup> Wayne Gretzky is the son of Walter.



ethnographer's curiosity as to whether there may not be something more unfolding within this field than either simple, idyllic leisure or unassuming, selfless parenting." Attached to community youth sports are what Dyck calls 'adult purposes.' He explains:

... community sports for children and youth have evolved to bear a substantial, though mixed cargo of parental hopes and expectations. Children's sports not only provide athletic and leisure opportunities for boys and girls but also sustain communities of sporting and parental practice that revolve around the objectification and direction of children's bodies for distinctly adult purposes (Dyck 2003: 56).

Adults, amid their 'hopes' and 'expectations', theorize sport to be a way of socializing children and youths. "Socialization," Philip Mayer (1970: xiii), an anthropologist, writes, "may be broadly defined as the inculcation of the skills and attitudes necessary for playing given social roles." "Roles and role systems," Mayer (1970: xiii) continues, "are central to the anthropological field of study however one chooses to approach it, and they can scarcely be conceived as existing or functioning without some provision for socialization, thus defined." From this perspective, competitive youth sports might be interpreted as a parental tool used to help transmit "needed" cultural values to children, values essential to *becoming* successful youths and adults. Dyck (2003: 59; my emphasis) agrees: "the training that children receive in organized sport is designed not merely to equip them with particular physical skills and, hopefully, pleasurable experiences of playing games, but also to attend to the appropriate development of their *future selves*."

### **Bringing It All Together**

Fantasy relationships, I argue, play an elusive but important role in how fans and participants experience sport. These persons seem to *expect* something from their involvement. In this way, sport functions to fulfill individual needs, whatever they may

be. Participants and fans tend to rely on the sports world to tell them *how to* realize their athletic and non-athletic goals, both short-term and long-term. For example, sports stars define the “best” attitudes, equipment, and styles of play to have or use. With these idol-endorsed tools, participants believe that they are more readily equipped to achieve their aspirations. As the subsequent chapters reveal, the project’s adult and youth participants share a deep passion for sport, but consider its purpose to be much different. For this community, I contend that ‘The Sidney Effect’ has helped both adults and youths achieve short-term (and potentially long-term) goals, what they perceive as “needs.” My study will provide evidence that fantasy relationships are indirectly supported by the parents, and wildly embraced by their children.

“ We are a, what you’d call, a *hockey family*. This is what we do. ” -Hockey mother

## Chapter 4: Hockey Families

The Tigers are not just a hockey team, they are a *community*. Player skill level aside, admission into this group is contingent on several factors, chiefly the parents’ willingness and ability to meet the team’s considerable financial and time demands. For these families, though, such demands are affordable, manageable, and seemingly welcomed. Standing together in the corner of a cold arena watching his daughter’s mid-week hockey practice, one father said to me: “I don’t think we’re a typical family, we’re a *hockey family*” (my emphasis). This statement, I think, best describes the members of this community.

Like Sands’ (1999b: xii) depiction of junior college football, the Tigers’ community “is full of diversity.” The differences that I noticed between players included: favourite professional hockey players and teams, hockey positions, and schools. There seemed to be more glaring distinctions between the parents, such as: differences in age, nationality, profession, and sex. The youngest parent was 32, and the oldest was 52; the average age of the parents was 47 (fathers: 45; mothers: 44). Of the 28 participating parents, 14 were female, and 14 were male. All of the parents were born in Canada, except for two, who were born in the United Kingdom. The greatest difference between the parents was their occupations. They worked in a wide-range of professions, including, but not limited to: administration, business, engineering, healthcare, plant operations, policing, politics, real-estate, social work, teaching, and various trades. For these middleclass to upper-middleclass families, the expenses of competitive hockey –

which is somewhere between \$3,000 and \$15,000 – are affordable.<sup>24</sup> Based on a Statistics Canada (2006/2009) census, the median after-tax income for couple households (common-law or married) with children in Ontario is \$74,095. I suspect that families at this median would be able to meet the financial demands of playing competitive hockey. Families below the median, though, might have a difficult time doing so. Additionally, I was able to collect some information about a few of the participants’ religious beliefs and political views. However, it would be unfair to comment on this data because there is not *enough* of it to make any sort of definitive statement, except to say that such views are also diverse.

As expected, there was plenty of camaraderie amongst the team’s players. On the ice, when games got ‘rough’, for example, players would ‘stick up’ for each other. A ‘cheap hit’ (e.g. ‘check from behind’ or ‘head-shot’) might lead to a ‘scrum’, ‘fight’, or getting the culprit’s ‘number’, with the intent on avenging the hit. Off the ice, they could often be found teasing each other or telling jokes. Take this conversation for example, which ensued between two players – goaltender and forward – while watching the Don Cherry film (my emphasis):

After the film showed a ‘highlight-reel’ save, the forward said to his goaltender: “... you gotta do that!”

Apparently insulted by the forward’s insinuation that he doesn’t *already* ‘do that’, the goaltender responded: “Hey, I can move!”

To this comment, the forward wittily replied: “You can *move*, but can you *save* it?”

This conversation, I believe, should be interpreted as nothing but good-natured banter. No one player seemed to be teased more frequently than another; some teasing was even directed at me.

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<sup>24</sup> From this point on, all financial figures are presented in Canadian dollars, unless otherwise noted.

Somewhat to my surprise, many of the parents had also developed meaningful relationships with each other. With her husband listening, one mother said: “sometimes, [our son] might think that, you know, we like being on the team more than he does because that is sort of our social life for eight or nine months of the year.” Another parent explained why he enjoys being a part of the team: “... we quite like the social aspect ... the parents are fun, we all share the same interests.” On a handful of occasions, during team practices (my opportune time to conduct adult interviews) I couldn’t find specific parents (mostly fathers) because they were together at the bar ‘having a drink’. At games, groups of parents tended to sit or stand together in the same vicinity, some cheering loudly, others quietly watching. Some of the relationships between parents even intensified outside of the arena, developing into long-lasting friendships. At the video-game tournament, for example, several of the parents casually mingled with each other while I supervised the youths. Much of the conversation in this setting, at least while I was present, was about hockey. Occasionally, though, the parents would reminisce about past out-of-town tournaments (some from previous seasons), recalling embarrassing or humorous moments that were often the result of drinking a little “too much.” What I noticed the most about the parents was their concern for each other’s children and willingness to ‘lend a hand’. From what I can remember, no player ever missed a practice, game, or tournament because they didn’t have a ride. “Sometimes we rely on friends to help us,” one mother told me, “and other times we don’t, we can manage it.” Another family traded in their car for a mini-van because they wanted to be able to reciprocate the rides given to them by other families. “The only reason we have our van is because of hockey ... we couldn’t pay them (other families) back because we had a

[car] ... And so now, now that we have the van ... three players [can] sit across the back seat, and then four adults [up front]. And away we go.” To join this tightly knit community, families must be willing and able to meet the team’s considerable financial and time demands, which proved to be a challenging feat for some.

### **Time Commitment**

Most parents emphasized how time consuming playing for the Tigers is, especially those who also coached, managed, or trained the team. One mother said: “... because of the AAA level, that commitment that we make, we are making it as a family. Not only financially, but emotionally, everything, because of the time, just the time.” Many other parents felt the same way. Here are a few examples:

- I mean, hockey takes a lot of time ... it adds a lot of stress ... This can almost take over your life!
- ... it is probably close to half of a full time job.
- Oh, huge! Huge! ... we are constantly going somewhere, every weekend. And it’s not like we’re always [playing] at home. So, we’re go, go, go!

Reiterating these sentiments, one mother discusses at length how her life seems to revolve around her son’s hockey during the fall and winter months. She explains:

The hockey basically consumes our time from ... when try-outs start some time in August ... through to the end of the hockey season, which could be the end of March or even earlier, if we get knocked out of [the] playoffs (laughter) ... and you don’t have a choice on your schedule. ‘Here’s your practices, here’s your games’. So, there’s no choice as to when he’s going to play hockey... And since it is ... travel [hockey], the away games take the better part of a Saturday or Sunday because of the distance that we have to go, the being at the arena an hour before the game, the game time, the changing time and leaving the arena, the driving time again to get home often consumes anywhere from six to ten hours, depending on where the games are ... The home games will take part of a day, but it’s a little more convenient, of course. So, I mean, he can be dropped off at the arena an hour beforehand and you can still run to [the store] or come home for half and hour if you chose to do so ... [The home games, though,] seem to be more towards the middle of the day. It’s not like it’s [8:00 a.m.] and then by [9:00 a.m.] your hockey is over for the day ... so anything you’re doing is revolving around ... when his hockey is.

The time commitment that the parents make also affects some of the players’ siblings, especially those who *need* adult supervision; these younger children have no choice but

to attend the Tigers' games, practices, and tournaments when their parents do. One father said: "it has meant my daughter has had to spend a lot of time in cars and in arenas and moving around." "It probably affects his sister the most," another parent said, "because she gets dragged to all of the game[s] ... because she is younger and not old enough to stay home alone yet." As a handful of parents explained, those siblings who do not require adult supervision tend to 'do their own thing.' One mother had this to say about her eldest son's involvement with the team: "[he] likes to hang out with his friends, so, it's not like he's missing out on us, you know, he has a job and stuff." Talking about his daughter, one father told me about her involvement with the Tigers in the past and present: "she used to come with us all the time ... at first it was great and then the novelty wears off and now she's older and does her own thing." Likewise, one mother described how her two oldest children used to regularly attend the Tigers' games: "it used to be, up 'till last year, we'd all go together as a family and do it as a family. And they (the other families on the team) have kids who are of similar ages and they would hang out too ..." However, now that her children are older, the 'as a family' mentality has changed: "... but everybody else is getting older, people aren't going, so it's not as much [of a] ... family thing." The financial cost, like the time commitment, of playing for the Tigers is demanding of the players and their families.

### **Financial Commitments**

When the parents were asked how much they expected to spend, approximately, on their sons this season, many different responses were given. On the low-end, one parent guessed that he'd spend somewhere between \$3–4,000 dollars. On the high-end, though,

another family expected to spend roughly \$14–15,000. This huge discrepancy of the ‘cost to play’ might exist for several reasons.

The most obvious difference, I suppose, is that some of the youths only play ‘Winter Hockey’ (September through April—what the Tigers play), while others also play ‘Spring Hockey’ (April through May). Winter Hockey and Spring Hockey are treated as two separate seasons and, therefore, require separate registration fees, a cost that is usually in excess of \$1,000. These fees pay for a number of team expenses, including, but limited to: rental of ice and locker rooms, arena maintenance, membership association dues, and the hiring of referees and scorekeepers.

Because players are responsible for their own equipment, except for the team’s jerseys and leg socks, the purchasing of it might be another major reason why some families expect to spend more money this season than others.<sup>25</sup> Skaters are required to wear/use ten pieces of equipment during play: helmet (with a full-cage mask), neck-guard, shoulder pads, elbow pads, gloves, stick, jockstrap, pants, shin pads, and skates. The goaltenders’ equipment is similar, but varies somewhat; goaltenders are required to wear/use eleven pieces of equipment during play: helmet (with a full-cage mask and throat protector), neck-guard, shoulder pads, chest protector, blocking glove, trapping glove, stick, jockstrap, pants, leg pads, and skates. Parents of both goaltenders and skaters alike expressed to me how expensive hockey equipment *can* be. “It’s a sport, just like any sport, it is expensive,” one mother explained. Another parent, trying to calculate the season’s total cost, had this to say: “everything is just so bloody expensive.” Based on the collected data, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty the degree of

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<sup>25</sup> The cost of jerseys and leg socks, I suspect, is likely included in the team’s registration fees or recouped through team-organized fundraising.



equipment quality that the youths' used—admittedly, this is deserving of further research. However, if their sticks are any indication of how expensive the rest of their equipment is, as discussed in “Chapter 6: The Magical and the Rational,” then it might be safe to assume that they generally used the mid-range to high-end ‘gear’. One parent said: “... you know, it’s a higher level of hockey, I always like to buy, you know, middle of the road or higher up equipment.” Talking about her two sons, a mother said: “as they grow the needs change and expenses change.” Another parent explained that his family prefers Nike-Bauer because “[it] is top quality equipment.”<sup>26</sup>

Some players might not need to purchase new equipment, though, because either their current gear still fits or they have received ‘hand-me-downs’ (usually from an older sibling). However, it is not unusual for a thirteen-year-old to rapidly outgrow his equipment. I can remember, as a youth, needing to buy new skates twice in one season. Equipment also breaks. A stick ‘snapping’, for example, is not uncommon. One player, his teammate told me, had *already* broken five sticks by the season’s midway point. However, breaking and outgrowing equipment are not always the reasons for purchasing new equipment.

As I found out, the differences between what a player *needs* and what a player *wants* are not always clear. For instance, one afternoon I accompanied a player and his father to a local sports store to have the player’s skates sharpened. While we waited for the sharpening to be completed, we passed the time by browsing through the store’s merchandise, mostly hockey equipment. At one point, the player stopped to look at helmets, or ‘buckets’. He showed me the helmet he wanted, Nike-Bauer’s “9500.” This

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<sup>26</sup> This brand of equipment is actually called “Nike Bauer.” I have hyphenated it for readability.

particular helmet, which a few of his teammates had, was painted the same colour as the Tigers' uniforms (which, I had guessed was the most appealing feature to him). When I asked why he wanted it, though, he emphasized how "safe" it was, not how it looked. Similarly, one of the players that owned this helmet described it as being "supposedly concussion proof." This is how Nike-Bauer (2009) describes the helmet:

Fused Expanded Polypropylene foam liner transmits 20% less energy during impact than the same volume of traditional EPP foam ... Integrated into the Comfort Padding of the helmet, Thermo Core absorbs and releases excess heat, balancing a player's body temperature and allowing them to focus on the game ... 9500 Face Mask offers lightweight strength allowing the use of thinner wires in key visual areas to reduce visual obstruction by 20% vs. competitor's premium models ... Good for your head. Good for your game.

The helmet's cost was around \$200. If the helmet was purchased with the "9500 Face Mask" the price of the helmet rose to about \$300. In agreement with his son, the father acknowledged that the helmet has, what seems like, exceptional safety features. Weeks later, though, when I asked the father about his son's interest in the helmet, he told me that the helmet his son currently uses, Reebok's "6K," is of comparable quality. He also mentioned that it was purchased, approximately, only a year ago, for close to the price of the helmet he now wants. In the end, I was given the impression that this player would not be getting what he wanted because he didn't need it, at least right now.

Although some of the players might not own the specific models of equipment that they want—which is typically the newest—they were quite adamant about what brands they preferred. While goaltenders preferred Brown and Vaughn, skaters preferred Nike-Bauer.<sup>27</sup> When I asked the parents if their sons had ever asked them to purchase a particular brand of equipment, the majority said, 'yes'. "Oh, yeah! All of the time!" one parent said with a laugh. "Oh, yes, without a doubt! ... Our son is very particular about his equipment," a father explained. A handful of other parents, though, weren't so sure,

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<sup>27</sup> Other, less popular brands mentioned by the skaters included: CCM, Easton, and Reebok.

but did, indeed, acknowledge that their sons do have a *preference* for particular brands.

Here are a few examples:

- There [are] brand names out there, I think, with [my son] that sort of works for him and what he likes and what he's had over the years.

- Not really. I guess that would be more of my husband. He just, my kids, my family buys Bauer, so that's what we've always done, that's what we started to buy, so, that's what the kids just go to.

Although their spouse might have had a different experience, four parents outright claimed that their son had never asked them to purchase a particular brand of equipment. For example, one mother said: "No. He gets an idea of particular brands, but when he goes out with his Dad, he gets what ends up fitting ... properly and comfortably." Her husband, though, had a much different experience with their son, who said with a laugh: "Yeah! ... I mean, we bought some Bauer skates and, you know, Bauer stick ... Bauer brand (marketing) did a good job." In total, 12 of the 14 participating players had supposedly asked their parents (at least one of them) to purchase a particular brand of equipment at one time or another.

The costs of travel might be the most expensive part of playing for the Tigers. Beyond just traveling to and from local arenas for practices and home games (some families have longer commutes than others), the team also travels out-of-town for away games (e.g. pre-season, regular season, and tournament games).

In addition to the two or three scheduled practices a week, the Tigers usually play, what works out to be, one regular season home game and one regular season away game each week (from late September through early February). The longest commute to a regular season away game is about two and a half hours. To reduce the costs of traveling to these games, many families carpool. Traveling to away games (which can,

on occasion, be an eight to ten hour commitment) also means that families will likely need to include the cost of eating, at least once.

Throughout the season, the Tigers compete in four to five tournaments, which are usually out-of-town. Besides the cost of commuting to these tournaments, families must cover overnight and eating expenses (usually two to three nights). The size of the family, therefore, might determine how much it costs to attend a tournament (e.g. the number of hotel rooms and meals needed). Occasionally, two families might share a hotel room if only one parent from each family is attending the tournament; likewise, two families might share a hotel suite, if large enough to accompany both. Further, to reduce costs, many families participate in potlucks—which makes hotel kitchenettes very appealing to some of these participants. “[W]e do economize by bringing food, eating out of the hotel room[s], bringing crock pots, bringing electrifying pans, that sort of thing, and make our own meals,” one mother explained. Another parent said: “we do potluck things ... we cook in the rooms, we hardly ever go out for dinners and stuff like that, we try to save money that way.” When I asked how many families participate in these potluck type of events, one mother thought “about half of [the] team;” another parent suggested even *more*: “Yeah, a lot, a lot do, certainly for the bulk of the meals. I mean, there are some families that might go out for one or two dinners or something ... There is the odd family that doesn’t do much of the hotel eating, but the *majority* do” (my emphasis).

Some parents described their involvement with the team as being, at times, *consuming*, *expensive*, or *stressful*. So, why do these parents continue to voluntarily commit their time and money to such a system? Perhaps they feel that the time spent with their families outweighs these seemingly negative effects. Indeed, this seems to be

the case, as many parents suggested that they convert the time demanded of them into ‘family time’. However, what seems to be more appealing to these families – chiefly the players – is the social circle that they are joining. Despite differences in age, gender, nationality, or profession, these participants function effectively as a team and community, united by a shared passion for hockey. From young to old, hockey consumes their lives and serves as a ‘vehicle of identity’ (MacClancy 1996a: 4). As the next chapter explains, their interest in hockey extends far beyond the borders of this community.

“ Anyone who reads the newspaper, watches television, or listens to casual conversation on the street is undoubtedly aware of the ubiquitous nature of sport. It is everywhere, it flavors our national culture, and permeates every corner of our daily lives. ”

-Blanchard, 1995, Pp. xvii

## Chapter 5: Consumed By Hockey

Adult and youth participants alike demonstrated great enthusiasm for professional hockey players and teams. For many of the parents, having grown up around it, the world of hockey is familiar and trusted space. I suspect that the youths’ interest in hockey, as both fans and participants, has been greatly influenced by their parents’ passion for it.

### Parents as Hockey Fans

Of the 28 parents interviewed, *all* said that they are fans of hockey.<sup>28</sup> Four parents – one father and three mothers – did not consider themselves fans of the sport until *after* their child (or children) started playing it. For a few parents, their interest in hockey seemed to be rekindled or intensified once their child (or children) started to play hockey. One mother explained how she was reintroduced to hockey as an adult:

I was a fan back when I was 10, 11 years old ... [I] kind of got away from it until [my son] started playing hockey ... [He] played house league hockey one year and I wasn't into it too much but the following year, when he was in grade two ... he got onto a travel team ... and that's when my hockey enthusiasm started to build.

Another parent explained how his first-born son, who started playing hockey at an early age, intensified his interest in the sport: “I probably became *more* of a fan when my kids started playing hockey ... I always watched it [before that,] but I got into it *more* when [my oldest son] started at age five” (my emphasis).

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<sup>28</sup> To the question, ‘are you a fan of hockey?’ three parents responded in these ways: “I am, sort of (laughter);” “Somewhat;” and “Yeah, I would say I’m a moderate fan of hockey.” Although every parent might consider themselves “fans” of hockey, they didn’t all share the same level of enthusiasm for it.

Most parents' interest in hockey, though, stemmed from their childhood. Family members and/or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's program *Hockey Night in Canada (HNIC)* turned some fathers onto the sport. What seemed to be the most influential to these fathers, however, was actually *playing* the game, whether it was community, road, or pond hockey. While five (5) of the 14 fathers did not mention playing hockey as a child or youth, that is not to say they never did. Based upon their current interests in hockey (some are even coaches) and what other participants told me about them, I would be surprised if they had never played before, in one form or another. Here are some examples of the fathers reminiscing about playing hockey during their childhoods:

- To me ... playing hockey ... and being a fan is part of being Canadian.
- ... my experience with hockey was mostly playing backyard hockey as a kid in my neighbourhood, we'd play all winter long.
- ... it was just standard back then in the neighbourhood that I grew up in [to play road hockey] ... and I was lucky enough to play AAA hockey throughout the system with parents that knew nothing about the game.

While none of the mothers mentioned, or gave me the impression, that they ever played hockey, their interest in the sport, much like their husbands, began during childhood.<sup>29</sup> Most of the mothers considered themselves fans long before their child (or children) started to play hockey. Several of them talked about the significant influence of their family members, mostly of fathers and brothers, who were "avid fans." Because many of them had family members or boyfriends that coached or played hockey, some mothers ended up spending a lot of time around hockey and in arenas, which triggered a personal

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<sup>29</sup> One mother, in addition to assisting with the Tigers' off-ice training, helps coach her daughter's hockey team. However, during her interview she did not mention *playing* hockey. When asked if she considered herself a fan of hockey, she enthusiastically responded by saying: "Love hockey!" Like many other parents, her interest in hockey started during childhood. She said: "Probably since my brothers [played], since I was a child. My brothers played travel hockey as well."

interest in the sport—as one mother put it: “Well, my dad has actually always been involved in hockey, so, I’ve always liked [it], it has always been around my house as a little girl.” Because her brothers played hockey, another mother told me in a straightforward manner: “I grew up at the arena.” Watching hockey live or on television also seemed to be quite influential towards some of these mothers developing an interest in the sport. During their childhoods, as a few pointed out, *HNIC* was a family event (not always by choice, though). “I had no choice,” one participant explained, “we had to watch it on T.V. and we only had one T.V. ... That’s what [we] did back then.” Another mother, also limited by the number of televisions in her parents’ home, said: “my dad [watched] ... *Hockey Night in Canada* every Saturday night, and we just, because we only had one T.V. back then, that’s what we watched.”

For many of these adults, though, how they experience hockey now, and their ideas about what it means to be a “fan,” have changed since their childhoods, in some cases, dramatically. All but three parents currently have a favourite hockey team, most of which are teams from the NHL. The most popular team, among the parents, by far, is the Toronto Maple Leafs (12 participants), then it is the Montreal Canadiens (four participants), and the third most popular team is the Detroit Red Wings (two participants). Other favourite teams include: the Tampa Bay Lightning (one participant) and the ’70s Philadelphia Flyers (one participant – he referred to this team as the “Broad Street Bullies”). Three other parents told me that they don’t necessarily have a favourite team, but tend to cheer for “local” NHL teams.<sup>30</sup> One parent told me that his favourite

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<sup>30</sup> For these participants, who are from Southwestern Ontario, the NHL teams most likely to be considered local are: the Buffalo Sabers, the Detroit Red Wings, the Ottawa Senators, or the Toronto Maple Leafs.



team changes from year to year, what some might refer to as ‘bandwagon hopper’. To my surprise, one mother excitedly explained that her favourite team is the Tigers.

Although not every parent discussed why he or she chose their favourite team, a few did. A common influence mentioned was family members. “I had to be a [Montreal Canadiens] fan,” one mother explained, “because ... my uncle played for [them].” Another Canadiens fan said: “Oh, I grew up in Montreal ... I grew up watching the Canadiens in the ’70s when they were the strongest team in the NHL. My parents both became fans. Every Saturday night was a family event. We’d sit down in front of the T.V. and watch *Hockey Night in Canada*,” his wife, who is also a Canadiens fan, did not have a favourite team until her husband (and then children) influenced her to. She explained: “Well, actually, I didn’t really have a favourite team, and then it became Montreal, because everything in our house is Montreal Canadiens.” This mother is not alone; several other parents discussed how their children or spouses greatly influenced their choice of favourite hockey team:

- My husband likes Toronto, so, that’s who we watch.

- ... if I had to pick a NHL team, it would be the [Toronto Maple] Leafs because, that is who most of my kids like.

Differently, one father, who “always just wanted to go against the flow,” seemed to select his favourite team as a child, the Detroit Red Wings, to playfully provoke his father, whose favourite team was the Toronto Maple Leafs—Detroit and Toronto, at the time, were heated rivals. This type of fan is often called an ‘anti-fan’. Other reasons for selecting a favourite team included: interest in a particular player; limited teams to watch on television.

Five parents, mostly mothers, said that they do not have a favourite hockey player. The 23 other parents, though, do have favourite hockey players, and often listed more than one.<sup>31</sup> In total, 24 different players were named, 18 of whom are now retired or not playing in the NHL. Of these 18 players, one retired in 1960, eight retired between 1979 and 1989, three retired between 1990 and 1999, and five have retired since 2000.<sup>32</sup> The most popular player, though, is *not* retired. Sidney Crosby, of the Pittsburgh Penguins, topped the list of favourite players. Crosby, of all the players mentioned, is also the youngest. Four other non-retired players were named, including: Jarome Iginla of the Calgary Flames, Saku Koivu of the Montreal Canadiens, Dion Phaneuf of the Calgary Flames, and Martin St. Louis of the Tampa Bay Lightning. Wayne Gretzky, Bobby Orr, and Steve Yzerman tied as the second most popular player. Some other favourite players included: Wendel Clark, Bobby Clarke, Marcel Dionne, Tie Domi, Phil and Tony Esposito (brothers), Doug Gilmour, Bobby Hull, Guy Lafleur, Mario Lemieux, Ted Nolan, Maurice ‘Rocket’ Richard, Darryl Sittler, and Bryan Trottier (Hockey Database 2008, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d).<sup>33</sup>

I do not doubt that all 28 parents are fans of hockey. But, if their sons did not play hockey, would they still be fans of the sport? For most of the parents, I believe so. I suspect, however, that for some, their interest in hockey would be lessened, if existent at all. I do not think that the parents use their children to fulfill their needs as hockey fans;

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<sup>31</sup> Some participants began by stating that they *do not* have a favourite player (or players), but then went on to name particular players that they enjoy watching or have met. One mother said: “Not really. Not right now, no. I like all of them, you know, Sidney [Crosby] and Martin St. Louis ... I [liked] Steve Yzerman whenever he was playing.” Comments of this nature have been included in this analysis.

<sup>32</sup> One player mentioned, Chris Simon, is not playing in the NHL this season (2008-2009). He is currently playing professional hockey, though, in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) for Chekhov Vityaz (Hockey Database 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Some players mentioned might not have been included in this list for a variety of reasons, including: possible mispronunciation of player’s (or players’) name(s) on the part of participants; unclear interview recording(s).

*professional hockey*, for the most part, seems to do that. While they seemed to enjoy watching the Tigers' games and practices – some even dress from head to toe in the team's colours for games, cheering with pom-poms and noise-makers – the primary reason for attending, I believe, is to support their children, not to watch hockey. In this setting, they are parents first, fans seconds.

### **Children as Hockey Fans**

All 14 of the participating youths, unsurprisingly, are fans of hockey. When I asked *why* they are fans of the sport, a variety of responses were given—some had multiple reasons. To this question, more than half of the youths' responded by talking about their *own* hockey careers, often explaining why hockey is “fun.” For a few of the youths, the answer to this question was obvious. One participant, seemingly surprised by my question, replied in this way: “I like it,” he said with a laugh, “It's fun.” A handful of the youths said that they were fans because they enjoyed watching hockey, professional or otherwise. One participant said: “it's fun to watch on T.V. and I've gone to a couple of ... NHL games.” For a few other youths, they are fans because of family tradition or influence. For example, one participant, whose great uncle played for the Montreal Canadiens, said: “Well, it's just sort of been around in my family. Like my grandpa used to play hockey, and actually my great uncle used to play in the NHL.” Another youth explained how his father, who played ‘Senior A’ for several seasons, greatly influenced his interest in hockey: “my Dad plays it and I watched him all the time and just grew up to like it.” Other reasons why these youths are fans of hockey included: being around friends and teammates.

The three most popular teams amongst the youth participants are the Montreal Canadiens (four participants), the Detroit Red Wings (three participants), and the Toronto Maple Leafs (three participants).<sup>34</sup> Other favourite teams include: the Calgary Flames (one participant), the Chicago Blackhawks (one participant), the Dallas Stars (one participant), the New Jersey Devils (one participant), and the Washington Capitals (one participant). While the youths were much more assertive than their parents about picking favourite teams, their reasons for liking them were quite similar. Only one player seemed unsure about *why* the Canadiens were his favourite team, simply saying: “I just started liking them.” Nearly half of the youths, though – like many of the parents – asserted that family members were a major influence on their choice of favourite hockey team. One participant had this to say about his father’s influence: “Well, uhh, it first started off with my Dad, he likes them (the Toronto Maple Leafs), and he is always watching the games ... He definitely started making me like them, and as I got older and older I started liking them myself.” Other youths were drawn to teams by particular players, or because they “always watched” a particular team growing up. One youth, whose favourite team is the New Jersey Devils, had this to say about his selection process: “Umm, because they won the Stanley Cup in 1995 and that was the year I was born.” Additional reasons for picking a favourite team included: family friends or dislike for another team (or teams).<sup>35</sup>

Only one youth said that he doesn’t “really” have a favourite player.<sup>36</sup> The 13 other youths, though, do have favourite hockey players, and occasionally listed more than

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<sup>34</sup> One participant had two favourite teams, the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs. Because of this, he was given two votes.

<sup>35</sup> Some youths, it should be noted, had multiple reasons for liking a particular team.

<sup>36</sup> However, the reason why the Toronto Maple Leafs is one of his favourite teams is because of, in part, particular players (e.g. Mats Sundin). He likes Sundin (who now plays for the Vancouver Canucks) because he is a “playmaker and good leader.”

one. In total, 15 players were named, one of who is now retired. No player was the clear-cut most popular. Jarome Iginla of the Calgary Flames and Alexander Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals both received two votes, the highest of any player mentioned. The 13 other players named each received one vote; they are: Martin Brodeur (New Jersey Devils), Sidney Crosby (Pittsburg Penguins), Pavel Datsyuk (Detroit Red Wings), Kris Draper (Detroit Red Wings), Marc-Andre Fleury (Pittsburg Penguins), Patrick Kane (Chicago Blackhawks), Alexei Kovalev (Montreal Canadiens), Dion Phaneuf (Calgary Flames), Carey Price (Montreal Canadiens), Mike Richards (Philadelphia Flyers), Alexander Semin (Washington Capitals), Martin St. Louis (Tampa Bay Lightning), and Steve Yzerman (Detroit Red Wings—retired in 2006) (Hockey Database 2008, 2008e, 2008f). The majority of participants picked their favourite player based on their style of play.<sup>37</sup> Talking about Iginla, one youth said: “He is like the full package, I guess. He hits, scores, [a] playmaker.” Another youth explained how St. Louis’s style plays an important role in his own game: “I like [him] because he’s small and so am I, so, I like the way he plays, and I try to play like him.” A few participants seemed to like players’ personalities, as demonstrated by this youth whose favourite player is Draper: “he’s like the leader in the dressing room.” For one participant, what appealed to him *first* about Fleury was his equipment: “I first liked his pads ... that’s what made him stand out at first and [then] I started watching him, and he is really acrobatic and stuff.” For some, their interest in a particular player seemed to be heightened by frequently watching him on television or because that player is, or was, a member of their favourite team.

Of the 13 completed surveys, a long-list of “favourite” players was generated and divided by position (left wing; center; right wing; defense; and goaltender). However, I

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<sup>37</sup> Some youths, it should be noted, had multiple reasons for selecting their favourite player.

question the authenticity of some of these selections. A few participants, for example, seemed to ignore the instructions of selecting a favourite player at *each* position. For instance, one participant listed Evgeni Malkin of the Pittsburgh Penguins (a forward) as one of his favourite *defensemen*. Presumably he did this knowing that the video-game software would permit it, in turn, sacrificing some defensive stability for increased offensive power in hopes of creating a “better” team.<sup>38</sup> Another participant selected Jeff Finger of the Toronto Maple Leafs as one of his favourite defensemen. He later admitted to me that he selected Finger in haste, only moments before the video-game tournament started. Nevertheless, in addition to the players mentioned during the interviews, the youths listed these players as their favourites: Brian Campbell (Chicago Blackhawks), Ray Emery (Mytishchi Atlant–KHL), Jeff Finger (Toronto Maple Leafs), Dany Heatley (Ottawa Senators), Jaromir Jagr (Omsk Avangard–KHL), Tomas Kaberle (Toronto Maple Leafs), Ilya Kovalchuk (Atlanta Thrashers), Vincent Lecavalier (Tampa Bay Lightning), Nicklas Lidstrom (Detroit Red Wings), Roberto Luongo (Vancouver Canucks), Evgeni Malkin (Pittsburg Penguins), Chris Pronger (Anaheim Ducks), Scott Stevens (New Jersey Devils—retired in 2004), Joe Thornton (San Jose Sharks), Jonathan Toews (Chicago Blackhawks), Darcy Tucker (Colorado Avalanche), and Henrik Zetterberg (Detroit Red Wings) (Hockey Database 2008, 2008g, 2008h). The participants were *primarily* drawn to these athletes’ styles of play. For example, Ovechkin was described as making “crazy plays,” Thornton was described as making

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<sup>38</sup> Although unlikely, it is possible that this participant thought Malkin was a defenseman, not a forward. Malkin won this season’s (2008-2009) Art Ross Trophy for accumulating the greatest number of points during the regular-season—35 goals and 78 assists for 113 points (TSN 2009e). No defenseman has won this award since Bobby Orr in 1975 (NHL 2009b). The mixing up of forward positions (e.g. placing a center at left- or right-wing) was also common, but more understandable, as many forwards do (or can) play multiple forward positions.

“great passes,” and Luongo was described as making “big saves.” Other reasons that the youths picked these players include, but are not limited to: age, on- and off-ice personality, intelligence, physique, and speed.

The youths made it clear that there is a distinct difference between their *favourite* players and the NHL’s *best* players. According to these 14 youths, the best defenseman is Dion Phaneuf, the best forward is Alexander Ovechkin, and the best goaltender is Martin Brodeur.<sup>39</sup> Dion Phaneuf received seven votes, followed closely by Nicklas Lidstrom with four votes, and then Chris Pronger with three votes. Alexander Ovechkin received eight votes, followed closely by Sidney Crosby with five votes, and then Vincent Lecavalier with one vote. Martin Brodeur received seven votes, followed closely by Roberto Luongo with five votes, and then Ray Emery with one vote (Hockey Database 2008, 2008e).<sup>40</sup>

### **The “Idolization” of Professional Hockey Players**

Of the 28 parents, 11 outright said that their son did *not* idolize any professional hockey player (or players). One mother said: “No, I don’t think that [he] really does. I think that he ... just loves to play hockey.” Her husband agreed, saying: “He doesn’t pretend to be somebody.” A handful of other parents, while they couldn’t say with certainty, did not seem to think that their son idolized a professional hockey player (or players). “You know, I don’t know now,” one mother wondered, and then later said, followed by

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<sup>39</sup> Although I am confident that this information is accurate, several notes should be made concerning how the results were calculated: (1) On two occasions a participant could not decide who the best player was at a particular position. Their votes for these positions, therefore, were nullified. (2) One participant could not decide who the best defensemen was, torn between Lindstrom and Phaneuf. He was given two votes. (3) It was difficult to hear one participant’s vote for best defensemen, having conducted the interview in a noisy section of an arena. I believe, however, that he voted for Pronger.

<sup>40</sup> Emery is not playing in the NHL this season (2008-2009). He is currently playing professional hockey, though, in the KHL. From 2002 to 2008, Emery played for the Ottawa Senator’s organization in the American Hockey League (AHL) and NHL (Hockey Database 2008).

laughter, “I don’t know that there is just one player that he really idolizes. He could give you a different answer!” After a long pause, another parent said: “Umm, I don’t know, you know, he definitely looks up to them. I don’t know if he puts them on a pedestal, you know, as a role model or anything that he wants to become. But to a certain extent, I guess, he might.”

Only 12 parents thought that their sons idolized a professional hockey player (or players). “Oh, I think most kids do! They grow up and they’re fond of particular players for their own reason ...” one father said, “Me, I think it’s part of growing up and, umm, I don’t see, I don’t see anything wrong with that at all.” Another father said: “He probably idolizes them all ... being that talented and where they’re at, the success that they’ve had in the sport.” “I think so, yeah. I think so,” one mother proclaimed, “[but] a year from now, would he, who knows. But right now, I still think he is at the age where that’s where his interest are.”

The youths’ “idolization” of these players, though, might be more accurately classified as a form of “respect”—for the players’ talents. As one father explained to me: “I think he idolizes what they do ... I mean, does he go to bed at night, you know, dreaming that ... he’ll have the same values as ... [or] be the same person as, you know, as a Saku Koivu (NHL forward and captain of the Montreal Canadiens) ... I honestly don’t think that ... I don’t think the, umm, attraction to that player goes as far as that.” Likewise, five (5) of the 16 parents who did not think – or were unsure whether – their son ‘idolized’ a professional hockey player (or players) might agree with this parent, and be more inclined to classify their sons’ relationship(s) with professional hockey player(s) as ‘respect’. “Not that he idolizes them,” one mother explained, “He *looks up* to them”



(my emphasis). “Like I say ... he enjoys him (Dion Phaneuf),” another father told me, but then said, “Idolizes is a pretty strong word.” One mother had this to say: “I think if they are younger, they idolize them. But now that he’s old enough now – he’s 13 – I don’t think he idolizes them, I think he just sort of respects them maybe and sort of, you know, [wants to] be like them one day.”

For many of the Tigers’ parents, there seems to be a thin line between what ‘idolization’ and ‘respect’ mean. It would be a mistake, I think, to dwell on terminology here. However the youths’ feelings are categorized, what remains clear to most of the parents is that these professional athletes have an “influence” on their children. Only three parents thought that NHL players did *not* have an influence on their sons, while two were unsure, and one said that her son had outgrown such influences. The 22 other parents indicated differently, having stated or inferred that NHL players, to some degree, *do* have an influence on their children.

In agreement with their parents, most of the youths thought that NHL players have an influence on their lives. Take these comments about “hard work” for example:

- ... it inspires you to ... wanna go beat [them] and do the same as them or do better ... Right now, I’m trying to get over 50 points in a season.

- Well, I like to be like them off the ice, too, ’cause they are always working hard at whatever they do. And they never give up when they try something.

The youths also seemed to be heavily influenced by professionals’ on-ice play, often trying to “be like them.” “Well, I think they make me strive to be a better player,” one participant began, “watching them teaches me different stuff.” One youth had to this say: “like when ... [they perform] a really big play or something, it kind of makes you want to try it and see if you can do it.” Another participant explained how he tries to emulate Martin St. Louis, who has a similar physique to his: “he’s really small and he just works

hard all the time ... and from hard work he gets goals, and, uhh, I try to be a lot like him.”

How the youths decorate their bedrooms might best reflect the intense influence that professional hockey players and teams have on them. Of the 11 bedrooms shown to me, all seemed to have an athletic, mostly hockey, theme. Amidst their own personal medals, plaques, trophies, and newspaper clippings, was a considerable amount of hockey memorabilia. Sports celebrities covered their shelving and walls, displayed on calendars, collector’s cards, jerseys, and posters (including a life-size one of Crosby). Magazine cutouts of players and trophies were glued to self-made posters or tacked to walls. Sports figures were turned into ‘bobble-head’ dolls or stuffed-animals. Team logos were plastered on bed-sheets, blankets, comforters, clocks, flags, hats, pillows, pucks, and tee shirts. Even in the most unexpected of places team logos appeared: floor-mats, frames, garbage cans, lamps, light fixtures, placemats, snow-globes, and wallpaper. Team colours coated the most dedicated of fans’ walls. Hockey films and video-games piled next to their televisions, sticks hung on the walls, and miniature-replica NHL trophies sat next to their own. The sheer volume of hockey (and other sports) memorabilia was astounding, some of which was even autographed by professional hockey players, young and old.<sup>41</sup> For some families, hockey décor extended beyond their sons’ bedrooms and into family living spaces; items most frequently displayed in these places included framed pictures or paintings, some autographed.

These youths, like Caughey’s informants (1978), seemed to know quite a bit about the heroes that graced their bedroom-walls. While watching the Don Cherry film,

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<sup>41</sup> This description is not representative of *all* the participants’ bedrooms or family living spaces. While many of them did have the same type of memorabilia, not *every* participant had all of the items listed here.

for instance, they could be heard discussing the previous night's games or critiquing players and teams (which might then lead to a friendly debate). They also frequently reminisced about highlight-reel plays or game outcomes (which might then lead to teasing, or what they might call 'chirping'). Hockey equipment was another frequent topic. Carey Price's stick was described as "sick." The type of skate blade Sidney Crosby used was debated. Teemu Selanne's helmet was laughed at and sarcastically called "sweet." One participant described his stick as being "better" than Marc-Andre Fleury's. The equipment that NHL players use seems to have heavily influenced these youths. Their preferred sticks, as partly discussed in the forthcoming chapter, best demonstrate this.

“ Fetishes or charms are material objects believed to embody supernatural power that can aid or protect the owner. Good luck fetishes are standard equipment for some ballplayers. They include a wide assortment of objects, from coins, chains, and crucifixes, to a particular baseball hat. Ordinary objects acquire power by being connected to exceptionally hot batting or pitching streaks, especially ones in which players get all the breaks ... The player attributes the improvement in his performance to the influence of the new object and comes to regard it as a fetish. ”

-Gmelch, 1999, Pp. 196

## **Chapter 6: The Magical and the Rational**

Dreams of athletic stardom, somewhat of a taboo subject in this community, divided much of my research findings into two themes—the magical youths and the rational adults. Most of the youths aspired to be professional athletes, *but* most of their parents did not see this as a realistic possibility.<sup>42</sup> This topic, I suspect, was not frequently discussed between the two conflicting sides. Despite the unlikely chances of stardom, though, the parents *still* encouraged their children to chase their dreams by supporting them emotionally and financially.

### **The Magical Youths**

To enhance their on-ice performances, which in turn improves their chances of ‘making it’, some of the youths perceived objects like hockey jerseys and sticks as fetishes. Their perceptions of what particular objects were “magical,” predictably, was occasionally defined by the celebrities they revered.

Many of the youths emphasized the importance of jersey numbers.<sup>43</sup> There were plenty of reasons for having a preferred number (otherwise called a ‘favourite’ or ‘lucky number’). For many participants, numbers were ritualistic. One participant settled on the

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<sup>42</sup> Given their age and level of hockey involvement, I was not surprised to find little interest in careers outside of sport. However, in addition to the handful of participants that discussed other possible athletic careers (golf and lacrosse), a few also discussed possible non-athletic careers, demonstrating an interest in the following fields: business, dentistry, law, and mechanics.

<sup>43</sup> The following comments are not limited to the Tigers’ current jerseys. Many of the participants also discussed previously worn jerseys.

number “10” because he once scored *10* points in a single game at the age of *10*; he has worn that number ever since. Also consider these comments (my emphasis):

- I *always* wear that number.
- ... *ever since* I started [playing hockey] I wore [that number].
- Because *every year* I’ve played AAA I’ve had [that number].

For a few participants, numbers were selected because of family influence or tradition. One youth has worn the same number as his older brother, a Junior B lacrosse player, for the past four seasons. Another participant had this to say: “[The number] kind of runs in my family. My dad wore it. My uncle wore it.” One youth, referring to a previously worn number, discussed luck: “... that was a lucky number when I was little.” Over half of the youths, though, selected their numbers to emulate a professional athlete (or athletes). “I picked [that] number,” one participant began, “[because] a lot of good players ... wear it.” Here are a few more comments about the influence of professional athletes on number selection:

- I just kind of like the number. There’s a lot of, lot of big (talented) players are [that number] in all sports.
- ‘Cause a good defenseman ... was that number and yeah, I like [him].
- ... one of my favourite players, he used that number in Juniors.

If their preferred number was not available, participants had to settle for their second choice. In such cases, they selected a number close to their preferred one (e.g. numerically close: “1” and “2”; or visually close: “12” and “21”). Alternatively, some youths were assigned a number, while others simply did not seem to care about the number on their back.

Perhaps even more important to the youths than jersey numbers were hockey sticks. The most popular sticks were ‘one-piece, composites’ made by Nike-Bauer (nine

participants) and Easton (four participants). When I asked the youths how much their sticks cost, only few offered definitive answers. Most had to guess, making such comments as: “Probably like...” or “Probably around...” Based on their estimations, stick prices varied considerably, ranging from \$100–300. The average price of all the one-piece, composite sticks discussed (owned or otherwise) was roughly \$200.<sup>44</sup> All of the youths used (or wanted a new) one-piece, composite stick, except for one participant – a goaltender – who claimed that his stick selection was limited because he shot right-handed.

There were a variety of reasons why these participants preferred Nike-Bauer and Easton sticks to all others. While the sticks’ “cool designs” were important to some, many participants preferred these brands because of their ‘feel’. Describing the stick that he *wants*, Easton’s “Stealth S17,” one forward said: “I think it feels good, ’cause I tried [my teammate’s] stick during the game or during practice.” The team’s regular-season goal leader had this to say about the same stick: “Well, my one stick is my favourite, the ‘S17’, because the shaft ... doesn’t have a lot of grip but it has *some* grip. So, it’s not like really hard to stick handle. It’s pretty good” (my emphasis). Several participants highlighted how technologically advanced their sticks supposedly are. Consider these comments (my emphasis):

- ... it’s [a] one-piece, composite, uh, it’s light and it has some, some like grip and like ... good like kick-points so when you shoot it, it gives you a little bit of extra like snap, it goes a little bit better than other sticks ... [such as] wood sticks or something ... You get a *better shot* with it.

- It’s called a Nike-Bauer ‘One 95’. It’s pretty much the [Nike-Bauer] ‘Vapor 30’, but with better technology, to *reduce* the puck from bouncing.

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<sup>44</sup> I must emphasize that this is *only* an approximation. Two participants did not give exact figures, instead offered only price ranges (e.g. \$100–150). In such cases, I took the highest figure. Differently, one participant guessed that his stick, which was purchased on sale for \$150, regularly sold for about \$200. In this case, I took the lower, sale figure.

- It has a lower *kick-point* than, say like a Nike-Bauer 'One 90'. And you can get it up higher and quicker.

Many preferred these sticks because of their extraordinary ability to “bend” or “flex.” Discussing his Nike-Bauer “One 90,” one forward said: “I don’t know, it’s just the flex and the weight. So, like, perfect.” Another participant, who owns a Nike-Bauer stick, had this to say: “it flexes more, so it gives you more of a bend.” A stick’s weight was another important quality to some of these youths. One defenseman, who used a Nike-Bauer “Vapor 40,” explained to me that one-piece, composite sticks are “really light” because of their “hollow” shafts. When asked if they break easier than other types of sticks (e.g. wood), he simply said: “not really.”

Several of the youths’ stick purchases seemed to be heavily influenced by NHL players. Talking about his Easton “Stealth S17,” this high scoring forward said: “I see the [NHL] players use it and I like how it feels, the way I play with it.” One power-forward, describing his current (but not favourite) stick, made by Warrior, said: “umm, ’cause some of the NHL players use it and I like the looks of it and it performs good.” Another youth, talking about his preference for Nike-Bauer sticks, had this to say: “Just ’cause everybody uses it and they’re a good name.” With regards to hockey equipment in general, some of the youths also acknowledged the influence of their heroes. One participant, talking about his favourite brands of equipment, Nike-Bauer and Reebok, said: “Well, they have good quality. Most of the professional athletes use it, yeah, and like lots of commercials around it.” A few other participants felt the same way. Here are a few examples:

- You see them (NHL players) in the dressing rooms with the same chest-protector as me. So, they are pretty good, yeah.

- ’Cause [Nike-Bauer is] more protective, and advertised, and everyone (friends and NHL players) uses it.

- It's just that they've been around for a while, and a few pros are sponsored by them and they all wear the Nike-Bauer stuff.

Sticks of this kind, like other 'top of the line' equipment, are expected to be more comfortable, durable, and safe—all of which will hopefully improve the user's performance. For the Tigers, a player's performance, in the end, dictates whether he continues playing hockey at an advanced level or not. However, a user's performance is not simply controlled by the product's quality. Hildred Geertz (1975: 71), an anthropologist, writes: "The nature of 'the Thing itself' is a conceptual as well as an empirical problem." As some of the youths have demonstrated, celebrity endorsements play a significant role in why some things – e.g. attitudes, equipment, jersey numbers, and styles of play – are conceptualized as being "better" or more "magical" than others.

### **The Rational Adults**

Competing at the AAA level, as some parents told me, is considered a natural steppingstone to 'Junior hockey'. Discussing the possibility of his son playing Junior B and/or being scouted by American universities for scholarships, one father said: "Any kid that is playing hockey at the Minor Midget AAA level, not any kid, but half the kids, will get a good shot at it." Junior hockey, for aspiring professional hockey players in Canada, is the ultimate forum to impress NHL organizations and *make it*. As many of the Tigers' parents understand, though, professional athletes are exceptions. According to one study (Parcels 2002), the chances of making it to the NHL are, to say the least, unlikely. Of all the children born in Ontario in 1975, approximately 30,000 of them played minor hockey "at one time or another" (Parcels 2002). Of those youths, only 0.1% of them played in the NHL; even more telling than that, only six (6) out of the 32 athletes that *did* make the NHL have since then "qualified for the NHL's Player Pension"—an honour awarded to



players who have competed in a minimum of 400 NHL games (Parcels 2002). The Tigers' parents seemed to be conflicted about their sons' chances of becoming professional athletes. After all, even against the odds, they do not *know* that their sons will not make it.

Only one parent explicitly said that his son had a realistic chance of making the NHL. "Well, I think it comes down to whether he wants it or not," he began, "I think, right now, that where he is, he has the skill level, he has the size, umm, he can do what he wants with what he has right now." This father then explained that his son's (possible) professional hockey career is dependent on future personal decisions: "Depends on [the] choices that he makes, umm, choices being, you know, girls, extracurricular activities coming into high school." Like this parent, a few others thought that their son had the potential to become a professional athlete, but not necessarily a hockey player. One mother, talking about her son's lacrosse ambitions, had this to say: "If he really wants to do it, he could do it ... if he puts his mind to it, he'll do it. I don't think so much hockey. He's not willing to put the effort in, I don't think. The love is not there for the game that needs to be. It might be there for lacrosse. It depends." Another mother thought that her son had a possible career in golf ahead of him:

And there is probably more realistic options as a professional golfer of some sort than a professional hockey player ... Umm, because if they don't make the NHL and they don't make like a European team or the American [Hockey] League where they're going to make a half decent living, what do they do? How are they going to make their living? Whereas with golf, if he doesn't make the PGA tour or doesn't make whatever other tours are out there, there's all kinds of European tours or whatever, he could get a very nice job in a good golf course as a golf pro and, uhh, build his clientele and make a good living being a golf pro at a local club.

While these three parents seemed convinced that their sons had the *potential* to become professional athletes, I did not get the impression that they believed it would *undoubtedly* happen. After all, these youth participants are only in the eighth grade. One mother, who

seemed unsure about her son's Junior hockey ambitions, put it this way: "I don't know, he's 13, I don't know how realistic that is. It is a good goal to have, I think. It is something to work towards, but I don't know how realistic it is when you're 13. I don't know."

Many parents, being older and more experienced, see the road to the NHL as being more difficult than their teenaged sons do. "No," one mother said, then laughed, "I mean, yeah, it would be great, I dream of winning the lottery, right (laughter). But it's a possibility; it's a possibility for anybody if they work hard, right. You never know, as kids develop, you never know what they can do." With his son in the next room and certainly within hearing distance, one father dismissed his son's chances of becoming a professional hockey player by simply shaking his head and quietly saying: "Not really." Another mother, who knows about her son's unwavering hockey ambitions, said: "Everybody thinks their son is going to make the NHL. But, honestly I know he probably won't ... I think that, as he gets older, I think he will realize that, too. But if that's his dream, go for it!"

Some parents believed that their sons had come to grips with reality, having recognized their unfavorable odds of making the NHL. "I think he has realistic goals," one father explained, "in that he doesn't, he's not saying 'I want to play in the NHL', but I think he wants to play Junior hockey." Another father, who thought that his son's hockey career might be shortened because of his physique, had this to say:

Playing professional hockey is a huge long shot, you know. That is not a reasonable thing to expect, especially, well, with the amount of effort that, you know ... he's probably willing to put into it not being the natural, big, gifted athlete, I would say. It wouldn't be reasonable, and he understands that.

None of the youths, though, gave me the impression that they had ‘given up’ on their athletic dreams, regardless of probability. As I quickly realized, this was a sensitive topic for some parents. After a long pause, and with his son watching television nearby, one father said to me: “... statistics, chances are very, well ... very few make it to the NHL. But, as long as, they have to have the dream, they have to have the ‘want it’, and they have to have the skill. It’s all up to them, so. Umm, but as far as a parent ... you’ve got to understand, chances are it’s *not* going to happen” (my emphasis). To his response, I then asked: “But do you think that [your son] realizes this, too?” The father then replied rather assertively: “I don’t want him to. I want him to have a dream and chase it! I don’t care what it is. I don’t care what it is and what the chances are.” He continued: “I want him to have a sight on something and want it so bad that he’ll do anything for it.” Like this father, many other parents encouraged their sons to dream of careers in professional sports. One mother’s comments, I suspect, best represents how the Tigers’ parents feel about their sons’ dreams, athletic or otherwise. With her husband listening in, she said:

I ... think that he (her son) has parents and family members who, umm, are realistic ... there are parents out there who, umm, who tell their kids and tell everybody else that they are going to play in the NHL! I mean, we would always support our kids to do whatever they can do, or be the best that they can be ... whether that’s playing in the NHL or, you know, being a firefighter, or being a teacher, whatever they want to do. I think we’d support that anyways, but we aren’t pushing him in that direction (professional sports)!

Like this mother, none of the parents seemed to *discourage* their sons’ “dreams” or “hopes.” I suspect that their rational opinions about the topic reflects their general concern for their children’s well being. The crux of the matter for these parents, it seems to me, is their children’s happiness and success. They hope that their sons will succeed at whatever makes them happy—right now, that is hockey. If the youths’ athletic pursuits do not transpire, though, their parents want them to have other viable options. Hockey serves a priceless purpose in this process—the socialization of their children.

“ ... the training that children receive in organized sport is designed not merely to equip them with particular physical skills and, hopefully, pleasurable experiences of playing games, but also to attend to the appropriate development of their future selves. ”

-Dyck, 2003, Pp. 59

## Chapter 7: Adult Purposes

I argue that the connections between hockey celebrities and my project’s youth participants, based on Caughey’s (1994) explanation, should be classified as fantasy relationships. The youths seemed to subjectively connect with sports media figures in multiple ways, often relying on them to help construct their own successful athletic personalities. Incorporated into this process is an unavoidable force, the youths’ parents. By emotionally and financially backing their sons’ expensive and consuming involvement in hockey, I argue that the parents are indirectly encouraging such fantasies. However, this support is not necessarily intended to improve their children’s chances of becoming professional athletes. Instead, it seems to me, this support is intended to assist in the overall development of their sons’ character, which will hopefully help them to become happy and successful adults.

Indeed, some argue that parents enroll their children in organized sports, year after year, because they believe that it is *good for them* (Dyck 2003: 57-58). “In principle,” Mayer (1970: xxvii) claims, “one might distinguish three main ways of transferring socializing responsibilities outside the home.” They are:

One is to place children or young people within another domestic family, not the parental one; a second is to assign them to special extra-domestic institutions, under adult leadership or supervision, e.g. schools or church youth groups; a third is to encourage or allow them to form youth peer groups proper, free of adult control (Mayer 1970: xxvii; my emphasis).

Competitive hockey, like Mayer’s examples – schools and church youth groups – is an ‘extra-domestic institution’ that is created, maintained, and supervised by adults. Such a space is expected to help ‘complete’ its child and youth participants. Dyck (2003: 57)

writes: “The beneficial outcomes attributed to children’s participation in sport are extensive and extraordinary.” Among other results, sport can supposedly teach children about achievement and diligence, sportsmanship and teamwork, and how to face challenges. Sport can also supposedly keep children out of trouble while also giving them confidence and self-esteem, responsibility and sociality, and perhaps most importantly, enjoyment and physical exercise (Dyck 2003: 57-58). If sport is capable of instilling all of this, there is no wonder that parents are more than willing, if able, to enroll their children in organized sporting leagues. Many of the Tigers’ parents, I argue, seemed convinced that playing competitive hockey will help prepare their children for adulthood. Additionally, the majority of parents also believed that the NHL and its players, for the most part, play a valuable role in this process, by helping to instill community defined positive values.

### **Instilling “Positive” Values**

Of the 24 parents that thought, or were unsure whether, NHL players had an “influence” on their sons, 21 inferred that such influences were “positive.”<sup>45</sup> Hockey celebrities were believed to have a positive influence on various aspects of the youths’ lives, including, but not limited to: attitudes (desire, determination, passion, work ethic); equipment and memorabilia purchases; off-ice behaviour (‘keeping out of trouble’, well-mannered);

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<sup>45</sup> While some parents did not explicitly state that such influences were “positive,” I was given the impression that they believed they were based on the following statements: One parent said, with his wife listening: “I would say [they] influence him in terms of love of the game.” Another parent, who wasn’t sure if his son “[picks] up on” such influences, said: “I sometimes try to use them (NHL players) as an influence by telling [him] what they did when they were young.” Another mother described Crosby this way: “the clean cut kid who isn’t in any trouble, you know, he is, you know, he is minding his ‘P’s and Q’s’, so to speak ... he is a good ambassador for the game.” Another father said: “You want to hope that’s what he’s seeing (positive influences).”

pursuing dreams; setting realistic goals; sportsmanship; and styles of play.<sup>46</sup> In this way, it seems NHL players are considered to be suitable role models.<sup>47</sup> Some parents discussed the value of “hard work.” “[You] know, the kids love hockey,” one mother began, “so, they look up to a certain player that they see works hard, [has] a good work ethic ... So, in that way, I think that it teaches them values.” Another parent had this to say: “I think, to get there (the NHL), there is a lot of hard work [needed], and that instills that ethics into them.” Making it to the NHL is no “cakewalk,” as one father put it, “nobody gets to be successful without a lot of hard work and desire and determination to make it.”

Like these parents, many of the youths recognized the hard work that it takes to play professional hockey. Some youths even acknowledged the great influence that hockey celebrities have on their own work ethic, while others seemed to infer it. One defenseman, when asked how he felt about Sidney Crosby in comparison to other NHL players, said: “[he] has a lot more heart than other people, and works really hard.” Another youth, who considered Crosby to be the NHL’s best forward, had this to say: “like he’s all around, like he passes, he can score, umm, and he works really hard.” Prior to missing much of the regular- and post-season due to nagging injuries (which would later require surgery), one defenseman said: “Like on commercials ... they’ll tell ya to keep working and stuff.” By ‘keep working’ he meant: “keep trying and practicing,”

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<sup>46</sup> Two parents discussed the positive influence of Junior players. Their comments were included here.

<sup>47</sup> Actions and attitudes considered to be, or that have the potential to be, “negative” influences, as discussed by some of the parents, include, but are not limited to: excessive fighting, disrespect, illegal body-checks, whining. A few parents also raised concerns about contentious, off-ice behavior (e.g. drinking and driving); some of these parents, though, didn’t think that, or weren’t sure if, their sons were “aware” of “stuff like that.” One mother thought that her son just discarded such influences, while her husband believed that their son “recognizes what’s right.” For another mother, who seemed to generally consider NHL players to be positive role models, also thought that they (NHL) don’t “stress enough ... how hard it is to get there.”

so that he'll improve or "get better." Talking about the possibility of playing in the NHL someday, another forward said: "'Cause ... if you see them, if you see them playing then you know that you could be like there one day if you worked hard. And that's what ... that's what influenced me, 'cause I know if I, if like I [work] hard, then [I] might have a chance of getting there someday, playing there." Not all participants directly attributed their hard work to the influence of professional athletes. Their impressive work ethic, though, was obvious and best demonstrated to me by their off-ice training. Consider this conversation that I had with one of the goaltenders:

**Researcher:** Is playing competitive AAA hockey just for fun, too? Or is it for something else?

**Goaltender:** It is for my enjoyment but, uhh, I wouldn't be playing AAA if I didn't want to get anywhere.

**Researcher:** Right.

**Goaltender:** So, yeah, I take it pretty seriously.

**Researcher:** What do you have to do to take it 'seriously,' what does it mean to you to take it 'serious?'

**Goaltender:** Well, you look at some players' pre-game and they are just fooling around. I actually try to focus and play the best I can play.

**Researcher:** Does that involve any different eating habits, sleeping patterns, anything like that?

**Goaltender:** Yeah. And like off-ice stuff. I do a lot of off-ice stuff like throwing the ball against the wall and I do some drills that helps my focus.

**Researcher:** What would a drill be like that helps you focus?

**Goaltender:** Well, it is kind of like, uhh, like a relaxation thing where it relaxes your body. Your body thinks twice as fast when it is relaxed.

**Researcher:** Okay.

**Goaltender:** So that is good for my type of [playing] style, 'reaction'. So I react twice as fast when I'm relaxed. My nerves aren't bouncing off the walls.

Like this youth, many of his teammates seemed to share a similar passion for off-ice training, by demonstrating a considerable amount of commitment, desire, determination, and hard work for improving their play—some even had personal trainers. Workout

methods discussed include, but are not limited to: biking (stationary), chin-ups, leg-squats, lunges, plyometrics, push-ups, running (sand, street, treadmill), sit-ups, sprinting, shot practice (basement, driveway), and weight lifting. There were some other exercises, perhaps more unorthodox ones, also discussed. One forward explained how he improves his wrist strength: “you can get like a stick and you tie like [a skate] lace around it and [attach] it to a weight and you can, you roll it up, you roll it up with your wrist to help build your wrist power.” To help prepare for the Tigers’ season, one forward flipped a “tractor tire ... up and down a hill.” Another exercise used by some participants was sprinting with a parachute. Usually once per week, I was told, one forward would run up and down his street with a parachute – unsurprisingly made by Nike – strapped to his back. He described this task as ‘tiring’, “especially when you go ... into the wind.”

### **Using On-Ice Values Off-Ice**

The perceived off-ice advantages to playing competitive hockey became quite clear during my interviews with the parents about, of all things, their sons’ education. Of the 25 parents asked, 20 suggested that playing competitive hockey partly influenced their sons’ results in school, while five parents did not seem to think so. Two parents insisted that hockey comes a distant second to school—should hockey begin to “negatively” influence their sons’ schooling, then they will no longer be permitted to play. “Yes, he has to keep his marks up or he won’t be playing hockey,” one mother explained. “[School is] ... not going to be an issue because, as soon as the grades go down,” another mother said, “and I know that [he hasn’t] tried ... [he] will not be playing any competitive sports.” Two other parents simply did not think that there was *any* relationship between their sons’ education and hockey. “Umm, no, I don’t think so,” one



mother simply said with a short laugh. Another parent said: “No, I don’t see how that affects his schooling, right, because for most of these kids, it is what they put into it. And they don’t miss a lot of time, maybe four tournaments a year you might miss a Friday or half of a Friday [from school].” And the last parent of the five who did not think hockey influenced their sons’ results in school said: “No, I think that if he wasn’t playing hockey he’d likely be doing about the same in school. But he’d be doing something else competitive. You know, he’d be playing a different sport. So, I wouldn’t say hockey itself has an influence on academics.” When I asked these five parents how well their sons did in school, I was told that they were relatively successful students—“a ‘B’ student;” “Average student. 70-80 [percent], I guess, 75;” “He does very well;” “He is average;” “He is an average student.” Like these five parents, the 20 others also described their children as successful eighth graders—85% of who attributed their sons’ success, in part, to lessons learned from playing hockey.<sup>48</sup>

A few parents, I should first note, raised concerns about the ways in which playing competitive hockey could *potentially* hinder their children’s schooling. “Yeah, it probably takes away from [school], ah, I mean, there is so much time spent at the rink, going to and from the rink that, that homework doesn’t get done because of hockey, or any extra, any sporting event,” one parent said. Also consider this conversation between two parents, as they debated the advantages and disadvantages of their son playing competitive sports and the impact that it has on his education. Notice how the father’s position, after considering his wife’s response, somewhat changes:

**Father:** I think that playing any sport kind of does (have an influence on education). A lot of it depends on again, like [my wife] was saying, the [hockey] organization. It is a good organization (the one that the Tigers belong to), from top to bottom and that helps with school stuff ... The only

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<sup>48</sup> No youth was described as being below a “‘C’ average” student.

thing that may hurt his [education], like, [are] things like tonight. Like, uhh, a practice, not that it's a late practice, but if you have a lot of homework then ... you come back and you're tired. And again, these guys are still kids, so they might want to do something else, but they're trying to eat and trying to do homework, so I wonder how much [of] a negative influence that is. Now, they always seem to catch up. But for tomorrow, if we didn't get [those] two [homework] questions done, then ... what would that do [to him]? Right? So, it takes a lot of time!

**Mother:** But I think the thing with hockey and probably a lot of other competitive sports [is] that the kids learn discipline from the very beginning. They respect people in authority, which is their coaches, which goes along to their teachers as well. And, umm, even though [my son] was really tired when he came home tonight ... he went downstairs, sat down at the desk and he worked steady for, you know, a good hour and a half to almost two hours, never once complained that he was tired and that he had to go to bed or wanted to play or watch T.V. or play Xbox or anything. He knew that he had to get his homework done and he worked hard until he got it done. So, I think, that's an extension of the discipline he learns at hockey.

**Father:** Yeah, it is the discipline but ... can he put 100% into it, though? Like when you're tired? So, that is the only negative thing, I think ... but, I think, like I said, they catch up because they have all that discipline, all that stuff that [my wife] was saying, so, the next day they can recover that little bit, they know how to do that, and I think that's through hockey.

Like this couple, some of the other parents also credited their sons' off-ice success in the classroom to lessons learned from hockey. Consider these parents' comments about their sons' competitiveness and work ethic:

- I think that in general he is a competitive child, whether it is academically or sports related. He [likes] competition, yeah. I think that it's his nature, yeah.<sup>49</sup>

- I think he's learning that he's got to give 100% at everything ... [instead] of just hockey.

- (Results from a study that he "was brought aware of" during university) ... a lot of high level athletes do very, very well in school because of the transition of life skills from either being organized, learning how to set goals ... their competitive juices still want them to be the top of the class.

- You only get out of it what you put into it ... [My son] does a lot of preparing for games, so, he knows the work that it takes.

Also consider these parents' comments about their sons' discipline and time management skills:

- ... to play travel hockey you have to be disciplined, because there is an awful lot of time involved with it. By definition, you spend a lot of time on the road and if you're going to do well in school you have to get your homework done and be prepared, and if you don't then you're not going to do well in school. So, it requires a degree of discipline and that's why we, one of the reasons why we allow him to play.

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<sup>49</sup> While this parent did not state whether she believes that competitive hockey influences her son's results in school or not, I think that this comment suggests that it partly does.

- It becomes a part of your time management skills.
- (How playing competitive hockey enhances her son's schooling) Oh, yeah! Definitely! 'Cause there is discipline, [being] on his own.
- It shows him time management a little bit more ... a lot of it, at this point, is influenced by us, I think ... but you kind of hope that in years ahead it will help him a little bit more so than now.

Several comments were made about their sons' organization skills, and one comment regarding mental health:

- He prioritizes ... He knows he has to get his homework done and he has a busy schedule.<sup>50</sup>
- I think that, umm, you know, the body stays healthy and strong and the mind is benefited by this, the brain, the functioning. Any athletics, not just hockey. Especially stuff that requires balance and coordination, there is a lot going on in the brain to do that and, I think, it does fall over into academics.

Likewise, some parents, who felt that their sons were underachieving in school, encouraged them to do better, and in some cases, hoped that hockey might inspire them to work harder academically. "He's, umm, a 'B' student," one father explained, "Probably, ah, could do a little better if he applied himself a bit more." One mother, who described her son as an "average student," said: "Umm, if he had as much passion for school as he does [for] hockey it would be fabulous." Another mother, who seemed to want to push her son to 'do his best', said: "with the skills [learned] when they play competitive [hockey], they are gaining those skills where 'I want to [be] better, I want to be the best I can, no matter what'. So having that type of drive, instilling those type of things within him, we're hoping that he'll have a good life and want a good life." Her son's schooling seems to have benefited from hockey; later into the interview she said: "Like, that drive that he shows in hockey also is, it is showing in his schoolwork."

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<sup>50</sup> While this father, who was interviewed alongside his wife, said that competitive hockey does *not* influence their son's results in school, I think that this comment, like the following, suggests otherwise. Later in the interview, I asked: "He (their son) had mentioned things like working hard to get to the next level, type of thing, so that is where I was wondering if that hard work also transfers to his school work?" In response, the mother said: "It does. It can. He works hard at school."

## Achieving the “Good Life”

Although many of the Tigers’ players hoped that ‘the good life’ would be achieved through a professional hockey (or other sports) career, most of the parents did not see this as a realistic possibility, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, an interest in athletics, some parents felt, might lead to careers in sport for their sons, just not necessarily as *athletes*. Sports-related careers discussed include: academia, coaching, health care (medicine; training), media (commentating), and teaching. When asked about his son’s hockey ambitions, one father had this to say:

... it is fun to watch him in this context because, without a doubt, and I encourage it, all twelve, thirteen year old boys should dream, you know, dream about making the NHL, I mean, I did when I was that age, but, he has shared with me, from time to time, that he realizes that he doesn’t have the skill level and he doesn’t realistically foresee that in his future. But he’ll talk about [other] things that’s actually kind of neat, he says: ‘I love the game and maybe I’d like to become a coach.’ And he certainly has the personality and the smarts to do that, if that’s something [he wants] to do.

Another father, with a short laugh, told me that his son’s *only* future ambitions are hockey; he then discussed what might happen should his son not make it: “he knows that if it doesn’t work out, he’s got to go somewhere else. But then he says, ‘I can teach, I can learn.’ So, that’s why I told him, ‘your schools got to be good, so then you can become a phys-ed teacher, you can become a trainer, all different [things].’”

One parent of *each* child, if not both, seemed to regard education, at the very least, as important. The majority of parents, though, tended to *emphasize* its value. “We really try to encourage him ...” one mother began, “[to] do good in school ... you have to have something to fall back on,” her husband finished. For the most part, I suspect, that comment, like the following, best represents how the parents feel about getting an education:

- ... but I always say [to him], ‘you know what, you have to go through school, do good schooling, college’, and for a while there he wanted to be a judge.

- So, you know, we've always thought that school is always number one. It is not number two. School is number one. Well, I guess family is number one. School is number two ... Without school you're not anywhere. You got to get some sort of an education, whatever it might be, you know.

- ... as they get older, they realize, 'you know what, it is a tough going (making the NHL), a lot of work, a lot of dedication' and I think he sees the writing on the wall and I think they just do it for the love of the game and if they get somewhere with it, great, but if they don't well, you know what, school comes first.

- He knows the importance of a solid education to set yourself up. He is starting to understand that. Actually, this is the first year. Last year ... when we'd talk about it he'd never engage in a conversation and talk back to me and ask me questions. Where this year he wants to know.

Some parents even saw their sons' elite athleticism as a means to an education. After taking his son to a popular hockey camp last summer, one father learned that his son's skillful play could earn him a 'free ride' to an American university. Talking about the camp, he proudly said: "[they brought] in all the, umm, college, umm, people around and they sat down for one hour every day and told these kids about if you can get 70s and 80s [in school] ... [they] draft those kids, and will give you tutors and then if you don't make it, you have a scholarship, you have something to work for in your life. So, that's the nice thing that is happening with hockey." Quite a few parents also thought that their sons might be capable of playing hockey or another sport at the post-secondary level.

Here are some examples:

- He'd like to get a scholarship, but he's not looking to make the NHL, just wanting to get a scholarship so he can further his education that way, so.

- We are trying to push him more towards where he can get the hockey scholarship ...

- Well, I think, he'd like to go to the highest level that he can achieve. Whether, you know, he can play Junior A or B, and there is always [the] college, university scholarship option, which would be great if that ever turned out.

- He mentioned, umm, maybe golf scholarships, stuff like that (future ambitions) ... I really don't know if it's [realistic], I mean, the country is so full of [talent], but ... I would never dash his hopes and say, 'he can't do it' ... I think, if he puts his mind to it then it's a possibility, you know.

- ... he realizes how difficult it is to get to that level (the NHL) and maybe [there are] other options for him that are more likely to happen, like scholarships.

While the Tigers players, at the ages of 13 and 14, might think that an athletic scholarship is just another steppingstone to the professional ranks, to their parents, a scholarship likely means obtaining an education from a prestigious American university, at a reduced price (or, maybe even, free).

### **The *Multiple* Purposes of Competitive Sports**

Clearly the project's adult and youth participants have different ideas about the long-term purpose (or purposes) of playing competitive hockey—some more realistic than others. One common, short-term purpose that it serves, though, is enjoyment. Dyck (2003: 69) writes: “in spite of the demonstrable instrumentality of children's sports, these highly organized activities still manage to provide discernible measures of enjoyment and pleasurable memories for child and youth athletes as well as for parents, coaches and sport officials.” The Tigers' enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, hockey (and sport in general) was obvious to me. How they experience the game, though, certainly is different from the “fun” Gretzky described several chapters ago.

Hockey has now transformed into a wildly complex system, and is even considered, by some, partly *responsible* for the development of its young participants. Youths, like children, Dyck (2003: 66) contends, “by definition, are viewed not as mature and finished persons but rather as ‘works in progress.’” For adults, it is theorized, the purpose of sport is to prepare children and youths for adulthood. Dyck (2003: 58-59; my emphasis) explains:

...in addition to constituting reasonably ‘safe’ places where children are meant to encounter ‘fun’, the venues of children's sport are also decidedly purposeful spaces within which significant matters related to child development are expected to transpire. Within these environs operate notions of socialization that tend to view children as *vulnerable* and *incomplete* persons who need to be *molded*, *directed*, and *completed* by parents and other adults.

Hockey, thus far, seems to have served its purpose for the Tigers parents, by helping to ‘direct’ and ‘mold’ their sons into ‘successful’ youths. Indeed, they are superb athletes—ranking among some of the best hockey players, for their age, in Ontario. However, what is *more* important to the youths’ parents, I believe, is that their children have been quite successful outside of sport. Many of the parents partly attributed their sons’ off-ice success – e.g. school – to the values instilled by playing and watching hockey. Such values are expected to help transform these youths, in time, into ‘complete’ persons. The likelihood of the youths achieving their dreams of becoming professional athletes, chiefly hockey players, is unrealistic. This is not to say that it is impossible – after all, for their age and locality, they are the best – however, probability says, it is unlikely. If the youths’ aspirations of athletic stardom do not transpire, I think, it is the hope of their parents that the lessons learned from the world of hockey will continue to influence their lives as adults.

“Many students of sport,” Broch (2003: 75) writes, “claim that it has never been proved that participation in sport activities has a lasting impact on athletes’ behaviour outside the arenas of play.” “However,” he then asserts, “competitive sports take up too much time, during several years in the lives of too many children, to allow this question to be excluded from further scrutiny by social scientists” (Broch 2003: 75). Will playing for the Tigers have a ‘lasting impact’ on the youths’ lives outside of sport? This question, of course, cannot be answered yet. What *is* clear to me, however, is that their involvement with hockey does have an *immediate* impact on them. How the youths experience hockey is largely controlled by celebrities—the influence of these media figures should not be overstated; however, should not be ignored either. Hockey heroes

and stars seemed to play a significant role in many of these youths' lives, partially shaping their identities, both on *and* off the ice. This influence seemed to be indirectly encouraged by the youths' parents, as shown by their willingness to emotionally and financially support their sons' demanding hockey careers. Such demands were met, I believe, because hockey was expected to help achieve both short- and long-term agendas.



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<sup>52</sup> The Internet Hockey Database (HDB) was a useful resource for me. It hosts a large databank of information about hockey players' draft positions, statistics, and trades. The website's home URL has been referenced instead of listing the many individual players' URLs. To access individual players' websites, simply input their full name into the website's "player search" function, which is located at the top-right-hand corner of the home URL. To date (April 26, 2009) HDB's search results indicate that eight players mentioned in this thesis have the same name as another professional hockey player; additional references have been listed for those players whose search results list multiple players.

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## Appendix

### 1.1 In-person Semi-structured Interview Guide for Parents and Other Adults

-Preamble to participants: To conduct this interview, with two adults at one time, I expect the interview to last 30–60 minutes. The interview questions will address such topics as: your interest in hockey; the financial and leisure time demands of ‘AAA’ hockey; the influence of hockey celebrities on your son; and your son’s hockey career. Please remember that you can decline to answer any questions and/or stop the interview at any time, and ask questions as needed.<sup>53</sup>

1. What is your name; age; place of birth; occupation; immediate family’s demographics?
2. Are you a fan of hockey?
  - (a) At what age did you become a fan?
3. Do you have a favourite hockey team?
  - (a) If so, what team?
4. Do you have a favourite hockey player?
  - (a) If so, who is it?

-Remind the participants that they can decline to answer any questions, at any time.

5. How much do you expect to spend on your son this season (approximately)?
  - (a) Equipment
  - (b) Registration
  - (c) Travel
  - (d) Other expenses
  - (e) Total cost
6. Has your son ever asked you to purchase a particular brand of equipment?
  - (a) What do you think influenced his choice of brand?
7. Does your son have a favourite hockey player?
  - (a) If so, why do you think he picked that particular player?
8. Do you think that the NHL has a “poster boy”?
  - (a) Who do you think that it is?
  - (b) Why do you think that it is this particular player?

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<sup>53</sup> The preambles for appendices 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 were not always given to the participants in full, or at all. However, some of the information that would have been given in these preambles was available to the participants in the project’s information and consent letters. Nevertheless, I now recognize the importance of completing this task in full, and intend on doing so in future projects. Further, with regards to appendix 1.1, no adult, other than parents or guardians, were interviewed.

9. Do you think that your child idolizes any NHL players?
10. Do you think that NHL players have an influence on your child?
  - (a) If so, a positive influence?
  - (b) If so, a negative influence?
  - (c) If not, how come?
11. How well does your son do in school?
  - (a) Do you think that playing competitive hockey influences this result?
12. Does your son have any future ambitions related to hockey?
  - (a) If their son aspires to make a career out of hockey: How realistic do you think these ambitions are?
  - (b) What other future ambitions does your son have?
13. How does your son's hockey career affect your family?

## **1.2 In-person Semi-structured Interview Guides for Team's Coaching and Management Staff**

-Preamble to participants: I expect the interview to last 40–60 minutes. The interview questions will address such topics as: player attitudes, education, and team practices on and off the ice. Please remember that you can decline to answer any questions and/or stop the interview at any time, and ask questions as needed.

1. When selecting players for your team, were their attitudes a factor?
  - (a) What does it mean to have a “good attitude” in hockey?
  - (b) What does it mean to have a “bad attitude” in hockey?
2. When picking the team's captains, what most influenced your decisions?
3. Has a player ever missed a practice, game, or tournament for school-related reasons?
  - (a) If so, how did you respond?
  - (b) If so, how did the team's other players respond?
  - (c) If not, how would you respond if such an absence did occur?
4. Could you please tell me about some of the drills and exercises performed during the team's on-ice practices?
5. Does the team train off-ice, too?
  - (a) If so, how often?
  - (b) If so, could you please tell me about this type of training?
  - (c) Do the players continue to train during the off-season?

### 1.3 In-person Semi-structured Interview Guide for Youths

-Preamble to participants: I expect the interview to last 40–60 minutes. The interview questions will address such topics as: your interest in hockey; life goals; favourite hockey players and teams; favourite brands of hockey equipment and their costs; and the influence of NHL players. Afterwards, I will ask you to show me your collection of hockey and sports memorabilia. Then, I will ask you to demonstrate some of your off-ice training activities that you perform at home. Please remember that you can decline to answer any questions and/or stop the interview at any time, and ask questions as needed.

1. What do you ‘want to be’ when you’re older?
2. I’m guessing that you are a hockey fan, how come?
3. Do you have a favourite hockey team?
  - (a) A favourite National Hockey League (NHL) team?
  - (b) If so, why? Did someone/thing influence you to like this particular team?
4. Do you have a favourite hockey player?
  - (a) If so, why? Did someone/thing influence you to like this particular player?
5. Who is the best defenseman/forward/goaltender in the NHL?
  - (a) Why do you think so?
6. Do you have a favourite hockey moment (e.g. game, goal, play etc.)?
7. What position(s) do you play?
  - (a) Why did you pick that/those position(s)?
8. How long have you played hockey?
9. What number do you wear?
  - (a) Why did you pick this number?
  - (b) Have you always worn this number?
  - (c) If not, what other numbers have you worn; and why did you pick them?
10. Do you play any other sports?
11. Which sport is your favourite?
  - (a) Why is it your favourite?
12. Do you have a favourite type of sports drink?
  - (a) Why is it your favourite?
13. Do you have a favourite type of hockey stick?
  - (a) Why is it your favourite?

- (b) How much do your sticks cost?
- 14. Do you have a favourite brand of hockey equipment?
  - (a) Why is it your favourite?
  - (b) How much does this brand of equipment cost in comparison to others?
- 15. Who usually pays for your equipment and sticks?
  - (a) If they pay for it: How do you feel about paying for it?
  - (b) If their parents/guardians pay for it: How do you feel about asking for these particular sticks and brands of equipment?
- 16. Would you consider using cheaper sticks or brands of equipment?
- 17. What hockey players do you see the most of, for example, on commercials, posters, and video-games?
  - (a) How do you feel about these players compared to other players?
  - (b) Why do you feel this way?
- 18. Do NHL players have an influence on you?
  - (a) If so, what kind of influence do they have?
  - (b) If so, how do you feel about that influence?
  - (c) If no, why not?
  - (d) If no, do you think you are unusual in that respect?



## 2.1 Survey for Youths

-Preamble to participants: This survey is to be completed before the hockey video-game tournament. Please answer these seven questions. Once completed, please send it back to me in the envelope provided (postage included).

1. Who is your favourite NHL Left-Winger and why?
2. Who is your favourite NHL Right-Winger and why?
3. Who is your favourite NHL Center and why?
4. Who is your favourite NHL Defenseman and why?
5. Who is your second favourite NHL Defenseman and why?
6. Who is your favourite NHL Goaltender and why?
7. Please pick a team name for the video-game tournament.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This survey has been modified from the distributed version. However, all questions have been included here.