

Organized Youth Sport, Parenthood Ideologies and Gender Relations:
Parents' and Children's Experiences and the Construction of "Team Family".

by

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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.

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ABSTRACT

While the importance and scope of children's sport participation has been a topic of research, to date, few researchers have explored the impact organized youth sport may have on family life. In particular, little attention has been paid to the way in which family relationships, interactions, and values are shaped by children's sport involvement. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature and the social and cultural context in which youth sport participation occurs. Specifically, the connection between children's participation in youth sport and contemporary motherhood and fatherhood ideologies is explored, including the relation between youth sport and being a "good parent". Changing parenting ideologies and their implications for gender relations are also addressed.

An interpretive approach was used to discover behavioural, relational, and emotional aspects of youth sport and family life. The setting for the study was a rural community (which included both farm and non-farm residences) since such communities are characterized by fewer services (e.g., leisure facilities, public transportation, health care) and higher rates of poverty and unemployment. Semi-structured interviews and on-line participant journals (10 days duration) were used to discover divergent experiences of mothers, fathers, and children. A purposive sample of seven families (19 children, 7 mothers, and 6 fathers) participated in the study. Data analysis was guided by a constructivist grounded theory approach to facilitate understanding of participants' perceptions and meanings of youth sport participation.

The data revealed three major themes. The first theme "Understanding Children's Experiences" relates to children's perceptions of their scheduled lives, the impact organized sport has on their relationships with their siblings, and how they perceive their parents' involvement and support. The second theme "Parenting in Public and Private Spaces" reveals the parents' perspectives on the high cost of youth sport for the family unit (emotional, physical, and financial cost), how the parents' involvement with the sport organization shapes the parent-child relationship, the judgment of other parents' behaviours, and meaning and significance of being a "good parent". The third theme that developed from the analysis, "The Nexus of Family Experiences", illustrates the intersection of the children's and parents' perspectives. This theme reveals the complexity of the decision-making processes and the positive and negative experiences of youth sport for different family members. The core theme, "Upholding Team Family", represents the culmination of the children's and parents' experiences, and helps to capture and integrate the insights gained from the analysis as a whole. This theme focuses on the centrality of organized youth sport in the construction of a sense of "team family", as well as the sacrifices and contradictory aspects of maintaining this ideal. Further, the gendered nature of organized youth sport involvement and how rurality shapes the families' sport involvement, are also discussed.

The themes that emerged from this study reflect the contradictory nature of organized youth sport, including the strengthening of familial relationships, as well as the tensions and disagreements arising out of divergent perspectives. Emphasis is put on the public nature of parenting in the youth sport context and its relationship to social constructions of being a "good parent". In terms of broader implications, the study emphasizes the close connection between organized youth sport, and changing cultural ideals and practices associated with gender and parenting.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Growth of Organized Youth Sport

The emergence of youth sport organizations during the past half century, in North America, has resulted in a new aspect of socialization of children and the nature of their leisure (Berryman, 1996; Coakley, 2006), and with each new generation, the popularity of organized youth sport has continued to grow (Adler & Adler, 1994; Fishman, 1999). This growth may be partly due to important generational ideological shifts and changing cultural and structural factors. Coakley (2006) theorizes that there are now important cultural connections between organized youth sport and ideologies of parenting and gender.

During the earlier half of the 20th century, the two spheres of family and school formed the majority of childhood experiences. However, Arendell (2001) argues that a third sphere now characterizes a child's life - enrichment activities and extracurricular experiences. Organized youth sport, in particular, is highly valued by many children as a popular extracurricular activity, with both 'fun and participatory' and/or 'competitive and winning' aspects. Many parents also value organized youth sport and purposively seek out programs for their child's involvement. Parents perceive that organized sport programs may help enhance their child's physical and social growth and development (Coakley, 2006; Iwasaki, 2005). Organized youth sport is also believed to facilitate important cultural lessons in the areas of character building, teamwork, responsibility, cooperation and competition; all attributes that are valued within a capitalist society (Adler & Adler, 1994; Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003).

The increase in youth sport participation in North America since the 1950s has occurred primarily in adult-organized and agency-sponsored programs such as little league baseball, minor soccer, and particularly in Canada the development of minor hockey programs

(Coakley, 2006; Donnelly, 1997). These leagues were “intentionally designed to inculcate children with a particular set of values necessary to function properly in a democratic society” (Wiggins, 1996, p. 15). Initially most sport programs were developed for boys and it was not until the 1970s that opportunities for girls’ sport participation were created (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

Organized youth sport has been a topic of considerable research in recent years, particularly in demonstrating the benefits of participation. Research has examined the psychological, moral and physical importance of the sport experiences as it relates to the child’s growth, development, and performance. Of significant note are the physical benefits of sport in combating childhood obesity and countering negative risk behaviours such as alcohol and drug use (Flegal, 1999; Iwasaki, 2005; Thorlindsson, 1999). Researchers have also raised social psychological questions that have focused on how young people are socialized into sport participation, the outcomes or benefits that parents hope their children will receive, and the relationship between parental support and children’s continued involvement (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006; Wuerth, Lee, & Alferman, 2004).

While the political and ideological importance and scope of children's involvement in sport has been the topic of research, little attention has been directed to the impact organized youth sport may have on family life. Research has often investigated the role of the family as a socializing agent and source of emotional, physical, and financial support (e.g., Green & Chalip, 1997; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004; Wuerth, Lee, & Alferman, 2004). However, less attention has been paid to the reverse relationship and the ways in which family life, interactions, and values are affected by facilitating children’s sport (Kay, 2000). As Coakley and Donnelly (2009) point out: “... organized sports is often a family affair.

However, few sociologists have carried out research on how youth sport participation affects family relationships” (p. 127). Informed speculation has suggested that organized youth sport can bring a family together, but it may also cause a great deal of stress between family members.

This study seeks to address this gap in the literature and explores the connections between organized youth sport, family life and the social and cultural contexts in which youth sport participation occurs. Specifically, it addresses some of the ways in which children’s organized sport participation may reflect and contribute to broader and complex socio-cultural changes in contemporary motherhood and fatherhood ideologies and what it means to be a “good parent” (Coakley, 2006). Grounded in a middle-upper class value system of post-industrial societies, a culture of *involved fathering* and *intensive mothering* has emerged with an important connection to organized youth sport. Moreover, the changing parenthood ideologies may have important implications for gender research. On the surface the cultural expectations, beliefs, and practices of involved fatherhood and intensive motherhood ideologies seem to evoke notions of gender equity; however, these practices may also hide underlying inequality.

Organized Youth Sport and Changing Parenthood Ideologies

Feminist scholarship has been central to the understanding of contemporary motherhood and fatherhood ideologies, cultural beliefs, and practices (Allen, 2004; Arendell, 2000). For women, “the character of mothering has intensified. Contemporary mothering arguably entails more involved and deliberate practices” (Arendell, 2001, p. 168). Mothers are expected to be child-centred and direct their children's lives in organized extra-curricular

activities. This has left both mothers and children with “little time for free play and simple relaxation” (Arendell, 2001, p. 164), rather, motherhood requires a significant amount of time, energy and financial resources for activity implementation.

Feminism is also advancing contemporary men's studies and the growing body of literature on new fatherhood expectations and values (Allen, 2004). For most of the 20th century men were expected to be the primary breadwinners for their families with little expectation for domestic responsibilities. Unlike previous generations, the emergence of new fatherhood ideologies are evaluating the current generation of fathers’ moral worth, based upon the meaningful time spent with their children (Daly, 1996). For many fathers this has created conflicting emotions and concerns as they try to meet the cultural expectations of primary breadwinner and a more involved style of fathering (Daly, 2002).

The cultural expectation for fathers to increase the amount of time they spend with their children challenges hegemonic forms of masculinity (Gavanas, 2003). As such, many fathers may use organized youth sport as a vehicle to fulfill new involved fatherhood cultural expectations, without challenging the dominant masculine ideology (Coakley, 2006). However, this has come under criticism as privileging men who now claim to share parenting responsibilities, yet women continue to fill the bulk of childcare and household related responsibilities (Coakley, 2006). This critique is also consistent with Such's (2006) research that fathers spend time “being with” children in leisure type activities, that do not challenge hegemonic forms of masculinity, while mothers spend time “being there” for their children in more feminine and domesticated work-related contexts. Therefore, gender ideology might provide another important aspect in illuminating the connection of organized youth sport to changing parenting beliefs, expectations, and practices.

Gender as a Relational Analysis: Inclusion of Both Women and Men's Perspectives

West and Zimmerman's (1987) landmark article has been instrumental in the development of gender scholarship in the social sciences. Rather than a social role or set of biological traits, gender is argued to be embedded and created in "doing" everyday social interactions. Gender is a powerful ideological device, reinforcing hierarchical relations between men and women, operating at both structural (macro) and interactional (micro) levels. Masculine and feminine behaviours are argued socially constructed, rather than socially modeled, and individuals are consequently judged by these normative standards. The significance of the "doing gender" thesis is the notion that gender behaviour is dynamic and could transform over time, responding to changing contemporary norms (Deutsch, 2007).

However, as Deutsch argues, the idea of "doing gender" has "typically been used to show how gender relations are maintained and even to argue that the more things change, the more they stay the same" (p. 108). Instead, to facilitate social change Deutsch argues that researchers need to shift from discussion about "doing gender" to illuminating how we can "undo gender". Deutsch proposes that future research should focus on questions such as "when and how social interactions become less gendered", "how the institutional and interactional levels work together to produce change", and "interaction as the site of change" (p. 106). For example, Deutsch discusses her research on equally shared parenting and how it demonstrates that parenting need not be gendered, and that change is possible with individual resistance to traditional gender ideology. Thus, gender research has the potential to illuminate enduring social constructions of traditional masculine and feminine relations within the family

context, but also to enrich our understanding of when and how social interactions become less gendered and have the potential for social transformation.

A considerable body of research to date has examined the connection of gender ideology and leisure and sport experiences (Henderson & Shaw, 2006, p. 216). Reflecting the initial feminist project, leisure gender research has typically focused on women's individual perceptions and experiences, and on broader societal expectations for women's responsibility within the domain of family life (Henderson & Shaw, 2006; Kay, 2006a, 2006b). Earlier studies on women and sport have also mirrored leisure research, with the importance of gender as a framework for analysis, and an emphasis on women's experiences, meanings, and the politics of the body (Birrell, 2006; McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000).

However, many feminist scholars have argued that gender research has been too narrowly focused in both leisure and sport research (e.g., Henderson & Shaw, 2006; Kay, 2006a, 2006b). To date, in gender analyses, leisure research has given minimal attention to understanding men's experiences, while maintaining a primary focus on women's perspectives. Likewise, although critical studies of men's sport has moved gender and masculinity to the center of analysis, (McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000), researchers have given little consideration to the relational framework of analysis. In an insightful summary, Kay (2006b) identifies the weaknesses of gender analyses in the sociology of sport and leisure research to date:

At one level, the sociology of sport has arguably been better than leisure studies in applying gender analyses to male experiences. The two areas nonetheless share a weakness: while leisure studies may have failed to apply gender analyses to men much at all, the sociology of sport has done so, but with limited attention to relational perspectives. McKay et al. (2000) suggest that further development within the sociology of sport is required through a greater emphasis on critical relational studies which take account of the reciprocal relationships between men's and women's lives. Within leisure studies, the conceptualization of gender as a

fundamental social construct that is continually produced and reproduced through the experiences and interactions of women and men has led writers such as Aitchison (2001) and Henderson et al. (2002) to emphasize the need to extend the approaches that have been used in feminist research beyond the study of females (p. 137).

I agree with Kay (2006a; 2006b) and Henderson and Shaw (2006), that the shift to include both women and men in gender analyses may provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between family life, gender ideology, and leisure practices. Relational analysis that takes into account the reciprocal relationship between men and women's lives may better illuminate the interwoven constructs of masculinity and femininity. As such, relational analysis is a guiding principle for this project that seeks to understand the dynamics of family life in connection to children's organized sport. In addition to recognizing the relational framework that emphasizes a family's agency in their gender negotiations, it is also important to recognize the broader cultural ideologies that shape the context in which this process occurs (Kay, 2006b). Therefore, the connection of family life to children's sport participation is explored, while seeking to understand how this connection is embedded within dominant cultural ideologies of motherhood, fatherhood, and gender relations.

Family and Sport in the Rural Context

This study also seeks to address another gap in the literature and the lack of research that has investigated organized youth sport in the context of rural communities, for both farm and non-farm residences. A portion of my master's thesis research (Trussell, 2005) identified some of the unique barriers and motivations that farm women experienced in facilitating their children's sport participation. As expressed by the women, the lack of public transportation options, the long distances to sport facilities and neighboring communities, and the work

demands of their husbands' farming operation, enhanced negative feelings of time stress and fatigue. Consequently, considerable marital tension and strain was experienced by many of the women, as they tried to negotiate the physical and emotional tasks related to their children's sport participation. Other researchers have also noted heightened time demands and transportation challenges when investigating leisure practices in the rural context (see, for example Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). Further, several of the women in my study also expressed the isolated nature of the rural locale, and for some farm women, the sense that the family farm was doomed. This encouraged many women to purposively ensure that their children were involved in a number of activities, thus integrating them into the broader community during their childhood and later in life.

Organized youth sport and its connection to family life was not a major focus of my master's research. Instead, this research sought to understand the meanings and experiences of family leisure within the context of the lives of women currently residing in the rural community. However, the impact of organized sport on family life quickly became evident as a major influence in shaping family experiences, interactions, and values as perceived by the women I interviewed. Thus, my master's thesis research has largely inspired my interest to pursue this topic in my doctoral studies.

There are several compelling reasons to explore organized youth sport and family life in the rural context. As Hornosty and Doherty (2003) explain, although rural communities have their own unique social structures and values, they do share important "cultural, social and physical characteristics that distinguish them from urban environments" (p. 40). For example, rural communities when compared to urban centres may be physically isolated, have

fewer resources and services (public transportation, childcare, education, health services), and have higher rates of poverty and unemployment (Hornosty & Doherty).

There is also an *idyll* of raising children in the rural countryside that may shape youth sport participation and meanings and experiences. The rural idyll is largely influenced by romanticized notions of the rural way of life. This image constructs rurality as positive, with a good moral foundation of a caring community and tranquil existence, surrounded by the simplicity and peacefulness of the natural environment (Haugen & Villa, 2006). In addition, the advantage of living close to forests, fields, and wild life may provide a natural landscape for physical activity, with little need for organized sport participation. This same rural landscape, on the other hand, may be isolating and organized youth sport may provide a particularly important venue for socialization and interaction.

In fact, Townsend, Moore, and Mahoney (2002) discuss how important sporting and physical recreation clubs are in rural communities. The centrality of sport to a rural community may be seen in its ability to bring a community together and provide a sense of unity and solidarity. Organized youth sport may become a source of community entertainment with a lack of cultural, entertainment, and leisure facilities (i.e., theatre, cinema, bowling, shopping etc.) (Haugen & Villa, 2006; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). Therefore, in a small rural town, organized youth sport may be an important source of leisure for children, their parent(s), and/or the community at large.

In contrast to urban life, the rural countryside has a positive image of having a social fabric that is close-knit, caring, and neighbourly, with people looking out for each other (see, for example Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen & Villa, 2006). However, at the same time, the close-knit community may also have contradictory meanings for individuals and families. As

Haugen and Villa (2006) explain: “While the rural community is appreciated as safe and caring and isolated from city problems, it also has its costs: social control, loss of freedom, gossip and rumours” (p. 187). As such, with the higher degree of visibility within the community, many parents may perceive heightened judgment of their parenting practices (Bonner, 1997). This may have important implications for the connection of organized youth sport and family life, particularly in light of the potential ‘moral worth’ by which a parent may be evaluated (Coakley, 2006).

Gender relations in the rural context may provide another perspective for studying youth sport and its connection to family life. Rural values, although not monolithic, tend to reflect a patriarchal view of traditional gender relations (Little & Morris, 2005). As Hornosty and Doherty (2003) explain: “Researchers have found that traditional norms around marriage and the family are more prevalent in rural communities, as are patriarchal attitudes that devalue and objectify women” (p. 41).

The highly gendered nature of sport in rural communities may also reflect and contribute to traditional gender relations. In many small towns sport participation is male oriented, with women excluded from the sport clubs or involved only in a support role for men’s participation (Dempsey, 1990; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). Community leaders’ decision-making may also reinforce male-centred activities and the beliefs about what is valued and important. For example, in a small rural community the major facility and focal point of the community is often an ice arena. As Hunter and Whitson (1991) point out, the ice arena is “great for husbands and children, but offering little or nothing to women other than watching the males in the family play hockey” (p. 230). Further, even though ice facilities may provide opportunities for *children’s* leisure, the gendered use of these facilities may be

reinforcing the importance of boys' leisure over that of girls. For example, Thompson, Rehman, and Humbert as recently as 2005 reported that "girls only" hockey and baseball teams are still not available in many rural towns. Thus, further exploration of the connection of youth sport participation within the rural context may be illuminative of broader socio-cultural ideologies of parenthood and gender.

Aim & Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the dynamics of family life in connection with organized youth sport programs. Specifically, an interpretive approach is used to discover behavioural, relational, and emotional aspects of youth sport and family life. A focus of this study is to understand youth sport in terms of broader socio-cultural beliefs, expectations, and practices as they relate to parenthood and gender ideologies (change/resistance as well as reproduction). The setting for the study is in a rural community (both farm and non-farm residences) where facilitating youth sport participation may have unique experiences, meanings, benefits and/or challenges.

Both mothers and fathers are included in the study. Further, children are also included because most of the family leisure and sport research to date has focused primarily on parental perspectives, often excluding children's interpretive perspectives (Alderson, 2005; MacPhail et al., 2003). The approach conceptualizes children as active participants in the research process, capable of speaking for themselves on the meaning of their own lived experiences (Christensen, 2004). Thus, recognizing that experiences and views may be divergent between individual family members, I included all family members in the research design. This

approach hopefully provides a more holistic, yet complex, understanding of the multiple accounts of family life and experiences.

In summary, positive and negative interactions and processes between family members (parent to parent; parent to child; sibling to sibling) and their influence on overall family life is explored in terms of their connections to children's organized sport and parenthood and gender ideologies, both within and outside the sporting domain. Individual perceived meanings and experiences are investigated with each family member, thereby including the perspectives of rural mothers, fathers and children. Given the purpose of this study, a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2005, 2006) is used to explore the individual perceptions and meanings of sport within the family context.

Chapter II: Review of Related Sport and Family Literature

To provide a broader background and more enhanced understanding on the proposed topic, I took a multi-disciplinary approach and reviewed the related literature from several academic fields: leisure studies, sport studies, and the broader social sciences literature on fatherhood and motherhood. This chapter first explores the dominant contemporary fatherhood and motherhood ideologies and the reflection and contribution of organized youth sport participation to these ideologies. The second part of this chapter explores the impact that organized youth sport may have on the family unit and other aspects of family members' lives outside of the sport domain.

Social Construction of “Involved Fathering” and Organized Youth Sport

From Breadwinner to Involved Fathering

The definition of fatherhood is changing. For most of the 20th century, a father's employment status and ability to provide financially for his family, underpinned strong ideological assumptions about masculinity and the fatherhood role (Brannen & Nilsen, 2006). However, an ideological shift from breadwinner to a more involved style of fathering, beyond monetary support, is on the rise. A contemporary ideal of fathering expects fathers to share in the physical and emotional care of their children (Yeung, Sandberg, & Davis-Kean, 2001). As Coakley (2006) theorizes, the shift in contemporary fatherhood expectations is:

fuelled by a combination of factors, including a conservative emphasis on traditional family values and fathers as heads of households, a neoliberal emphasis on individualism and the need for fathers to take responsibility for the development of

their children, a liberal feminist emphasis on gender equity in family life, and progressive ideas about the meaning of gender and sexuality” (p. 153).

In response to the fatherhood ideological shift, fathers have expressed difficulty in attaining the “involved” ideal (Daly, 1996). This difficulty seems to stem from the expectation of having a greater involvement in their children’s lives, while at the same time continuing to be the primary breadwinner for their families. Kay (2006b) defines these two conflicting cultural expectations as the central dilemma to the new fathering ideology with confusion and tension between these two roles. Consequently, many men have struggled to make sense of the competing images, and there has been a complex and diverse response to the practice of this new fatherhood ideology (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

To reflect and illustrate the complexity and diversity of father identities and masculinities, several scholars have proposed fatherhood models. For example, Brannen and Nilson (2006, p. 340) propose a three model typology. The first model is the *work-focused* father whose identity is primarily shaped by the work ethic and who has a rather low involvement in their children’s lives. The second fathering model includes the *family man* who still upholds the role of primary breadwinner, but who also places a high value on “being there” and helping out to some extent with childcare responsibilities. Brannen and Nilson describe the third model as the *hands on* father who is heavily involved in childcare and is not typically the main income earner for the family. Interestingly, Brannen and Nilson do not identify a model that stems from their research which illustrates an *equitable* and shared distribution of childcare responsibilities.

Reflecting on the previous generation of fathers, some men hold their own fathers accountable for not spending more time with them, although they themselves are “usually

willing to excuse their own absenteeism on the basis of their own work demands” (Kazura, 2000, p. 44). Nonetheless, most fathers have the desire to provide an enriched childhood for their own children (Brannen & Nilsen, 2006) and leisure often provides an important context to do this.

Leisure-Based Fathering as the Primary Context for Involvement

Compared to mothers, fathers devote less time to the emotional and physical care work of their children (Kay, 2006b), and rather, spend time with their children in play and companionship activities outside the home such as sports, outdoor activities, and hobbies (Brannen & Nilsen, 2006; Doucet, 2006; Yeung, Sandberg, & Davis-Kean, 2001). In recent years the importance of father-child interactions spent in moments of play has heightened with the emergence of the involved fatherhood ideology. One of the reasons for this may be that play and leisure activities are believed to strengthen and build the father-child relationship and build warm memories for years to come (Harrington, 2006; Such, 2006).

Many fathers may find leisure activities to be a favourable context for enjoyable interactions with their children, while fulfilling their cultural expectations of the involved fatherhood ideology. Shared leisure experiences may not only provide fathers with the opportunity to open communication channels with their children, but also, these experiences may become a catalyst for other topics as well (Harrington, 2006). Further, the activities that a father and child participate in together are often reflective of the father’s interest, which can create highly valued and meaningful experiences for fathers (Such, 2006).

Leisure-based activities are important to the development and growth of the father-child relationship. Yet, to date, fatherhood literature in the family, sport, and leisure fields has failed to examine “the social and cultural processes entailed in shared father-child leisure

activities, [and] the subjective meanings these activities have for fathers” (Harrington, 2006, p. 169). The context of children’s sport, therefore, may provide important future research directions in understanding the father-child relationship in relation to the meanings, interactions, and experiences of their time spent together.

Youth Sport and Hegemonic Masculinity

A different set of issues may arise when considering fathers’ involvement in their children’s sport participation, particularly in terms of hegemonic masculinity and evolving fatherhood ideologies. The new ideal of the ‘involved father’ is a concept of uncertainty for many fathers as the increase in childcare responsibility challenges traditional hegemonic practices of masculinity. The shift in the contemporary fatherhood ideology from breadwinner to involved fathering presents confusion, as men simultaneously deal with the dilemma of “how do you masculinize domesticity and at the same time domesticate masculinity?” (Gavanas, 2003, p. 1). For fathers, children’s organized sport programs may provide a context in which they can successfully avoid the dilemma of feminizing the fathering role. Coakley (2006) suggests that fathers are able to spend time with their children and meet childrearing expectations, without challenging the dominant principles of hegemonic masculinity. In fact, he argues that organized sport reproduces and strengthens the preservation of hegemonic masculinity in domestic life, as it provides fathers with the opportunity to “reaffirm traditional gender ideology at the same time as they meet expectations for father involvement” (Coakley, 2006, p. 157). This may be why parents are so willing to alter family budgets, and accommodate the financial resources required to support their children’s sport participation (Coakley, 2006).

Organized youth sport provides a setting where fathers feel comfortable, knowledgeable, and can demonstrate their expertise and skill level to their children

(Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005; Coakley, 2006). Fathers often take on visible leadership roles in youth sport in positions such as coach, manager, and trainer (Thompson, 1999). It is through children's sport that fathers are able to teach and inculcate life lessons and values of competition, strength, and aggression with their children; all attributes that are associated with traditional definitions of masculinity (Harrington, 2006).

Thus, organized youth sport may provide an important context for fathers to teach sons traditional notions of masculinity and what it means to be a "man" in today's society (Messner, 2001). Organized youth sport may also provide an important context for daughters to learn traditional gender ideology, as they are taught to be "ladies as well as athletes" (Coakley, 2006, p. 157). On the other hand, some fathers may make a concerted effort to choose or lead youth's sport programs that encourage gender equity and resist traditional gender ideology (Coakley, 2006). Therefore, a father may seek out youth sport activities that support only one, or a blend of both, ideological messages for the reproduction or resistance of traditional gender ideology.

In general the literature suggests that organized sport may be a comfortable and safe place for men that counters the feminization of fathering. In essence, organized sport may provide men with the opportunity to avoid the dilemma of adopting feminine notions of childcare, while upholding traditional masculine standards. An important distinction in the 'leisure-based parenting' role that fathers embody, compared to the 'ethic of care' role that mothers are responsible for, has been articulated by Such (2006):

The notion of 'being with' the children in the context of leisure [sport] therefore is crucially different from the notion of 'being there' for children that is closely allied with theories of an 'ethic of care'. It differs from a theoretical perspective in that 'being with' children is informed by notions of masculinity that are tied to 'providing for' children and family both financially and emotionally. This may be informed by more traditional ideas of fatherhood that centre on the breadwinner

role. 'Being there' is informed by notions of femininity tied to the nurturant and caring role of motherhood. (p. 197).

Thus, organized sport may provide the context in which traditional relational approaches to gender, in regard to child care responsibilities, may be maintained and upheld, and/or resisted, while meeting sociocultural expectations connected to the ideology of involved fathering.

Organized Sport and Its Purposive Context

Apart from issues connected with hegemonic masculinity and father-child relationships, men may see other values and/ or purposes for their involvement in children's sports. For many fathers, the opportunity to share the sport experience with their child brings warm and nostalgic memories from their own childhood, of time they spent with their father (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). Many fathers want to ensure that they pass on what they have learned to their children, who will then in turn do the same for future generations.

On the other hand, many fathers act to do things differently and in opposition to the memories that they experienced with their fathers. For example, men who had fathers that were overbearing, competitive and demanding of their sport excellence, may be determined to provide a more positive sporting experience for their children (Brannen & Nilson, 2006; Harrington, 2006). Also, fathers who feel that they were not encouraged to participate in youth sport, may be highly motivated to support their child's sport participation (Harrington, 2006). The important role that sport plays in the definition of a young boy's masculinity and status within their peer group (Messner, 2001), may make some fathers particularly sensitive to the sporting experiences that they feel they missed out on, and consequently, want to ensure that their sons' experiences are more positive. This may partially explain why fathers are more

supportive of their sons' sporting practices than that of their daughters (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004).

A father's ability to support his children's sport participation may also lead to feelings of inadequacy. Fathers have expressed feeling judged by their children for the amount of time they can share with them in the sport context (Brannen & Nilsen, 2006). Fathers have also expressed self criticism related to the amount of emotional and physical support they can provide their children, and the feeling that they can never meet their own expectations. As a result, feelings of guilt and disappointment have been expressed by many fathers (Ranson, 2001). Paid employment remains the primary obstacle that fathers perceive inhibits their ability to spend more time with their children. For many fathers feelings of conflict and inner turmoil are experienced as they try to meet the expectations of the involved fathering ideal and what they are able to accomplish in practice. As Daly (1996) points out, "We believe that it is important to spend time with our families, but in practice, it seems that there are always a variety of demands that take precedence and therefore interfere with the realization of this ideal" (p. 117). In practice, there may be a disparity between the ideal and what actually occurs in the family's lived-experiences (Arendell, 2000).

The purposive nature of creating shared memories, strengthening the father-child relationship through time spent in youth sport, and the inculcation of life lessons such as the resistance and/or reproduction of traditional gender ideology, may be similar to the concept of "purposive leisure". Shaw and Dawson (2001) conceptualize purposive leisure as a family activity that is "planned, facilitated, and executed by parents in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals" (p. 228). Purposive leisure is often not freely chosen or intrinsically motivated by the parents as they organize these activities out of a sense of duty or

responsibility (Shaw & Dawson, 2001) and more women than men view family leisure as an obligatory aspect of the parental role (Horna, 1989). The purposive facilitation of family leisure can be to the detriment of the parents' own sport/leisure pursuits. There may also be a related gap between the *idealization* and *lived reality* of the youth sport experiences, and the consequent levels of disappointment, frustration and lack of enjoyment (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2003). Thus, similar to purposive leisure, facilitating organized youth sport participation may have many different experiences, beliefs, and motivations for fathers than for other family members.

Social Construction of “Intensive Mothering” and Organized Youth Sport

The Idealization of Intensive Mothering

As the ideology of ‘involved fathering’ has emerged, so has a culture of ‘intensive mothering’. As mentioned earlier, feminist scholarship has been central to the conceptual development of motherhood ideologies and practices (Arendell, 2000). Motherhood is generally entwined with notions of femininity, nurturing, and caring. In fact, in most cultures, “Feminine and Mother are combined to form a single representation of WOMAN – and for most women in the world this is still their only self-representation (Lax, 2006, p. 1).

However, mothering as a *natural* and biological function has been deconstructed to reveal *socially constructed* ideologies for appropriate child care. That is, the social constructionist approach has revealed many different definitions of mothering, and shown how these definitions are in a constant state of renegotiation. Ideals of appropriate child rearing are situated in temporal, cultural, and political value systems. Further, motherhood ideologies reflect both “hegemonic institutional discourses and the discourses expressed by

women themselves in their everyday interactions” (Guendouzi, 2006, p. 902). Motherhood ideologies provide not only an idealization of childrearing practices, but also a set of criteria by which mothers may be judged (Leisse de Lustgarten, 2006).

The social construct of ‘intensive mothering’ has been one of the most important and influential conceptualizations during the past two decades in North American scholarship (Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). What is considered the dominant ideology of intensive mothering is actually one that is rooted in a white, middle-class value system based on the nuclear family model that promotes women who can afford and/or desire to stay at home with their children (Guendouzi, 2006). The ideal of motherhood is universalized and does not embrace the diversity of mother’s lived-experiences structured by their status of employment, marital, (dis)-ability, race, and ethnic diversity. Despite the diversity of women’s lives, all mothers are subject to judgment and censure by society, if they are not able to live up to the universalized ideal (Leisse de Lustgarten, 2006).

For most women, feelings of tension, conflict and guilt are experienced as they try to meet the ideological expectations of intensive mothering practices, while realizing their own individual needs (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005). Despite significant social, cultural and economic changes in Western societies, and the ways in which women practice mothering, traditional gender ideologies of parenting roles still exist (Maher & Saugeres, 2007). Women’s increase in paid employment (Harsch, 2006; Hattery, 2001), the rise of single-parent families (Daly, 2004), and the shift in government policies to a neo-liberal emphasis (Caragata, 2003) all contribute to a widening gap between the intensive mothering ideology and the reality of mother’s lived-experiences.

Time Famine, Stress and Fatigue

One of the reasons for the gap between ideology and lived-experiences may be the increase in time stress or perceived lack of time (Zuzanek, 2000). The increase in women's participation in the paid labour market over the last couple of decades may be a large contributor to families' feelings of time stress (Shaw, 2001). However, despite women's increasing role in paid employment, for the most part, fathers are still a long way from equity in parenting practices, particularly in domestic and caring labour (e.g., see Arendell, 2000; Guendouzi, 2006). As Craig (2006) argues "the time impact of becoming a parent is considerable, but very unevenly distributed by sex. Having children markedly intensifies gender inequities in time allocation" (p. 125). This is because, although the 'gender gap' between men and women's combined paid and unpaid work has narrowed, women continue to maintain the bulk of domestic responsibilities (Daly, 2004; Zuzanek, 2000).

Research has frequently reported women's feelings of time stress and fatigue. For example, Brown, Brown, Miller and Hansen (2001) argue that the physical and emotional demands of juggling a career, domestic work, and childcare have left many women with little to no energy. Strategies such as 'scaling back' are used by many women to attempt to manage their everyday lives (Arendell, 2001). For example, mothers often reduce the hours in paid employment or their career goals in order to better accommodate childrearing responsibilities (Arendell, 2001). As a coping mechanism, time spent in domestic work is also significantly reduced by women in dual-earner families. On the other hand the importance of paid work for fathers has been expressed differently as "men are more likely to see their work as primary and to fit into the family schedule when they had fulfilled those responsibilities" (Daly, 2001, p. 247).

Despite scaling back on paid employment, and/ or domestic work, many women feel that they do not give enough time to their children. It is not surprising, therefore, that a discourse has emerged around the amount of *time famine* that families are experiencing (Daly, 2004) and the perceived neglect of time with children. However, despite the growing sense of increased workload and time pressure, time use studies have reported that parents are actually spending more time with their children. In Canada, Zuzanek (2000) reported that the time allocated to child care involvement for employed parents with children under the age of 12 has risen by over 50 percent between 1986 and 1998. Although these results may seem counterintuitive, they may be partially explained by a more child-centred approach to parenting that has increased the expected amount of time parents spend with their children in connection to children's leisure, family leisure, and/or youth sports (Coakley, 2006; Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

The Centrality of Youth Organized Sport to Intensive Mothering Practice

As noted earlier, the ideology of intensive mothering embodies motherhood as child-centred, emotionally absorbing, self-sacrificing, labour intensive, with mothers as *active managers* of their children's time and activities (Hays, 1996). Compared to previous generations, mothering now extends beyond the provision of children's safety and well-being and involves an *enrichment* process, to ensure their children's time is well-managed and highly productive in terms of their ongoing growth and development.

The enrichment aspect of intensive mothering is similar to Lareau's (2002) concept of "concerted cultivation" (p. 748). Mothers seek out opportunities to foster their children's talents, skills, and abilities through organized leisure activities. This ideology is rooted in middle-class values that expect parents to "enroll their children in numerous age-specific

organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labour, particularly for mothers. The parents view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children” (p. 748). Other research has also supported the purposive and all-encompassing nature in the organization of children’s activities for their growth and development, and often at the expense of the mothers’ own leisure experiences (Shaw, 2001; Such, 2006). As mothers seek out organized activities to meet the cultural expectations of being a good mother, children’s organized sport participation becomes an important context in the provision of such opportunities.

Although sport is widely assumed to be a central context for fathering (Marsiglio, Roy, Fox, 2005), little research has investigated the important role of mothers in children’s sport practices. Notable exceptions are Thompson (1999) and Chafetz and Kotarba’s (1999) research on the gender differentiation of parenting responsibilities and expectations in facilitating children’s sport participation. These authors challenge the widespread perception that it is mostly fathers, rather than mothers, who are predominately involved in their children’s organized sport practices (Harrington, 2006).

The important connection of children’s sport participation to intensive mothering practices in Westernized societies has created an environment where a woman’s moral worth as a parent may be evaluated by her ability to foster her children’s sport participation (Coakley, 2006). Further, when mothers are unable to meet these expectations, they are deemed to have failed their child, and this may be the reason that they invest so much time and energy into the reproduction of the highly gendered support roles.

This begs the question, of whether the framework and philosophy of children’s sport has contributed to and/or perpetuated the dominant ideologies of intensive mothering as well

as involved fathering. Although children's sport participation may be for the benefit of the child, it may have important implications (both negative and positive) in terms of all family members' lives.

More Than Just Child's Play: Organized Youth Sport is a Family Affair

As mentioned earlier, while the importance of the family in providing emotional, physical, and social support for children's sport participation has been well documented (e.g., see Côté & Hay, 2002; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004), little attention has been directed to the impact children's organized sport has on the family unit. Limited research has explored the impact of the child's sporting experience on the family unit's interactions and relationships among its members. As Kay (2000) suggests: "While there are many references to the high level of support that families provide and the significant demands that this must place on them, very few studies have examined in detail how this affects the way the family functions" (Kay, 2000, p. 152). Further, the demands placed upon a family increases as the child's age and competition level increases (Kay, 2000). As children's sport participation consumes family resources (financial, time, and emotional) there may be important consequences for the family unit in other aspects of their lives outside of the sport domain.

Financial Support and Family Resources

Children's participation in organized youth sport requires a great deal of the family's financial resources. Direct costs (e.g., registration fees) as well as 'hidden' indirect costs (i.e., equipment, transportation, tournament fees, hotel rooms, and uniforms) are necessary to support children's organized sport participation. Townsend and Murphy (2001) reported that,

on average, the cost per child per sporting activity is \$500 per annum. For competitive child-athletes, as much as \$10,000 to \$40,000 of the household income is annually dedicated to sustain a child's sport training experience (Coakley, 2006). To help compensate for the costs, many families are expected to spend their time in fundraising initiatives, such as buying and selling raffle tickets and the donation of goods. Fundraising activities such as these may heighten perceived time stress experienced by family members. Further, parents often minimize or hide the costs of sports participation from their children (Kay, 2000).

This may create a social divide between those who can support their children's organized sport participation and those who cannot, such as low income or single-parent households. Evidence has supported this proposition as household income is a strong positive predictor of children's sport participation (Sport Canada, 2000; Trussell & McTeer, 2007). In fact, registration costs and/or lack of private transportation are significant barriers to children's sport participation (Havitz, Morden, & Samdahl, 2004; Lareau, 2003; Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). The need for reliable private transportation (especially as it relates to 'select' or 'rep' teams who often travel great distances) and the inflexible work schedules that are often characteristic of lower socio-economic jobs, may mean that many families struggle with the financial costs and/or time stress of fund raising initiatives.

Shaping Family Time: Physical and Emotional Experiences

Kay (2000) suggests that the "time demands of sport affect the daily, weekly and annual rhythms of family life" (p. 157). As such, family activities are often orchestrated with colour-coded calendars that control family activities and mothers are often in charge of such coordination (Arendell, 2001; Daly, 2001, 2002). The time demands that organized sport may impose upon families often becomes a way of life, with parents feeling powerless to make

changes and trapped by the demands placed upon them (Anderson & Doherty, 2005; Donnelly, 1997; Kay, 2000).

The time commitment of sport programs can leave little opportunity for impromptu or free time family activities (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Lareau, 2002). Anderson and Doherty (2005) suggest that organized youth sport has facilitated the “over scheduling of children and the consequent decline of family time” (p. 654). Highly valued family activities such as eating dinner together (Kay, 2000; Townsend & Murphy, 2001) or attending church (Trussell, 2005) may have to be negotiated and/or dropped due to time demands and schedule conflicts.

Organized youth sport may also constrain family holidays and alter parental employment patterns by, “affecting the hours they worked, the time they took off from work, and even their choice of employment with suitable hours” (Kay, 2000, p. 158). Further, many parents cease or minimize their personal sport involvement. Women in particular prioritize their children’s leisure pursuits over their own (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Thompson, 1999). Other strategies are implemented such as parents splitting up who supports each child’s sport activities, to ensure all sport and general care tasks are met. However, as Kay (2000) notes, this may consequently mean “that the family unit is rarely together as a whole” (p. 158).

The time investment required of children’s sport participation can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Feelings of stress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion have been expressed by families who feel that their children’s sport participation is all-consuming and fear that they cannot give anymore (Kay, 2000). Some women have reported up to 20 hours per week dedicated to children’s sport programs in transportation to practices, games and fundraising initiatives (Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Further, Trussell and Shaw suggest that

considerable tension and marital strain can develop, as families try to negotiate career dominated marriages, while juggling children's participation in a number of extracurricular activities. To help alleviate their stress, some families may make the decision to limit or discontinue their children's participation in organized sport programs.

The impact of organized sport on shaping the lives of siblings has also received little attention in the sociology of sport literature. Kay's (2000) study on elite child-athletes and the impact of the sport participation on their family life is a notable exception. Kay reported that parents are aware of the potential impact that a child's sport involvement may have on the other siblings, and many parents make a concerted effort to ensure all children are treated equally. "Some tried to do this by encouraging all of the family to be involved in and enjoy the sporting child's activities" (Kay, 2000, p. 159).

Some siblings that were interviewed in Kay's (2000) study indicated that they were very supportive of their brother's or sister's sporting involvement, while others expressed some negative experiences of living with "the emotional ups and downs that accompany the lives of the talented" (p. 160). For one family in particular, a sibling voiced his feelings of hurt and jealousy living in the shadows of his sister. Parents have also recognized the impact on siblings, especially younger siblings. With a lack of childcare, the younger ones may be toted along to sport venues and are affected by evening games or practices and consequently show signs of being tired and irritable the following day (Townsend & Murphy, 2001). Thus, organized youth sport may have a significant role in shaping the child-athlete's daily life; however, it may also significantly alter aspects of *all* family members' lives.

Shaping Family Interactions

As mentioned earlier, youth sport activities may provide an important context in which parents purposively seek out activities, to build and strengthen parent-child relationships through positive interactions, and to meet cultural expectations for “good parenting” practices. Positive outcomes in quality parent-child interactions may occur in the context of the actual sport venues, extra practice sessions at the family home, and/or during travel to games and practices. For example, driving to and from children’s sport activities may be a potential facilitator of positive interaction, when the parent and child can communicate and discuss a broad range of topics that go beyond the youth’s sport participation (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003; Trussell & Shaw, 2007).

However, family interactions related to organized youth sports may not always have positive outcomes and may be a context for extended negotiations and/or disagreement. One of the components of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2002, p. 753) is that middle-class parents encourage the development of reasoning skills with the child. Organized sport often becomes a site for this form of parenting and for parent-child negotiation of sports participation. For example, some parents will discuss the range of sport activity choices with their children, and will support the child’s indicated preferences as long as they have the family financial resources and time to support it (Dunn, Kinney, Hofferth, 2003). However, if a child expresses unhappiness with his or her sporting experience, parents may try to reason with the child and encourage “sticking it out” until the end of the season. Some parents believe that this directive reinforces life lessons of commitment and follow-through (Dunn, Kinney, Hofferth, 2003). This type of encouragement and reasoning may also be seen as a

form of parental “emotional work” that is needed to successfully facilitate and support the child’s sport participation.

Further, feelings of frustration and disappointment may be experienced by parents as their child does not exude the same excitement for their ‘shared’ sport interest. Consequently, parents may appear to be “enforcing pressure on their child to continue training” (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006, p. 68) in a sport organization. Children who have failed to meet parental expectations may even experience verbal abuse (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997) or physical violence (Donnelly, 1997). This perhaps reflects a contradiction between children’s sport as a “fun and participatory activity” versus children’s sport as “competition and winning”. Thus, children and parents may perceive the purpose and value of organized sport differently.

Organized sport as a site of contested terrain between parent and child may be particularly heightened during the teenage years. At this time youth promote their personal autonomy, and negotiations may occur between parents and children in terms of the balance between youth independence and parental authority, with both sides struggling for respective control over how the youth’s time is used and with whom (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003). Parents may set clear expectations in the prioritization of their child’s activities. For example, youth may not be allowed to go to their sporting activity until they complete their homework or domestic chores (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003). Likewise, youth may not be allowed to go out with their friends until they complete their sport training session (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). Frustration and disappointment may be experienced by the parent and/or the child if there are different priorities and levels of interest for the child’s sport involvement.

When a youth expresses the desire to discontinue participation in an activity, parents often reaffirm their expectations “about the importance of keeping commitments, discuss reasons for not quitting, or negotiate continued participation by saying the adolescent could quit after the school year was finished” (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003, p. 406). Further, when there is a conflict between parent and youth activity interests, the child is more apt to become responsible for making it happen. Heightened tension in family interactions may be further experienced, if parents perceive an *invested interest* in supporting their child’s sport participation over the years, particularly with the large amount of financial resources spent on it and/or the parent’s role as a coach or administrator (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003).

Shaping and Reflecting Gender Ideology Beliefs

Organized youth sport may reflect and contribute to the reinforcement and/or resistance of traditional gender ideology and broader gender relations. For example, young male participation rates continue to be higher than those of young females (Raudsepp & Virra, 2000; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004) and this may be partly explained by the belief that sport participation is more important for sons than it is for daughters (Coakley, 2006; Lareau, 2002). Therefore, the support, encouragement, and sport opportunities that parents provide for their children, may differ based upon the child’s gender (Coakley, 2006).

Mothers and fathers often perceive that their sons have a higher athletic ability than their daughters (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Consequently, boys have reported a higher perceived competence in their abilities and a stronger desire to continue participation and involvement in the future compared to girls (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). The *type* of sport participation is also influenced by cultural ideologies reinforcing the notion that sons should

participate in masculine sports, while daughters should participate in feminine sports (Coakley, 2006). Conflict between family members may occur when children have an interest to participate in a sport that is not traditionally gender appropriate.

The intersection of gender with social class and ethnicity may also shape children's sport involvement. For working-class teenage girls, organized sport participation is frequently constrained by their family members as they are expected to care for younger siblings after school. On the other hand, for athletically talented sons from lower-social class families, sport can be highly valued by family members with the hopes of them becoming a professional athlete, and the family's vehicle for social mobility (Donnelly & Harvey, 1999).

For inter-racial families, sport can be a site of conflict and/or transformation of traditional cultural values. One study on young Latinas and softball identifies how daughters with Mexican mothers and American-born fathers were highly encouraged and supported in their sport involvement with their "father's Whiteness in [their] academic and athletic choices" (Jamieson, 2005, p. 139). In comparison, young Latinas who had two Mexican parents experienced some initial resistance to their sport participation due to traditional gender and cultural beliefs and the lack of financial resources. Further, Jamieson also reported that some Latinas even received encouragement and support from their family members, as sport was seen as a "possible route to upward mobility" (p. 133) for the family unit as a whole, with a potential college scholarship on the horizon.

The physical and emotional volunteer work that is expected of parents to support their children's sport participation may also be largely influenced by traditional gender ideology. "Doing gender" in providing support for children's participation in organized sport can be seen to reproduce and validate traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity. While

fathers are more involved in the public aspects of children's sport participation (coach, manager, game strategizing, and playing/ practicing with the child), mothers are more involved in the domestic activities (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; Thompson, 1999). Aligned with the dominant ideology of intensive mothering, mothers are charged with the responsibility of facilitating the physical and emotional labour of children's sport participation. Tasks such as laundering uniforms, washing water bottles, preparing meals, and chauffeuring children to and from activities are often done by mothers. Further, the gendered tasks and time demands required to support their children's sport participation may become all-consuming, with parents feeling powerless to make changes to the existing sport structure (Anderson & Doherty, 2005; Kay, 2000).

Summary

The review of the related sport and family literature suggests that organized youth sport may have important implications for family life. For example, children's participation in youth sport may affect different aspects of family life such as family and/or personal time, activities, and financial resources. Research also suggests that to support children's sport participation there is a considerable amount of parental responsibility and physical and emotional work. Further, Kay's (2000) research stimulates questions on how organized youth sport can impact other siblings' lives. Therefore, a conceptualization of "youth sport participation" may be better defined as involving several and/or all family members' involvement, rather than simply the youth participant.

To date, minimal research has extended the connection of organized youth sport to family life, both inside and outside the sport domain. Little attention has focused on

understanding how youth sports may have broader implications for shaping overall family life experiences. As children's involvement in organized sport has become a popular cultural phenomenon of North American children's leisure, clearly, we should seek a better understanding of children's sport involvement and its potential implications on the family unit. For example, as family time and financial resources are consumed to support organized youth sport, how does this affect mothers', fathers', and children's everyday experiences (e.g. paid work, chores, and leisure choices)? Does organized youth sport bring family members closer together in a shared experience? Do the positive emotions related to children's sport participation strengthen other aspects of family life? What are the different meanings of this shared sport experience; are they work-like and/or leisure-like? What other highly valued family activities are lost when prioritization is given to children's sport? Do parents feel a loss of their own personal autonomy and sport involvement and does this create tension and/or resentment in other aspects of family life? How are the various physical and emotional responsibilities negotiated between parents? Is there disagreement on how work is divided and does the potential exhaustion and emotional fatigue strain interactions between family members?

As such, a central research question that guided this study was to seek to understand the dynamics of family life and how youth sport influences family interactions, values, and relationships. Through these family life processes (interactions, values, and relationships) a second central research question that guided this study related to the ways in which youth sport may reflect and contribute to ideologies of parenthood as well as gender.

In the past few decades, the emergence of the socially constructed ideologies of *involved fathering* and *intensive mothering* has created a child-centred approach to parenting.

The new parenting ideologies have positioned organized youth sport as an important context for successfully meeting the expectations of involved fathering and intensive mothering. The broader cultural shift in parenthood expectations and the consequent potential rise in the popularity of organized youth sports, stimulate many new questions. For example, do parents identify or sense broader social pressures and parenthood expectations to facilitate their children's sport participation? How does the notion of a parent's "moral worth" evaluated by their children's sport activities and level of achievement, resonate with parents? Do parents purposively seek out organized sport activities to fulfill the cultural ideal of the involved fathering and intensive mothering ideologies? On the other hand, do some parents actively and consciously resist the cultural idealization of these parenthood expectations?

We must also ask how does the structure and growing popularity of children's sport contribute to and even perpetuate the dominant ideologies of intensive mothering and involved fathering. As children's sport participation has become an important sphere for childhood and adolescence, whereby a parent's moral worth is evaluated, how has sport in turn, reinforced and heightened the cultural expectations for parenthood to be child-centred and self-sacrificing?

In addition, what is the intersection of children's sport participation with both gender and parenting ideologies? Mothers' and fathers' facilitation of children's sports may reflect and contribute to the perpetuation of traditional gender ideology, particularly as fathers are more involved in the public aspects of youth sport (e.g., coach, manager), while mothers are more involved in the domestic support activities (e.g., laundering, consoling disappointment). This is consistent with the involved fathering ideal whereby fathers are expected to share leisure-based activities with their children, while mothers are consistent with the intensive

mothering ideal by actively managing and scheduling their children's lives. Also, the reinforcement of traditional gender beliefs and practices in organized youth sport may seem counterintuitive to broader cultural ideals for co-parenting and gender equity in family life. In light of this, can the structure and socio-cultural environment of youth sport participation be changed, to help facilitate gender equity and help resist traditional gender ideology, rather than sustain it?

At present, very little is known about how parents or children feel or respond to the traditional gender expectations of girls' versus boys' appropriate sport participation, or mothers' versus fathers' gendered responsibilities. Do family members feel differently about gender relations in connection to youth sport? Is there agreement among family members or is there conflict and tension? Are there differences between families and the sport groups/organizations gender beliefs and practices, and if there is conflict, do family members go along with or resist gendered expectations imposed upon them? If they resist cultural and sport organizational expectations, in what ways do they do this? Finally, does the reinforcement and/or resistance of gendered practices by family members in the youth sport domain create conflict, mixed messages and/or internal struggles in other aspects of family life, and if so, in what ways?

Further, the important implications that youth sports may have on family life and ideologies of parenthood and gender may be seen differently by mothers, fathers, and youth. To my knowledge, most of the research to date on youth sport participation has focused primarily on the parental perspectives, with little interpretative research including youth's perspectives. I believe this to be a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed, and thereby, including children's perspectives may provide some important insights into understanding the

connection of organized youth sport to family life. For example, how do youth feel about the time demands placed upon them by sport organizations? Are they feeling the same contradictory emotions as their parents of enjoyment and exhaustion simultaneously? How does the sport involvement negotiation process between the child and parent affect their relationship and carry over to other aspects of family life? Also, what is the connection between children's organized sport participation and the dynamics between siblings? What if one child is a star athlete and another child is not? Does this affect the siblings overall interactions and relationship outside of the sport context?

Finally, what are the potential implications on the youth's lives as they relate to the broader ideologies of gender and their sport participation? Do youth believe that it is more important for boys than girls to play sports, or more important for girls than boys, or is there no difference? Do youth value and/or recognize one parent more than the other's sport involvement, based on the division of responsibilities and roles they fulfill (i.e., manager, coach, packing food, fundraising etc.)? What are they potentially learning about gender relations in a broader sense outside of the sport context?

Thus, research that explores how organized youth sport affects family relationships and dynamics, as seen by mothers, fathers, and youth, may help us better understand family life and relational processes beyond the sport domain. Research in this area may also contribute to the broader social sciences debates, related to family relations, and the resistance and reproduction of gender and parenthood ideologies.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework and Guiding Concepts

The intent of this chapter is to provide the theoretical framework and guiding concepts that will frame and direct this research project. Four topics are explored that will provide the theoretical foundation for Chapter IV: Research Design and Process. The first section explores feminist theory and the principles that I embrace. I will be discussing foundations of truth and knowledge, the notion that there is no value-free science, minimizing researcher privilege and power, the interactive nature of the researcher-participant relationship, and finally, the importance for a reflexive consciousness. The second section reviews the literature on involving young people in the research process. I explore shifting paradigms in children's research, the notion of power and bridging the researcher-child age gap, and I also discuss research strategies to empower young people in the research process. The third and fourth sections discuss the concepts of 'family' and 'rural'. For both of these concepts, I briefly explore the scholarly debate in the use and conceptualization of these terms, and end each discussion with the guiding framework that I use for this study.

Feminist Theory

Feminism is a philosophical and theoretical framework that embodies "aspects of equity, empowerment, and social change for women and men" (Henderson et al. 1996, p. 13). It is a social and political movement that is morally driven by the identification and documentation of women's inequality in the contemporary era (Bushnell, 1995). Moreover, feminism goes beyond the description and documentation of inequalities, and rather,

advocates for social change by challenging the dominant discourse of traditional gender power relations.

Although feminist theory is interdisciplinary with “powerful and sometimes conflicting ideas about women in society and culture” (Kramarae & Spender, 2000, p. 988), there are general concepts or principles that provide a foundation for feminist research.

Central to feminist scholarship is the belief that women’s experiences should be considered as an important source and justification of knowledge (Thompson, 1992). Building on this there are three major goals that are common to all feminist theoretical perspectives:

1. The first goal is the correction of both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to social change.
2. A second goal of feminism is the right of every woman to equity, dignity, and freedom of choice through the power to control her own life and body within and outside the home.
3. A third goal is the removal of all forms of inequality and oppression in society. (Henderson et. al., 1996, p. 74)

One of the strengths of feminism is that it remains highly diversified and dynamic with no single approach that can claim dominance over the others (Olesen, 2005; Schwandt, 2001).

I am of the same opinion as Baier (1994) in that “different feminist lines of thought are best seen as complementary and mutually supportive rather than as mutually opposed” (p. 296).

Diverse feminist theoretical perspectives have the potential to illuminate different aspects of oppression and collectively work for social change.

For example, Henderson et al. (1996) have identified four primary feminist perspectives used in leisure research: liberal, marxist, radical, and socialist. Liberal feminists focus on equality, individual rights, gender justice and the removal of oppressive legal and educational barriers. Marxist feminists address the interrelation between gender and class, centered on the oppression and conflict experienced by women in domestic/reproductive work

and paid employment. In the Marxist framework, capitalism not patriarchy is the root of women's oppression. Radical feminists are concerned with the social constructions that preserve male's domination and maintain women's subordination, and advocate for the removal of patriarchy and women's autonomy. Socialist feminists acknowledge the Marxist class analysis, but also believe that patriarchy is a critical contributor to women's oppression. For socialist feminists, issues of gender, race, and class are at the forefront of understanding people as individuals who exist as part of larger social institutions.

Moreover, Hesse-Biber (2007) outlines several feminist epistemologies and emphasizes "the importance of researching difference ... [and] the transformative practices of research that lead toward challenging dominant forms of knowledge building and empowering of subjected understandings" (p.11). According to Hesse-Biber, critical feminist theorists seek to expose dominant power structures and relations and emancipate those who are oppressed. Postmodern and post-structural [feminist] theorists deconstruct dominant discourse and there is an emphasis on bringing the "other" into the research process and the empowerment of oppressed groups. Although post-modernist and post-structuralist theories challenge feminist researchers, their epistemological beliefs have also "encouraged feminist researchers to become more open to ideas, more flexible, and more focused on issues of individual and cultural diversity as well as globalization" (Henderson & Shaw, 2006, p. 224).

Although these various perspectives are commonly used, they are constantly evolving while new perspectives are emerging (Henderson et al., 1996). Further, many feminist scholars may embrace aspects across several of the perspectives and do not fit neatly into one viewpoint and/or may change their theoretical lens from one moment in time to another. With the highly diversified and dynamic feminist theoretical frameworks, I spend the next section

of this chapter discussing my own feminist ethical-epistemological-political nexus and the feminist principles I embrace, and that have guided this study.

My Feminist Ethical-Epistemological-Political Nexus

The impact of feminism has changed the role of ethics in research and everyday life (Baier, 1994). Feminism argues that politics and personal values and ideologies are inherently embedded in the research process. Feminist scholarship places the researcher as an active agent in the research process while rejecting notions of ‘value free’ science (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002). The creation of knowledge is a political activity, and thus, ethics can not be separated from knowledge and political activism (Denzin, 2000; Gillies & Alldred, 2002). Within this theoretical perspective, ethics permeates every phase of the research process.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) propose that “how we know is intimately bound up with what we know, where we learned it, and what we have experienced” (p. 1059). Schwandt (2001) refers to this as the “ethics-epistemology-politics nexus” (p. 74) where the embeddedness of ethics and politics is internal, not external, to the research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This reflects a shift in the understanding of the connection between ethics, epistemology, and politics over the past decade. In Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) original conceptualization of paradigms, they saw ethical tensions as one of many *implications* from a paradigm’s position on selected practical issues (see table 6.2 on page 112). However, a decade later Guba and Lincoln (2005) now position values (ethics, aesthetics, and religion) as being *embedded* within a paradigm and as significant to the “basic foundational philosophical dimensions of a paradigm proposal” (p. 200). Within this framework, values, politics and epistemology are intrinsically connected (Alcoff & Potter, 1993) and the foundations of truth

and knowledge are shaped within specific historical, temporal, social and local conditions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

During the next section I will expand upon and describe my feminist ethical, epistemological, and political nexus that will guide this study, framed by general principles that are central to my theoretical perspective. They are:

- (a) Partial truths and multiple realities embedded within dominant ideologies
- (b) There is no value-free science: the personal is political
- (c) Minimizing privilege and power
- (d) The interactive nature of the researcher-participant relationship
- (e) A reflexive consciousness

Partial Truths and Multiple Realities Embedded Within Dominant Ideologies

Our everyday beliefs and value systems shape how we see the world and act within it; from this our scholarly paradigms and theoretical frameworks that we work within are informed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I have come to understand the lens in which I currently view foundations of truth, through a process of self-reflection during my doctoral studies.

Foundations of truth and knowledge for me are shaped within the context of a “historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193). More importantly how we see the world and the nature of reality is not static; rather it is a fluid process that transforms as time passes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Consistent with this notion, I see truth and knowledge as social constructs that are partial, multiple, intangible and historically situated (Harding, 1991). Collectively, through these equally important partial truths and fragmented perspectives, a holistic notion of truth but not a universal one, is socially constructed.

I believe that no single umbrella can fairly incorporate and characterize the thoughts, meanings, and experiences of all people. My feminist epistemology is value-mediated (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) in understanding the world as constructed through personal experiences that both enrich and constrain individual's daily lives (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005; Thompson, 1992). I see value and worth in discovering partial truths and rich descriptions of the everyday social world.

However, I also see the personal experience embedded within the larger social context. Although individual realities and experiences exist, they are still situated within broader temporal and social constructs, shaped by political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender ideologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Harding, 1991; Thompson, 1992). This is where individual lived experiences, beliefs, and actions are shaped by the broader social context. Therefore, through my lens, I find value in understanding the divergent meanings and experiences of individuals that are embedded within dominant ideologies and social structures.

There is No Value-Free Science: The Personal is Political

Science is inseparable from the socio-historical context in which my beliefs and moral value systems are formed. As a researcher I am a socialized subject (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Olesen, 2005) located in the same causal scientific plane as the research agenda (Harding, 1991). This consequently influences my resulting concerns and commitments throughout the research process. As Thompson (1992) suggests, at some level "all research sustains beliefs and politics whether or not they are acknowledged" (p. 9). Therefore, in science, the personal is political and is a reflection of the historical moment (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005).

Within this context, I agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2005) that there is no value-free science and all research findings have political implications. Harding (1991) notes, “Strong objectivity requires that we investigate the relation between subject and object rather than deny the existence of, or seek unilateral control over this relation” (p. 152). By acknowledging this, it compels me to place myself as the researcher into the broader social context, and try to gain an understanding of my own individual political ideals and moral values. Even the formed research question “what to study” in this dissertation has been socially informed and historically and politically located. Recognition of the ethical, epistemological, and political nexus requires me to not only examine the research problem, but it is equally important to examine how the research questions came to be in the first place.

Minimizing Researcher Privilege and Power

I have come to realize what a privileged position I occupy in society as a white female and a member of the educated middle-class. Further, my role as a researcher brings with it a certain amount of additional privilege and power (Olesen, 2005; Richardson, 1997). In previous research projects I have already identified and struggled with issues of power between the participants and me, largely shaped by my inherent privileged academic position.

Consequently, my ethical, epistemological, and political nexus, embraces values centred on morality, sensitivity, and the “extent to which the research relationship [can become] reciprocal rather than hierarchical” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 209). I strive for a research relationship built on trust, respect, empathy and compassion.

I also recognize that the power relations between the participants and me can never be truly equal. I am of the same opinion as Thompson (1992) who argues that the researcher-participant relationship is inherently unequal, and the appearance of equality can in fact be

more dangerous to the research process. Although I may not agree with this unequal power imbalance, acknowledging it can help minimize its impact on the participants' lives.

Throughout the research process I am guided by a moral accountability to the participants' emotional health and well-being. I recognize and embrace my ethical and moral responsibility (Birch & Miller, 2002) to ensure my research does not further oppress those who have already been marginalized (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As Thompson (1992) suggests, "nonoppressive research empowers, rather than exploits, women. Rather than research that serves the career interests of the researcher or social control, nonoppressive research serves the interests of the researcher or disadvantaged" (p. 14). It is vital that I recognize that the research process is as equally important as the outcomes (if not more) because of the implications that the research process may have on my participants' lives (Johnson & Macleod Clarke, 2003).

The Interactive Nature of the Researcher-Participant Relationship

Within my ethical, epistemological, and political nexus, research is an interactive process whereby the researcher and the participants interact and have the potential of altering one another's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For feminist researchers, the negotiation of researcher-participant relationships lies at the heart of ethical concerns (Olesen, 2005). The researcher and the participants are inseparable as both embody multiple roles. The participants take on an active role as not only being the observed, but also the inquirer, as they assess me as the researcher and determine a level of trust and authenticity as to my true research intentions (Deutsch, 2004). During the research process I also take on multiple identities as an inquirer, object of the participant's inquiry, and an active agent in the understanding and

awareness of my own personal lived experiences in relation to that of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

Further understanding my own positionality, can in turn enhance my level of understanding of the people I study and help enrich future research (Dupuis, 1999). The moral, ethical and political task of “working the hyphen” (Fine, 1994), concentrates on the link rather than the gap (Deutsch, 2004) between the participant and myself. Through a conscious understanding of my relationship with the socially constructed ‘other’, more illuminative and rich information can be gained. Attempts to distance myself may lead to an incomplete understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of my relationship with the participants and the research process as a whole (Dupuis, 1999).

My ethical, epistemological, and political nexus, also embraces emotions as a way of further enriching the analytical process and interpretations (Dupuis, 1999). As Deutsch (2004) suggests, it is important to embrace and reflect upon the emotional relationships that are developed between the researcher and the participants: “To deny such influences would be to deny the humanity of both researcher and participant. Through examining the humanity of both, we learn more about our topic and ourselves, we bring richness and honesty to our research” (p. 889). Recognizing our emotions and feelings that are evoked during the research process, may help enlighten us about the others’ lived experiences and meanings, creating an enhanced moral account of partial truths.

A Reflexive Consciousness

The process of reflexivity is important to feminist methodology (Deutsch, 2004). Feminism advocates for a “reflexive consciousness” with the recognition that researchers have personal family ideologies, values and experiences that shape and inform their research agenda and

process (Allen, 2000). Feminism advocates that if we do not critically reflect on the meaning and place of our own lives in the broader social context, we will forget what a privileged group and place we hold in society, regardless of our origins (Marks, 2000). Until we more completely understand ourselves and our privileged position as researchers “we will slip back, without awareness, into White-think, middle-class-think, men-think [sic], hetero-think or some combination of these” (Marks, 2000, p. 614). A reflexive consciousness seeks to acknowledge, confront, and integrate, our subjective experiences, beliefs, and values, for a more inclusive and diverse scholarship (Allen, 2000).

A reflexive consciousness provides a deeper understanding of how we affect the lives of those we study (Fox & Murry, 2000). Reflexivity provides a tool where we can recognize and embrace the moral responsibility (Birch & Miller, 2002) to minimize the further oppression that our research may have on those who have already been marginalized (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As Allen (2001b) suggests, it is easier to expose the vulnerability of the lives we study than it is to expose our own.

When conducting research with children, the process of self-reflexivity may be particularly important in developing an understanding of how our own childhood and young adult experiences may indirectly (or directly) influence our research. For example, if we were a victim of bullying, avid ‘gamer’, or participated in organized youth sports, on some level these personal experiences or interests may influence what we choose to study and/or our understanding and interpretations of the research findings. As Jipson and Jipson (2005) argue, “Notions about childhood that we bring from our own experiences as children can also project particular understandings onto our interpretations of children’s experiences” (p.37). Our own childhood experiences related to our social class, race, gender and ethnicity can also shape our

interpretations of children's social worlds. Further, when conducting research with families, it is also difficult not to think about our own families. As Jordan (2006) points out, she sees the children and families she works with through the "lens of [her] own family life" (p. 182).

In summary, my feminist ethical, epistemological, and political nexus, embraces the complexities and intersection of gender, race, sexuality, and issues surrounding the struggle of power. I value the everyday lived experiences of individuals, embedded within the broader social context. I recognize that I am a socialized subject located in the same plane as the researched. Acknowledgement of this forces me to reflect upon my own lived experiences, beliefs, and my inherent position of privilege and authority. Similar to Parry and Shinew (2004), the particular feminist epistemology I have adopted embraces "emotions, values, personal beliefs, empathy, multiple realities and voices, politics, personal and lived experiences, and motivations" (p. 297).

Feminist scholarship has challenged the agenda of traditional science where women's lived experiences were at one time invisible. The male experience is no longer conceptualized as universal. Feminist theorists and the re-thinking of power relations have also had a significant influence on research beyond that of women's lives. Feminist contributions have also been important in re-conceptualizing how we research young people's lives (Robinson & Kellet, 2004).

Young People as Active Research Participants

Shifting Paradigms in Children's Research

Prior to the 1990's children's interpretative research methods were relatively undeveloped (Mauthner, 1997; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). Epistemological assumptions

about children conceptualized them as vulnerable and victims in need of protection (Morrow, 2005). As Fraser (2004) explains, “one long-held view of social and psychological researchers has been that young children are not competent to describe or understand their own world” (p. 16). Consequently, children’s voices were typically excluded from mainstream social science. Instead adult ‘proxies’ were used to speak on children’s behalf, and were thought to present more valid accounts of children’s lives (Morrow, 2005).

Major criticisms arose in the late ‘80’s and early ‘90’s on the ‘adultist’ methods of exploring children’s lives (France, 2004), and adult proxies were criticized for providing inaccurate representations (Valentine, 1999). Over the past decade and a half, there has been a movement for new ways of researching children which emphasizes research *with* not *on* children. This paradigm shift conceptualizes children as active participants in the research process who are capable of speaking for themselves about the meaning of their own lived experiences (France, Bendelow, Williams, 2000; Christensen, 2004).

Power: Bridging the Researcher-Child Age Gap

As identified in an earlier section of the chapter, the researcher role inherently brings a certain amount of privilege and power that is embedded throughout the research process. However, when conducting research with children, power imbalances are heightened and reinforced by dominant cultural ideologies of power and control in the adult-child relationship (Christensen, 2004). Mishna, Antle, and Regehr (2004) stress that when researchers engage in research with children it is “critical that researchers be aware of the tremendous amount of influence and power adults have over children, who typically are compliant with adults (p. 463).” Research with children inherently involves the authority of age and subsequent inequalities of power in the research relationship (Mauthner, 1997).

How we conceptualize children's capabilities is critical to the level of power differential that is formed between the researcher and the child during the research process. How we perceive children's skills and abilities also affects subsequent ethical tensions that may arise. As each researcher has his or her own personal beliefs about what children are capable of, there is a continuum of unequal power differentials.

Alderson (2004; 2005) summarizes three main levels of involving children in the research process. The three levels are: 1) unknowing objects of research, 2) aware subjects, and 3) active participants. The different levels show decisive power differentials in the researcher-child relationship. The first level views children as '*unknowing objects of research*' who may not be aware of their actual involvement in the research process. Often this type of research does not seek children's consent and may include covert research such as two-way mirrors (Alderson, 2004). Adults (usually parents or teachers) are used as 'interpreters' of the children's lived experiences because the children are perceived as vulnerable, incompetent, and unable to provide truthful accounts of their social world. Under this framework, children are not viewed as experts of their own lives and adults are thought to have superior knowledge in this regard (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Alderson (2004) draws similarities of this framework to the type of research that was formerly done on women's lives: "Imagine a Victorian husband being assumed to be able to report completely his wife's views, and you have some idea of the present power differences between many adults and children" (p. 100).

The second level views children as '*aware subjects*'. Alderson (2004) explains that in this type of research children are asked for their consent to be involved in the project, but "within fairly rigid adult-designed projects such as questionnaire surveys" (p. 100). Although children are involved in the process there is a large unequal power differential as researchers

make exclusive decisions on subject participation based upon perceived age, maturity, cognitive ability, and competence (Robinson & Kellett, 2004).

In the third level, children are viewed as '*active participants*' who willing take part in research that is reflective and adaptive to their individual needs (Alderson, 2005). This type of research views children as co-researchers who are actively involved in all stages of the research project. Although there are still inherent power imbalances in the interpretation and dissemination of the findings, children's voices are encouraged to be heard during the data collection process. What can be dangerous with this type of research is the "pretence of shared work characterized by manipulation and tokenism" (Robinson & Kellett, 2004, p. 86). The approach of including children as active participants, however, can provide meaningful and positive experiences for the children, while attaining the best representation of their lived experience.

In an attempt to equalize power differentials some researchers take on the 'least adult' or 'friend' role with children. Holmes (1998) advocates for taking on a 'friend' role when working with children, to help develop rapport and gain the children's trust. However, I agree with researchers such as Christensen (2004) who do not support the 'friend' approach and suggest that it may in fact place the children at a greater risk of being exploited: "This strategy must be commended for its wholehearted effort to enter into and participate in children's social relations but is open to the criticism that it seems simply to wish away the complexity of the differences and similarities between children and adults as they are currently constituted" (p. 173). I believe that it is important to communicate at a developmentally appropriate level with the child throughout the research process. I also believe that we need to

be aware of what the child may perceive as *patronizing*, and ensure that our actions do not magnify the unequal power differentials.

In working with children I believe in maintaining the adult role. However, this should be an adult role that is conscious of the inherent unequal power relations, and consequently aims at trying to create a relationship of mutual respect, understanding, and support. I embrace a value-laden ethical approach that sees children as experts of their own socially constructed lived experiences, and listens with sincere interest to what they have to say.

Research Strategies to Empower Young People in the Research Process

When children are valued as active participants in the research process, it is important to respect children's right to freely decide whether or not they want to be involved in the research project (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr, 2004). This includes the ability to decline participation even after the child's parent or guardian has given legal consent on their behalf. Particularly as it relates to figures of authority, Hurley and Underwood (2002) point out that it may be difficult to truly ascertain if a child is "assenting freely because they have been socialized to fear declining adult requests" (p. 133). It is imperative that the child fully understands his or her right to withdraw participation at any time throughout the research process.

Previous research has demonstrated children's capability in understanding their rights in a research project; specifically as it relates to issues of confidentiality (Hurley & Underwood, 2002). However, confidentiality also provides unique and complex ethical tensions as a researcher can not guarantee absolute confidentiality, especially for children who may disclose information of living in a dangerous situation (Alderson, 2004; Jansson & Benoit, 2006). This can present ethical dilemmas when a researcher develops a positive

research relationship with the children, and the children's disclosure of information may have legal implications (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr, 2004). For example, researchers in Canada who come across suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect are legally mandated to report this suspicion (Walsh & MacMillan, 2006). As such, children need to fully understand our responsibility to disclose any information that they might share with us, related to their safety and well-being.

In understanding the implications of informed consent on the research process, Morrow and Richards (1996) draw on important distinctions between consent and assent. *Consent* is the process whereby someone voluntarily agrees to participate in a research project while *assent* refers “to a parallel process in which the parent or guardian agrees to allow a minor ward to participate in a research project, and the child assents or agrees to be a subject in the research” (Tymchuk, 1992, p. 128, quoted in Morrow and Richards, 1996, p. 94). Trying to minimize power imbalances, many researchers have designed age appropriate ‘assent forms’ for children to sign after their parents or guardians have signed the consent form. The use of an assent form in the research process may provide the child with an enhanced sense of independence and empowerment in making their own decision to participate in the study (Danby & Farrell, 2005). Further, modified information leaflets can also be used to better inform children about the purpose of the research project and what they can expect if they choose to participate (Alderson & Morrow, 2004).

Child-friendly forms of communication can empower children to demonstrate their creative and imaginative skills and abilities throughout the process of data collection (Valentine, 1999). Different mediums have been used such as “drama, diaries, photos or videos, paintings or maps created by the children” (Alderson, 2005, p. 30). Regardless of the

specific methods used in the research process, what is most important is how we personally interact with the children. If the researcher adopts a caring, empathetic and respectful approach, rather than an authoritative and commanding one, a research culture will be created that will foster positive experiences and the chance to enhance the children's self-esteem through knowing that they have contributed to something meaningful and important. For research projects that last for an extended period of time, an environment may also be created that promotes the child's emotional, social, and physical growth and development.

Power differentials in the research process are particularly evident in the interpretation and writing of the findings (Valentine, 1999). It may be difficult to interpret children's constructed meanings when the researcher and the child have different vocabularies and perceived social worlds (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, Britten, 2002). Therefore, it is important for researchers to identify themselves in the reporting of the findings as being *interpreters* of the children's meanings. To help address issues of representation, some researchers send research materials back to children for their feedback, similar to the process of member checks. As children may not be privy to the privacy of their own mail, and there is a risk of breaking confidentiality with a parent opening it, some researchers recommend the use of child-friendly communication systems (Valentine, Butler, & Skelton, 2001). Communication tools such as e-mail may better protect children's confidentiality, while increasing their level of participation in the study. Further, while children are valued in presenting their own lived experiences during data collection, they are rarely given research findings at the completion of the project (Valentine, 1999). To demonstrate respect and appreciation for the child's efforts, Valentine suggests that a researcher could develop a child-friendly final report when disseminating the results.

In summary, my approach in this study was to include children and youth in the research process as active participants, encouraging their individual perspectives and voices to be heard. Although there are still inherent power imbalances in the interpretation and dissemination of the findings, I encouraged their voice during the data collection procedures. In particular, I used strategies that I hoped would evoke a sense of importance for them, while being adaptive and creative to their individual development needs. For example, a child's information leaflet, assent form, and adapted interview guide were used for data collection. I also used on-line options for data collection that is congruent with the preferred communication methods of many children/youth. In the next chapter, these strategies are described in detail.

Defining the Concept of "Family"

Families shape our everyday lives and for many individuals are a primary source of companionship and psychological gratifications (Freysinger, 1994). However, what exactly constitutes a "family" is characterized by multiple meanings and contexts and has been a subject of ongoing debate and disagreement within the family studies field (Allen, 2000). In fact, the debate on what defines a family has dominated family science discourse over the past 50 years; many researchers arguing that it has impeded the advancement of the field and the development of a valid family theory (Allen & Baber, 1992). As a result, numerous definitions have developed, that promote specific political and ideological standpoints. For example, the most traditional and idealized definition is the Standard North American Family (SNAF) (Smith, 2003).

Standard North American Family

The traditional SNAF is a legally married heterosexual couple with an ideology rooted in an era of industrialization. As Mestdag and Vandeweyer (2005) explain: “Industrialization promoted an ideology that identified work and the wider public area with the male and the private, domestic area with the female. The home was the place a man could come home to, where the private, caring family could protect itself against the heartless, competitive world” (p. 304). The nuclear family model is largely associated with idealized middle-class values, and was not a lived-reality for many families, even during the era of industrialization. Consequently, the SNAF definition has been challenged by critical scholars as ideological, mythical, and a romanticized notion of a reality that never existed (Coontz, 1992).

Despite these ideological challenges, the mainstream conservative discourse continues to support the SNAF definition of family, and maintains its stronghold in the twenty-first century. The SNAF’s ideological dominance is reflected in the major family journals (*Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Family Relations*, and *Journal of Family Issues*) with most family scholars being white, heterosexual, married and embracing positivist psychology or sociology epistemologies (Allen, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1995).

Despite the dominant discourse of SNAF, there is a growing number of family researchers that are changing the representation of family studies scholarship with “more and more women, people of color, lesbians and gays, and scholars from working-class backgrounds” (Marks, 2000, p. 611) entering the field. This collective group of scholars has called for the recognition of cultural variations in family types that are more representative of the diverse family forms that exist. An inclusive conceptualization of family would include family forms such as: childless couples, lone parents, separated and divorced families, re-

married and step-families, cohabiting families, gay and lesbian families, and extended families (Ambert, 2006).

Definitions are needed to provide shared understanding and communication (Allen & Demo, 1995). However, definitions can reduce the complexity, diversity, and richness of a social construct to a monolithic entity. Static definitions of family do not reflect changing cultural processes and values. Globalization, economic instability, and changing social beliefs and values have shaped the everyday lived experiences of family life (Baker, 2001; Teachman, Tedrow & Crowder, 2000). Further, any attempt to socially construct a definition is embedded with political and ideological implications of a specific historical period in time. For that reason, reflexive epistemologies that locate the researcher as a socialized subject in the same plane as their research, bring strength and legitimacy to the research findings (Thompson & Walker, 1995). Feminist scholars in particular have raised a ‘reflexive consciousness’ in the family scholarship, acknowledging that the ‘personal is political’ and the implications (both positive and negative) to the research process (Allen, 2001a).

Feminism and Families: Towards an Inclusive and Diverse Framework

During the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, feminist scholars have been instrumental in advancing family scholarship. Feminist family scholars have demonstrated the fallacy of the SNAF as an ideological myth with poverty, diversity, and social change characterizing the 1950’s, despite the fable golden years of “Leave It to Beaver” (Coontz, 1992). Allen (2000) has argued that maintaining the primacy of the SNAF upholds patriarchal values of power and privilege; justifying women’s inequality and men’s privilege (Luxton, 2001).

Feminist researchers are at the forefront of the movement to expand the conceptualization of family to become more inclusive of diverse family forms and processes. “Feminism exposes the dialectical tensions that characterize today’s families and gives special attention to persistent inequities at both the micro- and macrolevels of society” (Allen & Baber, 1992, p. 378). Feminist scholars recognize the multiplicity of individual thoughts, meanings, and experiences (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). Feminism recognizes the critical intersections of race, social class, gender, sexual orientation and age as they characterize the diversity of family experiences and contexts (Allen, 2000). Therefore, feminist family theorists find value in exploring and understanding family life as constructed by the diversity, complexity, and richness of individual everyday lived experiences.

Feminists also see the personal experiences as embedded within the larger social context. Although individual realities exist, they are still situated within broader temporal and social constructs, shaped by political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Harding, 1991; Thompson, 1992). This is where the diversity of individual family members’ everyday lived experiences is shaped by broader social processes.

In defining the concept of family, many feminist and critical theorists argue that definitions of family should be “broadened to encompass caring and enduring intimate relationships regardless of legal or blood ties. In other words, they argue that the structure of the unit or its legality is less important in defining family than the functions fulfilled by the unit or the services provided” (Baker, 2001, p. 9). The efforts of these critical theorists and advocates are influencing social change. In the political context, Statistics Canada (2006) has recently adopted a new standard of the definition of family, reflecting the diversity of Canadian families. Conforming to internationally recognized standards, Statistics Canada

created a classification that was compatible with the definition of a family nucleus, as presented in the United Nations' Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1, 1998 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Unlike previous definitions, family reference is now inclusive of same-sex couples and custodial grandparents.¹ The new census definition, however, still does not acknowledge non-custodial parents or families without children.

The Guiding Concept for This Study

As a feminist theorist, my perspective aligns with the definition of family as one that encompasses caring and intimate and/or enduring relationships, regardless of legal or blood ties. Family relationships are dynamic, in a constant state of negotiation, and have changing dimensions and value systems that alter throughout life events. I reject the notion of family as defined by SNAF, and view the SNAF definition as myopic, static, and non-responsive to social change. However, I also believe that the notion of family has somewhat of a “functional” aspect in the provision of basic living requirements, and feminist definitions of the family, to date, have missed this critical component of family life. Not all families reside and/or remain together out of a loving and caring relationship, and rather, sometimes there is a functional and practical aspect that will bind a family together.

¹ Statistics Canada's definition of family for the 2006 census was defined as: A married couple and the children, if any, of either or both spouses; a couple living common law and the children, if any, of either or both partners; or, a lone parent of any marital status with at least one child living in the same dwelling and that child or those children. All members of a particular census family live in the same dwelling. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. Children may be children by birth, marriage or adoption regardless of their age or marital status as long as they live in the dwelling and do not have their own spouse or child living in the dwelling. Grandchildren living with their grandparent(s) but with no parents present also constitute a census family. (Statistics Canada, 2006).

For that reason, I have adopted Tess Kay's concept of "home-groups"² in defining the notion of family. Kay (2007) defined home-groups as "people whose everyday lives are interdependent and who share, at least partly, living quarters and/or domestic arrangement. This interdependence includes emotional/relationship meanings as well as practical resources". The concept of home-groups recognizes and values the different living arrangements that families have and the cultural and ethnic values that they embrace. It also recognizes that people live with their home-groups all or some of the time.

I would also like to add to this definition that there might be multiple sub-home-groups within the larger home-group membership. For example, a child might have several home-groups with whom they have an emotional connection and reside with, particularly with parental separation and joint custody situations. Secondly, as I found in my master's thesis, the larger home-group may have sub-groups that dominate family life. For example, the mothers and children were quite often one sub-group who spent a lot of time together (excluding the father), while at other times the entire family unit was together (including the father). Also, the intergenerational nature of some home-based groups may result in multiple families that reside on the same property, yet have different connections and relationships between each sub-group.

Defining the Concept of "Rural"

The rural concept has also been a subject of never-ending debate over the past century (Halfacree, 1993; Rye, 2006). Although the notion of rural is routinely used by academics,

² At the 2007 Leisure Studies Association Conference I had the pleasure to see Tess Kay's thought-provoking presentation on how leisure researchers conceptualize the notion of "family" and suggestions for future research directions. Although it was in the process of being fully conceptualized, Tess Kay introduced the notion of "home-groups" as a defining framework for the concept of "family".

policy makers and lay discussion, its exact meaning remains largely unspecified (Berry, Markee, Folwer, & Giewat, 2000). Post-positivists, critical theorists, and postmodernists have created a complex discourse around the meanings of rurality, and consequently, three dominant frameworks have emerged.

Rural as a Descriptive, Tangible, Socio-Spatial Concept

Rural as a descriptive, tangible, socio-spatial concept, dominated academic rural discourse until the mid-twentieth century (Cloke & Thrift, 1994). The prevalence of mapping and material objects for observation was evident in this definition of rural. With the popularity of positivist studies, quantification, and universal laws during the 1950s and 1960s, complex measures of socio-spatial classification and measurement were important contributors to the rural concept (Phillips, 1998). Definitions of rural were typically defined by tangible statistical measurements of economic and occupational land use, such as agriculture or forestry, or low population size/densities (Bealer, Willits, & Kuvlesky, 1965; Berry, Markee, Fowler, & Giewat, 2000; Cloke & Thrift, 1994; Halfacree, 1993).

Even today mapping and material types of measurements are still considered by many researchers and policy makers to be important tools in classifying rural areas. In particular, population density is the most commonly used measurement tool. Smailes, Argent, and Griffin (2002) define population density as a “quintessentially spatial phenomenon, expressing the way that human beings spread out over, and occupy, the earth” (p. 386). Population density remains a popular method as it provides a relatively quick and practical measurement tool to delineate urban from rural areas.

The use of an urban-rural continuum in classifying various degrees of ‘rural’ has been a popular research tool. While conceptualizing urban and rural as a dualism, areas are placed

along a continuum with the most urban situated at one end and the most rural at the other end, and the relative degree of ‘rurality’ or ‘urbanness’ is located between the two ends of the continuum (Berry, Markee, Fowler, & Giewat, 2000). Despite the on-going use of the urban-rural continuums (Shucksmith, 1994), this approach has been placed under much scrutiny. Researchers have shown urban attributes in clearly rural societies, while conversely, rural attributes have been shown in clearly urban societies (Pahl, 1966; Newby, 1986). For example, Pahl (1966) argues how commuters “can be at one end of what we have been referring to as the rural-urban continuum by day and at the other end at night!” (p. 316).

The popularity of the rural-urban continuum as a means of classification declined when researchers began to understand the *relationship* and *interconnectivity* between urban and rural areas. Rurality, conceptualized as a descriptive, tangible, socio-spatial concept could not explain the complex and dynamic social, political, and economical changes that were occurring in the 70’s. Global economic restructuring demonstrated how concepts of urban and rural were interconnected and affected by structural processes of politics and power (Newby, 1986).

Rural as a Political-Economical System

This concept of rural is shaped by the global economy and its subsequent impact on the political, economical, and socio-cultural aspects of rural life (Cloe & Thrift, 1994; Phillips, 1998; Philo, 1992). Rurality is no longer conceptualized as being static, harmonious, or part of a dichotomy (Newby, 1986; Tacoli, 1998). From the 1970’s and onwards, economies of scale, patterns of rural depopulation and counter-urbanization, distribution resources and service provisions such as employment, housing, and transportation became important indicators in the conceptualization of ‘rural’ (Phillips, 1998). The social transformation of rural descriptors

were viewed as “the result of economic relations: initially those of property and of occupation, but expanding gradually to include relations of consumption, commodification and representation” (Phillips, 1998, p. 134).

The causes of rural change are now defined by structures outside the rural areas themselves; the similarities and interconnectivity with urban processes and concepts are central to this notion of rural. With roots in a Marxist view of capitalist production (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993), this concept of rural emphasizes the uneven development of rural areas based on the closeness and proximity to urban areas, and/or their ability to adapt to a globalized economy through developed tourism and recreation opportunities (Bryden, 1994). Power is at the centre of analysis, with global forces of economic restructuring shifting the function of rural areas from production to consumption; particularly for the urban population use (Phillips, 1998; Shucksmith, 1994).

Shucksmith (1994) provides examples of a ‘collective consumption’ with the popularity and rise in the stature of national parks and heritage areas, while ‘private consumption’ patterns are illustrated with the in-migration of ex-urban middle-class couples and families into rural residential dwellings. Further, many researchers argued that advancements in technology and transportation had minimized the friction of distance and blurred the formerly defined urban-rural boundaries (Bryden, 1994). Consequently, some researchers have called for an end to the ‘rural’ as a theoretical concept until researchers could clearly distinguish between notions of ‘urbanness’ and ‘rurality’ (E.g., Hoggart, 1990). Scholars such as Hoggart argue that socio-political interests to maintain academic rural departments and rural government bodies, is the driving force in *preserving* the rural concept.

The political-economical rural framework also came under scrutiny as being ‘deserted of people’ in measuring them as faceless, classless, and sexless (Philo, 1992). Instead, rural researchers like Philo, embraced multiple realities and argued that for some researchers, the time for a universalized notion of ‘rurality’ had come to an end.

Rural as a Social Construction and Representation

Rurality as a subjective and socially constructed phenomena gained popularity in the 1990’s. Rather than a material entity that could be objectively measured, rurality was viewed as a social construct and an immaterial product of social meaning (Cloke, 1997; Halfacree, 1993; Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). This approach was a paradigm shift for researchers: “rather than asking what rurality ‘is’ the pivotal question has become: how do actors socially construct their rurality” (Rye, 2006, p. 209). An interpretative approach to rurality was embraced that shed light upon differences (Shucksmith, 1994) and how rurality informed and shaped social relations in everyday lives (Little, Panelli, Kraack, 2005). In this approach, rural was seen as a cognitive construct, symbolically and subjectively located (Pierce, 1996) in a variety of different social spaces, “reflecting a world of social, moral and cultural values” (Cloke & Thrift, 1994, p. 2). Accordingly, understanding rurality embodied multiple interpretations and valued the voice of the ‘other’ or those who were marginalized. Different social identities were recognized that enhanced our understanding of the rural concept, through the lens of social class, gender, and ethnicity (Cloke, 1997; Halfacree, 1993; Phillips, 1998). The social identities that were previously ‘hidden’ became important considerations to the research agenda.

The concept of rural as a social construction also acknowledges that researchers have been socialized by dominant socio-cultural ideologies of their historical era (Pierce, 1996). In

light of this, some scholars engage in a process of researcher reflexivity and critical reflection to better understand the socio-political beliefs embedded in their academic activities (Philo, 1993). Pini (2004) argues that researcher reflexivity enriches the research process by making it more transparent to address issues of legitimacy. Rurality conceptualized as a social construct, however, has also been critiqued. It has been criticized as lacking “empirical clarity” with its “contradictory character” making it difficult to hold a “clear, well-defined and well-structured ‘image’ of the rural” (Halfacree, 1993, p. 33).

The Guiding Concept for This Study

Phillips (1998) argues that to fully understand rurality we need to draw on all three theoretical perspectives: the material, the immaterial, and the political/power concepts. Found in-between these ‘poles of thought’ (Phillips, 1998) are a variety of perspectives that will uncover the multiple representations and meanings in the process of understanding rurality (see Figure 1). Collectively, these fluid and equally important partial perspectives will provide a holistic notion of rurality, but not a universal one.

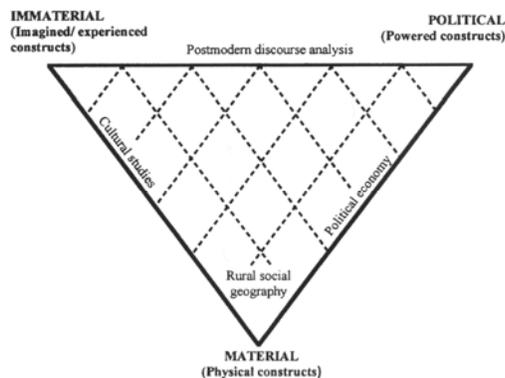


Figure 1 (Source: Phillips, 1998, p. 146)

Halfacree (1993) argues that the “quest for any single, all-embracing definition of the rural is neither desirable nor feasible. Increasingly, there is a call for the definition to be used

to be tailored to the task at hand” (p. 34). Although I find myself drawn to understanding rural as a social construct, I also find value in the use of all three approaches in creating a rural framework and/or criteria based upon a project’s specific research purpose and question.

I am of the same opinion as Halfacree (1993), that rural as a descriptive, tangible, objective, socio-spatial concept (i.e., landscape, occupation, population densities) is better conceptualized as a research/measurement tool. These tools do not define rural itself; rather they are a form of quick and easy measurement, using descriptive “lay discourses” of what we are *socialized* as researchers to consider rural. They do not acknowledge the political values and consequences embedded within their use. I do feel, however, that they are a valuable tool for data collection when the conceptualization of “what is rural” is not the primary focus of a research project. In fact, to use a social constructionist approach to understand how participants perceive rurality, may actually distract or fragment the main purpose and intention of a research project!

Because the primary research question of this project is discover the connection of organized youth sport to family dynamics, (and not the constructed meanings of rurality), the convenience of rurality as defined by population densities will be used for this study. The Statistics Canada’s classification of “rural and small town areas” is an area outside of urban centres with core populations of 10,000 and more³ (Statistics Canada, 2001) will be the guiding framework in determining if a family resides in the rural context.

³ In 2001, using this classification tool, approximately 20.3% of Canadians reported living in rural and small town areas (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Chapter IV: Research Design and Process

In this chapter the methodology that I used to answer the central research questions and sub-questions is addressed. An overview of the constructivist grounded theory research design is presented followed by a description of research participants and site, data collection and management, and data analysis and interpretation procedures. Trustworthiness perspectives and techniques are also discussed.

Central Research Questions and Sub-questions

As outlined in the first chapter, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the dynamics of family life in connection with organized youth sport programs. A focus of this study was to understand youth sport in terms of broader socio-cultural beliefs, expectations, and practices as it relates to parenthood and gender ideologies (change/resistance as well as reproduction).

The central research questions for this study were designed through the guiding purpose and theoretical sensitivity to the related literature. The central research questions were as follows:

1. How is youth sport participation seen to influence family interactions, values, and relationships as perceived by mothers, fathers, and children?
2. What are the connections between these components of family life (interactions, values, and relationships) and achieving and/or resisting socio-cultural expectations associated with parenting and/or gender ideologies?

The investigation of family interactions, values, relationships and broader parenting and gender ideologies, as they relate to youth sport participation, were investigated by the following four sub-questions:

- i. How is youth sport participation perceived by family members to influence the rhythms and patterns of daily family life?
- ii. What are the expectations, hopes, and emotions of facilitating/participating in organized youth sport activities?
- iii. Is youth sport participation seen to be a leisure activity for all family members or for the child's enjoyment/benefit only?
- iv. How does residing in the rural context seen to influence youth's sport participation in connection with the above components (rhythms, patterns, expectations, hopes, emotions).

The fourth sub-question was also used to provide insight into the specific context of youth sport participation in connection with rural family life.

While there are many definitions of the concept of "sport", Coakley and Donnelly's (2009) definition was selected for the purpose of this study. According to Coakley and Donnelly, sports are "institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards" (p. 4). Thus, in this study, not only were team sports such as hockey and baseball included in the definition, but also individual activities such as dance and figure skating.

Ground Theory: A Constructivist Approach

With the discovery nature of the central research question and the focus on the subjective experiences of each family member, an interpretive qualitative approach was used. Specifically, the guiding principles of grounded theory were used throughout the research process, informing and emphasizing a systematic gathering and analyzing of the data, while allowing for creativity and openness to emerging concepts and themes.

Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Initially utilized by sociologists, over the years grounded theory has been adopted in a diversity of academic and practitioner fields, either alone or in combination with other methodologies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is a “general methodology, a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 163). Strauss (1987, p. 5) states:

The methodological thrust of the grounded theory approach to qualitative data is toward the development of theory, without any particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests. So, it is not really a specific method or technique. Rather, it is a style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features, such as theoretical sampling, and certain methodological guidelines, such as the making of constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm, to ensure conceptual development and density (p. 5).

Consistent with the use of the grounded theory research design, previous literature guided me with the use of sensitizing concepts as a starting point of inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). This open-ended research design allowed for emerging data to develop and enrich emerging themes that are grounded in the views of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Thus the research design used was based on a systematic, yet creative framework. Data was analyzed word by word, sentence by sentence, and section by section for the interview transcripts, participant journals, and researcher reflective notes (Strauss, 1987). The process, then, was not linear

(Charmaz, 2006), rather the grounded theory method used consisted of “simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508).

However, there is disagreement among different ‘camps’ of grounded theorists, particularly between positivist and constructivist traditions. Charmaz (2006) contrasts ‘objectivist grounded theory’ to ‘constructivist grounded theory’. According to Charmaz, an objectivist grounded theory approach is rooted in a positivist tradition with theorists remaining separate and removed from research participants and objective and ‘unbiased’ in the analysis. Theorists who adopt this approach seek to minimize or do not recognize the social context in which the data is produced nor the theorist’s subjective role in the development of theory. In contrast, a constructivist grounded theory approach “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data ... Constructivist grounded theory lies squarely in the interpretive tradition” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Constructivist theorists seek to understand how they shape and inform the research process through the practice of self-reflexivity (Charmaz, 2005).

Specifically, I was guided by Kathy Charmaz’s (2005, 2006) constructivist approach to grounded theory that views “grounded theory methods as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” with flexible guidelines that are used, rather than “methodological rules, recipes, and requirements” (2006, p. 9). More importantly, I found value in Charmaz’s constructivist approach to grounded theory that places the researchers as part of the social worlds they study, rather than objective, impartial, and removed from the research process. As Charmaz (2006) suggests, “We *construct* our grounded theories through

our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 10).

I embraced grounded theory through a constructivist lens, which sought to understand how I co-construct the data and analysis with the participants. Consistent with my feminist theoretical framework, a constructivist grounded theory approach recognizes that there is no value-free science, and highlights the importance of understanding the interactive nature of the researcher-participant relationship in the creation of knowledge.

Sampling Strategy, Participant Selection, and Research Site

Participants for this study were families residing in a rural community in Ontario, Canada. As indicated in the previous chapter, the notion of ‘families’ was guided by the concept of ‘home-groups’, and rural was guided by Statistics Canada’s definition of a community with a core population of 10,000 or less. I used initial and purposive sampling strategies as a starting point, to find families that were information-rich, illuminative, and were the best participants to begin to understand the problem and the research questions (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2007). At the same time, I also used snowball or chain sampling strategies, to help identify and recruit additional participants. With an emphasis on systematic gathering and analyzing of the data, I used theoretical sampling strategies to help elaborate and refine emerging categories (Charmaz). Theoretical sampling meant that I sought to collect data that would fill out my tentative major categories. This emergent process also allowed me to further develop and clarify relationships and processes between the categories (Charmaz). Theoretical sampling can be done through interviews with new participants or re-interviewing old participants (Charmaz), and I sought out new families that specifically had daughters.

(After interviewing the first three families, the children's organized sport involvement was representative of only one daughter, and seven sons.) Purposive, snowball, and theoretical sampling strategies were selected, as they coincide with the discovery framework of this study, and also because they coincide with a grounded theory research design.

Family selection was based upon insights from the related literature. For example, to ensure an element of homogeneity, each family had at least one child in the family unit in the twelve to fifteen year old age group who currently participated in organized sport, as this is the age where parent-child negotiations may be particularly heightened. At this time youth may seek their personal autonomy, with the parent and child struggling for control over how the youth's time is spent and with whom (Hutchinson, Baldwin, Caldwell, 2003). The influence of peer groups and the higher rate of drop-out at this age may be particularly insightful to parent-child negotiations and the dynamics of the relationship. Further, this age group is too young to qualify for a driver's license which could alter the support required from their parents for their sport participation. Thus, the criterion for a family to participate in this study was that at least one child was in the identified age group (as noted above) and that he or she participated in organized youth sport.

If there were two or more parents active in the child's life I encouraged all of the parents to be involved in the study. I agree with Hertz (1995) that the concept that one partner can speak on behalf of the other partner (or other parents in the case of blended families) needs to be abandoned. Instead, if possible, I spoke with all parents available, and therefore, had multiple accounts and perceptions of family life. I also included all siblings that were interested and available to participate in this study.

The families were recruited initially through contacting several volunteer organizations from a rural community located within a one hour driving distance from Waterloo, Ontario. Members of the organization were asked if I could speak at a meeting to recruit potential families and/or if a recruitment email could be sent out to their membership list (see Appendix A). Initial contacts were made with the Secretary of the Kinsmen Club who sent out an email to his membership, the President of Optimist Club who explained that their group was inactive, and the President of the Community Club (Seniors Group) where I attended one of their meetings and spoke to their membership. It was the President of Kinsmen Club who eventually helped identify family #1. Snowball or chain sampling strategies were then used to assist with the recruitment of additional families (i.e., a family involved with organized youth sport recommended other families who were also involved and met the criterion as outlined above).

Although the initial goal was to recruit four to five families for this study, I had the opportunity to meet and interview seven families. From the seven families, all family members participated in the study, with one exception. The father from family #4 declined participation. In total, seven families participated in the study: seven mothers, six fathers, and nineteen children (nine boys and ten girls). A detailed description of the families is presented in the following chapter.

When I made initial contact with the families, I explained the purpose, research intentions, and process of the study. Being part of a small community, and having spoken to several community groups, many of the families had stated that they had already heard about me from other members of the community. In all instances it was the mother of the family, who I had initial contact with, and set-up the dates for my visit. The initial meeting with a

family was arranged for a day and time that was most convenient for them and their respective schedules. This was a very difficult task to achieve in the midst of their sport seasons, yet provided rich and detailed data with very recent experiences.

The setting of each interview was an important consideration in the research design. A natural setting where the researcher can gain insight and develop a level of detail about the individuals in their natural surroundings is important to qualitative research methods (Cresswell, 2003). The research site may in part shape power relations between the researcher and their participants. Manderson, Bennett, and Andajani-Sutjahjo (2006) suggest that the researcher's workplace privileges the researcher, a public place influences confidentiality and issues of privacy, and the participant's home may provide a greater sense of comfort and security for the participants.

The family home also provided context as I was "witness to the class and social status of the interviewee through the location and kind of housing and its contents, and to clues to identity and history through personal artifacts (such as photographs), which, in turn, are open to comment" (Manderson, Bennett, & Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006, p. 1318). The length and framework of the data collection procedures that I used also suggested the usefulness of the home residence as an interview site as I met with each family member individually, and thus, other family members were able to go about their day without an extended period of interruption. As such, the family's home was the suggested research setting, although, an alternative location would have been suggested and arranged if a family expressed discomfort with the home site.

As the home is the primary site for data collection I also needed to be attentive to how disruptive entering a private home can be on family relationships, and the tension it can create

between family members. A study that involves multiple family members can be particularly disruptive to family relationships if there is disagreement on willingness to participate. Jordan (2006) reflected on the hostile reaction from a husband who did not see value in participating in her study. Unknowingly, his wife had volunteered their family's participation, and it created considerable marital tension during the research process. Also, the family composition in the home needed to be considered. Although for this particular study there were no extended family members residing in the home, they (i.e., elders/grandparents) may have had significant involvement in the decision-making of the children's lives. Out of respect for the family dynamics, consideration would have been given to extended family members and their involvement.

The time I spent with each family lasted approximately five to eight hours. During this time, I enjoyed a significant portion of the day in informal discussions with family members in between interviews. With four of the families, I was also invited to join them for their lunch or dinner. The informal conversations and being a part of a meal enhanced my opportunity to spend time with family members, whether individually or as a collective unit. These occurrences provided rich detailed information on family life as family member(s) shared additional, and sometimes collective stories, as well as the opportunity to observe some of the dynamics between family members. Upon my drive home, these observations were recorded on an audio-recorder and later transcribed into my reflective journal.

While I was at their home, each family member received an information letter (see Appendix B for parent's letter and Appendix C for children's letter) outlining the details of the study and their consent (see Appendix D for parent's consent form and Appendix E permission for a minor). An assent form (see Appendix F) was also given to anyone under the

age of 18 who participated in the study. During the initial discussion with each family member, I informed them of their right to decline participation in the study at any time, independent of the decision made by other members.

Data Collection and Management

Data collection for this study included multiple methods to help illuminate and enrich the understanding of the research problem. As Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller (2005) reflect on their research with children:

We contend that using a variety of research strategies to interest and engage children in the study was both philosophically appropriate and pragmatically valuable. These strategies respected children's agency as social actors and active participants in the creation of their own worlds of meaning. The various approaches complemented rather than duplicated and enabled the expression of different aspects of the children's experiences (p. 430).

The goal was to seek rich data that was detailed, focused, and enlightening that reveals "participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Specifically, data collection was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews, participant journaling, informal observation while at the participants' home, and a researcher journal. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, the semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection with the participant journaling, informal observations, and researcher journal providing complementary sources (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2007).

Semi-Structured Interviews

As Charmaz (2006) argues, “interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible” (p. 28). As a data collection tool, interviews can provide in-depth responses from participants about their experiences, perceptions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge (Patton, 2002). The interview style that I used was conversational in nature, where I asked questions and invited reflections from participants. Specifically, my aim was to go beyond the surface of described experiences, and ask participants about their thoughts, feelings, and actions while validating and valuing the participant’s humanity, perspectives, and experiences (Charmaz, 2006). However, this is within a context that emphasizes respect and the role of participants in choosing “what to tell and how to tell it” (p. 27).

Prior to beginning the individual interviews, I intended to meet with the family unit as a whole, to introduce the study, provide an explanation of what the study involved, and to remind participants of their right to decline answering specific questions or their participation in the study, at any time during the interview process. However, only on rare occasions were all family members home together at the same time, so this discussion occurred with each individual family member before their interview began (with the exception of the father from family #4). I asked a representative of the family to fill out a family demographic form (see Appendix G) to assist me in the attainment and organization of descriptive details about the family and individual family members. In all but one case it was the mothers who assumed this responsibility.

Interviews are social interactions that are shaped by the researcher and each individual research participant. I agree with Manderson, Bennett, and Andajani-Sutjahjo (2006) that “no

two interviews are alike: Each is the unique outcome of the characteristics of the individuals and the uniqueness of the time and place in which they interact. Yet, structural factors, including class, gender, and age, also shape the relationships of the research participants and the process of interviews” (p. 1319). Furthermore, who is present at the interview, whether alone or with other people, will also shape the dynamics and outcomes of the interview discussion.

I intentionally interviewed each family member separately on the same day for two reasons. First, with families’ limited free time, it was more practical and less intrusive to interview a family on one day, rather than disrupt their family schedule on several occasions (Hertz, 1995). Second, conducting the interviews sequentially, instead of on different occasions, may help minimize a family’s collective shared discussion of topics in between interviews, and hence, may provide multiple accounts that are not influenced by other family members’ memories, feelings or experiences. If a family member was unavailable to participate on the day I arrived, I was prepared to conduct a telephone interview with the missing family member at a later date. However, this situation did not arise.

Hertz (1995) argues that although interviewing a couple together may elicit the advantage of a shared and collective story, it is often difficult to detect differences and discrepancies in individual experiences with most couples wanting to show a unified front and/or avoid confrontation. Traditional gender ideology is also reinforced in joint interview settings, with wives being more likely to agree with their spouses’ answers. As Zipp, Prohaska, and Bemiller (2004) explain in their methodological paper on interviewing couples: “True to gender theory, men used the interview situation to assert their dominance by largely ignoring their wives’ answers, even on matters in which women have traditionally held sway

or in situations in which they themselves were the junior partner” (p. 952). Further, women were ‘doing gender’ in the interview by agreeing with their husbands answers and indirectly deferring power to their husband, regardless of the “women’s financial, cultural, and political capital” (p. 953). In the research design for this thesis, I extended this concept as joint interviews conducted with a parent and child or multiple siblings may also elicit hidden power relations of gender and age.

I believed that separate interviews would provide a composite story of family life that would be richer than joint interviews which may privilege one dominant voice over another. The separate interviews provided individual family members with the opportunity to discuss their different experiences, meanings, and contexts of family life in connection to youth sport. Further, the (relative) privacy and confidentiality of individual interviews allowed family members to express deeper differences, disagreement, and emotional strife, without necessarily inducing family disruption (Hertz, 1995). During separate interviews it was also important to probe and untangle if the participant’s use of the word “we” meant the reality of plural family members experiences and decisions or if “we” was the idealized and unified “we” of marriage and family life (Hertz, p. 437). Careful attention to this shift in linguistics helped illuminate the processes and meanings by which “consensus” was or was not achieved in family life (Hertz, 1995).

Interview guides (see Appendix H for the parent’s interview guide and Appendix I for the children’s interview guide) were used to ensure that the same topics or subject areas were explored with each interview (Patton, 2002). The initial questions were developed from a review of the related literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Further, follow-up probes were developed to encourage participants to continue, expand or clarify their responses. The

parents' and children's' interview guides matched each other with similar sectional topics.

The broader issues of family interactions, relationships, values, and the ideologies of parenting and gender, were embedded and discussed throughout all sections of the guides. The sectional topics of the interview guides were as follows:

- a) Section I of the interview guide focused on the *rhythms* and *time use patterns* of family life and youth's sport participation.
- b) Section II of the interview guide focused on *expectations, hopes, and values* of youth's sport participation and the anticipated benefits/outcomes and negative aspects and difficulties.
- c) Section III of the interview guide focused on the leisure-like and/or work-like aspects of youth's sport participation and if this type of sport was seen as an enjoyable activity for all *family members* or for the *child's* sake only.
- d) Section IV of the interview guide focused on *emotional life, interactions, and relationships* in connection to youth's sport participation.
- e) Section V of the interview guide focused on how living in a *rural context* shaped or influenced the nature of children's sport participation.

In addition to the shared interview topics, I also embraced the individuality of each interview shaped by the particular lived experiences of each participant. This was because although the "interview guide may serve as a common thread between interviews, each interview becomes a unique exchange with each new respondent" (Hertz, 1995, p. 433). Further, the use of an interview guide provided a beginning focus only with the flexibility and freedom to explore new topics of importance that emerged with each individual interview (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During the discovery of emerging themes, the

research questions were slightly changed and/or refined as I learned what to ask with each subsequent interview. Furthermore, my former experience residing in a rural community and participating in organized youth sport were used to enrich the understanding of the participants' experiences while engaging in dialogue during the interview process.

At the end of each individual interview, I once again highlighted the confidential nature of the interviews amongst family members. I am cognizant of the potential awkwardness and level of uncertainty that may exist between individual family members as an outcome of the interview discussions. As Hertz (1995) explains, at the completion of individual interviews, family members were always eager to tease one another about what was said, even while she was still present in their home. Indeed, several of the participants' journal entries revealed the comparative discussions that occurred after I had left the house. Some participants in Hertz's study also expressed concern that their answer may have differed from their spouses', and that the interviewer may not think that they are well matched, or as one participant explained to Hertz: "I'm curious about what my husband said ... I feel like I am standing naked in front of you. You know more about the intimate details of my life through my husband's eyes than I do" (p. 445). Similarly, several of the participants (particularly the parents) in this study made references in the interviews that expressed uncertainty as to whether their spouses had responded in a similar fashion, or if there would be divergent perspectives and inconsistencies in the sharing of their family stories.

Further, I have a heightened awareness of confidentiality issues that may ensue between parent and child. As Hood, Kelley, and Mayall (1996) observed in their research project, some parents were nervous about their children talking independently to a researcher and one mother even requested information about what her child had said. Other parents may

be simply curious and want to have an enhanced understanding of their children's lives as communicated to the researcher through the research process of interviews and journaling. Indeed, there was this sense by two mothers in particular, who "hovered" near my interviews with other family members, and wanted the interview location to be in a central place in the house such as the kitchen.

I stressed with parents, and gently with these two mothers in particular, the importance of their children's participation in the study without concern or fear that their parents will learn the content of their responses. I also explained that by respecting their children's privacy and autonomy in the research process, more honest, open, and illuminative responses and findings would emerge, that might better assist families in supporting their children's sport participation in the future. I suggested that if they were interested in understanding their children's perspectives, I could come back at a later time with some of my preliminary findings that would include the voices of *all* children who participated in the study. At this time, I also discussed the next steps of the study.

Participant Journal

At the end of each individual interview, I explained the second part of the study that included the use of participant journaling for the duration of 10 days (see Appendix J for screen shots for the on-line journal). The primary purpose of the journal was to provide the participants with the opportunity to be reflective about their daily experiences and family dynamics as these related to children's sport participation. The advantages of using a personal journal is that it "captures a reflective and private view of everyday life" and "generates substantial qualitative data" (Leyshon, 2002, p. 186). Personal journals also provided the participants the

time to be thoughtful, elaborate, and to self-censor with less time pressure than an interview setting creates (Shields, 2003).

In particular I used personal journals in the form of elicited texts as a supplementary source of data to the individual interview. As Charmaz (2006) explains,

Elicited texts involve research participants in producing written data in response to a researcher's request and thus offer a means of generating data. ... These texts, like published autobiographies, may elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influence the person. Researchers' guidelines for elicited texts may range from detailed instructions to minimal suggestions (p. 36).

To foster creativity and youth friendly forms of communication, I gave minimal instruction and open-ended prompts. Participants were encouraged to write or draw their reflections, thoughts, feelings, and emotions that they might have encountered on a given day. Further, participants had the option of entering their journal on-line or hard copy.

The on-line journal option reflects advances in technology and is a preferred method of communication for many youth. It can also be beneficial for parents who are working away from the home. Shields (2003) also suggests that web-based data collection procedures may provide additional rich data that participants may not be comfortable to share in person and/or this form of data collection may be a vehicle to minimize power relationships, as the internet is a tool that children/youth use on a daily basis. Only the individual participant and I had access to each participant's entries. The on-line journal format also helped with confidentiality issues, as family members were not able to readily access each others' journal entries within the home environment (compared to a hard copy version).

The on-line journal was linked through a page on the University of Waterloo's website to an encrypted page on an external website (Canadian host), in order to support the necessary software (Coldfusion). At the completion of the participant journaling (after approximately 2

weeks), I offered follow-up interviews with each participant, if they would like to meet a second time to discuss the journal content. However, none of the participants in this study expressed an interest to meet for a second time.

The data collection tool of a participant journal had mixed success. All of the participants who completed the journal chose to do the on-line version. Although all of the participants originally expressed interest in completing the 10-day journal, in reality, only eleven of the thirty-two participants submitted entries. The eleven participants included three of the seven moms (43%) and eight of the nineteen children (42% total; 50% of the girls and 33% of the boys). None of the fathers submitted an entry. Each of the participants who did use the journal, submitted one or two entries, with the exception of one mother who submitted four entries. The entries were composed by members from five of the seven families, with no submissions from family #3 or family #4.

The analysis of the participants' entries revealed a couple of interesting points about the methodological design and process. First, as identified above, there was a gendered component with a higher percentage of both mothers and female children who decided to participate in this secondary source of data collection, compared to fathers and male children. As well, two of the three families with whom I did not share a family meal, and spent only limited time in informal conversation, were also the families that did not submit any entries. Moreover, many of the participants had signed off their journal entry with "talk to you soon", and the youngest participant's second entry revealed that she was waiting for a response from me. For future consideration, an interactive process between the participant and me where I send comments in return throughout their submission time frame, may help create an enriched on-line dialogue.

Finally, at the conclusion of data collection for a family unit, participants were asked for their permission to be contacted by phone and/or an additional meeting to clarify any additional points that I may have related to the emerging themes and concepts. All participants were mailed a feedback letter following the completion of the data collection, thanking them for their time and insight into family dynamics with connection to children's sport participation (see Appendix K for parents' letter and see Appendix L for children's certificate of thanks). In appreciation of their time, all parents who participated in the study received a \$10 gift certificate to Tim Hortons (coffee shop), and all children received a \$10 gift certificate to a sporting store of their choice. The family unit as a whole was also sent a personalized thank-you card for their time and sharing their experiences.

Researcher Journal

I used a researcher journal for three purposes during the research process. The first function of the researcher journal was to record logistical information about the time, place, and dates of the interviews and participant journals for data management and organization purposes (Cresswell, 2003). Descriptive observations of participants and family dynamics throughout the interviews were also recorded immediately following an interview session (i.e., non-verbal communication).

The second function of the researcher journal was to provide a space for 'memoing' or writing down ideas about evolving themes and concepts in data analysis. The research journal provides an important role in the conceptual development of emerging concepts, relationships, and processes (Cresswell, 2003). A more detailed description of 'memoing' will follow in the "Data Analysis and Interpretation" section of this thesis.

The third function of the researcher journal was to provide a space for the process of self-reflexivity which is an important aspect to feminism and constructivist grounded theory (Allen, 2000; Charmaz, 2006). Self-reflective journal entries are a central piece in informing and shaping the research process, and are a validation strategy that aligns within the feminist theoretical framework. The process of self-reflection also provides a method of inquiry that blurs fieldwork and writing together and enriches the process of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). A detailed description of this process follows in the final section of this thesis: “Post-Script: Charting the Journey”.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As outlined earlier, a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis was used in this study. Specifically, the strategies of memoing, coding, comparative method, and theoretical sampling procedures as outlined by Charmaz (2006), provided the guiding principles for analysis. To facilitate the organization, analysis, and storage of data, I used the QSR NVivo software package. All data, including interview transcripts, participant journals, and researcher descriptive and reflective field notes, memos and diagrams were stored in the software program. The qualitative data analysis software package assisted me in the retrieval and organization of data throughout the analytical process; however, it was an organizational tool only, not an analytical resource (Strauss, 1987).

Memoing

As described in the earlier section on “Data Collection and Management” I used a researcher journal for three purposes: to record logistical information, to provide a space for memoing or

writing down ideas about evolving themes and concepts, and for the process of researcher reflexivity. As Charmaz (2006) suggests, a critical step in grounded theory and data analysis is to frequently interrupt the coding process to write descriptive and reflective memos. Memo-writing is an important vehicle in conceptualizing ideas and providing guidance in further questions and directions to pursue (Charmaz). Memoing placed me in an analytical and reflective realm that assisted in the development of emerging conceptual themes, relationships, and interactions (Strauss, 1987).

Methods of memo-writing are spontaneous, free, and informal. They are also partial and preliminary in the development of ideas, concepts, relationships, and theories (Charmaz, 2006). Memos exemplify the discovery and creative aspect of analysis that is grounded in the data through a researcher's subjective lens. In starting a new memo entry, I adopted Charmaz's suggestion of 'clustering' as a good preliminary sketch of the memo:

Clustering gives you a non-linear, visual, and flexible technique to understand and organize your material. Adopt this technique to produce a tentative and alterable chart or map of your work. Like freewriting, a major objective of clustering is to liberate your creativity. You write your central idea, category, or process; then circle it and draw spokes from it to smaller circles to show its defining properties, and their relationships and relative significance. (p. 86)

Throughout the data analysis process, memos became a larger part of the process as coding became more focused. Memoing is an important tool in moving codes to conceptual categories (Charmaz). Memo-writing provided an important process and space in the constant comparison of codes and conceptual categories, and the understanding of their interconnectedness. It builds, clarifies, or removes codes/categories based on identifying variations within a code/category and between other codes/categories (Charmaz).

Through the use of concept charting I also used diagrams to visually display, conceptually map, and analyze the emerging categories (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This

process involved placing all of the categories on pieces of paper to visually aid in the development of relationships and interactions among the categories. A larger roll of mural paper with post-it notes was purchased to visually construct and develop concept charts and post on my home office walls for data analysis.

Coding Paradigm

During the beginning stages of the analysis I read through all of the data to obtain a general sense of the information and made reflective notes on each transcript and participant journal's (when completed) overall meaning (Creswell, 2003). After I gained a general familiarity with the data source I began the initial stages of the coding process. Charmaz (2006) defined coding as "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them" (p. 43). In grounded theory, codes emerge from the data, rather than from pre-determined frames (Charmaz). Coding involves classifying and labeling items of information for data organization and synthesizing (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Items of interest will include: "behavioral actions and events, observed or described in documents and in the words of interviewees and informants" (Strauss, 1985, p. 25). Analysis is also conducted to look for insight and understanding beyond the surface level. A conceptual analysis of interactions, relationships, and processes between my analytic categories were examined (Charmaz; Strauss, 1987).

The coding process is an important part of the data analysis and interpretation, and is *constructed* by the researcher's emerging ideas and concepts, while grounded in the data. I agree with Charmaz in that I see the process of coding in a subjective context: "We may think our codes capture the empirical reality. Yet it is *our* view: we choose the words that constitute

our codes. Thus we define what we see as significant in the data and describe what we think is happening” (p.47). It is an interactive process between researcher and data, and the process of self-reflexivity will help enrich the data and understand our own preconceived notions and concepts.

A key principle of grounded theory is the comparative process. Throughout data analysis a “researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 517). Constant comparisons are made throughout the simultaneous process of data collection and analysis, examining similarities, differences, and degrees of consistency among the content of the data which in turn will result in coded categories that have underlying uniformity.

Guided by Charmaz’s (2006, p. 41-70) principles of constructivist grounded theory, I engaged in initial, focused, and theoretical coding procedures. The first type of coding that was conducted in the data analysis was initial coding. This early stage of coding involved the review of interview transcripts and journal entries line-by-line, examining and exploring concepts that seemed to fit the data. In this coding process I “st[u]ck closely to the data” and compared data with data rather than applying “preexisting categories to the data” (p. 47). Further, I attempted to code with words that reflected action rather than topics. This initial stage was seen as tentative, its primary purpose being to invoke thinking and engage in creativity and conceptual exploration. Through the lengthy process of initial coding, codes were discarded, modified, reworded, and expanded with the goal of saturation and placing them in relationship to other codes. Thus, these initial codes were “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, p. 48).

The second major phase in the coding process was focused coding. Charmaz defines focused coding as “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57). However, moving to the focused coding stage was not a linear process, rather I was working back and forth through the initial and focused coding procedures. Further, the focused coding process had me actively working across interviews and journal entries, while comparing “people’s experiences, actions, and interpretations” (p. 59).

The final phase that Charmaz suggests is the process of theoretical coding. Charmaz defines theoretical coding as a “sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding” and identifies “possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding” (p. 63). As the early coding stages fractured and separated the data, this process brought it back together again in a “coherent story” and moved the analysis into a theoretical direction.

My *aim* was to exhaust coding procedures until categories had reached a point of saturation. Theoretical saturation “occurs when added information does not reveal new understanding about relations or abstraction” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 138). However, as Charmaz (2006) argues, we need to go beyond *claims* of saturation to evaluate the quality of grounded theory studies. Thus as categories were developed, I also addressed questions about the categories’ quality and trustworthiness.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Divergent perspectives and terms have been at the forefront of the validation debate in qualitative research. Many interpretative researchers have questioned the use of ‘validity’ with its positivist origins and have argued that instead, interpretative researchers should be aiming for and demonstrating the ‘trustworthiness’ of their research (Angen, 2000). In the validity/trustworthiness debate, there have been several dominant perspectives that have maintained “staying power” (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 522). Cresswell (2007, p. 202-206) summarizes several of these perspectives and their suggested framework for evaluation. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have used alternative terms to the [post]-positivist validation terminology that are more congruent with naturalist research such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. On the other end of the continuum some researchers have little use for validation and feel that it is simply rhetoric that distracts from understanding what is really going on (for example, Wolcott, 1990 as cited by Cresswell, 2007). Other qualitative researchers, such as Lather (1993) subscribe to a more postmodern re-conceptualization of trustworthy data through the framework of paralogic validity, rhizomatic validity, ironic validity, and voluptuous validity.

Several scholars have tried to synthesize the various perspectives and writings on validation/trustworthiness. For example, Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) analyzed thirteen writings and extracted central concepts that represented a common thread among all of the perspectives. They created two levels of criteria. The primary criteria were defined by credibility and authenticity, criticality and integrity. The second criteria related to the additional guiding principles of explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity. Angen (2000) also synthesized various recent qualitative approaches to

validity and proposed two overarching principles that she argues are more appropriate to interpretative epistemological assumptions and goals. Angen argues that *ethical* and *substantive* criteria are more appropriate than validity in guiding and establishing trustworthiness in an interpretative paradigm. After considering the multitude of perspectives that aim to develop and establish trustworthy research, I decided to use Angen's criteria as I felt that they aligned with my epistemological (see previous chapter) and methodological framework for this study.

Ethical and Substantive Validation

“Ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 205). As noted earlier, the creation of knowledge is a political activity, and thus, ethics can not be separated from knowledge and political activism (Denzin, 2000; Gillies & Alldred, 2002). Interpretative research has an emphasis on understanding everyday experiences, meanings, and relations, and as such should be grounded in a moral understanding of our social world shaped by a thoughtful, caring, and compassionate framework (Angen, 2000). Moreover, interpretative research should go beyond simply understanding our social world and should aim for “generative promise” (Angen, p. 389) in asking new questions, stimulating dialogue, and transforming our actions.

What interpretative researchers discover in the research process is inherently bound to their relationships with their research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Ethical validation implies that the researcher tries to minimize his or her privileged and authoritative position, and aims for a more reciprocal and non-hierarchical research relationship. Harding's (1991) posture of “strong objectivity” and Fine's (1994) position of working the hyphen, both

encourage a researcher to understand the interplay and relation between researcher and participant rather than deny its existence. As a result, recognizing and embracing this phenomenon brings more honesty and responsibility to research agendas.

Angen (2000) also suggests that a number of substantive issues should be considered in establishing the trustworthiness of an interpretive study. Cresswell (2007) summarizes substantive validation as: “understanding one’s own understandings of the topic, understandings derived from other sources, and the documentation of this process in the written study” (p. 206). Self-reflexivity is a fundamental commitment to substantive validation. As constructivist grounded theorists are embedded in the social context of the phenomena in which they are studying (Charmaz, 2006), it is important to understand and judge the trustworthiness of the co-interpretations that develop. Angen explains that in interpretative research, substantive issues arise that require “a chain of interpretations” (p. 390) to be well documented in trusting the final meanings of a study. Finally, written texts must resonate with their intended audiences and must be powerful, compelling, and affect them emotionally or intellectually (Angen).

Trustworthiness Strategies

As Cresswell (2007) argues, it is not enough to simply adopt trustworthiness perspectives and terms; it is important that they are translated into practice. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) have identified several strategies or techniques that may be used to demonstrate trustworthiness. In consideration of the purpose and design of this study, I adopted four strategies that I believe align with my theoretical perspective and the guiding principles of ethical and substantive validation.

Specifically, the techniques of *reflexive journaling* and *memoing* were strategies in establishing trustworthiness in the documentation of the ‘chain of co-interpretations’ and conceptual development of the study. Reflexive journaling was also a process and context through which I tried to understand how I shaped the study through my ethical, political and moral assumptions. In the final section of this thesis, I reveal some of the reflexive journal entries made, and some of the concepts that arose during data collection and analysis, to which I gave considerable thought. Furthermore, I provided a *rich and thick description* in the presentation of the study’s written accounts, so that the audiences can share the experiences and meanings revealed in this study, and make their own judgments as to the trustworthiness of the research (Cresswell, 2007). Finally, participant’s *verbatim quotes* are intertwined with my constructed themes and interpretations throughout the narrative text.

Descriptor of Participants

Before presenting the findings, a foundation will be laid to provide an overview of the similarities and differences of each of the seven families who participated in the study. A description of family composition, highest education attained, sports participated in (current and past), and volunteer roles within a sport organization (current and past) are discussed for each family. Also, a few points of interest are provided as well. While interpreting the findings, this may help the reader better understand the context of the participants’ lived experiences and reflections.

All seven families lived in the same rural township. The community is primarily an agricultural community, with one main town and several smaller villages. The families lived

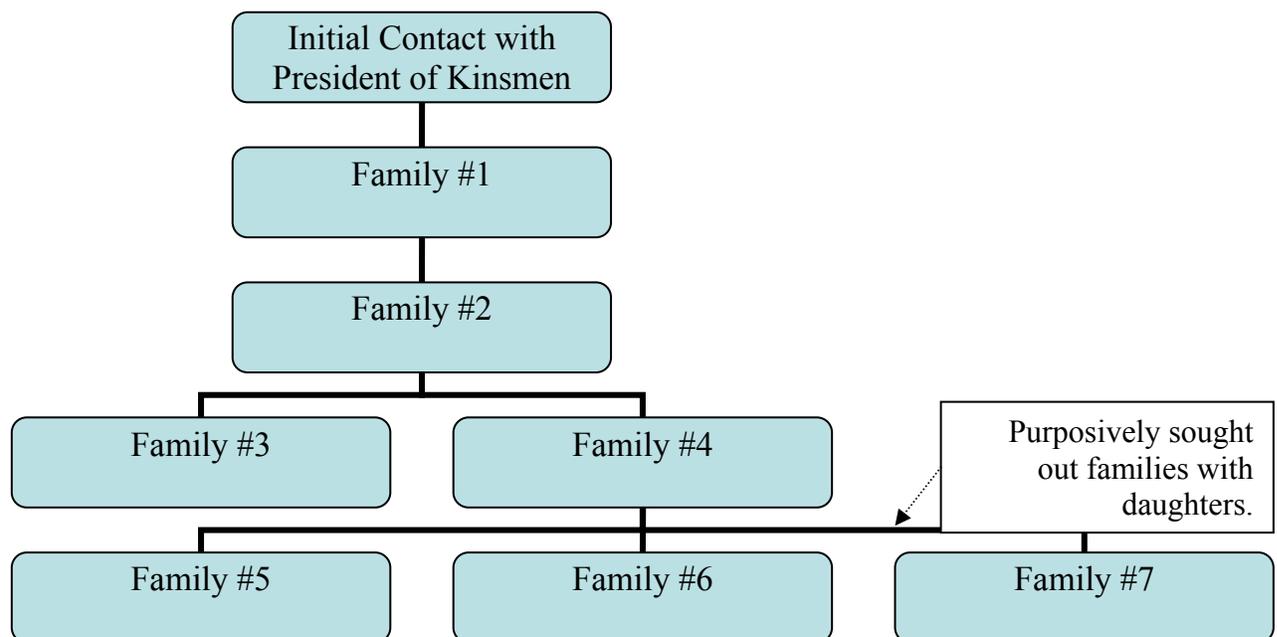
in different types of residences within the rural setting: two of the families resided in the small town of approximately 900 residents, two other families resided in the small village of approximately 200 residents that was a five minute drive from the town, and three of the families resided on family farms located between the town and the village.

All families had at least one child in the twelve to fifteen year old age group who was currently participating in organized sport. Siblings were also included in this study and the ages of the children ranged from nine years old to seventeen years old. The parents' ages ranged from thirty-seven years old to fifty years old. As outlined in Chapter IV, although I would have embraced a diversity of family types for this study (i.e., blended families, single-parent families, gay and lesbian families), the families who participated in the study were a fairly homogenous group with two heterosexual parents residing in the household. None of the families were blended and there were no extended family members who resided in the household. Further, all of the families were Caucasian; thus, diverse issues as they relate to race and ethnicity did not become a prominent aspect of the participants' interviews.

Consistent with the demographics in Canada's rural areas, the families who participated in the study represented diverse socio-economic backgrounds. For example, the parents' highest level of education ranged from three parents who did not finish high school, to five parents who received their high school diploma, to six who parents had gone to university/college. The type of employment was also diverse as some of the occupations included being a truck driver, a labourer, a farmer, a personal support worker, an information technologist, and a "corporate" manager. Every family unit who participated in the study had two vehicles, both parents were currently employed full-time, and all families had extended family members who resided close by.

My experiences of residing in a rural community during my childhood appeared to put the participants somewhat at ease as they saw a commonality with me. There was also an unknowing coincidence that seemed to create an ‘in’ and a shared rapport with some of the families in the study. Two years prior, five of the families (who had sons that were all thirteen to fifteen years old) had played my hometown of Sunderland in the “All-Ontario” finals. As I remember from my childhood, a small community making it to the All-Ontario finals was a rather big event for the community! As it turned out, this coincidence inadvertently helped open the doors to this community for me. When I called them for the first time, I learned that they had already heard about me, and I had become known in the community as the “girl from Sunderland”. It also became a lively point of discussion in several of the interviews.

As mentioned earlier, snowball or chain sampling strategies were used to recruit participants, and the following diagram illustrates by whom the families were referred.



As the study progressed, I realized that many of the families were socially connected, even though they had been recruited through different chain sampling contacts. Many of the stories I learned in each of the interviews, started to cross-over with other families and shed light on earlier examples and incidents that I heard about. For example, the following personal connections were made: (i) In five of the families the boys played together on the same hockey team, (ii) In three of the families the girls figure skated together, (iii) In four of the families the girls played hockey together (three of them also figure skated together), and (iv) In two of the families the fathers were brothers.

For the presentation of the findings, I assigned pseudonyms to each of the participants to help ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Further, the names of the rural communities have been changed to reflect the game of hockey (e.g., “Puckville”, “Stickville”). Any reference to a city is referred to as “Urbanville” or “Suburbanville”.

To provide a concise summary of the families, the following seven tables provide demographic information and details of each family member’s current and past community sport involvement. The tables also provide descriptive information about the interviews, such as date, length of time at the family residence, and location of the interviews.

Table 1: Description of Family #1

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Keith	Father	Hockey	Local	No	Hockey	Coach	No
		Baseball	Local	No	Baseball	Coach	No
		Broomball	Local	No			
Kathy	Mother	Broomball	Local	No	Hockey	Trainer	Yes
		Baseball	Local	No	Hockey	Executive- Town Contact	No
		Golf	Rec	Yes	Baseball	Asst. Coach	No
Devin	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	No			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			
Kaleb	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	No			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			
Daemyn	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	No			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			

Additional Notes:

- Interviewed on Saturday, February 9, 2008, at family residence and hockey arena from 10:00am to 6pm (8 hours).
- Interviews occurred in the family living room (minimal privacy), with the exception of the father's interview that occurred at the community arena as he was working for a portion of the day (maximum privacy).
- *This family was the lowest socio-economic family interviewed, and the topic of finances dominated the parents' interviews. Both parents did not complete their high school education, and until recently mom had been working in a part-time job at a local nursing home that required her to be away evenings and weekends.
- Interestingly, the father used to coach children's sport teams, but quit when his own children were old enough to play, as he did not believe that a parent should coach their own children.

Table 2: Description of Family #2

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Peter	Father	Baseball	Rep	No	Baseball	Coach	Yes
		Broomball	Local	No	Hockey	Timekeeper	Yes
		Hockey	Local	No			
Julie	Mother	Baseball	Local	No	Hockey	Fundraiser	Yes
					Baseball	Scorekeeper	Yes
					Baseball	Fundraiser	
Thomas	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes	Hockey	Asst. Coach	Yes
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
Kristen	Daughter	Hockey	Elite	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed on Saturday, March 1, 2008, at family residence from 9:30am to 3:30pm (6 hours). • Interviews occurred in the family living room (moderate privacy). • Father's interview was unfortunately cut short as they had to leave for their daughter's hockey game. This six hour block of time was the largest amount of 'free time' that they had unbooked on their calendar! • The daughter is playing at a high level of girl's hockey. A controversial decision, 4 years prior, that did not allow her to play on her older brother's team was discussed repetitively throughout this family's interview. Moreover, the scenario was brought up by three other families in this study, and thus, it must have been a contentious situation in the broader community. 							

Table 3: Description of Family #3

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Stewart	Father	Hockey	Local	Yes	Hockey	Coach	No
Amy	Mother	Baseball	Rep	No	Baseball	Coach	No
					Baseball	Executive - Secretary	No
					Hockey	Executive - Secretary	No
Mark	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			
Todd	Son	Hockey	Triple A	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			
Sam	Son	Hockey	Triple A	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
		Golf	Rec	Yes			

Additional Notes:

- Interviewed on Monday, March 10, 2008, at family residence from 2:00pm to 7:15pm (5 ¼ hours).
- Interviews occurred in the family room in the basement (moderate privacy).
- Throughout my time spent at this home, I could hear the kids ‘beating on each other’ throughout the house at any given time. There was also a somewhat sense of hostility and tension between the husband and wife with my limited observations of their interactions.

Table 4: Description of Family #4

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
David	Father	Hockey	Local	No	Hockey	Trainer	No
		Baseball	Local	No			
Paula	Mother	Figure Skating	Local	No	Figure Skating	Executive – President	Yes
		Hockey	Rec	No	Hockey	Trainer	Yes
Manuel	Son	Hockey	Triple A	Yes	Hockey	Helper on ice.	Yes
		Baseball	Local	Yes	Power-skating	Program assist.	Yes
					Hockey	Referee	Yes
Brandy	Daughter	Figure Skating	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Program assist.	Yes
		Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
Katie	Daughter	Figure Skating	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Program assist.	Yes
		Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			

Additional Notes:

- Interviewed on Saturday, May 3, 2008, at family residence from 10:45am to 3:45pm (5 hours).
- Interviews occurred in the dining room (minimal privacy).
- When I originally spoke with the mother she said that their schedules were quite hectic and would get back to me. I received a phone call at 8:30am on the Saturday morning, and was invited to come to their home as the skating lessons had been cancelled for that day!
- Unfortunately, although present at the residence, the father declined participation in the study.

Table 5: Description of Family #5

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Patrick	Father	Baseball	Local	No			
Wanda	Mother	Swimming	Rec	Yes	Figure Skating	Test Chair	Yes
		Biking	Rec	Yes	Hockey	Fundraising	Yes
					Soccer	Uniform Rep.	Yes
Kaitlyn	Son	Figure Skating	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Program asst.	Yes
		Soccer	Local	Yes			
Nadia	Daughter	Figure Skating	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Program asst.	Yes
		Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed on Friday, May 9, 2008, at family residence from 4:30pm to 11:15pm (6 ¾ hours). • Interviews occurred in the basement in an office (maximum privacy). • This family resided on a farm. The farm was cash crops with no live-stock. Both the mother and father also worked full-time jobs off the farm. 							

Table 6: Description of Family #6

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Jacob	Father	Baseball	Local	No			
Lara	Mother	Baseball	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Treasurer	Yes
					Hockey	Executive- Town Contact	Yes
					Hockey	Team Manager	No
					Baseball	Asst. Coach	No
Travis	Son	Hockey	Local	Yes	Baseball	Umpire	Yes
		Baseball	Local	Yes	Hockey	Timekeeper	Yes
					Hockey	On-ice assistant	Yes
Cali	Daughter	Hockey	Local	Yes	Figure Skating	Program Asst.	Yes
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
		Figure Skating	Local	Yes			
		Step Dancing	Rec	Yes			
Breeana	Daughter	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
		Dance	Rec	Yes			
		Stepdancing	Rec	Yes			
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed on Saturday, May 10, 2008, at family residence from 1:30pm to 8:30pm (7 hours). • Interviews occurred in the family room in the basement (moderate privacy). • This family resided on a farm. The farm was cash crops with no live-stock. Both the mother and father also worked full-time jobs off the farm. 							

Table 7: Description of Family #7

Household Member's Name	Who?	Main Sport(s) Played	Level	Current Participant?	Sport Volunteer	Organizational Role	Current Volunteer?
Bob	Father	Hockey	Local	Yes	Hockey	Coach	Yes
		Slo-pitch	Rec	No			
Kandy	Mother	Hockey	Rec	No	Hockey	Trainer	Yes
		Slo-Pitch	Rec	Yes	Baseball	Coach	Yes
Larissa	Daughter	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
Abbey	Daughter	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
Sadie	Daughter	Hockey	Local	Yes			
		Baseball	Local	Yes			
		Figure Skating	Local	Yes			

Additional Notes:

- Interviewed on Monday, May 26, 2008, at family residence from 4:30pm – 9:30pm (5 hours).
- Interviews occurred outside on the side porch (maximum privacy).
- This family resided on a farm. The farm was cash crops and live-stock. Only the mother worked a full-time job off the farm.

Chapter V: Understanding Children's Experiences

The analysis led to the development of three major themes that best reflected the meanings and experiences of the children and parents. With most of the research on youth sport focused primarily on the parental perspective, the first theme addresses a large gap in the literature, and emphasizes the implications of youth sport from the children's perspectives. The theme "Understanding Children's Experiences" is described in this chapter and has four sub-themes that illustrate the children's scheduled lives, the impact organized youth sport has on their relationship with their siblings, and how they perceive their parents' involvement in facilitating their sport participation, as well as their parents' sport organizational roles.

The second theme "Parenting in Public and Private Spaces" is revealed in Chapter VI and emphasizes the implications of organized youth sport for the parents' lives. From the analysis of the parental discourse, three sub-themes emerged related to the high cost that participation in organized sport has on the family unit, the additional responsibilities connected to the sport organization, as well as judging the parenting practices of their spouses and other parents in the community as these practices related to their organized sport involvement. These sub-themes revealed the impact that organized youth sport could have on family dynamics, as well as on relationships with other parents in the community.

The "Nexus of Family Experiences" emerged as the third theme and is described in Chapter VII. The analysis of the intersection of children's and parents' diverse perspectives revealed two sub-themes that reflect the complex family dynamics associated with children's sport involvement. The two sub-themes relate to unwrapping the complexity of the decision-making process for children's sport participation, and understanding the enjoyment and negative

aspects for each family member. Within these sub-themes there were some commonalities and diverse perspectives of meanings and experiences among mothers, fathers, and children

From these three major themes, a core theme emerged reflecting the idea of “Upholding Team Family”. Throughout the three major themes, there was an overall sense of organized sport creating a shared family identity and sense of belonging, and at the same time, the significant sacrifices to family life that were made in the creation of this identity. Moreover, the sense of upholding team family was revealed in both the public and private spheres of family life. The core theme “Upholding Team Family” is presented at the end of Chapter VII. Discussion of this core theme also focuses on the ways in which the families’ sport involvement and the notion of “team family” is both gendered and embedded in rural community life.

Understanding Children’s Experiences

With limited earlier research that has sought to understand children’s perspectives, the analysis of the children’s data provided a window into their experiences of organized youth sport and family life. The first major theme “Understanding Children’s Experiences”, and the four sub-themes that emerged, revealed the children’s discourse and the contradictory aspects of organized youth sport, which both strengthen and create tension within their familial relationships. The analysis of their interviews and journal entries also illustrated the intensity of their schedules, and for some, how sport had become a way of life that shaped other aspects of their lives. The four sub-themes are: (i) Living Scheduled Lives, (ii) Challenging and Fostering Sibling Relationships, (iii) Recognizing Parental Support, and (iv) Perceptions of Parental Organization Roles are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Living Scheduled Lives

The Intensity of Children's Activities

For many children, their lives were highly structured with a wide array of activities that filled their week. For example, two children talked about their participation in an activity almost every night of the week, with organized youth sport cited often:

Um, well Guides is on Wednesday night. And I do that after school at six o'clock. And then I do skating on Mondays and Fridays, and then hockey on Wednesday nights. Swimming lessons is in the summer and piano is during Tuesdays. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4,)

It is very crazy! Well I baby-sit after school every Monday and so hockey I usually fly from babysitting to the arena, it's usually Monday and Wednesday. I have figure skating Tuesday and Friday, step dancing Thursday, hockey practice Saturday, and Sunday I'm just chillin'. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

The children were also aware of not only their own activities, but the hectic schedules for all family members related to sport involvement:

Well, in the winter it's usually like, because my sister plays hockey and my brother plays hockey and I play hockey, so every night of the week it's usually somewhere. Just busy, busy, busy. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

When like, cause me, my brother, my sister and my mom play baseball. So we usually have like 3 games every night. So it would be like she comes home at 5 every night, sometimes 5:30 so then we have to eat quick and then go. (Youngest child, female age 10, family #6)

The children's scheduled lives gave them little free time after school. Many of the children's descriptions of their weeknights had a feeling of being rushed and/or time crunched, and thus, they had to live a highly routine existence to ensure all responsibilities such as homework were successfully accomplished. Everyday tasks such as eating dinner were frequently on the run, and the children often made their own quick meals. For example:

On Thursday nights I have practices at 6:30pm so I have to leave at 4:30pm. I do my homework right after school and then I eat, just something quick and then we leave around 4:30pm. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Well, after school I usually don't have time for much supper, usually have to cook a grilled cheese and get out of the house. (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

I usually, get home off the bus at like quarter to 4, so I usually quickly make something if we're in a rush or my mom will bring home pizza. Or if it's, I have practice at 7:30pm my mom will cook supper. But sometimes I just have to quickly make a grilled cheese or throw something in the microwave. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Many children described how difficult it was to balance their participation in organized youth sport with all their other activities, including their homework and sport teams at school.

For example, one child talked about having two soccer practices a day – one for her school team and one for her community team:

Very busy! Depends on the day. Usually I have soccer practice in the mornings for school so that's usually either 2 or 3 times a week. And then I have classes, 4 classes a day. And then after school I either have soccer practice again or I have league soccer which is out of town, like in Jerseyville. So, I have practice from like 7pm till whenever. Then come home and do homework for a few hours, then do it all over the next day. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

At times, balancing their organized youth sport participation with their educational responsibilities seemed to cause heightened moments of stress and feelings of being overwhelmed:

I think it depends on school. Like right now we're kind of at crunch time, like exams are slowly creeping up. Like if I have school soccer 3 times a week and then league soccer 3 times a week, like that just takes up a lot of time. You just feel like you're constantly running back and forth and trying to fit everything in. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

This sentiment was reflected, also, in a statement by one child who explained that at times she wished she could just quit. She felt a great deal of anxiety as she tried to complete her school projects while being at organized youth sport commitments every night of the week:

Just I think school is a lot, to do both it's hard. So like speeches, if you have to write a speech at school, well not at school, at home. And like speeches [are] coming and I just want to quit everything so I can get my speech done and get all my school work done that I need to get done and not have any sports cause it's like, every night at least I'm at the arena from 7 to 9pm. Yeah. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Despite these expressed moments of wanting to quit sports, this same child quickly followed her previous response and assured me that her sport participation level was acceptable, and that she was still able to handle all the activities that she was participating in:

People tell me that I'm a bit crazy for doing all of this but I think it's the right amount. Like some days I'm like, some nights I just wish I could quit everything. But I think it's good. I'm still managing. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6).

In addition to their homework and non-sport activities such as music lessons or Girl Guides, the older youth talked about their part-time jobs and their effort to balance their employment responsibilities with their sport participation. At times, these employment schedules added to their hectic way of life. Speaking from her experience, the oldest child in the study revealed:

Lately, the past few months I've been working every weekend. So it's been a little much because I work Saturdays and Sundays usually. Shifts range from like 12 to 8 or the morning shift, from like 5 to 1 in the morning. So lately it's been kind of a lot. It's been a lot, with school and everything ... it's really busy right now. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

Moreover, to be able to play organized youth sport she also revealed how she learned how to negotiate and manage her work schedule to book time off:

Like my boss, if I need times off, like usually I don't work during the week, I just have weekend shifts so it doesn't usually interact with that. But like if I have tournaments on the weekends or something it's pretty good with getting shifts switched. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

At the same time, she also realized that the busy life she had was her own choice. In fact, she and her father had disagreements over her high level of activity:

Well this morning, it's kind of a funny example, just my dad thinking it's too much, to be on both, but I kind of feel like it is a tad bit [busy] right now, but I know it's going to kind of slow down here soon. But I want to do both so I think I can manage it! (*So what is that discussion like with your dad?*) No comment! [Laughter.] No, I just try to inform him that it will all work out! (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

However, I would like to highlight that the intensity of children's activities was not experienced the same by all children, and in fact, there were some diverse perspectives. Some of the children described a very relaxed portrayal of their daily activities. For example:

Come home get a snack and usually go out on the snowmobile ... play guitar here. Or go up to the Stickville arena and just play hockey for a little bit. (*What do you do on the weekends?*) Hang out with friends or play hockey. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

I'll come home and if I don't have any sports or anything at night, I'll watch TV, maybe go down to my buddy's in town. Just head out and something like that. Just relax. (*What do you do on the weekends?*) Usually I'm just at somebody's house and then we'll snowmobile, or GT, or bike or something. But if there's nothing going on I'll just watch TV and relax. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

The children's interview transcripts from three of the families (two families were all boys) had an overall sense of more free-time and simply hanging out with friends. Notably, these three families also had the lowest family income compared to the other four families. In review of all of the children's interview transcripts and the family information forms, in general, it appears that the children with the stress-free depiction of their daily lives were only participating in one sport at any given time. Moreover, unlike the other four families there was almost no mention of additional extra-curricular activities in their interviews such as school teams, music lessons or Girl Guides/Scouts.

Becoming a Way of Life

Despite the diversity of their scheduled activities, most of the children seemed to feel that the amount of time they spent in organized youth sport was adequate and met their needs. However, there were some statements that suggested that their schedules could become too busy. For example:

I think I'm spending a good amount of time. If I was involved in one or two more teams it would be too much. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Just the right amount, maybe I could do a bit more, but it's pretty good. (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3)

It appeared that for some children a busy schedule had become a way of life. In fact for one child the very notion of not participating in sports meant boredom and feelings of restlessness:

I'm used to that type of lifestyle. I get bored if I have nothing to do. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Surprisingly, only two children out of nineteen participants said that they felt like they were involved in too many sport activities. However, one of these participants also reported that she liked all of her activities, and therefore, it justified her current participation level: "Well, I think I am taking a little bit too much, but I like it, so I don't really think so." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4) Similarly, a second child described how the level of activity in the winter months was perhaps too much, however, she also expressed that during the summer time her needs were not being met either. During the summer months she felt bored with the lack of organized activities that she participated in:

Sometimes too much in the winter because like I only have one free night which is like Monday, which is a bad day for me. And in the summer I feel like I'm doing too little but in between like spring and fall it's perfect. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

However, this sentiment was not reflected by her older sister who preferred the down time in the summer months. She enjoyed the opportunity for a more relaxed schedule when her family could take pleasure in the simple everyday activities such as eating dinner together:

But in the summer it's nice because we're not as busy. Baseball's at 7pm so we can have time to actually have a good supper. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

For some children, although they did not currently feel that their sport participation was overwhelming, they did reveal that they had previously been involved in too many activities. Consequently, they had to quit an activity and/or choose between two different sports to provide a more manageable and less exhausting schedule:

Well one year I did both but that was just way too much because my sister did both too and a lot of running every night and it really wore me out. So I just had to choose one. (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

I would like to do soccer too, baseball and soccer, but I don't know, it's just, summer's supposed to be relaxful so I don't want to be running around again. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Overall, it also appeared that for most of the children, long-term participation in organized youth sport had become a way of life, and for the older children in particular, the decline in sport opportunities could create a sense of loss. One of the oldest male children in the study expressed how he would like to participate in more activities. With age, he had found that his opportunities had become more limited. In fact, this was the first year he was unable to play in the local minor baseball league. After over a decade of playing, he was now too old for the league and there was not a team for him to play on. He felt a void in his life as he reflected on his earlier sport experiences:

I think it's a little bit less than just right. I actually wish I could spend a little bit more time playing sports. (*Why is that?*) I think I played more sports when I was younger or just more often. 'Cause hockey school and stuff like that and playing for different teams like 3 on 3 I think I played for a little bit. So it has just kind of lulled off a little bit right now. So it's probably like, if somebody was just starting in sports and playing as much as I was, they'd be like "WOW, this is a lot!", but I think 'cause I got used to it at a young age I just kind of like, "Okay let's go play sports!" (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Prioritizing the Value of Sport and Homework

For some children, academic achievement was seen as an important priority in their family. They were not permitted to go to their game or practice until all homework was successfully completed, and at times, this created feelings of anxiety. As one child described, he almost always abided by his mother's rule:

I guess one of the rules is if we don't have our homework done we can't really go. (*Have you ever not been able to go because your homework wasn't done?*) Well, no ... not personally. Well, I guess there was an instance where I came really close! (Laughter) (*So what happened during that instance?*) Well, I got so upset that I was going to miss it that

I worked hard enough to finish my homework. (*Whose rule is that?*) Mostly my mom's rule. Yeah! Homework comes first! (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

However, as he further revealed, the rules for homework in relation to his sister's sporting practices were different. Even though they lived in the same household, their parents had adapted the homework rule to accommodate the nature of each child's sport participation. While the son played in a local hockey league with minimal travel time, his sister played on a regional team and often had to travel far distances in excess of an hour to get to practice (games were up to 3 hours). Consequently, she was permitted to do her homework on the road or upon her return. As the brother and sister explain:

I guess for Kristen's practices in Helmutville she can just do it on the road. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

I can do it [homework] on the road, I do that a lot. Sometimes I have to stay up a bit later. My parents are strict on bedtimes too because I have a busy lifestyle, and yeah, I can't be tired. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

As she explained, sports were an important priority in her life. Even when she had behaved poorly or did not meet her parents' rules and/or expectations, sports were never used as a form of discipline or punishment. Instead other activities were taken away:

My parents don't usually ground me from sports because that's a big priority in my life. They will ground me from TV or Wii and other things around the house, like friends or whatever. But they don't usually ground me for sports. I'm usually always at my sports. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Another common strategy that some of the children talked about was to complete their homework at school. However, at times they were not able to complete it during the day, and as one child described, he purposively would not tell his parents about his homework so that he could attend local hockey games:

I usually get my homework done at school. Like not too long ago I wanted to go to watch a game [in reference to his brother's hockey play-offs], but I knew they didn't have a lot of games so I didn't even tell my parents, 'cause I'd rather go to the game. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

For other families, the importance of homework did not appear to be such a central issue between the parent and child. Some children talked about completing their homework when they got home from school; however, there were no real consequences if they did not complete it. For example:

No, it's never like that: "You can't go to sports unless your homework is done." I usually get my homework done. Like I get off the bus at a quarter to 4 so I usually get it done from 4 to 4:30pm, so it's very tight but there's really no consequences, like if you don't do this you can't go to your hockey game. It's never like that. Cause they want to see me there. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Shaping Unorganized Play

Children's participation in organized youth sport extended beyond their practices and games. Their sport interests and participation often shaped their free time activities as they would practice and play on their own to improve their skill level. As one child described, he played hockey almost all of the time:

Like I ask them [his parents] if, if I can like go up to the ice rink. Just to do some little pylons. Skate around them – put the net out to shoot to help me. (Youngest, male, age 10, family #1)

Another child explained that she still liked to play hockey, even when she did not have a game or practice that night: "We have an ice rink outside that I really like to go on. It's just out back (points to the back of the house). My brother and I like to play on it a lot." (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2).

These informal opportunities to play sports were often with the same group of friends who they played with on their organized sport teams. Moreover, it became evident throughout the analysis that living in a rural community provided children with the opportunity to roam freely throughout the small town or village without fear of strangers. Having the freedom to roam and play sports, without parental guidance, provided an opportunity to enhance friendships and social groups. As two children expressed it:

You have friends and people in the community that know you play sports, and you always talk about it, and go out and play shinny and stuff and pond hockey. You're always out doing something that you like. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

Yeah, everyone's athletic pretty much around here. So we'll get, like a bunch of guys and go up to the cement pad and up to the arena and play ball hockey. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

What was also unique about the small village was the unconventional model of arena usage. There was an individual hired to look after the on-going maintenance of the natural ice surface (there was no refrigeration unit), and many of the volunteers in the local community groups had a set of keys to the facility. The children would often go to the arena and play games of shinny whenever they wanted to, and without adult supervision. This informal and *unsupervised* facility usage was a part of their regular after-school activities:

Come home get a snack and usually go out on the snowmobile ... play guitar here. Or go up to the Stickville arena and just play hockey for a little bit. (*Who do you go to the arena with?*) Just my brothers or I might call some friends up. (*How do you guys get in the arena?*) My dad, he runs the ice up there. (*So did you always do that or is it just with your dad having a key?*) I always used to do it ... I do it more often now since dad runs it. (*Did you dad have keys before?*) Yeah, he did ... because he's like a Kinsmen. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

My friends are like taking care of the ice and that, so we'll just go and play shinny or something. (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3)

Go up to the arena and play hockey. If I'm allowed I'll ask my dad if I can go and shoot pucks on the ice ... by myself or my brother Kaleb will come up and play one on one. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

However, organized youth sport was sometimes seen as interfering with other unorganized activities that they would rather do. For example, when asked if there was anything else he would like to do or spend more time doing, one child explained how his sport schedule left him with little free time and energy:

Maybe snowmobile a little more or dirt bike. (*What stops you?*) The sports. You don't get a lot of time to ... usually on the weekend we play a lot of games so you don't want to waste all of your energy. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Organized youth sport participation also appeared to impact the children's social lives. Two children described how their time with their friends was interrupted to participate in organized sport activities. One child expressed disappointment when he would have to leave playing with his friends to go play a game:

If I'm out playing with my friends and I don't really want to go because I want to keep playing with them. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

This sentiment was reflected, also, in a statement by one child who was contemplating quitting a sport as she realized that it was cutting into her Friday night social life:

Well sometimes when I want to hang out with my friends and stuff like that, I can't because of sports. And cause it's just kind of in the way. But I think if I cut out skating that'll leave my Fridays and that's when my friends usually hang out. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Yet, as another child revealed, sports were of utmost interest and he had less desire to participate in non-sport activities. When asked if there was anything else he would like to do or spend more time doing, he exclaimed:

No! Sports are a higher priority. Like, I'd rather go play sports than play Guitar Hero or something like that. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

Understanding the Benefits of Participation

When asked what they *liked* about participating in organized youth sport activities, almost all of the children expressed how "fun" it was to play. For example,

I love it. It's fun! (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

I like it its fun. I get to hang out with friends a lot and have fun. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3).

I love it! It's really fun! (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

However, what they liked about participating in youth sport appears to be different from what they perceive to be important reasons for their sport participation. When asked how *important*

organized youth sport activities were to them, many of the children's responses included words such as "healthy" and "active". For example:

Sometimes you get a little overwhelmed with the amount of traveling and the amount of the sports, but it's still important to be that activeness. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

I think they're pretty important to me [playing baseball and hockey] because, I guess the main reason is they keep me physically fit. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

It gets me exercising and better shape. It gets me out doing stuff so I'm not sitting at home bored. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Well I like sports because you know, you're not always just going to be at home with nothing to do, you can be part of a team or whatever and it's obviously good exercise as well too so you're always doing something, you're always active and you meet new people too I guess, and you just have fun. (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

The use of this terminology may suggest that the children have been taught the cultural value placed upon the physical benefits of sport participation. Moreover, the social marketing and/or parenting messages appear to have successfully reached even the youngest participants in the study. As the two youngest children explain the importance of sports:

It makes me better because I get exercise. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

But then the people who do play sports are usually more active and more healthier and everything. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

Two other children also talked about healthy eating to improve their game performance. Their parents helped them decide what to eat and/or purposively prepared healthy meals prior to a game or big tournament:

If I have a tournament I really have to eat healthy like that week, I can still eat some not so healthy things, but I think I'm fairly good and my parents help me with that. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Well usually my mom makes me something healthy before a game. She's like cleansing [a program to "purify" the body of toxins]... so she gives me an energy drink and it works a lot. It makes me get energy. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

Two other children talked about the importance of making positive choices in relation to their recreational activities. They appeared to be aware of the idea of organized youth sport in deterring them from negative behaviours:

It just makes us more like a family instead of not knowing where you're at, 'cause if you don't do that much sports ... your parents sometimes will wonder where you are. You won't ... you're not doing bad things. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

It keeps us out of trouble and it keeps us fit and stuff like that. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Not only did the children appear to be well versed with the physical benefits of their sport participation, but they also appeared to understand the cultural lessons. Values such as commitment and personal growth were reflected in some of the children's responses. For example:

My mom doesn't like it if I miss like a hockey practice cause then she thinks if like the coaches are volunteering their time to come out, so you should be there. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Like if I want to play, I have to be committed, if we're going to be there, I have to be. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

You usually know as soon as you make the mistake that you made it. Kristen and I are both really good for that. But yeah, that's the only way to learn is to make mistakes. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Moreover, the notion of physical activity also appeared to influence the children's perceptions of gender equity and sport participation. It appeared that broader social values connected to the importance of physical activity, were validation for equal opportunity.

I honestly don't think there's a difference. Like, both genders need physical activity in their lives. (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3)

If it's more important for the boys to play and the girls not to, then the boys would be in better shape and the girls wouldn't be. And the girls would be at home playing video games and not getting out and doing a lot of activities. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

In sum, the experiences shared by the children illustrated diverse lives, but also revealed some commonalities. The children who were involved in multiple sports in a season, or in other extra-curricular activities such as music lessons, portrayed a more intense and hectic lifestyle than those who only participated in one activity per season. Moreover, there were diverse responses as to the value and importance for homework in their lives, with the rules even changing or being adapted to each specific child within a family, based on their sporting demands. Finally, children enjoyed the “fun” aspect of organized youth sport, but also had a sense of the benefits of their participation, and why it was important to participate for a variety of social, physical, and moral reasons.

Challenging and Fostering Sibling Relationships

Spending Time Together: A Basis of Inspiration and Irritation

As alluded to in the earlier sub-theme, children’s participation in organized youth sport also extended into their unorganized play, and for several families, these free time activities were enjoyed primarily with their sibling(s). The siblings’ common sport interests facilitated opportunities for them to spend time together and practice their skills. Their shared interest in a particular sport also provided an activity for them to enjoy together, regardless of their age or gender. For example, the first quote is a brother and sister who practiced their hockey skills together, while the second and third quote are representative of two families whose siblings have a four to six year age difference:

Well I like to be out player [shooting goals], and my brother is actually goalie. Yeah, we switch, I think it’s fun! I can practice my shot doing that. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

So we have, so like you get your sister to come out and like we play road hockey in the lane and we have a baseball thing that bounces the ball back to you so. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

Play soccer and basically every sport that we have the ball for. (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3)

Moreover, it was clear that with a common sport interest, siblings benefited from more than simple physical enjoyment. Organized youth sport also strengthened their emotional relationships and provided a sense of unity and comradely spirit with their siblings. A common sport interest facilitated opportunities for communication and provided them with an enhanced sense of connection. As two children described what sport meant to them and their siblings:

Because my brothers ... we live for hockey, like we love hockey! (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

You can relate and you can talk about it and you get like, you have one more thing in common with them, and it's just more fun because then you go out and have fun with your own family. Like shoot pucks or you can just have a game of shinny or like one on one or something. You don't have to practice by yourself or call someone. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

It was clear, too, that organized youth sport provided siblings with the opportunity to develop a mentor-type relationship as they would teach each other new skills to enhance their game play. Older siblings, in particular, would take a leadership role with younger ones in both formal experiences such as being their volunteer coach and/or informal experiences such as practice sessions in the back yard. These leadership experiences also provided the older siblings with a sense of expertise that they could share with the younger children. As one older brother explained, he would spend some of his free time with his younger sisters to teach them how to play hockey, an activity that he felt very knowledgeable about:

And like for my sisters I kind of try teaching them stuff because I have more experience and stuff. So when I like teach them something and they use it in a game or like stuff like that. (*So when would you teach them stuff like that?*) Well at practices and stuff. And sometimes we go out on the road with a net and hockey sticks. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

This sentiment was reflected, also, in a statement by his younger sister who liked her older brother teaching her how to become a better hockey player:

They take the same sports as I do so I know what they're going through but their sports are obviously harder. It's just knowing that they take the same sports and that I'll be as good as them if I keep taking it. So it's just they're teaching me how to play good.
(Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

Yet, the siblings' relationships were not always harmonious with regard to their shared sport involvement. The same child also expressed mixed feelings about her older brother's attendance at her games. She appreciated the help he provided in improving her skills, but at other times, was unhappy about his teasing behaviour while she played. When asked if she liked her older brother umpiring her games, she explained:

Sometimes and sometimes not. (*What do you like about it and what don't you like about it?*) Because he can tell me pointers of what to do and like how to hit the ball. And sometimes I don't like it because sometimes I hit it funny and he laughs at me when I run. So then I can't focus on running, so then I'm out, and then he laughs at me again.
(Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

There was one family in particular for whom their common sport interests did not seem to enhance their relationship in any way. In fact, at times organized youth sport may have strained or created tension between the siblings. The children never talked about any positive shared sport experiences, in both the formal sport venue, or informally in their home environment. For example, in this particular family the siblings indirectly (and directly) suggested that they had very little concern for each other's sport participation. As the brother and sister explained, unlike the other six families, they hardly ever played sports together when they were at home:

(*How did you first get started with umpiring?*) 'Cause I was old enough to do my sister's age so I was going to all of them anyways. (*How did you feel about umpiring your own sister's games?*) I thought it was pretty funny, 'cause especially when she struck out or something like that. (*So do you care about their sports?*) Not really. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4)

Since he's in high school now I don't really talk to him that much and we don't really do anything together so, we play guitar, we play Rock Band but that's pretty much about it. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Moreover, the children in this family also explained how their siblings' attendance at their games was a source of irritation for them. At times, they were also intentional in creating ill-feelings towards one another. For example:

Sometimes they annoy me. (*How do they do that?*) Well if we're going to, like a farther away place, I hate them in the car cause all they want to do is watch chick flicks. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4)

That's why I go to her skating [in reference to her younger sister] just to make ... 'cause she doesn't like when I go to her stuff. (*She doesn't?*) Yeah, she doesn't like when I go to her stuff. And I don't like when she goes to mine. (*Why's that?*) I just feel like she doesn't need to be there and I think she feels like I don't need to be there. So it's kind of just pay back. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Perceptions of Fairness and Equity

When asked, in an open-ended question, what they thought about their sibling(s) sport involvement in general, a common response was to describe the quantity of their participation. Moreover, many of the comments described the concepts of "fairness" and "equity" as they related to their siblings' sport participation. Some children compared the number of opportunities each sibling had, while other children qualified equal participation, based upon the number of evenings. For example:

I think we're pretty even with what we do and stuff. She's on two soccer teams and so it's even that she also doesn't play hockey. (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

The very fact that the other siblings were participating in sports also provided a validation for equality. As these two sisters explain:

She takes figure skating but I take dance. And there's like, I have 2 classes of dance but she takes figure skating like 4 nights a week. So, we're kind of like equal. So I'm not really jealous about her. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

I am the one in the family that does the most with hockey and figure skating. My brother only does hockey, my sister does both, she does a lot too I guess. She dances, hockey, step, and piano. And she also sings if that's a sport! Yeah, so they still get to do sports, so they're not really missing out on anything. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Interestingly, there was a slight difference of perspective between these two sisters. As reflected in the above quote, the older sister believed that because they all participated in sports, no matter the quantity, all of their needs were being adequately met. However, the youngest sister recognized her brother's current minimal participation in comparison to theirs, and consequently, expressed feelings of empathy for him:

Well I kind of feel sorry for him because I take like 10 sports and he only takes hockey and baseball. So, I'm not really jealous. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

This sentiment was reflected, also, by their older brother. As cited earlier, his sport participation had declined in recent years as he was now too old for several of the minor sport leagues. He recognized that he currently participated in fewer sports than his sisters. However, he still perceived a sense of equity in relation to his sisters' sport participation, as he acknowledged his higher participation rate in earlier years. Further, it is worth noting that in light of his sisters' current involvement, he wondered if he should have asked his parents for additional opportunities when he was younger. When asked what he thought about their sport participation, he explained:

I think it's kind of a tad over the top but if they can handle it then good for them. Like I used to feel like I was in a lot more than them, but it's kind of teetered off now I guess. (*Oh it's kind of changed now?*) Yeah, like I'm not like mad that they're in like a lot of summer sports. Like I wish I kind of wish, well, like when I see like they do so many sports. I kind of sometimes, like maybe I should have asked mom more and I could have played some other sports or tried something else. Just stuff like that. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Even in families who had one child that played at a higher caliber that required additional family time and money, there seemed to be little resentment expressed by their sibling(s). Once again, the concept of fairness appeared to be an important factor for the children, even when in reality it was an "unequal" circumstance in terms of consumption of family resources. As one

brother, who played in the local hockey league said, it was only fair that his brother also had the opportunity to play hockey, and there was no concern or jealousy over his brother's participation in an elite level:

Hockey for me is two times a week. I'm not as busy as Sam. Just a weekend practice and then a weeknight game. (*How do you feel about him playing Triple A hockey?*) I don't feel anything too much, they have to go [referring to his parents]. I'm going to watch him and support him. Equal opportunities and they can't take that away. They can't take that away so I don't mind it. It's fine, he's gotta go play. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

Once again, however, one family expressed mainly ill-feelings towards the quantity of their siblings' sport involvement and extra-curricular participation. This was the same group of siblings who had also expressed very little concern for each other's organized sport participation, and very rarely played sports together in their free-time at home. The children's responses had a sense of disdain and/or fault towards each other when asked what they thought about their siblings' sport participation. For example, although the older brother revealed that his one sister was involved in what he perceived to be a lot, he actually wished that his second sister was involved in more activities to keep her away from him. Yet, as one of his siblings revealed, he often complained to their mother for his lack of opportunities, relative to his sisters' involvement:

A little more than what she should, 'cause sometimes she does like, she does figure skating, hockey and singing and all other kinds of stuff, so she's always gone and going. (*You're okay with it?*) Yeah, 'cause then I can't fight with her. (*What do you think about your other sister's sports?*) I think she doesn't do enough sports 'cause she's always around pestering me. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4)

We all basically play the same sports and we all have different things that we do. Like my brother only plays hockey and baseball, so he sometimes gets mad: "Like why can't I do something else?" And my mom just comes back with all the same things: "What else do you want to play? If you want to do something else, just tell me and I could sign you up!" And he doesn't have anything. (*Oh, because you get to figure skate?*) Um-hm. And Guides and piano, and ... (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

Another comment by the middle child seemed to suggest that she felt her brother had equitable opportunities for different experiences, albeit, not always sport activities. Further, she felt her sister was at fault and perhaps burdened for taking on too much:

My brother always goes to like, his friend's house and like dances and all that stuff. So I don't think he's limited. Katie I think, she's limited by her own stuff. 'Cause whenever she wants to go somewhere 'cause she also does Guides, and I think sometimes like, skating interferes with that. And she wants to go somewhere but she can't because she has skating. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Living With a Star Athlete

In each of the families there was one child who, to some extent, stood out as the athletically talented one. The star athlete was often identified by measurable indicators such as competing at a higher level or the number of goals scored in any given game/season. The siblings of the athletically talented child expressed a variety of sentiments and feelings in relation to the family's star athlete. For example, in family #2 there was clearly a star athlete who was competing at an elite level. The star athlete's brother was proud of her success, and in turn, she was pleased with his sport involvement. However, there was also a pointed sense of recognition of their respective hierarchal levels of play:

I think that she's going to go places in sports. Yeah, she's a good goalie. I'm extremely proud. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Well, he's at a lower level than me. I like to go and watch him. He's in a lot of sports at high school and I think that's a good thing. And I think he's good. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Even though in the local leagues the brother was a skilled player himself, he judged his own performance relative to his sister's accomplishments and down-played his own abilities:

I don't really plan on going anywhere with hockey or baseball. I'm not a super-star. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

For other families, the children's perceived skill level and success in organized youth sport seemed to provide a divider between siblings. As two siblings revealed, their lesser skilled brother was a little different from them:

Daemyn is good. Kaleb could probably participate a little bit more. (*What do you mean by that?*) He's not really as athletic as us. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

I like watching Devin's game because me and him are alike and we can skate fast. Me and him are centreman ... Kaleb's a defenseman. So we get more action and everything. Devin is the goal scorer in the family. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

Their brother (Kaleb) recognized his lack of skill relative to his siblings as he described, at times, feeling a little envious when he played with his older brother:

I'm a little jealous of Devin because he's bigger. Just when we are playing hockey up at the rink he can always go by me. (Middle child, male, age 13, family #1)

Tension between siblings was particularly evident when the younger sibling was thought to be the star athlete and a direct comparison of their performance and skill level could be measured. For some of the older siblings it meant that they questioned their abilities and contemplated dropping out of the sport. Feelings of negativity and inadequacy were expressed when they perceived that their younger sibling was at the same skill level (or higher) than them. As one sibling revealed, she was unhappy with her sister's progression in their shared sport:

I'm not, I don't really like skating that much. I think I might quit next year. (*Why?*) I don't know. I just think I'm starting to lose interest in it, but I kind of want to do it because when you skate you help the little kids and then ... Well, I think with skating I just, I think starting so young, and I think I've reached the point where I'm not going ahead with skating. And I think I just, I'm starting to realize that I think I'm better at hockey than I am at skating. And I'm starting to have the pressure of my sister's caught up to me in skating and I don't ... I feel like I'm not moving forward so I can't get ahead of her again. (*For example?*) For dances like, we're right at the same dance now. And I just feel like I don't want to be working on the same dance as my little sister. Yeah, I just kind of feel like she is like so younger than me and she's at the same level, I just, I don't really know how I feel about it. I just don't really like it. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

It was evident, too, that she wanted to pursue an activity that was clearly her own. Perhaps she could then create her own identity, without living her life in the shadow of her younger sister who excelled in all her pursuits. As she explained:

She's played on my team for hockey before and she also said she wanted to do singing, and I just want to have something that's my thing. Like she has piano and Guides and that's her thing, and she wants to do this and that, and I just, I want to have my thing. 'Cause I played girls hockey and then that was my thing until she wanted to play it too. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

In contrast, the middle child of another family was able to find her own special niche in figure skating, and thus, was content that her younger sister was the talented sibling in other activities.

Well she used to figure skate too and then she quit figure skating and did hockey, but no I'm not really jealous, like she can like, she can sing way more better than I can, she can dance way more better. So I'm just, I don't really want to do any of that stuff. So she can do it and I don't really get jealous at all. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Moreover, when siblings were teammates there was the potential for heightened tension and strain, particularly when one child was considered to be the star athlete. As one older sister explained, it was emotionally difficult to play with her younger sister. Even though the older sister was the captain of her team, she did not always like it when her younger sister played on her team when they needed an extra player. When asked what she thought about playing with her younger sister she replied:

Like you pass her the puck and she goes up, and sometimes she just gets, well it just bugs me, when like if she scores the goal and I'm the defenseman so I just stop part of the goals. (*So its hard sometimes is it?*) Yeah, and then when she goes and gets a goal, and everybody's happy because it's a winning goal, or she gets a whole bunch of them. I haven't gotten any and it was my game. Like the one time, I had the puck and the team wasn't very good so I could skate around them all and I could have passed it to her and got a goal, and she would have got a goal. But I just shot it and unfortunately it didn't go in. But it didn't matter because I had already scored 2 goals and we won the game 2-0. (*How does that make you feel?*) Just that she was the one that got the goal and not me. So she got a little bit of glory when she already has it on her own team. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

This sentiment was reflected, also, in a statement by the third sister who played on the same team as the star athlete. Even though she was the youngest, she still felt some resentment towards the amount of glory that her sister received, particularly when reflecting on what her father perceived to be their performance outcome: “Because it’s always Abby that scores and he always hears about it. But he never heard about my goal, and never saw my goal.” (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

However, from the perspective of their sister who was the star athlete there seemed to be little acknowledgement or understanding of the impact she may have on her other siblings. When asked what she thought about playing with her sisters, there was some recognition of her skilled performance, but also a desire to help her younger sister succeed:

(Do you like playing with your younger sister?) It was okay. Sometimes she got on my nerves. *(What do you think about playing with your older sister?)* Um, it’s a lot of fun. I usually score a goal and she usually assists with it. And I score a lot. *(Do you have a preference of what sister you like to play with?)* My younger sister. *(Why?)* Because she hardly ever scored goals and I like setting the puck up for her so she can try, but sometimes she misses it so she doesn’t have a lot of chances. (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

Moreover, many of the comments made by siblings who had been teammates, in the past or in the present, highlighted the importance of the star athlete’s ability to help their team win. The benefit of having a sibling who was the star teammate was seen to be instrumental in nature. Overall the ability to win provided a sense of enjoyment, even for the two sisters who had described a strained relationship with their star athlete sister. For example:

(Did you like playing with your sister?) Well, sometimes she really helps us win and stuff. Yeah, she scored 70 or 60 goals in 30 games. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

(Are there any good things you like when you play together?) Yeah, because our team, some of the forwards don’t have that ... some days they just don’t have the motivation, and they don’t play the way they should play. Like, she scores the goals and kind of gets like ... I want to win the game and I’d be working hard but you need those forwards to score the goals because you can’t do it all by yourself. And she goes out there and she gets the puck and ... (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

In another family, a brother whose sister left the local league to play at a higher level wished that she could come back and play with him, so that his team could win once again:

I'm kind of put out whenever she doesn't want to come back to Puckville. Like, come back and play in Puckville here. Because well, we've been having some goal tending problems since she left. (*So you two used to play together?*) Yeah. (*What was it like playing on the same team?*) It was fun. We actually won the WAAA championship whenever she was with us. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

None of the comments made by any of the siblings in this study who were at one-time teammates describe their experiences as being emotionally gratifying with the exception of the instrumental function of winning. It seems that the siblings value their opportunity to play together based upon the win-loss outcome, however, they are less aware (or vocal) of the other potential benefits they may experience through their shared sport experiences as teammates.

In sum, children's participation in organized youth sport appears to have contradictory meanings and experiences with regard to their siblings. For some families, it provided a commonality that they could share together and appeared to strengthen and enhance their relationship, both physically and socially in terms of playing together, talking, and also through informal mentorship roles. For other families, their participation in similar sport activities seemed to have little impact on their relationship, or even in some cases, increased the tension and strain between siblings. The negative emotions were particularly evident when a younger sibling of the same sex seemed to be the athletically talented one. Moreover, when siblings were on the same team together the perceived benefits appeared to be more instrumental in nature because they related to their ability to help the team win. Interestingly, the perception of "fairness" and "equity" and different levels of play and consumption of family resources was not an issue for the siblings. Instead, fairness in siblings' participation levels was evaluated on the *quantity* of teams that they were involved with, not the family time or financial resources that were consumed.

Recognizing Parental Support

Providing Physical and Financial Resources

When asked the open-ended question, “What do your parents do to help you play in sports?” most of the children immediately talked about the physical and instrumental support required to facilitate their sport participation. However, the children’s recognition of the exact type of support was diverse. The younger children primarily recognized their parents’ physical presence at a game. As two children eagerly expressed, it was simply having their parents physically at the game to watch them play that made them feel supported:

[Excited and loud response.] Well my mom ... when she gets to the arena she’s different ... she’s a hockey mom. She’ll like call ... she’ll like stand-up and everything. She’s changed when she gets to the arena. My dad ... my dad’s just really clapping ... if I’ve scored he’s cheering me on like my mom. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

Like, they are there a lot of the time and they watch what’s happening. And they teach you how to get better. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Not only was the spectatorship support of being at the game important to the younger children, but also the help required to organize and put on their equipment. As two of the youngest children in the study revealed:

She helps me get there on time and helps me get my stuff on. I know she always watches me when I get a break-away or something. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

Like, for figure skating she makes sure that I have my skates and my bag and my dress. My hair done up, so. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

The older children in the study appeared to recognize some of the logistical work required to facilitate their sport participation. For example, they acknowledged some of the hidden tasks that their parents completed such as registration, transportation, and equipment purchases. Three of the older children in the study identified their parents’ support as the following:

They make sure I get signed up, they'll pay, and then they make sure I always have rides to games or practices, and make sure I have the proper equipment so I can play. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

They usually pay for most of my equipment and stuff and sign me up and drive me everywhere 'cause I can't drive yet. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

I guess taking me there. Like, they just, they're always there to bring me and if I need a ride home or something they're just always there to help. And there's fundraising at our club so we always get jackets and slush pants so I guess they're paying for that. Yeah. Like, say if we won a game and we're out in Gloveville, we'll go out for supper. So, it's good. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Thus, unlike the younger children, the older children in this study did not outwardly identify the importance of having their parents as spectators. Instead, they appeared to readily acknowledge some of the financial resources and hidden work (i.e., registration, transportation) required to facilitate their sport participation. Further, as one older child explained, there was also some recognition and appreciation of the work that her father did at home to help out with her sport participation. Speaking from her own experience, she revealed:

Well, my dad, just for example, he's helped us with the ice rink. I asked him at the beginning of winter if he'd make it this winter and he's done a lot of work on it. He helps a lot, and it's been mild, so its melted a few times, and he's worked hard to get it back. And I appreciate that a lot. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Many of the children talked about both parents being at their games when they did not have work conflicts. At the same time, some of the children were aware that their parents would have to divide up the work responsibilities to facilitate their participation and that of their siblings. As one sister and brother in particular described:

Usually they alternate. My dad usually does the home games because he runs the clock for both my sister and my hockey. (*So they sometimes alternate?*) (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

My dad usually comes to practices because he gets home from work early and my mom likes to come to games, but my dad has to go to our home games, because he volunteers as time keep. So my mom likes to go to away games. So they take turns. And sometimes everyone comes. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

This sentiment was reflected, also, in a statement by one of the children who indicated that the parent's involvement with their sport organization also dictated who would take them to a practice or a game:

(Who usually goes with you to your hockey games?) Well, this year my dad because he coached. *(So do they split it up or how does that work?)* Well my dad's coaching - he kind of has to go. So then, my mom just takes whoever else. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

However, underlying much of the talk about their parent's support was a sense of "doing gender". Some of the children illustrated that it was primarily their mother who completed the hidden work to support their participation with the use of the words "she" or "mom" in their responses. For example:

(What do your parents do to help you participate in sport?!?) She helps us get ready and makes sure we're ready for the game. *(Does your dad help out with the sports in any way?)* No, he used to but he didn't 'cause he's working so much. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

Two other children explained how it was their mother's responsibility to support them as their father was busy with his work schedule:

My mom does the registration 'cause my dad doesn't have time for that. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

My mom. But my dad's in the field of course, and in the winter he's snow plowing or something. [The term "field" refers to a farm field.] (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

Another child also indicated that her mother usually drove her to practices as her father was busy with work. However, she also revealed that her father would often attend the games:

My mom is usually the one that brings me to practices because my dad's usually busy at work, but my dad likes the games too. They're always standing up and when we miss the net or something, you can tell that they're, yeah. They like it. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

After several of the children talked about what their mothers did to help them play sports, they often provided justification as to why their fathers were not at their practices or games as

much as their mothers. This response was given, at times, without any prompting, and at other times after they were asked specifically about their father's involvement. For example:

(Is your dad involved in your sports in any way?) No, not really. *(How does that make you feel?)* Well, he does work and I understand that. And you have to kind of understand how he does work and you have to. He has to make a living and he has to do this, but he does come to some of the games. And he just, he talks to some of the dads, and he does come. He mostly comes to hockey for me and then it's mostly skating for Katie. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

The nature of their father's work also appeared to influence his attendance and perceived support at their games for some of the children. As one child explained, her father was able to attend her sister's games but not her own as it conflicted with his work schedule:

So I kind of feel left out because he goes to my sister's baseball games but never to mine. *(Why do you think he sometimes goes to your sister's games but not yours?)* Because mine are earlier and Cali's, she's, her team is older so she can have the later practices. So that's why he comes in from the field. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

Moreover, this same child and her older brother also perceived the seasonal implications of their father's employment. Consequently, as expressed by the children, their father was more supportive of their winter activities than their summer activities:

In hockey yeah, 'cause there's no farming during the winter, but during the summer like in August, fall and spring, he does kind of miss a lot of the baseball but ... (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

(Do you think your dad enjoys going?) Well, when baseball is on he's usually in the field, so probably no because he knows he has to go out into the fields. So that's only when we have a lot of games at night, so not usually. *(Do you think your dad's supportive of your sports?)* Yeah, because he comes to my games to cheer me on in hockey but usually in baseball 'cause he's out in the field. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

What was interesting to note was that although the father's work was frequently cited as a reason for their lack of presence at their games and/or practices, all of the mothers in this study were also working and many of them had full-time positions that required a commute of up to two hours each day. The children in this study rarely spoke of their mother's absence due to work-related responsibilities. Thus, although both parents were working, as revealed by the

children, it was often the mothers that were charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the children made it to their practice/game.

Providing Emotional Support

The emotional support that parents would provide was also important to many of the children.

The parents' supportive words of encouragement and expressive emotions in the stands were recognized by the children. For example:

And they take me there and yeah, they just support me when I play and give me good luck and stuff, so. (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

And they clap and I can hear my mom yelling and my dad clapping ... I always look up and see them clapping. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

Once again, there appeared to be diverse perceptions of their parents' emotional support. As the above quotes revealed, for the younger children, it was the encouraging messages that were spoken just *before* the game or *while* the game was occurring. For the older children in the study, their parents' emotional support and work to encourage them *to go to* their respective game and/or practice was mentioned more often. For example:

Yeah, I just kind of, I'll just be like I don't really want to do this right now. And my mom will be like, this is your only practice this week, you can do it. So it's no big deal. But once I get out there I'm good, I'm with all my friends so. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

They drive me there. Sign me up. Then they, like, if I don't want to go they encourage me to go. (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3)

Another child, who was one of the oldest boys in the study, indicated that there were times when he was younger that his parents would have to push him to go. Values such as commitment and being active were cited as reasons to motivate him to go. Now that he was older, he alluded to the fact that he would have to push his parents to go to the sport venue. As he explained in detail:

But yeah, driving, equipment, and they kind of push me, not as much as they used to because I'm getting older and I guess I don't need [to be] pushed anymore, but yeah, they

still kind of. (*What do you mean pushing, what does that mean?*) Like they just really encourage you to go get out there and do stuff instead of just staying at home and doing nothing. (*Right.*) If you didn't want to go to practice or something they'd be like you're going to practice. You made a commitment to your team when you decided to play so you can't skip out on that. (*When don't you want to go to practice?*) Oh yeah, lots of times. Like, especially in the mornings. (*Yeah, early morning practices! So what happens with that?*) Well, when I was younger I would like always not want to go and stuff. I don't know why, but they would be like, "Oh no! You have to go because of the commitment thing!" And now we both grumble about it, but I think I'm used to like grumbling and still going. So I grumble and I still go, but they grumble now too, but I guess it's kind of me making them go now. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

It was also evident that the children's perception of their parents' support was seen through their efforts to cheer them up when they were feeling disappointed, either about the outcome of their game or their individual performance. As three of the children expressed it:

Neither of my parents went ... it was before they got off work. After the game, which we won 26-7, my parents asked me the usual questions, "Did you win?", and "How did you play"? I felt I played a mediocre game so I told them I played "Okay" to which they responded, "Oh well, you'll play better next time!" ... which did nothing to help my mood after playing averagely. (On-line journal entry from oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

When I have a break-away in hockey and it's like 5 seconds left and we're losing by one and I don't score I feel like I disappointed my whole team. Or like in baseball, pitching, and then you give 5 bad pitches and they're all out. You ... all the pressure is on you. So that's when I feel like I let my team down basically. (*Do you ever talk to your parents about that or do you keep it inside?*) Well they're usually at my baseball and hockey games so they just say, "Oh, if someone did that, it would probably be the same, and don't worry, your team will probably forgive you and everything. They're just supportive. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

I think they are. If I'm in a bad mood or something after a game because we lost in overtime or something, they'll try and cheer me up and say that it's a team effort and it wasn't just my fault [she's a goalie]. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Finally, some of the children recognized their parent's emotional support when they held visible leadership positions with their team. For example, two of the children talked about their parent's role as their team's coach:

(*Do you think they're supportive?*) Yep. (*What makes you think that?*) Because they get involved and they're part of the coaching staff and everything. So, they help us and stuff. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

She practices with me at home and then she sometimes is my coach so she helps a lot out with other people too. (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

Thus, the parents' support for their children's sport participation was recognized by the children in a variety of ways, through their physical, financial and emotional support. However, the children's recognition of their parents' support had diverse meanings and contexts that were shaped primarily by the children's age. They also recognized that support was altered based on their parents' schedules, and shaped by their employment and siblings' practices and games. Moreover, several of the children's comments indicated that the mothers were primarily responsible for the hidden work of facilitating their children's sport participation such as registration and getting children to and from practices and games. Children also alluded to the notion that their parents' role in their organization also contributed to a sense of feeling supported. Children's perceptions and meanings of their parent's role in their organized youth sport organization will be further explored in the next sub-theme.

Perceptions of Parents' Organizational Roles

Enhancing a Sense of Connection and Communication

Underlying much of the children's talk about their parents' organizational roles on their team was a strong sense of enhancing communication and connection with their parents. This enhanced sense was related to their parents' active role on their team and their parents' ability to understand and talk about what happened during the game and/or its outcome. As two children expressed it:

I like, when they're coaching. I like it because after games you can talk to them more because they know what happened and what you're feeling too because they're just right there with you so it's easier to talk to them about the game afterwards. I like that too. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

Well, I guess ‘cause there’s someone on my bench that I don’t really like and he just kind of bothers me sometimes. [It was later revealed that “he” is one of her coaches.] So she kind of sees what’s going on and she kind of understands instead of me just like telling her and she doesn’t believe me. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

This sense of enhanced connection and communication also developed because the children looked up to their parents and their sport knowledge. Another important insight was the pride that they felt with their parents in the leadership roles. One of the boys described how wonderful it felt to have his father in these positions:

Baseball we put together a team in Puckville and usually my dad coaches it because he knows a lot about baseball. We usually go into a competitive WOAA league. (*Do you like your dad being your coach?*) Yeah, I do! He gives Kristen and I both good tips about baseball especially because he understands it so well. Scorekeeping, I guess there’s no real way to say that you’re not proud of him for that because he’s really good at it so. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

These sentiments were echoed by another child who explained one of the most memorable moments he had of his childhood that happened over a decade ago:

It was like my 2nd or 3rd year of hockey. (*Do you remember what it felt like?*) I really liked it because I think that was the year I got my first goal or something. So I, it was in a tournament and I just remember looking at the bench instead of looking up in the crowds, and just going like to him instead of like ... because he’s on the bench. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

His father was only involved as a coach during the first couple of years he played hockey; however, the opportunity to see his father on the bench provided a lasting and powerful memory.

A sense of enhanced connection and communication also developed from more instrumental benefits. One of the children, who had been coached by both his mother and father, talked about getting the inside scoop “because then I know what’s happening and what they [his parent/coach] are thinking about” (Middle child, male, age 14, family #3). Other children talked about the functional aspect of their parents helping them to be better players. As three of the children explained:

Because then she can help me on the field and she can go to my practices and stuff. (*And what about your dad?*) Because practices he's on the ice and if I make a mistake he'll tell me how to fix it. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

And when they're on the bench they can give you little pointers. And they yell at you and correct you. And we never miss games. And like, if I'm having a really bad game, he'll say something like he'll tell me what I'm doing wrong and to go fix it. And one time I was mad so I went out and scored a goal for them. (*Right!*) It's just those little pointers when you're on the bench. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

Yeah, I like it. It's kind of cool because they can tell me right from wrong. (*What would some of those times be?*) Well some of the times with baseball my mom was my coach and she kept telling me to hit the ball. (*How did that make you feel?*) Oh, good because she gave me a tip. She said, "Pretend the ball is one of your sister's face and pretend like you are really mad at her and keep doing that", and I always hit the ball now! (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

The sense of enhanced connection was also evident when the younger participants talked about their parents' role in helping them when they were hurt. As two of the children revealed, they appreciated their mother's role as their team trainer:

Yeah, because sometimes I had got hurt during this winter, because I tripped and I had hit the post. (*Oh!*) So she got to come out right when she saw me fall. She knew she had to go out on the ice. (*Anything else you like about her being the trainer?*) I like to see her help my friends when they get hurt. (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

I think it's a cool idea that my mom's my trainer. Once I had a really bad headache. I was going, "oh my headache hurts!" I just had to keep on the ice because I had to have the wind on my head. But every time I kept getting off ... "oh my head hurts!" It felt like I was going to die. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

Moreover, as one child explained, the dual role of parent and coach may alter the rapport that a child would normally have with his or her coach:

Well my dad usually coaches hockey and my mom usually coaches baseball. (*Do you like them doing those jobs?*) Yeah. (*Why do you like it?*) Little more comfortable when you know, you're standing there you don't get more nervous. You're not afraid to speak up I guess if you have a problem. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

This child saw the rapport with his coach, who was also his parent, in a positive context.

However, the dual role of parent and coach, at times, created heightened negative emotions for

the child. The next sub-theme will explore these occurrences and the meanings they had for the children.

Strained Parent-Child Relationships and Heightened Conflict

A sense of strain on the parent-child relationship and heightened conflict also developed from the analysis of children's perceptions of their parents' organizational roles. One child in particular felt that she learned a lot more from other parents, and also had difficulty with her mother being her coach. She explained that: "If you get into an argument with her, you just kind of, you're mad. You learn a lot more from other parents [said in uncomfortable, hushed tone]." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4) Another child revealed, at times, he was unhappy with his dad being his coach: "Only if I played bad. (*What happens if you've played bad?*) I get a little talking to after the game". (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Moreover, a parent's leadership role as a coach could heighten negative emotions for the child in relation to his or her peer group. A sense of uneasiness was expressed by some of the children as they felt that their parents' coaching actions and behavior would negatively affect their relationship with their teammates. As two children revealed, having their parent as a coach affected them personally in multiple contexts, such as parent to child, and also parent to peer group to child:

When I start to get into the game a little too much ... I might do stuff that I don't really want them to see. Or just sometimes when they get yelling it's a little uncomfortable too. When they get pointing at people and stuff you kind of feel like the other person that they're yelling at or something may look to you in a bad way just because you're their kid. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

Well, it is kind of weird when the other girls say comments about him and you're standing in line with them. (*What would some of those comments be?*) Yeah, its like, they don't want to do that drill. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

In a similar perspective, another clear discomfort that several of the children expressed was the embarrassment that they felt when their parents were in a leadership role. In addition to the sense of uneasiness for disciplinary actions, some of the children also felt a sense of discomfort when their parents exhibited “goofy” behaviors. As one child described it:

I don't really like it that much 'cause she's been the trainer for I think all the years I've played girls' hockey. Maybe not one, but I just feel like maybe someone else should try it, and she, 'cause she's taken her turn at it, maybe someone else ... (*Why do you feel that way?*) 'Cause sometimes she's kind of embarrassing. She kind of says stuff or does stuff that's kind of embarrassing. (*What would be an example?*) She's just like kind of weird sometimes or like she wants people jumping and so she jumps. It's kind of embarrassing. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

A sense of heightened tension and the blurring of personal family experiences into the public sphere also came through. One of the children expressed times of embarrassment when her coach (mom) shared personal stories from her home life with her teammates. Although she enjoyed the experience of her mom being her coach, she was also embarrassed when her mother blurred the boundaries between her two roles as coach and mother. She explained:

I like just having her there. Like I can see her. But then a disadvantage is that she embarrasses me, and yeah. (*What happens that makes you sometimes feel a little embarrassed?*) She like, I don't know why but she would start talking about how we were playing catch one time and I didn't catch the ball and it landed on my toe and I started screaming. So I was super embarrassed. Just, she tells stories about me sometimes not even related to baseball about me, and I get embarrassed and I push her off the baseball field. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

A sense of heightened tension and conflict was particularly strong for one family. Based on all family members' interview transcripts, it appeared that the mother in this family sometimes exhibited what they saw as inappropriate behaviour at her children's games. Thus, the brothers were quite embarrassed about it as they explained:

I don't really like having any relatives on my ... on the bench. (*Why not?*) Yeah, mom likes to yell a lot so ... so it's kind of embarrassing sometimes. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

She opens the door, tells us who's going on, if someone gets hurt she goes out there. (*Do you like your mom doing that?*) Not really. (*How come?*) Just, she's very loud on the bench. (Middle child, male, age 13, family #1)

Other difficulties related to the parents' organizational responsibilities related to their sibling's sport participation. For example, some of the younger children talked about how it was a bit of an annoyance that they would have to attend their older sibling's games, but would have very little social or practical benefit from the experience, because of their parent's absence due to their coaching role:

It's good that she's not on my bench, 'cause I wouldn't like that. It's just kind of awkward for me ... it's kind of good and bad because then when she's on my sister's bench I don't get to talk to her as much and she has to be in the dressing room 'til, and then we have to stay later 'til everybody's out of the dressing room. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

But when I come to the games and he's coaching and my mom's not there, well I, sometimes I want to buy something at the booth but he's on the bench so it's kind of hard. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

The strained relationship and loss of social time between parent and child was also echoed by another young girl, who felt at times a sense of disconnect with her mother. As she described it: "Just not being able to talk to the person 'cause they're running someone somewhere or just kind of like not being able to speak or just having the awkwardness like you haven't talked for a while and just very awkward." (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Recognizing the Value and Importance of the Parents' Organizational Roles

Underlying much of the children's talk about their parents' responsibilities with their sport organization was a strong sense of pride associated with the more *visible* leadership positions. Responsibilities that were highly visible included roles such as the children's coach, trainer, and/or the game announcer. Roles that were more *hidden* or invisible included the behind-the-scenes administrative type work, such as serving on the Board of Directors, being the team

manager, or helping out with the fundraising. The visible leadership roles were more readily described by the children. Sometimes the children only briefly mentioned a parent who was involved in more of a hidden support role such as a fundraiser, and at other times, they would only discuss this type of role when prompted. For example, when asked an open ended question about whether their parents helped out with their teams, a brother and sister responded:

My mom does 50-50 as you saw. [Her mom was cutting the tickets when I arrived.] It's a neat way to do it. You just put a twonie and then you draw. It just works. And my dad, he's timekeeper for both mine and Thomas's teams. He announces and it's fun to hear that. He says who scores and assists and penalties ... and if you missed who got the penalty and the goal you can always listen. And yeah, my mom just fundraises and helps with that. (*So what do you think about your mom being involved?*) I don't really ... I'm busy with my teams, so I don't really get to see her. (*What do you think about your dad?*) I really like his announcing and everything. I like to listen to him on the microphone. He sounds enthusiastic. It just makes me happy. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Well, my dad does the timekeeping ... he runs the clock for both my sister and my hockey. He's really good at it. He does the announcing and he has the stereo for the music. (*That's great!*) Yeah, I've heard some good comments about him! (*Is your mom involved at all?*) I guess she does the 50-50 for Kristen's team. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

This sentiment was also echoed by another child, who inferred the different value associated with different volunteer roles, and what she deemed to be important. Her statement appeared to devalue the hidden support roles, compared to the positions that were highly visible such as coaches. As she explained:

You know, they help out just a little bit ... but they're not the main coaches or the assistants or anything. (*What are some of the things they help out with just a little bit?*) Like she'll, my mom with the hockey, she'll get everything organized and when we have auctions or little sales or something, she'll make sure that you know, she'll help out at a table or something like that. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #5)

Embedded in the above quotes was the gendered nature of the parents' leadership roles and the implications it had for the children's perceptions of the value and importance of their responsibilities. As described by their children's accounts, their mothers tended to fill the invisible leadership roles such as fundraiser, with little to no mention of their fathers occupying

these same roles. Instead, the children's description of their father's role, if they were involved in a volunteer position, tended to portray a more visible role that they were proud of, and readily recognized with enthusiasm in their voices.

Yet, there was also a sense of change as it related to their parents' organizational roles and the gendered nature of these responsibilities. Although many of the stories illustrated their mothers in invisible roles, while their fathers held the visible positions, there were a few examples of the mothers increasing representation in visible positions. As two children said:

She was my coach ... she would help people who got injured. She's like manager or something this year for my team. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

My dad he, if I'm playing in Puckville he coaches me and my brothers. And my mom usually coaches us in baseball. My mom coached me last year in baseball. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

The mothers' increased participation in visible leadership roles may be partly related to the new opportunities for their daughters to participate in sport. One child revealed that it was a policy to have a woman in the dressing room for the girls hockey league, thus, her mother fulfilled that role: "My mom ... she's my trainer. She usually opens the door and helps us get dressed because in Atom girls' hockey, the boys [meaning her coaches] aren't allowed to come in the dressing room while the girls are getting dressed." (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

Although some children talked about their mothers' roles in visible leadership positions, it was also evident that the mothers were filling multiple jobs. Thus, this sense of change and the increase visibility of women in leadership roles within a sport organization may increase their amount of work, responsibility, and time commitment to the organization. As two children explained, their mothers were involved in both the hidden and visible volunteer positions:

Like when we ordered meat pies she makes sure that everybody has their meat pies ... and looks after the fundraisers. For my sister, she's a trainer. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

Yeah, my mom was manager for my youngest sister's hockey team this year. And she's usually been like a treasurer and stuff for Puckville minor hockey. My dad not really. He coached my hockey team one year but that was a long time ago. So I guess it doesn't really count anymore. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Thus, children's perceptions of their parents' organizational roles had multiple meanings and contexts. For some of the children it enhanced their relationship with their parents and appeared to provide memorable moments. Sentiments of being proud of their parents' involvement, as well as shared moments of time spent together practicing their skills were cited. However, at the same time the dual role of parent and coach was sometimes seen as a strain on the parent-child relationship. These difficulties often related to the dynamics between a parent and child after a poor performance, and when the parent (who was also the coach) yelled at the child's teammates or displayed what the child perceived as "goofy" or embarrassing behaviours. Moreover, underlying this theme was the notion of the value and importance of the respective leadership roles. The visible leadership roles (e.g. coach, trainer) were often filled by fathers, and these roles were more highly regarded compared to less visible leadership roles (e.g., fundraiser, team manager) that were typically the mother's responsibility. Yet, there was also a sense of change with a couple of mothers involved in the visible leadership positions; however, this was in addition to the hidden roles that they also fulfilled. The parents' perceptions of their involvement and organizational roles are explored in-depth in the next chapter.

In sum, understanding children's experiences revealed the intensity of the children's activities and how it had become a *way of life* for many of them. Children clearly enjoyed the "fun" and social aspects of organized youth sport, and also understood the socio-cultural importance of their participation as it related to living a healthy and active lifestyle. Children's participation in organized youth sport also had implications for their relationships with their siblings and parents in ways that both strengthened and caused considerable tension. Further,

throughout this chapter the gendered nature of parents' roles in supporting their sport participation, in the private (home) and public (organization) context was also revealed.

Chapter VI: Parenting in Public and Private Spaces

The second major theme “Parenting in Public and Private Spaces” revealed that children’s participation in organized sport, consumed the family resources, and that the organizational commitment required by the parents greatly altered their relationships with their children and with other parents in the community. Moreover, the analysis of the parental discourse discovered that parenting went beyond the home environment and became a public act that was observed by other parents, with these observations creating the basis of what was deemed to be a ‘good parent’. The three sub-themes: (i) Paying a High Price to Play, (ii) Additional Organizational Demands, and (iii) Being a “Good Parent” are discussed in this chapter.

Paying a High Price to Play

The idea of paying a high price to play, complements previous research that found that children’s participation in organized sport led to highly scheduled lives for parents (e.g., Kay, 2000), the consumption of family finances (e.g., Coakley, 2006; Townsend & Murphy, 2001), and perceived loss of family togetherness (e.g., Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Because of this, I will only briefly discuss the theme of “Paying a High Price to Play” to help set the stage for the other two themes “Additional Organizational Demands” and “Being a Good Parent” that are described in more detail.

Highly Scheduled Lives

Consistent with Kay’s (2000) research, the parents in this study talked about their hectic schedules and feeling like their family was always “on the go”. These feelings were particularly

intensified when the family had multiple children participating in organized sport. As two parents expressed it:

Usually, as soon as you get home, “okay what game are you going to?!” (Mother, family #1)

Well with three kids, you know, sometimes the scheduling can be ... like you have three games the same night and all at different spots. Somebody has to go with somebody to the game. (Father, family #6)

Some parents talked about how their children’s sport controlled their lives. Two parents described how other aspects of family life would be scheduled around the organized sport games and practices:

Well it takes over right. I would say it just becomes what you do. It becomes your life. (*In what way does it become your life?*) You fit everything else around the games or the practices. So, I think it just, you know, once you get your hockey schedule and it’s on the fridge, all three of them on it, then you fit everything else around that. (Mother, family #3)

I would say it probably controls it. I don’t know if control is the proper word, but it is a big part of our life because we are always going somewhere. (Mother, family #7)

It was clear, too, that the mothers were responsible for the orchestration and scheduling of the children’s activities. For example,

At the beginning of the year, when we get the schedules, I write the schedules down. I kind of colour coordinate. Kristen’s schedule is in red, Thomas’s in blue, and my work schedule is in black. (Mother, family #2)

I’m the one that keeps it all organized. He [her husband] has no clue from day to day. “What’s going on tonight?” Yeah, I have it all organized and I’m the one usually running especially this time of the year because he’s in the field. (Mother, family #6)

It was also interesting to note, that some of the mothers talked about “equal responsibility”, yet it was the mothers who were primarily responsible for the hidden work and the emotional labour and coordination of the family activities. Husbands also re-affirmed this, by talking about their involvement in transporting the children, while their wives coordinated the family schedules. As this couple revealed:

I would say that it's pretty equally involved. Like maybe ... I would have to say overall it would have to be equal. (Mother, family #1)

Well, she'll write down on the board what's happening, like on the calendar. And she'll say "well do you want to take Devin or Kaleb or Daemyn?" And I'll, "well I haven't seen Kaleb's game for a while, so I'll take Kaleb." That's how we do it, but she'll kind of look after the scheduling. (Father, family #1)

Consistent with Trussell and Shaw's (2007) research on farm women and their families, the fathers were often unable to attend their children's games or practices due to work obligations. As two parents explained:

Well, obviously, when it's in field planting or combining, I'm doing all the running or organizing with other parents. I know this week is a busy week and unless it rains ... (Mother, family #6)

Well, if you looked in the crowd you'd probably see the majority of mothers there compared to the fathers. Especially in the rural community because some who farm, like they just can't ... the chore time is 5 'til 8 or something like that, so there's no way they ... like you see the majority of mothers running their kids to practices. (Father, family #1)

Because of the hectic schedules and the husbands' inability to help out at all times due to work demands, some of the mothers expressed sentiments of time stress and fatigue as they tried to balance their employment and domestic responsibilities with their children's sport schedule. For example,

It's very hard! Its hard on family life, it can be. Like, it can be very stressful. Like, you know, you come home and if they haven't ... I get upset and come home and you're expecting something to be done and it's not done. I get frustrated sometimes that way. Or if you've asked the kids to do stuff and they haven't done it, it's like "Listen, you know, I'm running you here and there, you guys need to step up and help!" Especially now that I'm full-time [full-time job], "You guys are old enough now, you've got to start doing your chores, not me yelling at you all the time" kind of thing. I'm probably bad for that. It's one of my things I have to work on too because I get frustrated I guess. It's hard. (Mother, family #1)

Moreover, it became evident throughout the analysis that living in a rural community intensified the families' schedules and consumption of their resources. If the parents and the children decided that they wanted to play at a higher caliber, they would have to join the Triple A

team for the boys or a regional select team for the girls. As one mother explained, they were quite limited with their choices of competition levels, and at times, this could create stress on the family unit as a whole and the child:

The difference is every minor hockey, any minor sports in a rural areas is based on population. The level that you have to play, so being in a very small community, it is rated the lowest. So it's like an "E" or "D" centre. If you were in an urban centre, you could try out for any of the teams. The "C" the "B" the Double "A". So the only way to play a little bit better ... is we have to go all the way to the top, Triple "A". So if we had a choice, if they would amalgamate centres and they would make them a "B" or a "C", would we play Triple "A", no, I wouldn't! It's tough for Sam, too, because I don't know if our kids are really Triple "A" caliber. But you play a little better hockey, it's the only option. (Mother, family #3)

Parents also talked about the intensity of the sport program and how it affected family life. The higher the caliber of the team, the more it shaped the family schedule. For example, the number of practices/games per week and the distance travelled would often increase when the children played on more competitive teams. As two fathers explained:

Kristen's has definitely changed being as she's moved up to being more competitive with the girls. (*How has it changed?*) The level of participation ... you go from one practice a week to two or three practices a week. One game a week to usually always one, sometimes two, sometimes three games a week. (*And what's the distance you are going to those?*) Minimum of one hour. (Father, family #2)

Well it's harder to do the Triple A, just more time consuming, right? Because a practice for that can be to Maskville. When we were doing hometown hockey they only got an hour for practice. Triple A they get an hour and a half, so you're there a half an hour to three quarters before and you're driving an hour both ways. So there's four to five hours just for practice. (Father, Family #3)

Similar experiences would occur for those who would like to figure skate at a higher level than what a small rural community could provide:

I think in rural Ontario it's a little harder too because you can only go so far in figure skating right until you need to get to a bigger centre. You know, the coaches that we have, only coach to a certain level then they [the children] have to move on. I think the closest to here would be Suburbanville or Urbanville. Then their ice team ... they are fighting with hockey teams and everything else for ice so then you're going at 6:00am. I was close to a girl and she figure skated out of Suburbanville and 5:30 in the morning was her ice time. So her parents had to get up, and she lived in Iceville, and drive her for 5:30am.

[Iceville is a two-hour drive to Suburbanville according to “Google Maps”.] (Mother, family #6)

Travel distances in a rural context were also intensified for the local girls’ hockey league, as there were fewer teams to play against in the infancy of the sport:

A lot of driving, a lot of gas. For sure, we play Postville which is like an hour. Lineville ... the girls’ tend to go further than the boys. (*Do they, why is that?*) Because there are more boys’ teams. Like there’s a lot of centres, but its growing. There’s a lot of centres that don’t have girls’ teams. (*So they have to go out further for league play?*) Exactly. Whereas for the boys, like every centre has got a boys’ team. There’s not girls’ teams in every centre. (Mother, family #6)

At times, the community had insufficient numbers to make a team, and the families were forced to go to a neighboring community. As one mother revealed: “This year in our town there isn’t actually baseball, there isn’t enough kids that signed up. So it was either, not play ball, play a different sport, or go to another town, so.” (Mother, family #4)

The time commitment was also related to the length of the season for more competitive levels of play. Often, the children and their families at the higher competitive levels would only have a few months off. For example, as one mother described, it was currently March and her son’s season had just ended, yet try-outs for next year’s team were only in a few weeks:

April, so it’s in a couple weeks. Now that he’s done and off the ice, he’ll start try-outs in two or three weeks. Teams are picked and they are on the ice in August. They start doing dry land in July. You’re looking at ... playing Triple A ... you’re looking at maybe three months off. So you hope it’s nice people [other parents on the team]! [Exasperated] (Mother, family #3)

These sentiments were echoed by another father, who revealed that at the higher caliber level it was also the social commitment to create a mini-community around the team, that heightened their involvement with the sport program:

Kristen’s hockey team, they quit, it’s usually the middle of May by the time they’re done and then they start again in the middle of August. But even those two or three months they have off in the summertime, we’ll have barbeques and just get together at least twice. You know let the girls get together. Especially at the competitive level where you have new kids coming on to the team every year. You want to make them fit in and mesh

together and you know, get them round a pool and swimming and carrying on. (Father, family #2)

Another mother revealed that the families' lives often revolved around the elite child athlete who had the more intense schedule. After that child's schedule was taken care of, the others were then filled in around it. As she explained:

Well, Sam is playing Triple A hockey this year so we print his and then we write all the other ones on there because he has four times as much hockey as the other two. (Mother, family #3)

Parents also talked about the lack of facilities during their long drives to the games and practices. For example:

In the city you never worry about money and gas stations, like if there is 24-hour gas stations, 24-hour McDonalds and Tim Hortons, you know, restaurants that you can stop and grab some food. If we are on our way home from ... there's nothing. Not a gas station, not a place to stop to get something to eat or a variety store to get a Gatorade or whatever it might be. That creates some challenges too. (Mother, family #2)

After I almost ran out of gas on the way home from interviewing a family, and being famished as all the restaurants were closed on the drive home, I could appreciate how these little things could create heightened difficulties for the parents!

Thus, the highly scheduled lives that these families lived, compounded by the unique challenges of residing in a rural community, created a sense of emotional stress and fatigue and a tightly regulated and busy family life.

Consuming Family Finances

Consistent with earlier research (e.g., Townsend and Murphy, 2001), the parents in this study talked about the high cost of children participating in sport. However, some sports appeared to have a greater amount of economic strain on the family than other sports. For example, hockey was perceived as far more costly than baseball:

Like a lot of money is spent in hockey, whereas baseball you know registration is \$35. (Mother, family #6)

Hockey appeared to be the most expensive sport for the families. Not only were the registration fees high, but the extra costs related to equipment and transportation also consumed the family resources. As one father said:

Definitely, the registration which is dear, and then it's all the equipment which is expensive and then there is the gas running around all over. Like all winter long, I don't think the car ever cooled down. You drive home and you want to just leave it idling in your drive-way because you know you'll be going somewhere again shortly. (Father, family #5)

Moreover, for higher competitive levels there was also a significant increase on the consumption and strain of the family's economic resources:

The high cost, jump! The high Triple "A" jump! Oh yeah, it changes everything. Registration is \$1,800. That's just registration, that's not equipment, that's not tournaments, that's not \$100 a week in gas. And that's not hotels if you are in a tournament. Like Sam did four tournaments and they're all sleepovers. (Mother, family #3)

Another father, whose son had played for over a decade, indicated that the cost of organized sport was high; however, it was only for a short duration of their lifespan and thus was worth it:

It's expensive – the cost of the equipment, and gas and traveling expenses and all that. So you know, it's not cheap. But I don't look at the expense of it. It only lasts – Tad's got two more years maybe of Midget and then he's done. (Father, family #6)

It was clear, too, that the cost of children's sport participation had heightened strain on families with a lower household income. Although all families talked about the high cost of children's organized sport, and in particular hockey, there were notable differences in how the families were able to pay for the programs. For example, this contrast is illustrated by the following two mothers; the first one from a higher income family and the second from the lowest income family in the study:

Now Travis is \$335, Cali is \$285, and Breeana's is just over \$200. It just gets more expensive as you go up. I know at our centre the registration is quite reasonable. I mean

it's a big cheque I have to write for all three, but I just write it once. For figure skating you write it, and write it, and write it with the coaching. (Mother, family #6)

For registration you can either pay one cheque or else you can do three payments too which I find it hard even to do. Because you split almost \$1,200 up into three payments is even a fair chunk of money. I know the treasurer ... so he helps me out so I can make more payments and smaller amounts. So I just pay him cash. Instead of paying three payments. I like to pay it out of every time I get paid ... I pay him so much. Which is good because he kind of helped me get it paid. (Mother, family #1)

As the second mother explains, it was because of her acquaintance with the treasurer that she was able to moderate her payments, yet there was little anonymity to their financial situation with this arrangement. Moreover, this mother also talked about the stressors related to the sense of peer pressure to have the best equipment:

And it can be stressful money-wise when it comes to like, "I want a new hockey stick!" and "Why does that person have that kind of hockey stick? Why can't I have one?" Like, an aluminum stick is easily \$80 to \$100. And then I come home and then the other ones go "Well that's not fair, I didn't get one!" So then Keith will say "How come he got a stick?" (Mother, family #1)

To help alleviate the financial strain the children would often have to partially pay for their registration and equipment costs.

When they want one, I made them, they had to earn it. Pay for half of it and we would pay for the other half, just so they knew it wasn't a hockey stick that could go outside and play with. It just isn't handed over. (Mother, family #1)

This sense of financial strain on family life was evident throughout the mother's interview and the discussion kept returning to the financial aspect of her children's sport participation. It was evident that this family was trying hard to support their three boys' participation in sport, even though it consumed a great deal of their limited family resources, and strained the family dynamics.

Loss of Family Togetherness

Similar to Kay's (2000) research, the parents in this study talked about the loss of family time due to their children's sport participation. Dinner was frequently on the run, and this was deemed to be a loss of an important shared family activity.

They'll have something you know, half a grilled cheese for the road, a pickle while I'm changing my shoes. It isn't always rushed, but a lot of time it is. (Mother, family #2)

This response was also reflected by another mother; however, she also revealed that as her children grew older they were able to eat together more frequently due to the time slots:

It was worse when they were younger because their times were right around supper. Probably two or three times a week, you probably don't get any supper because you're taking them some place. (Mother, family #4)

Thus, organized sport shaped family life and shared activities such as the coveted dinner time.

Parents also expressed a loss of family time in the sense that did not have many days to relax at home with their hectic schedule or to enjoy other leisure activities together. As two parents explained:

Not too many weekends that you have nothing in the winter. I kind of like having weekends off sometimes just to get things done. And the kids too, like "Do we have anything on?" "No!" "Oh great!" Because we are so busy all week and then the weekends it's just nice to do nothing. (Mother, family #6)

I'm not a real big fan of Sunday hockey. I never did care for that. I just figured that was, well I'm sure we can take one day off and just spend it at home or something. That's something that I, if they want to play hockey they can play Friday nights or Saturday. But when they have Sunday night practices at 5pm or 3pm in the afternoon or 7:30pm or 8:30pm at night, like I don't think there's any need for that. But you gotta get it when the ice is available, so I understand that. (Father, Family #1)

These sentiments were echoed by a father who talked about the loss of couple time with his wife:

The biggest one is the time we spend one on one with your spouse. Or you know if we are together it's usually one or two kids with us. Yeah, I keep telling Julie, it will come back. We'll have the time again. (Father, family #2)

In sum, children's sport participation created hectic family schedules and other aspects of family life were organized around practices and games. Mothers were primarily responsible for the coordination and scheduling of children's activities, and the fathers' absence, due to work conflicts, heightened feelings of time stress and fatigue for the women. The caliber of the sport team also shaped family life, with higher competition levels meaning more practices and games and a longer overall season. Consequently, the families' lives often revolved around the child who was the elite athlete.

The consumption of family finances created internal conflict within the family unit over the cost of registration, tournaments, and equipment. It also exposed a family's limited financial circumstances to other community members, making parents vulnerable if they sought to negotiate "private arrangements" for such payments. Further, the hectic lifestyle created a loss of family togetherness with dinners on the run, a decline in couple time, and a lack of days at home to simply relax with other family members.

Additional Organizational Demands

In addition to the above stressors and consumption of family resources, the parents were also required to fulfill additional responsibilities related to the youth sport organization. This section explores how these volunteer roles shaped the parents' relationships with their children. The politics of an organization and how it created heightened tension and frustration within the family unit is also explored. This section begins by revealing how the parents became involved in a volunteer capacity with their children's sport organization.

Personal Choice or Obligatory?

A sense of obligation as it related to parental involvement with the sport organization became apparent throughout the interviews. When children joined an organized youth sport program, it often meant that their parents would also be taking on volunteer responsibilities. As one mother explained, it was almost an expectation that they fulfilled a volunteer role of some kind:

It's just like anything, they are desperate for help and they'd like as much help as they can get. Every sport you sign up for, you can expect to have some jobs and to be quite honest with you, that's another reason for soccer. It was like, let's sign up for soccer and see how soccer goes because there isn't a whole lot involved with it unless you want to coach or something. But there's very little involvement with the soccer or the baseball team on my behalf. (Mother, family #5)

Almost every mother and father who was interviewed spoke about the work demands related to the fundraising initiatives. It was perhaps one of the most taxing and demanding responsibilities felt by the parents, as they tried to raise funds to help offset the high costs of the sport program. In particular, hockey and figure skating were revealed to be the most demanding:

Skating and hockey are a little bit more. Obviously, it's the ice time for both of those sports just makes it really expensive. (Mother, family #5)

Hockey is just way more expensive so we need to offset their expenses with fund-raising or some sort of something to raise funds. We do all kinds of different things with hockey like we serve dinners for the Lions or help the Lions Club do big events. (Mother, family #5)

Other parents talked about the systems that were in place to help offset the organizations costs to run their program. These programs often took into consideration the number of children playing as well as a buy-out option for parents who would rather just pay the extra money. Two parents explained this "ticks" system:

You have one kid in sports you have to do three volunteer positions, if you have two kids, then you have an extra one, if you have three kids it's an extra one. (Mother, family #6)

The way the Puckville system works is you pay the registration and you have to sign up for so many different ticks. Whether it's figure skating or hockey, it's part of the

registration, and even soccer now too. Now because the kids are playing in all, well baseball isn't, but hockey, soccer and figure skating – when you sign. Because those three organizations are involved in other different community events, like for fund-raising and that kind of thing. So like with the hockey, they have the Puckville Thrasher. So if you don't want to do any of them items, then it costs you more money. If you don't want to help out or do any of them, then it cost you \$200 more. (Father, family #5)

In addition to their obligatory fundraising activities, many of the parents were required to take leadership positions such as being their child's coach or on the board of directors. For some of the parents, there was a sense that it was their parental duty to ensure their child had a team to play on or a league to participate in. For example, when asked why she volunteered one mother explained: "Well I knew they needed help. Like they didn't have anybody who was stepping up. You know you go to those meetings and you go: "Just sit on my hand!" And then I just go "Well, okay I'll do it." (Mother, family #5) These sentiments of reluctantly volunteering were reflected, also, in statements by two other parents:

Because they wouldn't play if I didn't [coach]. You know, because nobody else wants to do it so. (Father, family #3)

I took it over [in reference to a specific position on the executive] because the lady had been in there for so long and she really wanted out. It's like nobody was stepping up to the plate. So I thought "Oh, I'll give it a shot" and then a year was long enough for me. And then I decided to go on the bench [as the team trainer]. I decided to help in a different way because they were always crying for trainers and stuff. (Mother, family #1)

Although at times parents may volunteer out of guilt and/or necessity, they also explained that the outcome of the experience could be an enjoyable one. As two mothers explained:

I enjoyed it. I liked to get them [the children] pumped up and ready for a game. Because you know the caliber and what they can go out and do. So I guess in a way I would be sometimes kind of serious that way with them: "Come on you guys, let's go out! It's an important game, and I know what you can do, get your butts going!" kind of thing. You get them warmed up and you see some people, and it's like they know better not to jump with their skates on kind of thing. I felt that I could do good enough job to be there with them, so I think that's why I enjoyed it. (Mother, family #1)

Well with figure skating, the parents were kind of all standing around and well one of us has to be the president. Well they said "You should do it" and I said "Well I'll do it but you all need a job!" "Okay!" So then we did. You can't run these things without ... David

says I can't say no. But you know it has been a lot of fun because we have a lot of fun, the adults have fun doing it together too. It's just another kind of social where the kids are. And you know I guess you do it because if we didn't we wouldn't be able to have it. (Mother, family #4)

The outcome of volunteering as a parent's social activity was also echoed by another mother who said, "I enjoy the social aspect of it too – being part of something." (Mother, family #6)

Additionally, one of the fathers talked about the positive attributes of volunteering, and why he deemed it was an important responsibility to the community and provided a sense of fulfillment:

I think a lot of it has to do with self satisfaction and you want to be involved and ... I'm a volunteer firefighter in the community as well so you know, why do you do that? You want to help the community and you want to help the children. I enjoy children. My theory is there's no such thing as a bad child – it's the environment that makes them bad. (Father, family #2)

Parents also talked about volunteering to learn more about the sport organization.

Moreover, their discussion of this volunteer commitment reflected a sense of wanting to change the current system to make it better and more equitable. As these two mothers revealed:

Just for the executive just because I've never been on it. I just wanted to see the aspects, and I figured, when I bring certain things I don't always agree with everything that happens. Like you bring things up, and it's like things have been this way forever so that's the way it is which kind of frustrated me. (Mother, family #1)

When I got onto the executive, it was because we were trying to get girls' hockey started and I mean being a mother of three girls, if you aren't going to support it at that stage, then you know ... how can you expect anybody else? So I guess we were one of the big pushes to get it going so that there was that place for those girls. I mean, there are girls playing hockey now that would have never played hockey had there not been a girls' league started. (Mother, family #7)

It was clear, too, that one of the reasons that parents volunteered was purposive in another sense too. Demonstrating the value of volunteering and being a role model for their children was important to several of the parents. Two mothers described how they wanted their children to embody the values and beliefs around volunteerism:

And the volunteer aspect – I want them to grow up and volunteer too. You know, you can't expect somebody else to do it all the time as a volunteer organization – always looking for people. (Mother, family #6)

So I guess it's showing them you know that you have to volunteer to get things going and if your parents never volunteered then I guess how do you ever learn that concept right? So that's good community things that you're giving them like setting by example almost kind of giving them that. (Mother, family #4)

Moreover, some parents intentionally wanted to be involved in their children's sport organization as they felt that their own parents had not been actively involved in their lives. As one mother expressed it in a passionate tone:

I do it because I want my kids to see that I am involved. My mom never was involved in anything and why wouldn't I be involved? I helped coach, assistant coach, Cali's ball team for a couple of years. I just want my kids to be proud that their mom is helping. (Mother, family #6)

Thus, although an "expectation" of the organization, for some parents their volunteer role provided a number of benefits including the opportunity to teach their children values around volunteerism and future ideals to be active members in their community.

Shaping the Parent-Child Relationship

A parent's volunteer role with his or her child's sport organization also shaped the parent-child relationship (as previously discussed from the children's perspective). The time required for the volunteer role could heighten the sense of time stress for parents. It was not only facilitating the children's sport participation that the parents found stressful at times, but also the additional work required for their volunteer positions. This was seen to affect family dynamics as the parents would have to give up their valuable limited time and be away from their children. For example, one mother talked about the impact of her commitments:

We had meetings to go to which takes more time out of your busy schedule. And then with figure skating I've got a really good group of people that we work with and everybody does a lot of work but it does take time to be able to offer these things. (*What*

do your kids say about it?) Sometimes I think they just think it takes up some more of my time that isn't always available. (Mother, family #4)

It was clear, too, that their volunteer role shaped the time they were able to spend with their individual children, and for many parents, this was a source of frustration and unhappiness.

For example:

And when I was on the bench a couple years ago I found that kind of hard because then you're obligated to be on that child's team. You have to go to their games. So those three years that I was on the bench, as trainer, it was kind of frustrating because practices and stuff it's not so bad, but especially if it's a good game or a big game coming up or something you really want to see. It's hard to miss when you're obligated to be on the bench with one of the other kids. So that aspect of it is kind of hard. (Mother, family #1)

So that kind of worked out when she was coaching. I'd drive the other because she has to go and the same for hockey. If I'm coaching one I have to go, so you don't have to decide. That's the worst part then ... you don't get to see everybody all the time. (Father, family #3)

These sentiments were reflected by two other parents, who were also concerned when their children expressed some discontentment with the limited time they spent with their parents because of volunteer obligations:

I've actually been the trainer of Brandy's team so I always have to go with her. So the last time Katie played hockey I didn't get to very many of her games because they were often at the same time as Brandy's and I know she made mention to that the odd time, but you know, I had a commitment, I had the commitment to another team which is kind of unfortunate. (Mother, family #4)

I guess the hardest thing that we run into is being fair. Bob coaches Larissa's team so obviously Bob goes with Larissa. So I helped with Abby's team which worked out fine last year because Sadie was there. So I obviously went with those two and Bob went with Larissa. It's working very much the same with baseball this year. ... Because Bob is going so much with Larissa this year in ball, the other two will say "Well, why don't you ever come to our games?" (Mother, family #7)

Moreover, the dual role of parent and volunteer also seemed to impact the parent-child relationship through heightened moments of conflict. The parents, at times, would have to exert the tough actions required of coaches, and their own children would not be excluded from this. As one father explained: "She tries extra hard. She doesn't get any favouritism. She'll get roared

and yelled at the same as everybody else not doing what they're supposed to." (Father, family #7)

These moments of conflict were exacerbated when the children responded in a way that reflected the relationship of a parent-child rather than a coach-player:

Sometimes harder with Kristen ... because oh I shouldn't say ... because you know, like I said, I expect respect on the baseball diamond. And I know there was once last summer I benched Kristen because of something she had done and she started lippin' back to me and I just said to her: "I'm your coach out here, I'm not your father. If someone else was coaching would you have said what you just said?" "No!" (Father, family #2)

Some of the parents were also aware when their behavior at games and practices seemed to embarrass their children. As one mother revealed: "All three of them say that they hate me!

Hate me being on the bench! Sometimes I have ... I'm like "Oh I shouldn't have done that!"

(Mother, family #1). Yet, this same mother went on to explain and justify her actions:

Devin's told me that I get loud and get yelling, but usually I find if I'm on the bench, sometimes if it's a bad call or whatever, I might you know, you say the little things come out or whatever. But I just get excited and into the games, and they're like "Oh mom, you're embarrassing me!" (Mother, family #1)

Other comments by her husband emphasized how her actions affected her son and her relationship with him:

Kathy [mother] and Devin [oldest son] and Kaleb [middle son] too ... they have arguments about how mom acts [out] at the arena sometimes. But I've never had them come to me with a problem about it. (*What are Devin's and Kathy's feelings when they have the conflict?*) Well Devin, he's embarrassed, I think just because of what his friends see. And Kathy, she gets mad and she doesn't like backing down I guess. And they move on. They give their parting words and somebody will go one way and the other will go the other way. (Father, family #1)

While for many families the dual role of parent and volunteer was seen to shape the parent-child relationship in a negative way with heightened stress and conflict, this was not always the case. At the same time as these moments of conflict, many of the parents perceived that their volunteer role enriched their sense of connection with their children. The opportunity to

have shared experiences that they participated in together was perceived to foster and build the parent-child relationship.

I believe it has strengthened it [our relationship] because you know, obviously me being sports minded myself, they will come to me for pointers. Now whether that's because I'm their coach or I'm their dad, I don't know. And with baseball and before, if we have half an hour in the evening or whatever we'll get here and throw the ball around or quite often Thomas will come to me: "Do you want to go down to the school and hit some balls or whatever?" Or Kristen will come to me: "Can you take me down to the school and throw some to me?" Yeah, so you know, is that a coaching aspect or a parenting aspect, I don't know. (Father, family #2)

When I go on the bench with the girls, it makes a big difference I think for them. I think if you get yourself involved in whatever your kids are involved, I think you and them get as much out of it as anything. (Mother, family #7)

The Politics of the Sport Organization and Family Stress

All parents talked to various degrees about the politics of youth sport as it related to the organizational policies, philosophy, and disagreement with other parents who were in leadership positions (e.g., their child's coach). For some families these aspects of organized youth sport were a minor irritation, whereas for other families, it was a source of considerable tension. In the latter situation, the public sphere was brought into their private homes, and could be a highly charged topic of discussion amongst the family members.

The lack of consistent policies and the standardization of league rules caused considerable stress for several families. It was evident from the parents' responses that it was a common theme for discussion in their household. As one mother revealed, her daughter had made the boys' rep team (i.e., a higher competitive team), but was being hassled to sign a contract for the local team as well. The family clearly did not want their daughter playing on two teams which meant doubling the commitment. The conflict with the coaches and the organization's Board of Directors caused enough dissention with the parents that their daughter ended up leaving the community, and playing for another centre:

We went to our Board and said we don't want to sign that contract for Kristen. And they said "Well you have to". And we said "You know, we don't have to". ... We did our research and homework on our own to find out what this was about and went to the WOAA and asked our team rep ... and they'd never heard of such a contract. They're still doing it, and they are still having battles and hassles. But it kind of gives you a little bit of frustrating taste I guess. We've never looked back and I do believe things happen for a reason. (Mother, family #2)

Another family had concerns with the executive and the way that the hockey league was being run:

I wrote them a letter even. They don't do well at organizing things and making sure minor hockey systems do things right and fair and what's best for the kids. WOAA is the governing body of all these arenas. There's some sneaky, weird stuff going on and there isn't a set standard or an expectation of what should happen. (Mother, family #3)

That's the problem with the whole hockey system. They're cutting your ice time back. It's all money. It's all bullshit is what it is. It's ice time. Like our kids started in November and their season ends first of January, hometown hockey. It used to be right until ... but they cut it back. That's bullshit, that's sixteen games and sixteen practices. So it's not about kids anymore. It's time and money. (Father, family #3)

The same father, who coached his son's team every other year, expressed further frustration with the philosophy of the league:

I think there's too much ass kissing in the world. Like one thing, we're at a tournament and they give out this most valuable player award for the game. Lots of times they just pick the number because they've got the wrong people doing it. Well, one time they gave it to the worst kid on the team because he was the worst kid and they thought he would like a prize. And hockey's not supposed to be a competitive sport! [Sarcastic tone] And I'm thinking no it is! There's a winner and a loser. And that's ... to say it's all about the fun is bullshit! The fun is a big part, it's nice to have fun, and everybody has more fun when they work. But they also have to be taught ... (Father, family #3)

Yet, at the same time this family also recognized that it was volunteer parents, like themselves, who organized the programs. In fact, both of these parents had been involved in the league as a head coach or on the executive:

And I think every executive in all these minor hockey systems are volunteers. So they bring to the table what they know, what they've experienced. There's no policies, no guidelines, there's no, you know ... what at Tyke, at Novice, [names for different age groups] this is what you should be doing. Why should there be try-outs? Why should there be a rep and a local? No, no, it's just all up to you, you guys figure it out. So if you

get a bad executive, or you get inexperience there, it affects the organization as a whole. And don't get me wrong, I appreciate all the work the volunteers do. I volunteer as well, and I was on the Executive, and I know the time and the work. (Mother, family #3)

The nature of playing in a rural community and the league politics/policies also appeared to heighten the impact on family life. Considerable tension and frustration was evident in one mother's response, who described in detail the politics of signing your child up with a specific centre when they were young, and then being committed to that centre as long as they participated in hockey. As the family resided in the countryside in-between two towns, a "C" centre and a "D" centre, they originally had a choice as to which centre they wanted to sign up with, but now they heatedly regretted the decision they made over ten years ago:

I wish the system did a better job of looking after the rural kids because there isn't the levels like we talked about. And if you're young and naïve and signed your kid up at a centre that you think looks cute [sarcasm], not realizing what you've done for life. You have no idea what it means long-term, you just want them to skate. We signed in Puckville, we're not allowed to go to Skateville unless they release us. They would never *release* us because they need the players. So the only way to ever play better hockey – like we don't think our kids are going to the NHL and I don't think our kids do either – but it's just a little better, it's a little more competitive, and it's better skilled. And you get into hockey and you think this is pretty, you know. But, I also think that WOAA is our Western Ontario Athletic Association here, and I think they're doing a terrible job in supporting kids in rural sports. (Mother, Family #3)

Whereas, another family, whose daughters were the stars of their hockey teams, enjoyed the smaller community feel:

Skateville is a closer centre for us, but rights, it's the closest centre for hockey. Skateville doesn't – they're not a really good community. Maybe it's because they are so large. But it's not very community oriented, whereas Puckville is more community oriented so we went to Puckville when we started and once you sign, you can't move. That's where you have to stay. (Mother, Family #7)

Because of the strong opinions from other parents, and the difficulties that a volunteer may encounter, several of the parents talked about why they chose not to fill leadership positions within a sport organization. As one mother said, she was hesitant to fill a role with the hockey

association because of the tension and pressure that could develop with other volunteers. The culture of the organization was too serious for her:

I have quite a few jobs at the skating club. I'm not so much involved with the hockey. They're working on me really good this year. I'm just like, I really don't want to get involved with the hockey because it's really - it's hard to describe it - it's too intense for me. It's too serious and it's like I don't know, I just don't want to go there. But they are really pushing hard because they need a bunch of positions filled. And I'm like "whoa!" I don't mind the skating club so much, I'll do whatever. But I'm really trying to stick to my guns on the hockey because ... I just don't know how to describe it to you but it's just too intense for me. There is too much. I don't understand the rules of hockey like some parents do and they live and breathe it where I like to go and I like to watch. I know in my own little pea brain, if I say yes to that job, I'm going to be so ugly. It's just going to piss me off so I'm not going to do it. (Mother, family #5)

Another father, talked about why he refused to coach his children's hockey team:

Well, I'm not a big hockey supporter of coaching your own kids in hockey. I just see too many parents that do it and it's so biased. Like, it frustrates me so I don't want to. ... I just, I'm not much for confrontation, and I hate hassles, so. That's why I never got involved with coaching. I can't say I've never thought about it. It's just, not my boys. And then plus too, if I was coaching not my boys, like how would you swing that? Coaching another hockey team when I've got three boys? I'd never see any of their games. (Father, family #1)

Another comment revealed the pressure to win that a volunteer coach would often receive from other parents:

Parents will blame the coaches if they are on a losing streak. I think there's always parents who only see everybody else's child making a mistake or they need somebody to blame so it's got to be the coach. They wouldn't lose if it wasn't for that coach. Well they are also the ones who are not willing to volunteer their time. (Mother, family #7)

At the same time, one of the most common complaints that the parents talked about was the other volunteer parent coaches. For example, having what was deemed to be a bad coach (who was also a parent) could cause considerable stress on family life. As one mother said: "Nine times out of ten your coaches are people who are just volunteering their time and they are good at what they do. Most of the time they have a love for the sport. I mean, mind you, you do get your jerks some times, but we've been lucky not to have any of that." (Mother, family #5) When their

children had what parents deemed to be a bad coach, this could seep into family life and dominate family discussions. Discontentment and frustration was revealed by this couple's passionate comments:

We had a few frustrating years and nothing against a mom being on the bench coaching, but it's frustrating when you know that there are some skills out, people with skills that you wish could be coaching that aren't kind of thing ... I think Kaleb had her two or three years. To me he kind of dropped back, lost some skills, like some important skill time. ... It's tough getting the volunteers with the skills you need ... and I feel bad because some people do it because there's nobody else to do it, so you stop and look at it that way. You know, it's hard. (Mother, family #1)

It should be a rule, but I know it's hard to get coaches, but it's a conflict, it is! And you notice it too, I'm not bragging but Devin, he's a pretty good hockey player and he's been captain a few years. And when I see him sitting on the bench with less than minute left in the game, and the coach's son is out there who shouldn't be there, see that, that makes me mad. So now am I any better if I'm the coach and putting him out there? Because when you hear from other parents standing in the crowd, how come he hasn't put Devin out there? He's a top scorer, last minute and he's not out there, and his boy is out there? (Father, family #1)

As this couple revealed, there were several aspects of a volunteer parent coach that could be a potential stressor. One of the issues identified was when a coach had what was deemed to be insufficient skill level, and the child would receive inadequate instruction. Thus, in future years, the child's abilities may fall behind their peers' who had another coach. Other issues identified included perceived favoritism of the coach's child in terms of playing time or being given a prominent position on the field or ice. It was for that reason that father #1 expressed his own hesitation to be a coach, and yet at the same time, he could not coach other teams because it would interfere with the time spent with his own sons. Interestingly, a couple of the parents suggested that some of the young adults in the community, who were not parents, should become involved in volunteer work and make a positive contribution:

Some of the other teams, like Kaleb's team, he's got younger guys. I think they're all in their mid-twenties and those boys are respected by those kids. I mean when they are talking to them or explaining something to them, they sit and listen. (Mother, family #1)

It's better when we can get volunteers, young people from the community to do that. Instead of somebody's parent. And it just maybe is better on the team because you know, whether you favour one or don't favour one, when it's unbiased. Somebody doesn't have their child on the team, it's better. And as kids get older that's probably a way better thing. Like I know my son's team this year had a group of young guys. They went when they were young and watched them win an All-Ontario. Went to the arena and watched those guys you know. So there's some element of respect for these young guys there even before ... (Mother, family #4)

Thus, although the parents' participation in an organizational role could strengthen family relationships, it could also cause considerable stress and tensions within the family unit, as well as with other parents in the community. Moreover, the conflicts that developed may reveal the high level of importance that parents place on children's sport participation. That is, children's sport participation may become political because it is highly valued and central to the families' lives.

The Gendered Nature of the Sport Organization

Underlying much of the talk about organizational demands and responsibilities was a sense of gendered politics that were related to the respective roles that the mothers and fathers held within the sport organization. When asked the open-ended question "What are the expectations for mothers and fathers in the sport organization?", many of the parents initially talked about a sense of equality in the leadership roles. For example:

I would say it's probably about 50/50. Where I think a few years ago it was more dads. (Mother, family #4)

It is very mixed. Like, I would say it's even. There's about the same amount of men as women on the board. (Mother, family #5)

Some parents even revealed that women predominantly held leadership roles in their sport organization's board of directors. As one mother explained:

Our president is a woman and our second vice is a woman, and of course we have the registration coordinator's a woman, like any of the big roles. The secretary is a woman.

We have a town contact for the boys [who] is a male, our treasurer is a male, and our first vice is a male. (Mother, family #7)

Like I know with baseball our whole board of executives is female. And with hockey I would say its split 50/50. (Father, family #2)

However, the type of sport appeared to influence the gendered nature of the volunteer work. As the above quote revealed, fathers were still typically involved with the hockey's board of directors, a sport that is traditionally considered "masculine". However, women were principally responsible for the facilitation and leadership roles for "feminine" sports such as figure skating, while fathers provided very little leadership support in this area. For example, one couple revealed the lack of male leadership participation in their daughters' figure skating club:

There isn't a dad involved with the skating club. We have not had a dad anywhere near in sight. (Mother, family #5)

(Are you involved with their figure skating?) Not really, no. They have a winter carnival every year so I help decorate the arena. Yeah, I've helped that way but an executive position on the figure skating club, no. *(It's predominately all women?)* Yeah. Wanda is a past chair. Don't get me wrong, like a male could do that. It would be no different than the bookwork I did for the snowmobiling club, but I haven't been asked and I probably won't volunteer. Can we leave it at that? [Interview started to feel awkward!] *(We can leave it at that! Moving on! Laughter to ease tension.)* I probably could but it just seems ... it is a little different I guess. I don't know. It shouldn't be. I don't think there's any males who've done it in the past. (Father, family #5)

These sentiments were echoed by another mother who explained that it might be because of a lack of knowledge by men in this area: "The figure skating executive would be mostly moms. You would never ... very seldom see a dad. ... I don't know if dads understand figure skating so ..." (Mother, family #4) Interestingly, many of the women who were involved in leadership roles for the hockey's board of directors did not have any previous experience with hockey.

Women's employment related skills also appeared to provide a rationale for their organizational contributions. As one mother said: "So our registration's all electronic now so that might be something that you know, is something that a mom might do. The same as ... we have a

website so you know, the people that are doing it, that's they're kind of type of work and they happen to be moms." (Mother, family #4)

The increasing number of mothers on the board of directors may be an example of women "doing gender". The hidden work on the sport executives may be an extension of their traditionally private domestic work, related to the organization and scheduling of their families, into the public domain. As one father said, when asked why he did not volunteer his time on the board of directors similar to his wife, "It's a job that takes a pretty dedicated person to do. A thankless job I guess you'd say it would be." (Father, family #7)

In visible leadership roles such as a coach or trainer there was also a sense of change with more women becoming involved, particularly with the onset of girl's hockey and its league rules. Similar to the female children (Chapter V), two mothers explained the increasing presence of women in visible leadership roles due to the league regulations:

With the girls' team there has to be a female. Like on our co-ed team you know it can be all boys or all men or ... where you can have all male coaching staff but the trainers have to be female. (Mother, family #4)

Hockey is men [referring to coaches] but there are definitely women trainers sitting on the bench. Actually with girls' hockey there has to be. That's a league rule for the girls' team because of going into the dressing room. They have to because if they have to go to the dressing room it has to be a female. (Mother, family #5)

However, beyond the initial few examples given, it became evident that the fathers were still primarily involved in visible leadership roles such as the coach, with only an emerging sense of the mother's involvement in this form of volunteer work. As a mother and father revealed:

We've had both [men and women] actually. Yeah, mostly men but the very first year we did ... it was a girl that had played girls' hockey her whole career and I think she was maybe in grade 12. (Mother, family #4)

Mostly all men. I don't think there's, well, now that there's so much more girls' hockey too. Like more of the ladies are taking up coaching because I have seen that. But as far as coaching any of the guy's teams, especially the older ones, there's no ladies. But they do help out with the younger, the beginner kids. (Father, family #1)

These comments reflect the gendered politics related to women's and men's organizational involvement in sport. Although the initial response was that men and women were equally involved, the gendered nature of their participation was implicitly evident. For example, the fathers tended to maintain the highly coveted and respected roles in the sport organization. That is, there were specific positions on the board of directors that were primarily occupied by men. As one mother explained:

[When deciding] executive roles, a woman would probably never be the coach mentor ... or not in this [geographical] area anyways. (*So what roles would they fill?*) Well they'd like you to be fundraiser or secretary or treasurer. (*And what's the roles that men fill?*) Dad would be, you know, hockey operations and ice convener and stuff like that. (Mother, family #3)

Fathers also typically occupied a head coach role, while mothers were in the assistant roles. As one mother explained: "With hockey I think you see a lot more dads as coaches, whereas the moms are more team reps and stuff like that." (Mother, family #6)

Similar to the board of directors, it became evident that the type of sport also influenced who filled the coaching positions. As one father who was a coach explained:

Baseball it's probably split about 50/50 as far as moms and dads or brothers and sisters or whatever the case may be. And in hockey it's as far as the coaches go, like its male and there's always usually at least one female on the bench acting as a trainer or a manger or something along that lines. (Father, family #2)

One rationale of why men were still in the highly coveted and visible leadership roles was that fathers were thought to be more knowledgeable about sports. Moreover, there was also some acknowledgement that it also reflected gendered traditions or views. For example:

I think that there's maybe a little societal view that maybe the dad's have a bit more knowledge than the moms. Maybe they do, I can't comment on that. I can only comment on my own knowledge though! (*Why do you sense this?*) I think just tradition that men kind of get the guts of the game a little better or the rules of the game or understand it a little better. It just depends an awful lot on how much involvement you've had in the sport and how, you know, have you been coaching? Have you been a parent watching? Or have you been actively involved? Or you know, there's a lot of contributing factors, but I think

for the most part there's a little bit more ... the thought process is that it comes more from the men, the dads. (Mother, family #2)

This notion of men being more knowledgeable about sports also appeared to be more relevant as the competition level of the league became more elite. As one mother, whose son was playing Triple A hockey, explained:

Well, hockey is an old boys club. So if you were to stand and talk to, if a mom comes up and was talking to some men, they'd probably walk away or really not listen. (*Are you talking coaches?*) Men as in parents. Maybe not as much at home [home referring to the local level hockey]. I could probably stand and talk with a bunch of dads about the game and how they ran the bench or whatever. (*Right*) I see it. I feel it at Triple A hockey. (Mother, family #3)

Moreover, when families that typically embodied egalitarian principles in their household were confronted with inequity in the sport organization, they would simply avoid confrontation. For example, two mothers who perceived that women were being thought of as inferior would not openly complain or try to initiate changing perspectives:

You know it originally annoyed me with the higher level [Triple A hockey] and women you know, but whatever, it doesn't bother me now. It's just funny. (Mother, family #3)

I would allow that process to carry on even though I might feel differently, unless it's a really big heart tug for me that I feel I really knew something, I'm okay with it. [Conversation is getting awkward and calculated responses.] (Mother, family #2)

Finally, as mentioned previously, it is also important to note that the gendered affairs of sport organizations were also revealed in the fundraising responsibilities of mothers and fathers. Although both mothers and fathers talked about the importance of fundraising and the high costs of children's sport participation, it tended to be the mothers who talked about the work (planning and organizing) of fundraising activities. Further, women were often involved in the activities that were over an extended period of time and less visible, whereas, the fathers were more likely to take on the "one day" visible type of responsibilities. For example, one couple revealed their respective fundraising tasks for their minor hockey association:

Anything, like we had the year end tournament for the Pee Wee girls at our centre. We got that so I did all the fundraising. I organized and got that all together. That was a big job and raise funds and whatever funds we raised went back in for the girls' team. (Mother, family #6)

Motocross races in Scoreville – we look after the flagging and the parking and all that stuff. They make quite a bit of money from that so everybody is expected to do a day of that and there's other things. You know, tickets and stuff like that. Yeah, I think everybody's okay with it. (Father, family #6)

In sum, applying a gendered analysis to parents' organizational responsibilities revealed a sense of change and women's increasingly public roles. Yet, this analysis also demonstrated the reproduction of sport as a traditionally masculine domain, with men at the visible centre roles and women in the hidden periphery roles. It appeared that women's traditional responsibilities for planning and organization within the family unit, were extended into the public domain and the organization of the children's sport leagues. This was particularly evident in the local leagues and traditionally feminine sports.

From the two sub-themes "Paying a High Price to Pay" and the "Additional Organizational Demands", it was clearly evident that children's participation in organized sport took a heavy toll on family life and greatly shaped family dynamics. When considering all the emotional and physical work and the consumption of family resources, why was the children's participation in organized sport such a valued and important aspect of family life? The next sub-theme reveals why the parents were willing to do all this work and make personal and family sacrifices.

Being a "Good Parent"

The analysis of the data revealed the very high value and significance of children's participation in organized sport opportunities. Many of the parents believed that the facilitation of

children's participation was a necessity to develop their skills and abilities, and prepare them for future years. The parents emphasized that the *provision of opportunities* was a central aspect of being what they deemed to be a "good parent". Further, throughout the interviews it became clear that organized youth sport took the notion of good parenting beyond the home into the public sphere. Not only did parents talk about their own children's sport participation, but they also talked in great detail about their observations of other families. Underlying many of the stories was a sense of judgment, by parents of other parents, with respect to their involvement in children's organized sport. Moreover, judgment of their spouse's and the grandparents' level of support was also revealed. This section begins by exploring why parents feel that the provision of sport *opportunities* is an important aspect of being a "good parent". It then describes how parents judge other parents in the community and reveals that parents sometimes have limited empathy towards other parents who did not exhibit "good parenting" behaviours. Finally, it concludes with discussion of conflicting and contradictory opinions related to parents' behaviours as spectators.

The Importance of Providing Sport Opportunities

The importance that the parents in this study attached to providing sports opportunities for their children complements previous research (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1994; Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003). That is, research has shown that many parents believe that organized youth sport facilitates important lessons related to character building, teamwork, responsibility, and cooperation and competition; all attributes that are valued in a capitalist society. Consistent with this notion, the parents in this present study talked about the importance of facilitating their children's participation in organized activities, and clearly believed that these activities would help prepare children for their adult years. For example, one couple talked about the value of organized youth sport, and their belief that every child should be actively involved:

As we were discussing earlier over lunch, whether it's organized sports or an organized club, I feel every child should be involved or should have the opportunity to be involved within it. And sports builds up not only your own inner self esteem, but it teaches you how to play as a teammate and it prepares you for the real world so to speak once you leave high school. (Father, family #2)

I think the families around here are wonderful. Most all of our kids' friends are involved in some aspect of something. ... Neat coaching events, neat parenting events, neat teammate events, you know. There's a lot of different things to think about, but I would say most families around here, that are our friends or our kids' friends are involved in some manner or aspect of community and sports. (Mother, family #2)

These sentiments were echoed by two other fathers who thought that it was very important that children participated in organized sport, and who criticized other parents when their children were not provided with such opportunities:

There are still a lot of kids out there that don't. Maybe they can't afford it. I know some that can afford it and they're just not involved anyways. Maybe, it's the kid's choice too but I think a lot of times it's the parents. Like a lot of times I think the kids would want or want to get involved in sports but their parents maybe don't want to. (Father, family #6)

I see some of the kids in the neighbourhood that have parents ... the kids aren't involved in sports at all. And I think it's something the kids should have a chance at. (Father, family #1)

Supplementary opportunities to enhance their children's development were deemed necessary. As one mother revealed:

Not like you're in competition but what I find is, especially with hockey, everybody thinks your kid's a super star but they don't want to give them the tools that they need to be a good player. They don't want to spend any extra to have them take skating lessons or take power skating. But there are a group of parents that get it. (Mother, family #4)

Another issue was the need for parents to provide opportunities, so that their children would not feel resentment in later years. As two fathers explained:

Just to give them the opportunity to excel, because if they wanted to it was there. 'Cause they had a bit of natural talent so you have to, right? Otherwise you look bad, you know, well what if? 'Cause I didn't have it and I turned down an opportunity. (*Oh, did you?*) For junior B when I was 14. (*Why did you turn it down, do you remember?*) Well, my parents were getting divorced and stuff and I had no support and I didn't understand any of it ... 'Cause I grew up here, so. (*So, do you think that affects your fathering with your own kids?*) I think ... that's why we do it and don't complain, right? (Father, Family #3)

And you know, a friend of ours just lives outside of town here and he was an awesome hockey player and he was invited to the junior camp and his mom never told him about it until it was over. And he's still bitter about it and he's almost 50 years old now. So, you know, we don't want our kids to look at us, you know 20 years from now and say you never gave me the opportunity. Whether anything becomes of it or not, that's up to them now. We gave them the opportunity we feel, and it's up to them to work at it. And you know, summertime sports we all enjoy it. And hopefully they'll give their children every opportunity that they can possibly. (Father, Family #2)

Thus, in part, a good parent was defined by their *provision of opportunities* for their children, and this may be the reason that so many parents were willing to do all the work to facilitate their involvement. This provision included not only the sport activity itself, but also the supplementary activities for skill enhancement and the kind of support that parents provided. Moreover, the parents did not talk extensively about why sports participation was so important for their children. However, their feelings about the importance of sport, and the central role that parents can and should play in this regard, was revealed in much more detail when they talked about and judged other parents in the community. Hence the issue of judging other parents (including community members, spouses, and the grandparents) became an important theme, reflecting the parents' values and opinions with respect to "good parenting" and sports.

Judging Other Parents

Underlying much of the parental discourse about the notion of good parenting, were evaluative statements about the other parents' level of involvement as it related to their child's sport participation. Most of the parents were highly critical of "absent parents", who were seen as parents who dropped their child off "at the door", and did not actively support their children at the sport venue. Leaving their child and not watching their practice or game was deemed to be a questionable parenting act. For example:

It's sad. You can see it in the kid's face if they're [i.e. the parents] not there or if they are there and they're an ass it's even worse. It just destroys the kid. Really breaks them down.

It just kills their spirit. (*Would it be one parent or both parents?*) Both. (*So how would the child ...*) Calls one of us. “Can he stay with you for the weekend in the hotel room?” “I don’t even know you!” Who would ask that of a complete stranger? (*Do you know why?*) I don’t know! Why would you sign your kid up if you don’t want to be involved? We don’t understand it at all! We have no idea! (Mother, family #3)

Kids that get dropped off at figure skating and their parent don’t stay to watch. I can’t imagine not being there and watching my daughter. Like I can’t imagine dropping her off and not seeing her. Now mind you, Wanda and I sometimes take turns but at least one of us is there. But there’s parents that never are there, they just drop them off and leave and come back – [a “good parent” is] one that’s more involved than that. (Mother, family #6)

These sentiments were reflected by another mother who also emphasized the emotional impact that a parent’s absence may have on a child:

Another parent, her son plays goalie, his dad’s never there. And you know, you see him there once in a blue moon to watch his games and it’s like, I just couldn’t handle that. I just feel bad. I mean, it’s not that he’s not there in other ways, it’s just hockey isn’t his thing. Like his son snowmobiles and he’s a mechanic, so it’s not that they’re not interactive that way. But I couldn’t imagine not being at the hockey game or Keith [her husband] ... I mean we try to get to all the boys’ [games], but for him not to come if he could be there ... (Mother, family #1)

Moreover, a good parent was seen as someone who volunteered and helped out with his or her children’s sport teams. Active involvement in their children’s lives was deemed to be important, both to the children and to the sport organization:

A parent who volunteers. One that doesn’t just send their kid out on the ice or send their kid out on the diamond and just sits there and watches. You know – be involved. You know the kids see it and they know it. (Mother, family #6)

Parents are just like they’re everywhere. And you get some that just have no idea – just bringing little Johnny out and never volunteer. You know you get that crowd that never help out. Bitching and complaining but never helping out. (Father, family #3)

Judgment of absent parents was also revealed to be directed at spouses as well. Family conflict was evident when one spouse was seen to be unsupportive and did not attend the games. For example, one mother talked about an incident that had occurred just the day before:

Like Travis had rugby yesterday and it took a lot of ... I dropped a lot of hints saying “you know, this will probably be the only time you’ll get a chance to see Travis”, because he’s off Fridays and rugby will be over in a few weeks and this is the only Friday game

that was in Benchville so. And Jacob's [her husband] like "oh no, I'm busy, I've got to go pick rocks." And I said "You know, God it'd be nice if you'd go see his game because it's the only chance you'll get. Pick rocks tomorrow!!!" I was glad that he went. (*Oh, he did go?*) He did yeah, because any chance that I get, I'm going to watch, but Jacob tends to be more focused on getting stuff done around the farm and losing track of ... (*He's task oriented?*) Yeah, and when you look back, are you going to be glad you picked those rocks or be glad you got to see your son play rugby? I don't know... (Mom, family #6)

Conflict between husband and wife was also evident when one parent was not seen to be "pulling his or her weight" for the sport organization. For example: "Like it kind of bugged me about Keith, he knows so much about hockey ... he knows how to skate and everything ... but he would never go out because he didn't want parents grumbling at him kind of thing." (Mother, family #1) This sentiment was echoed by another mother who was involved in leadership roles for her children's team, and was also frustrated with her husband's lack of involvement. Resentment was also expressed, upon reflection of her childhood, about her own mother's lack of support:

I do it because I want my kids to see that I am involved. My mom never was involved in anything and why wouldn't I be involved? Why would I expect somebody else to do it for my kids? And I enjoy the social aspect of it too – being part of something. Jacob is too busy. He does nothing and sometimes I wish he would but that's the real downfall there. But no, I do what I can. I helped coach, assistant coach, Cali's ball team for a couple of years. I just want my kids to be proud that their mom is helping. (Mother, family #6)

Further, this mother also criticized the grandparents' lack of involvement: "My parents and Jacob's parents are not involved at all. They never [or] rarely see anything which is a little bit disappointing." (Mother, family #6)

Moreover, the importance of being on time was emphasized by several participants, and became another point of criticism of other parents. Making sure that your child was ready to play was seen as an important quality of being a good parent. For example:

You know, you'd like to see the parent go the extra mile and make sure the child is there on time. There is nothing worse than having an hour practice and showing up with your child five minutes before you go on the ice and they still have to get ready and they've got

to be fully equipped. By the time they get on the ice they've missed the first twenty minutes of practice. (Mother, family #7)

It's important that you get your kids to the games in lots of time. There's lots of parents that don't do that you know. When the coach says you need to be there at a certain time and they don't listen to that. I find, it's the kids that are the ones that are ... It's really the parent's action - it's not getting the child on time. (Mother, family #4)

A good parent was seen to provide adequate emotional and physical support to their child as well. Not only was it important to physically take their child, but it was also important to have a positive and supportive attitude. As one father expressed it:

I think the parents' attitude. I think the parents have to want to do it too. I think it would be, you know, if you said your kid could play or do a second sport and every time it was time to take them somewhere, you said: "Oh God do I have to?" or whatever. They would see that you didn't feel like taking them or if you weren't supportive of it. Then the kids might think: "Oh well, maybe mom or dad doesn't want me to do this." (Father, family #5)

Positive feedback that supported their children, no matter how they performed, was also deemed to be a good parenting practice. As two mothers revealed:

Praise is always a good thing. It doesn't always matter if you win or lose, just be supportive. (Mother, family #4)

I think a good parent would be one that supports their child no matter what they are doing and again whether they are good at whatever sport they pick or whether they're not. Like I've seen it where some of the kids that maybe don't shine as well, their parents when they come off the ice, they go over and hug them and say "good job" or whatever. (Father, family #5)

Yet, not all parents shared this same view. One parent in particular thought that more honest criticism should be given to the children from the parents. He had earlier revealed that he thought there was too much "ass kissing in the world" in reference to parents praising their children's play. He thought that (harsh) honesty was more important as he described his own feedback to his sons:

And getting them there and making that attempt, and appreciate it because when they don't appreciate it, we let them know [in reference to his own kids]. That and they also understand ... we keep throwing back in their face once and a while. Because I started

them skating when they were 2 years old or something. They were on the ice very young. So when they're having trouble with something else and it frustrates them I'll say, "Remember back when you couldn't even skate? Remember how long it's taken to get half-ass good at it? Cause you're still not a pro, you know." (Father, family #3)

Another mother, who was also a coach, believed that at times children only played because their parents wanted them to, and this was not always the best decision. She revealed some of her frustration as a coach:

They can play hockey but do they really want to be there playing hockey or would they sooner just be at home playing their Wii or something? I think that's fair. I helped coaching ball and it's very frustrating. They're building sand castles and they are ... They're not paying attention and somebody's going to get hurt that way for one thing. And then their parents will sit in the stands and go "hm, hm, hm". The game will be over and they'll say "oh yeah, you played great" which is good but you know. Your child really didn't play that good and I think half of the time I think it's because the parent wants and thinks they should be there. (Mother, family #7)

It was clear, too, that judgments were often made of other parents who were "forcing" their children to play at a higher competitive level. Parents were judged if they were clearly the ones forcing their child's involvement:

Like sometimes you can push them. I see people that push their kids to play Triple A hockey and they really don't want to be there. (Mother, family #1)

Like, I'd never *force* my boys into anything. They've all always had their own decision. Because I'm not gonna *force* them. It's their decision. I've seen too many parents wreck a kid's career, drop out of hockey altogether because they're just *forced* into it too much. Would I be disappointed if they quit? Probably, yeah. But I'm not gonna, but once they sign up they're committed. So they finish their year. And then the following year, if they don't want to play then that's fine. (Father, Family #1)

Similarly, a parent who pushed their children too hard at a game/practice was also deemed to be inappropriate:

I am the least competitive parent there is. It actually just drives me insane when I go to the arena and kids aren't really enjoying skating or whatever and they're coming off and they're like: "I want my skates off!" or "I want to go home!" or whatever, and their parents are like "Get out there!" It always infuriates me and I've often said that to my girls and they know that if you come off and want to get your skates off, take them off and we'll go home. I'm not – like if they are having fun, that's great. If it's becoming stressful and a burden, let's just go home because what's the sense? It's supposed to be

for fun. I know some parents think the competitive aspect and their kid's going to the NHL, blaw, blaw, blaw. Well think about it! It's really not going to happen. I just don't understand that and it just sends me overboard. That's probably the part of the sport that just about drives me the most crazy. The other parents who are just too overboard – too much (Mother, family #5)

Visible accomplishments, and their child's success, were perceived to be some of the reasons that parents would push their children. As this same mother explained:

I think parents want to see their child succeed at everything they do and if your child's not the best out there, then they want to see that they can become the best. I don't know. (Mother, family #5)

Even parents, who were deemed to be too intense at times, also made judgmental statements about the inappropriate actions of other parents, yet did not necessarily recognize their own. For example, the mother whose behavior was criticized by her husband and children as being inappropriate and embarrassing talked about hearing other parents who were too critical: "I've heard other parents be very hard on their kids. They get not really yelled at, but it's like: "Oh that was the worst game!" "Why weren't you moving?" (Mother, family #1) Further, parents who were highly critical of their children's game play were thought to be especially "hard" on their kids during the post-game talk that usually occurred in the vehicle. For example, one father described how the ride home and the parent-child interaction could be "intense" if the child did not play well: "There's a lot of parents that I think push their kids quite a bit to do well and if they don't do well, well then they get an earful in the car all the way home. I think some parents expect more maybe from their kids." (Father, family #6) This type of intense parenting has been recognized as problematic by some sports organizations. There was an example given of a parental contract, developed by a sports organization, as a tool to control inappropriate behaviours:

I know some hockey teams, and it wasn't our hockey team or our girls, but some of the more competitive hockey teams, they make the parents sign like a little contract. I've see the coaches do it. Yep! That you will not critique your child to or from the ride there or

home. This was a boys team, like a Triple A serious hockey team or whatever and the coaches made the parents sign this contract and I thought: “Right on!” I’m sure there’s kids that just get it. (Mother, family #5)

A lack of *empathy* and the *recognition of differences* were missing in the parental discourse on judging other parents. Although many parents shared stories of their difficulties in supporting their own children, their view of other parents and any difficulties that they might encounter were not acknowledged. For example, in addition to supporting the idea of children being involved in organized youth sport, criticisms were also made about parents who did not go far enough to facilitate their children’s sporting skills. As revealed earlier, a “good parent” was one that provided all of the supplementary programs such as power skating to enhance their children’s skills. Yet, there appeared to be little recognition of and empathy for the cost of the sport participation and families’ potential inability to financially support these type of activities. One mother had experienced this lack of compassion from other parents. She said: “In the past years there’s been times when you’ve struggled [financially]. It’s been more difficult or whatever. I’m working a little more too which helps. But it can be ... people don’t understand what other people do, what their issues are. So it can be frustrating that way.” (Mother, family #1)

This same parent also made other comments about the social pressure she was experiencing from other parents:

I know some parents at the arenas when they’re talking about going to so many different tournaments. Like usually at the beginning of the year they’ll try to talk about how many tournaments they’re going into or what tournaments. Some parents who have only one child in hockey, it’s like “Oh yeah! Let’s go in this tournament and this tournament!” It’s like well that’s okay for you to say that but I have three kids and if they all go in three tournament you’re looking at least \$30 per tournament and if you’re away it costs money ... that adds up through the year. It can be hard depending on what time of year it is. If it’s just before Christmas. Certain things can be frustrating. That’s fine, they’re allowed to go in two tournaments kind of thing. And then I’ll see how our budget works out or whatever. It’s different having one child compared to three. (*How do you feel about those little discussions in terms of how many tournaments?*) Sometimes it’s kind of frustrating

because you have three and they have one and some of the comments that people will say. (*What would be some of those things?*) Well it was your choice to put them into hockey or things like that. They always make the parent look like the bad person too. And that kind of can be frustrating. (Mother, family #1)

While the lack of empathy for families in difficult socio-economic circumstances was common, there were a few notable exceptions. Yet the parents who were aware of the difficulties that other families faced, seemed to feel this way only because they were close acquaintances.

For example:

My girlfriend with her being a single mom and the job that she's in, I find that the kids are with their grandparents a lot which I think she hates. When she has to miss the kids' games and she can't always be there because she's more ... like she works with the police department and she's more into the investigating stuff. So sometimes, she just can't help and leave by 5:30pm to be with her kids. So when I see that, and you know, other parents that are single parent families that are there. (Mother, family #1)

And there's other kids on the team that maybe aren't as fortunate. We know other families and we know that things may be a 'little snug' [financially tight] and you wonder how they do it actually. So sometimes, especially when there's away tournaments and you have to stay overnight and sometimes it's two nights and you're going out for meals all the time and you run into couples who just can't do that. So then the girls get subjected to that kind of thing. (Father, family #5)

Other comments by the father from family #5, and from his wife, also seemed to suggest a sense of some empathy to less fortunate families:

Yeah, financially we are fairly fortunate here that way but it does cost a ton. Like, I mentioned earlier, I'm sure there's lot of people who can't, that want to, or they might have to make the decision that it's either figure skating or hockey. They can't do both because of the financial restraints. I think the girls know that it costs a lot. (Father, family #5)

I often say financially there's – like there's all kinds of kids who'd love to play that can't. It's expensive. Like everything you go to do is really, really dear. (Mother, family #5)

Moreover, parents had different values as it related to the “seriousness” and purpose of the children's sport experiences. As one mother revealed, she felt pressure to provide the opportunity to her child, even though she did not agree with the nature of the league:

I'd be lying if I didn't think about that even with baseball now. First when we signed her up for baseball it's always been really local – 10 or 15 minutes. Now that she's on a straight all girls team, we're traveling an hour, an hour and a half to games and I'm like "I didn't sign up for that!" [The local league's numbers declined, and the girls had to join another community's team that participated at a higher caliber.] But I feel really pressured in that regard. All we want to do is go for a fun baseball game and now we're into this serious ball. (Mother, family #5)

Diverse parental values as they relate to the purpose of the league (level of "fun" or "seriousness") may also be exacerbated by living in a rural community. Because of the limited numbers to draw from, there was not a house league system, comparable to an urban or sub-urban model. Instead, there was generally only one or two teams that would represent the town, and each of the small towns in the area would then play each other.

Some parents found this model to be positive because everyone was able to play rather than endure competitive try-outs. Moreover, with limited numbers, the players received lots of playing time. As two parents revealed:

Puckville is really good in the fact that whoever signs up, plays. Like I say, Puckville is very good. You signed up, you paid you money, you should play. (Father, family #5)

They have the opportunities because they get more ice time, they're playing on teams that have only 10 skaters, so they're playing every other shift which is a benefit. You're definitely getting your money's worth. (Mother, family #7)

At the same time, other parents were disappointed with the level of competition that the small town could provide. Because there was so few numbers to draw on, children of all skill levels would be on the same team, and this caused significant frustration. It also created a situation where all of the children were not able to participate at a level that they felt comfortable playing.

As these two mothers explained:

The drawing of the caliber of people that you draw from. In a city I think you draw, you have more opportunity and population to draw people. Whereas, in a rural setting, maybe Kathy [reference to family #1 mother] mentioned the same thing when you met with them, but we had 16 players try out for Thomas's team for hockey. That's too many for one team but not enough for two teams. So the level of some of the kids, had always played on a house league team, were now being forced to play on a rep. travel team. And

some of the parents' viewpoints of the hitting, and the checking that goes on, the commitment of traveling, that really wasn't their cup of tea, but they had no choice if they wanted to play. Whereas, in the city, you see the different [opportunities] available, I mean you could have a Double "A" team, an "A" team, [and] a house league team because the numbers are there. (Mother, family #2)

I mean, okay in an "E" centre like Puckville, Sam could skate very, very well, could be playing hockey with somebody who's never skated before. So those would become your lines and it's not fun. It's fun because they're with their friends, but whether they admit it or not, they were as frustrated as we are. Skill level ... you have no choice, everybody makes the team. (Mother, family #3)

Therefore, with a small population to draw from, children were forced to play in the same league even though there were different parental beliefs about the purpose of organized sport (e.g., "for fun" or "for competition"). This in part may shape the basis of parental judgments, with regard to appropriate levels of competition, criticism and/or aggression.

In sum, parents made numerous judgments of other parents who did not provide what was deemed to be appropriate opportunities to participate in organized youth sport activities and/or to enhance their sport skills. Further, this section illustrated the contradictions inherent in the parents' discourse as they are criticized both under-involved and over-involved parenting. That is, parents were highly critical of other parents who were absent from the children's games/practice, and they were also highly critical if they thought other parents were "forcing" their children to play and/or were "too hard" on them. Diverse opinions were also evident related to the type of feedback and support a parent should give their child (e.g., positive and encouraging versus highly critical and harsh). The lack of empathy for socio-economic differences was also revealed as some parents did not recognize other families' circumstances (e.g., limited finances).

Criticizing Parent Spectators

Another aspect of conflicting and contradictory opinions related to parents' behaviours as spectators. Many of the parents talked in great detail about "misbehaving" parents and what they saw as inappropriate behaviour, particularly at children's hockey and baseball games. Narratives of parents yelling and screaming while watching their children play were cited in almost all of the parental interviews. For example, one of the fathers described some of these incidents:

There have been some parents where, well a couple come to mind, a couple mothers, when they are sitting on the bench and it's got to be like all the rest of us. If you're sitting beside her, she just yells the whole time, hanging over the glass just screaming at her kids. You know "Get down there!" or "Hurry up!" or "Get the hell off the ice if you're tired!" and that kind of thing. You know you see it all and again is that a good parent? I don't know. Sometimes some of the things they say, you may be kind of wonder, "geeze!" (Father, family #5)

One mother said that this type of behavior affected where parents chose to sit at games: "We all know parents to sit beside or to not sit beside at a competitive sporting event, for sure. More so probably, well I can think of hockey and ball. That would be your two. You don't see it so much in soccer. A little bit maybe but not very much." (Mother, family #5) Moreover, the inappropriate behaviour became so bad at times, that another father talked about physically separating himself from his wife and the other parents: "Sometimes it gets so bad that if I'm up in the bleachers I'll go stand in the lower part behind the glass. I just can't take it." (Father, family #1)

Other parents talked about the spatial arrangement in which mothers and fathers were often situated in different parts of the arena to watch the game. Both sides seemed to blame the opposite sex for these inappropriate behaviours. For example:

The hockey moms are the worst. Yeah, you want gender, that's the only difference. Honest to God, that's the only difference is hockey moms are a lot worse, majority wise. I mean, if you walk in, whoever's screaming the loudest and chewing at the ref would be a hockey mom. There'll be dads too but there'll be more moms, eh?! Oh yeah, it's funny

that way. That's why guys stand at the one end and the women stand at the other end. (Father, family #3)

Actually, we have one parent on our all girls' hockey team who is a dad and knows he can't control himself a little bit. (*Knows?*) He knows so he sits inside. He never sits out in the cold, partly because he gets too involved, too emotional and I'm like: "Holy crap! He's very competitive!" (Mother, family #5)

In addition to shouting at children, some parents were also seen to use inappropriate behaviours towards referees. One mother, though, who described this kind of behavior, seemed to be primarily concerned with the economic implications:

This past year when Travis's playing Midget hockey I've noticed other teams who just get nasty to the refs and I just don't think that's fair because we are crying for refs all the time and I see how much is spent on refs that you have to get from far away. If you can keep your local ones you know it saves Minor Hockey a lot of money. (Mother, family #6)

Similarly, another commented: "It could be anything from cursing words or just a yell or they start yelling at the referees. Well, sometimes the referees are young and they don't get better if they don't ever ref so you know. You don't want to put the stripes on [reference to the referee's uniform]." (Mother, family #7)

Interestingly, it was often young and inexperienced referees that the parents were yelling at. As illustrated earlier, a good parent was one who was deemed to provide positive support towards their children's sport participation. Yet, this same sentiment did not seem to extend to the support of teenagers who were refereeing the younger children's games. Ironically, this negative parental behaviour at games may impede future leadership opportunities for young adults in organized youth sport. One of the mothers, who had an older son, described why her child did not want to referee:

That's why Travis never wanted to be a ref for hockey. Never wanted that yelling, no. He does umpiring for baseball and by the time baseball is done, he doesn't want to – he wants the season off. I know a lot of kids ref hockey like at his age but he never wanted, never had an interest which really surprised me because he's played hockey for so many years. (Mother, family #6)

It was evident that some parents, even though they disliked loud, critical and “inappropriate” behavior, they also seemed to dismiss such behaviour as normative. As one mother said:

Well, any competitive sport they’ve all witnessed either a coach swearing at refs or parents swearing at umpires. I mean there’s all bad negative stuff with any sport, doesn’t matter which one. (Mother, family #3)

And one father distanced himself from this kind of behaviour:

I don’t take it real serious like some parents if we are having a bad game and bad calls from the refs and stuff like that. They’ll get all excited and yelling and swearing and all that. That’s not me. I couldn’t care less, you know. It’s nice to win but some take it too seriously. (*You led right into my next question, what are you like as a parent?*) I get into it. I like it when we’re winning and I definitely get into the games. But if we’re losing and bad calls – like I said bad calls, I’m not the one standing on top of the bench yelling and screaming and you know, “oh well!” (Father, family #6)

However, some parents seemed to justify this type of behavior under some circumstances.

For example:

There’s a lot of – there are parents who are just screaming in the stands and I’m a yeller from the stands too, but I don’t yell at them [the children]. I may yell that the pucks behind you or whatever but there’s by far ... there’s ones [other parents] who are just – and they are not only yelling at their own kids but they are yelling at all the kids. It’s the kind of thing ... you can yell at your own kid. I don’t care what you do, but don’t yell at mine. (Mother, family #7)

Another good reason given for a spectator to yell was when another player was hurting their child. As one mother revealed, she criticized parents who “yelled”, yet she also justified her own behaviour: “You see parents yelling at the refs all the time. I might get upset sometimes if I see somebody hurting my child. It’s like: “Hey, what was that!” Like that, but I would never yell at my child. (Mother, family #6)

Perhaps one of the most poignant and detailed stories that was shared was when a mother ran over yelling at the other team’s bench when her son was hit by a player from that team. From her perspective, her emotional response was validated due to the circumstance:

I thought he was dead. I thought: “My God he’s dead!” He hit the ice so hard it scared the living crap out of me. I was just furious. So I of course stood there. And they didn’t stop the game right away, because you know, you get a hit and you get back up. While he wasn’t getting back up and I’m banging at the refs, yelling and screaming. And I finally ran around to the side and I was assistant trainer on his bench that year, so normally you’re not supposed to be on the bench. But it was kind of in the moment too. So I went out and the trainer went out to him. And I didn’t go out on the ice right away. Instead I went down to the other team’s bench and freaked out on the coach. I was just so mad; this was the third kid this boy has hurt tonight! I was just frustrated as heck. I wasn’t there that long, just went down and made my point and was like: “Get him off the ice!” (Mother, family #1)

As a result of her behavior during this incident, the mother explained that she had to write a formal letter of apology to the opposing team.

Sometimes behaviours deemed to be inappropriate led to criticisms and discussions between married partners. For example: “There’d be instances where I’d get a little vocal at a ball game or something and she [his wife] wouldn’t appreciate it. (*How do you guys talk about that?*) She points it out to me! (Laughter) (*And is it well-received?*) Most of the time, yes.” (Father, family #2) Moreover, this father also explained that his loud behaviour may be deemed inappropriate by other parents, but he believed that it was still reasonable:

I’ve got a loud voice and it carries well. And it, you know a group of boys and girls that I coach in baseball, they know me from this high [puts hand out at level of his waist] and they know how to take me and respond to me. But some of the new parents coming in they think I’m a little over assertive. But the kids realize, “oh that’s him!” (Laughter) And you know, whether I’m strict or loud or whatever you want to call it, I expect respect and discipline from the children that I’m coaching, and if they don’t give me that, then there’s going to be disciplinary actions. And I’m there for the kids I’m not there for the parents. Parents, I don’t care. If they don’t like it, tough. If the kids are enjoying it and having fun, that’s all that matters to me. (Father, family #2)

Interestingly, one of the fathers who was a volunteer coach talked about the training that he received. He explained that the management and control of mis-behaving parents on his team was not seen as his responsibility:

We take courses when we’re coaching on how to treat kids or whatever. I forget now what the name was – Preventions Course?! (*Oh, interesting.*) It’s basically just watching a video and asking a few questions. They show you a video of the bad dad and the good

dad. (*Do they talk with you on how to handle the bad dad or the bad mom?*) It's really not our job to deal with them really, as being a coach. (*Why do they show you a video of it then?*) Just so we don't as parents. ... When you're on the one side of the ice when you're coaching you can't really see or hear what the parents are doing. When Abby and Sadie's playing I get to sit with the other parents and you kind of hear what they are saying. It's different. (*In what ways is it different?*) Well you just see, hear how they are apprehending the game or seeing the game and sometimes you'll think, are we watching the same game? (Laughter) (Father, family #7)

Further, inappropriate parental behaviour had extended beyond the sport venue into the virtual world. As one mother explained, inappropriate comments had been posted on the league's website by a parent who was upset at the outcome of an earlier game:

In Young Canada week [annual hockey tournament] Iceville beat Jerseyville. That's the first time they had been beat all season, and Iceville is a weak team so it was a big upset. Jerseyville on their website ... the one parent that puts stuff down ... it was nasty because she wasn't taking it [well] that they had lost. It was just nasty against Iceville and I thought, what are you teaching your kids here honey? And I know some girls, like friends of mine, their daughters were very embarrassed by it because it was poor sportsmanship. The daughters were on the team. It showed poor sportsmanship. A mom wrote it and posted it. I mean fine you lost. It was your first loss this season. Suck it up and keep going! But she couldn't do it. ... I mean it's unbelievable what she wrote! (Mother, family #6)

In sum, although organized youth sport consumed family resources (time and money), and shaped family dynamics with home and organizational demands, many of the parents believed it to be a highly valued activity. Consistent with earlier research, the provision of sport opportunities were thought to nurture the children's skills and abilities and prepare them for their adult years. Moreover, the provision of such opportunities was characterized as a necessary characteristic of being a "good parent". The parents' own beliefs were then used to evaluate other parents (in the community, their spouse, and the grandparents) and their moral worth as a good parent. Observations of the other parents' behavior in the community, and their level of involvement/support for their children's activities, as well as their behavior at games, provided the basis for their judgment. The parents' comments also revealed the difficulty and contradictions of being what was perceived to be "supportive" yet not "forceful". Moreover, the

contradictory nature of the “good parent” ideal revealed how parents could be highly critical of both “absent” and over-involved or “badly behaved” parents. Yet they could also sometimes understand and *justify* these issues when they occurred in their own lives.

Chapter VII: The Nexus of Family Experiences

Looking at the family as a whole, and the complexity of the children's and parents' perspectives, the analysis led to the third major theme "The Nexus of Family Experiences". This theme focuses on the commonalities and diversity of the family members' experiences, and the emotions and family dynamics that evolve from the familial interactions. The analysis also reveals the complexity of the decision-making process throughout the entire sport season, and the different and contradictory perspectives and experiences associated with organized youth sport for family members. The two sub-themes: (i) Unwrapping the Complexity of the Decision-Making Process, and (ii) Whose Leisure Is It? are discussed in detail below.

Unwrapping the Complexity of the Decision-Making Process

Similar to earlier research, and as discussed in Chapter V and VI, the data from this present study indicated the most important motivations for children's participation in sports were to enhance their opportunity to socialize with other children, the challenge of the activities, learning the value of competition and commitment, to improve their skills and abilities, to "stay out of trouble", and "to have fun". As the analysis progressed, it also became clear that the decision-making process did not end after registration, and that parents and children were faced with a variety of decisions throughout the entire season. For example, some children decided to end their involvement with a specific sport or a particular team. Akin to earlier research, the reasons included a bad coach, a losing team, experiencing injury and/or performance anxiety, the influence of their peer group, and a loss of interest.

The extensive nature of data from this present study, and the inclusion of parents' and children's perspectives made it possible to examine in more depth the complexity of the decision-making process, and how these decisions were made. Thus, these complex processes are the focus of this sub-theme. The multiple levels of discussion, parental pressure, and the familial tensions that develop are revealed. This sub-theme also shows how the cultural beliefs about gender-appropriate sports (from parents, other children, and broader society) also shape children's decisions about their sport involvement.

On the Surface "It's What the Child Wants"

When asked how the family decided what sports the children will play, almost all of the parents immediately responded with "it's whatever they want to do". Ideologically, there was also a sense of "making it happen" no matter the cost to the family unit, and the resources consumed. One father explained: "The kids seem to be doing what they want. We've never said "No they can't do something". Like we maybe bitch about what it costs because you do have to drive everywhere ... which is getting a little crazy." (Father, family #5)

A critical time for the child's sport involvement decisions occurred at the point of registration. Several of the parents talked about the short discussions that would occur, and many of the children also explained their brief discussions with their parents. As two children described:

We talk about sports around registration time, see what we want to do. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

She'll ask me. She knows I'm not gonna quit hockey cause I miss my team already, like we're having a big party in June with our whole hockey team that I'm really looking forward to. But she knows hands down that I won't quit hockey. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Of interest, too, was the sense that the mothers were more likely to engage in the decision-making conversation with their children. As these participants explained:

Usually, I just, well I think they know I'm going to be playing. But maybe just my mom a little more because she's the one going to sign me up or whatever. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

Usually it's getting close to registration time and so a lot of times you know, the newsletter comes home from school, right, to remind people of registration coming up and usually I'll ask them. I'll say "Are you guys going to play ball this year?" "Yep!" That's usually the most of the discussion that we have. It's not usually a long ... (Mother, family #7)

Yet, at times, it was a difficult decision to make, and it created feelings of angst for the children in making the "right" decision. One of the mothers talked about a process that she used to help her son decide if he wanted to play Triple A hockey for another season. Her strategy was to have her son sit down and write out all the benefits and consequences of his potential decision.

As she explained:

Because he'd been there for 3 years and he played really well, I made him write out the pros and the cons on paper. I made him sit down and write out the pros of staying, the pros of leaving, the pros of coming home [i.e., playing on the local team] and the cons of coming home. So he had to write it out and look at it and visualize it, and he just literally came up with more pros to leave than he did to stay. So I said, "Well your decision is made." (Mother, family #3)

For some families, the children could not decide between sports, and instead chose to play multiple sports in one season. Of significance was that several of the girls in the study were the ones participating in multiple sports within the same season, mainly figure skating and hockey simultaneously. This was due to the fact that many of the girls had started figure skating when they were young; however, girls' hockey had been introduced five years ago. While many of them were eager to start playing hockey, they also had a vested interest in maintaining their participation in figure skating. Thus, rather than having to make the difficult choice of one sport,

they participated in both. For example, family #5 talks about how the decision to participate in multiple sports occurred:

So she thought maybe she'd give it a try [to play hockey], so she asked us and we said it's up to her if she wants to, that's fine, so she did. And she just took right off it was unbelievable. (Father, family #5)

Well I've always done skating and my friends started hockey and I thought I would try it, so you know they obviously let me try it the first year. And the next year they asked me if I wanted to do both and I learned to love hockey just as much as skating. So you know, they were like, "Do you just want to pick one?" They probably just wanted me to pick one, but I love both and I couldn't choose so I just played both. I just have no idea how to decide! (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

However, the decision to participate in multiple activities during the same season also would affect family life, with its already hectic and time stressed schedules. Even though her parents fully supported her decision, they also recognized the consequences and impact it would have on them. As the father and sister revealed:

I don't think there was ever really a question mark as to either "yes she can play" or "no she can't" ... but I'd be lying to you if I told you we didn't think about – because at that time without the hockey thrown into the mix, it seemed like we were running all the time because figure skating kept us hopping, and then with hockey we were thinking like, "Oh God". So now we're going to be, you know, throw a game or two in there and a practice – we're going to have no free time left! You know what I mean? It was just going to be more running and nights away and whatever. (Father, family #5)

That's totally her choice too. Like this year she, it just gets too much so I think she's maybe supposed to pick one that she wanted to do but she ended up doing both. So we'll see how next year works. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

Moreover, even though it was seen "to be a given" that the children would participate in sport, there was some expressed conflict and indecisiveness with this decision. For example, these conflicting statements by a mother and her son, demonstrate a sense of inconsistency with what was expressed by the parents, and how the children may have remembered the experience:

It's pretty much a given that the kids are going to play hockey. Definitely Travis ... there's never a question. Of course he's going to play. (Mother, family #6)

I just started Midget and that's like a 3 year group so people are like a lot older like grade 12s. I was grade 9 then I think. So it was kind of, that's usually when a lot of people stop playing, so I was kind of iffy that year but I knew I wanted to keep playing cause I knew it would get better cause we'd be getting older and like in 3 years time we'd be the oldest with all the younger people. And that would be the last time I'm able to play minor hockey for Puckvillee. (*Did you talk about that with your parents or is that something you keep inside and don't talk about?*) I talked about it with them because I was kind of scared for like the big guys trying to run me over and stuff. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Another comment that clearly indicated the "hidden indecisiveness" and uncertainty was revealed by this young man:

I actually don't think that I've vocalized it [he wants to quit] to my parents. (*Why is that? Why have you kept it inside and not told your parents?*) I don't know. I have always been indecisive as to whether or not I'm going to play. And I always decide, okay I'll play again this year. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Further, the irrevocability of the children's decision to play or not play at the point of registration was revealed by the following quote:

He didn't play, just last year. Daemyn didn't want to play and then he decided he wanted to play, but then it was too late. I said "I'm not registering you late." He had to decide when it's time." ... They have to learn that, no, I'm not paying the extra money for late fees. Not that they always charge you, but it can cost you and extra \$50. So it's like, "You need to be responsible enough to decide if you want to play or not." (Mother, family #1)

I guess we kind of give 'er, well it's hard ... it's in April so ... [Triple A hockey try-outs are in April, for the following season that begins in August]. We kind of give them the choice, then once we're out the door, that's the end of the conversation. (Father, family #3)

Multiple Levels of Discussion and Heightened Familial Tension

As the analysis progressed, it became apparent that the decision-making process was not as simple as "It's what my son or daughter wants". When probed further, the parents in particular, revealed very complex processes with multiple levels of conversation that included and excluded family members from the decision-making process. Moreover, not all familial perspectives were given equal weight in the process. At times it was the parents' perspectives that were more

influential, and at other times it was one parent in particular. It was also revealed that these interactions could create considerable tension between family members.

In some contexts, it was evident that two levels of discussion occurred within the family unit. There was a level of discussion between the parent(s) and the child, and there was a simultaneous level of discussion between the two parents, unbeknownst to the child. For example, one couple revealed how the decision was made, as to whether or not their daughter would play on a higher caliber team, which consumed more of the family's resources:

There's a lot of discussions. Yeah. Not only with Julie and me but you know we talked it over with Kristen too and involved her. We even involved Thomas within it too, obviously because once she moved to Helmutville, you know you're talking a lot of more hours on the road and you know it affects him too [his son]. So, you have to discuss it as a family. (Father, family #2)

I think we as parents have to do a lot of talking first of all, without Kristen, to find out what each other's viewpoint on what was happening at our minor centre ... how that was affecting our family. Secondly, what would be the best route for Kristen and discussing with Kristen how she felt about all of that. There was a lot of decision making to come into place there. And I think it took a lot of communication to get to where we needed to be. As far as making the phone call to make the decision, to see if it was the right decision, that wasn't a hard decision, but it was a matter of getting to the decision of whether that's where we needed to be or not. (Mother, family #2)

These sentiments were echoed by other parents, who revealed that in bed late at night, or over an early morning coffee, they would have private conversations without their children, discussing what they thought would be the best decision. Once again, the children were asked for their thoughts, however, on a separate occasion:

Oh yeah, like we, I'd say it goes both ways. Like we've had, like when she was wanting to do it, we had discussions with her and then Wanda and I would talk later like at like 11:00 o'clock or lying in bed and it's like okay what do you think, are you game for this or do you think she should or I know she really wants to. So we discuss that kind of thing. So I would say both ways, I think it's good if it involves your kids, you've got to talk with them about it. I think every parent would talk between the two of them on their own about it. (Father, family #5)

In bed at night or in the morning if he gets up, if we're both up in the morning over a coffee. I'm not even sure if Spence knew I wasn't for it. He might of, I don't know if he

did or not. (*What happens with your conversations?*) Well, those conversations, those are just for Stewart and I. There's lots of conversations that we have in front of the boys, but when it's just Stewart and I deciding, we would bring Spence into it, "Tell us why you want to do it?", you know, "Do you remember what you felt like that year?", "Do you really want to do that again?" (Mother, family #3)

The idea of multiple levels of decision-making, and the private nature of the parents' conversations about their child's sport participation, was supported in the children's interviews. Almost all of the children revealed that they were able to play whatever they wanted to. In the 19 interviews conducted with the children, not a single participant mentioned the discussions that their parents might have that they were excluded from. All of the children's responses were typically defined by statements such as "We usually get to choose what we want to do." (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4), and, "It's whatever I choose." (Youngest child, female, age 12, family #5)

Moreover, when asked if they had ever seen their parents disagree about something related to their sports, none of them drew upon incidents related to the decision-making process. However, heightened conflict between parents was evident, when there was disagreement as to the best sport participation decision. There was also a somewhat of a gendered nature to the final outcome of these disagreements. Because the mothers were, for the most part, responsible for the facilitation of their children's sport activities, they were also the family's primary decision-makers as to their children's frequency and type of sport participation. Two mothers described how they essentially made these decisions with their children, while at the same time their husbands were excluded from the discussion and/or there was an expression of irritableness about the final decision:

I think, he likes the hockey. Sometimes he might think I'm just a little crazy putting them in stuff, but he doesn't see the reasoning behind figure skating, the purpose of it, but the kids enjoy it. Sometimes I think some things he doesn't see a purpose to ... but as long as the kids are enjoying it and I'm able. (*Is Jacob involved in the decision-making process?*) No ... me and the kids, because I do the majority of the running. (Mother, family #6)

I know sometimes he'll get frustrated about, "Do they have to do that?" ... I think we leave David right out of it, because he doesn't do the driving so it doesn't matter. We kind of ... like I know sometimes he's not very happy with us going to Urbanville [1 hour drive away], but you know really we can't go to Suburbanville [location of a specialty figure skating camp] and not do that. Without understanding all that so, I think sometimes it's just he doesn't like the topsy turvy lifestyle we live. His mom stayed at home and the house is always tidy and our house isn't. It isn't always like that; I think that's what bothers him more than anything else. Lots of times we'll go through, like in the summer sometimes he'll work from 6 to 10 and we hardly see each other to actually make any, have any like that's just because of his type of work and if he's busy and if he does come home you don't want to be talking to him because he's tired and grumpy and hungry and you know, so we've had to just kind of do our own thing, make those decisions so I don't, we don't usually really talk a whole lot about those sort of things. (Mother, family #4)

As this father explained, he preferred to let his wife make their children's sport participation decisions, to avoid any further confrontation:

I give in. To me it's just not worth fighting. If she gets her mind made then I'm not gonna argue. I'm not gonna cause a big hassle over it, so. I just probably give in and say "Do it your way." Cause it doesn't matter. Like when it comes down to it, it's just, I don't like making a big deal over nothing. She usually has last call. (Father, family #1)

It was clear, too, that the higher the competition level of the sport, the more involved the fathers were in the decision-making process. In fact the parents in family #3 expressed considerable disagreement over the decision for their one child to go back to playing Triple A hockey after a year off. As they animatedly explained:

(Were you and Amy on the same page as to whether or not he went back to Triple A hockey?) NO! [Sarcastic tone.] No, it was up to me to take him. She didn't want to do it this year because of the time commitment involved on us. Like I said, Amy wasn't crazy about it. She was "You're doing all the running!" [Sarcastic tone.] (Father, family #3)

Well, I told him he was crazy. Like I don't want to do this, this year. Look at how much easier it was for us last year. We had a whole year off right and I was like "Oh my God, it was so much easier!" *(How long did that conversation happen between you and your husband?)* Oh weeks. I don't even think I took Spence to many try-outs. I wasn't interested. I didn't probably take him to a lot of try-outs. It was basically Stewart who said I'll pay for it, I'll do the running. He does a lot of practices, but I mean, it was emotional at the time that I didn't want to do it. Am I glad that we did? ... Absolutely! (Mother, family #3)

Moreover, the emotional response for her son's safety and the physicality of the Triple A hockey was also a concern for her: "It took a lot of convincing for me to sign that card. Like I was crying because I really didn't want him to sign that card. His dad really wanted him to sign that card. I didn't want him to. He's a small boy, I knew it would be a tough go on him." (Mother, family #3)

Heightened tension with other aspects of family life outside of the sport domain, and the dynamics between husband and wife, were also affected. As the one mother further explained: "Little digs. Well, I'd always be, "Well it's your decision!" "You knew it!" You know, sure it would carry over. Just maybe more arguments, more tension, nothing really serious, but little digs. "You better oil lots of cars, because I'm not paying for it!" (Mother, family #3)

Interestingly, the children in family #3 seemed completely unaware that their mother had reservations about them playing Triple A hockey. Their responses suggested that there was minimal conflict in the decision-making process as it related to their sport involvement. Two of the boys said: "They usually have the same point of view on most things. I can't remember a time when I seen them disagree on something." (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3), and, "Not with my sports." (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Underlying Parental Pressures

It became evident, as the analysis progressed, that the decision-making process was deeply influenced by the parents' own perspectives and what they deemed to be in the best interest of the child. Parental pressures were discovered in relation to the parents' sport preferences, the resources (time and money) required to facilitate participation, and the parents' notions of commitment or 'sticking it out'. These parental pressures are revealed in detail in this section.

The parental influence for the children to participate in a particular sport was particularly apparent when talking about the younger children's experiences. As one mother explained, the

decision to play at a higher caliber was primarily the parents' decision due to their daughter's age at the time (approximately 9 or 10 years old):

And Kristen was still pretty young, so she didn't totally understand ... it was not something she was quite understanding as to why they [the coaches and Board of Directors] wanted her to do this, she just wanted to play hockey, you know, she just wanted to play hockey! I think there was a lot of trying to bring it down to her level to understand what was happening about the situation in general. (Mother, family #2)

Moreover, it was clear too, that there were times when the younger children did not want to play a specific sport, or were pressured to play a sport that was more aligned with the parents' sport preference. As one mother revealed, her son expressed some opposition to playing hockey in his early years: "Well, for Devin we didn't think he'd ever play hockey. The first time when he stood on the ice he just screamed and balled and cried. He's like "I'm never playing hockey". So like when you look at those years and you see them slowly get into it and stuff ..." (Mother, family #1) These sentiments were echoed by another father, who in detail, reflected on his oldest son's experiences almost a decade ago:

The oldest one, he'd be sacred shitless. And often you'd drag him in and he'd be crying and they'd [other parents] be going "What the heck, what are you bringing him for?" "He wants to." (*So how did you work with him in that situation?*) We just waited him out. We sat there on time, I bet you he only played the last 10 minutes of one game. (*So you would constantly encourage him to get out?*) No, just say "are you ready to go yet? Cause we're not leaving. You're sitting there 'til the game's over!" (*Oh, you made him stay for the whole game?*) 'Til he went out. Because if you just stop and let them win, then he doesn't learn nothing. (Father, family #3)

Another comment by one father also exemplified his sport preferences that may have indirectly persuaded his children to play a particular sport. His interesting use of terminology in the interview with words such as "force", "guide", and "let" revealed how he felt about different types of sports: "I don't feel that either Julie or I have *forced* them to do anything, you know. We *guided* them maybe towards hockey and baseball, and we *let* them play soccer for one or two years and, you know, it wasn't for them and they decided on baseball." (Father, family #2) As an

avid baseball fan and coach in the minor baseball league, perhaps the father's subtle sport preferences indirectly impacted the children's decision-making process.

Other comments revealed that it was easier for the children to decide to quit, when there was little parental interest in the sport. For family #1, the father had clearly stated in an earlier theme that he found baseball to be boring. Accordingly, when the decision had to be made to sign-up for another season, there was little resistance (and perhaps even encouragement) when these brothers wanted to end playing baseball:

Yeah, baseball ... when I quit ... I don't think they cared. (Middle child, male, age 13, family #1)

My mom and dad actually thought it was good because they do enough moving around in hockey. They got a break. And sometimes ... like every other year, our teams gets better and worse, and sometimes ... I like it and sometimes I don't. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

The children's adoption of their parents' perspective (and giving in to the pressure) was clearly evident in the following mother's and daughter's explanation of why the daughter chose baseball over soccer:

And I guess, maybe I'm trying to steer her towards the baseball. I play ball or I used to play ball ... and I think, it's very social and you can play ball for years. You know, there's not many 30 yr. olds still playing soccer. And Stickville has always been a big ball community, so I think, there's more old timer ball as much as there is young in Puckville ... 35 and older playing. ... I think that ball is a sport that they can play for years, whereas soccer, not so much! (Mother, family #7)

Well we started playing baseball because baseball is fun just like soccer, but you think about it, like 20 years from now when you're an adult, you'll still be able to play baseball, but you probably won't be able to run around the soccer field. (*Oh, why do you think that?*) I don't know, I always run around the soccer field. (*Does your mom still play?*) Yep, she still plays baseball. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

Similarly, the children's reflections on their sport experiences subtly revealed the parental persuasion that occurred during the decision-making process. When two of the youngest

participants talked about some of their experiences, there was some suggestion of parental influence on their sport choices:

This year I didn't really want to play baseball and I wanted to play soccer but my mom said that, um, "You get all dirty and there will be no playground to play after the game". (*Right, there would be no what after the game?*) Um, you couldn't play on the playground after the game. (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7)

(*So tell me a little about when you made the decision to stop figure skating?*) Well, I didn't really make the decision, my mom just offered it and I said "Sure, just try something else." Cause it's the same payment, but I'm on the ice more. Hockey was on Wednesday and Sunday for the same price, so hockey's better. And it's better for my schedule. (*So you quit figure skating and then started playing hockey?*) Yeah, this is my first year of hockey after taking figure skating for like 6 years. (*Were you okay with that or how did you feel?*) I was a little upset because my best friend, my best friend was still taking it and then I was kind of happy because my other best friend was on my hockey team. So it wasn't that bad. (*So what did you dad think?*) He said that I needed a change too because I'd been taking figure skating for a long time and he doesn't really like figure skating so he wanted me to switch to hockey and get more aggressive. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

As evident in the above quote, at times, the children's responses appeared to reflect ideas that had adult reasoning and parental undertones such as financial implications.

The family resources (time and money) also appeared to create parental pressure in coaxing the child towards a particular decision. This was predominantly evident in higher caliber sports that consumed more of the parents' time and the families' finances. Once again, undertones of parental support in the first quote, or lack of support in the second quote, were evident when the discussions occurred with the children:

The conversation with Sam was, simply, "Ok, if you want to be a hockey player, this is your best way in and we'll do this for you, but you have to give up ... he's a social butterfly." He's got his mother's blood right?! I said you gotta give up, remember, you are giving up your weekends. You're giving up tobogganing and snowmobiling. Which it didn't work out that badly anyways, he had a few free Saturdays. Like my parents didn't say to me "If you want, if you express interest in this ...", and honestly, you're not gonna regret it. Like I said when you see these guys playing Junior B and high quality hockey, and they're gonna be really good hockey players. (Father, family #3)

But we told her, "It's quite a bit of money and it's a lot of driving, a lot of traveling." If she went and did that, that would definitely hurt the other two as far as their's ... We

asked her if she wanted to play that much hockey and she basically said, “Well would I have time to go snowmobiling and stuff like that?” “No, you’d be away playing hockey.” “Well, then I don’t want to play that much hockey, I want to play in Puckville”. (*She really wanted to stay as well? As a parent were you a little relieved?*) Oh yeah. But then you hear how they are doing in the paper and think well Larissa could have been on that team or Abby could’ve been on that team. (Father, family #7)

For some families, the issue of social mobility was also seen as a contributing discussion point in the decision-making process. As these two fathers revealed, they saw their child’s participation in a higher caliber league, as a vehicle to help them later in life. For the first father it was through the potential for a scholarship, and for the second father it was showing his son the lifestyle of the upper class:

As far as Kristen’s hockey goes, you know whether anything becomes of it or not, you always have the scholarship end of it at the back of your mind. (Father, family #2)

You see the good and the bad. Like with the Triple A it’s neat because you got all levels of society, you’ve got the poor people, rich and middle class. And like I said, some kids can’t play. And us, like we give up everything, we’re more or less the poor people and there’s teams, guys on Spence’s team, there’s two millionaires on the team right? And it was good ’cause they always hear me bitching to [do well] in school. And I’ll say “You’re not living my life. Do you want to be like us or do you want to be like them?” ... Nice people, they’re all good people. And they could see that everybody’s the same ... the only difference is their vehicles actually going to make it to the game no problem. (Father, family #3)

The parents’ notion of commitment also appeared to create instances of parental pressure in coaxing the child towards a particular decision. The decision-making process continued throughout the season, when the children expressed their desire to quit their sport involvement. Only one family expressed a sense of the parents’ unconditional support for the decision to quit mid-way through the season, as exemplified by the one child’s comment:

Like I’ve been really frustrated lately. There was a point where I kind of actually wanted to quit. And my mom, she said “If you hate it so much”, and she knows I enjoy the sport a lot, and she could see that I wasn’t having a great time, so she said “If I wanted to drop it for this year, I could”. But I was already involved in it and thought maybe things would work out. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

For the majority of the families, it appeared that there was the potential for conflict between parent-child if the child wanted to quit mid-season. As one of the fathers explained, once a decision was made there was no turning back:

Would I be disappointed if they quit? Probably, yeah. But I'm not gonna, but once they sign up they're committed. So they finish their year. And then the following year, if they don't want to play then that's fine. (Father, Family #1)

Once again, a sense of the financial investment appeared to heighten the parental disagreement with their children to end their involvement mid-way through the season, and thus they reinforced the notion of "sticking it out". For example:

Skating, last year I kind of wanted to quit. I wasn't really enjoying it at all. (*So how come you decided to keep with it and didn't quit?*) I think it was because my mom's already paid for it and I have to do this because I'm not wasting money. (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Sometimes, you know she just wanted to stay home. I said "no, you've got power skating and we've paid our money. You know it will help you ..." because a lot of the girls had been playing for years at her age and she was one of the weakest. So with power skating it did help develop that and which she understood that when she started playing hockey she needed that extra little help. She's not power skating next year though. She's already said that. (Mother, family #6)

As one set of parents revealed, a sense of stress between parent-child, and also husband-wife, could develop if there were opposing views on whether or not the child should fulfill their commitment to a team:

We came home and I said: "It's your decision. If you're not going to play, you're done this year". Like I said, "we're not going to do I want to play, I don't want to play, I want to play, I don't want to play" kind of thing right. That was kind of with baseball, that kind of jump too. So he finally said, "no I want to play". And we've had different times after a bad game where they're like "I'm not going to play anymore". And you know it's like, "I can't make you play, but we have paid for it and you need to finish up the year". (Mother, family #1)

Well Kathy and I were split on that because she was, "You can't quit!" Where I said, "If he wants to quit he can quit." Like, I don't have a problem with that. Eventually it got to the point with Kathy where it was like, "You go tell your coach you're done!" So, there's one bad game and he's come home and said "That's it, he's quit." And then come practice

time he says he's going back. And that was the last time we heard of him wanting to quit throughout the year. (Father, family #1)

Moreover, as the mother further explained, an outside group entered into the decision-making process as his teammates and other parents on the team also reasoned with him not to quit: "I think some boys talked him into coming back. Well, actually one of the parents said "Devin you've got to come back and play. You're part of the team, you've got to be there with them" kind of thing." (Mother, family #1) Consequently, the child did not quit the team:

Half way through the season I wanted to quit because we don't have really good team. And we kept getting blown out all the time, so I was getting mad and so I didn't want to play, but I came back. (*How did your mom and dad react when you said you wanted to quit?*) They kind of understood why because we didn't have a good team. But then, they said to think about it, and I decided to stay. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

Of interest, too, was the discovery that in all the interviews conducted there was only one situation of a child quitting mid-season, although, there were multiple situations where the desire was expressed by the children and confirmed by the parents. A sense of commitment and seeing something through to the end was an important parenting lesson: "I'm big on making the kids follow through. If you commit to something, then you need to follow through." (Mother, family #7)

There was one particular situation of a child who wanted to leave his team mid-way through the season that stood out from the others, and occupied a significant portion of the family members' interviews. The description of this situation illustrates how many of the concepts in this sub-theme are *integrated* during the decision-making process, and do not occur in isolation from one another. The complexity of the decision-making process, the multiple levels of discussion, the underlying parental pressure, and the familial tensions that developed are revealed in this particular experience. Moreover, it demonstrates a situation seen both as the child's *choice* and also the issue of commitment to stick out the season, no matter how the circumstances and

experiences might affect the child. Finally, this example also shows how at times the communication line between parent and child can be authoritarian in nature, and indeed, in reality the decision is not as simple as “what the child wants”.

As the mother explained, in this particular situation, her son wanted to quit playing Triple A hockey because of a bad coach. The nature of the coaching behaviour was revealed by the mother in this passage:

His coach told him: “Mom and dad know nothing. You don’t tell them what goes on in a dressing room. This is our time, this is our private time.” We weren’t allowed in and they wouldn’t let us. That’s a bad coach, and that’s what they do. So Sam never told us a lot of it. What I’m telling you now is what we learned long after the fact ... we knew there was a lot of yelling, well okay, he’s not right at Sam [yelling directly at him], so he’s probably safe enough. (Mother, family #3)

The decision to stay committed to the team or to quit was a difficult decision for both the mother and the child. As the next passage revealed, there was considerable emotional strife during this decision-making process:

It was really hard to decide what to do. I didn’t feel like his coach was abusing Sam, I knew he was screaming and yelling really hard at the other kids, so I felt bad for those kids. I didn’t want Sam in that and I think coach realized if he ever yelled like that at Sam, he would break, he would have. So I think Sam had to kind of learn how to block out the yelling and throwing of things in the dressing room and tough it out. And you know he learned from that, sometimes you have to tough it out. You signed up Sam, we can’t do anything about it. Because he wasn’t directly abusive to Sam. If he had been directly abusive we would have yanked him then. We didn’t take him to [Triple A] try-outs the next year, and he came home and played [with the local team] until there was a different [Triple A] coach. But it was really hard. (Mother, family #3)

However, at the same time, his father, who felt he had missed his own opportunity to play at a higher caliber of hockey in his own childhood, tried to reason with his son and placed pressure on him to continue playing. As the child explained:

Yeah, I wanted to quit hockey one year because the coach wasn’t the nicest. (*So tell me a bit about it, what happened?*) He just yelled a lot and stuff. (*So why did you decide to keep playing, you’re still playing this year?*) Well, this year there was a different coach and he was really nice. He didn’t yell or in your face or anything like that. (*How did you dad react when you wanted to quit? Did you tell your parents?*) He [his father] was trying

to make me keep playing. (*How did he do that?*) He just told me to, not to think about that and stuff. (*And how did that make you feel?*) Better. (*How did you mom feel?*) Same as my dad. (*Do you think that you could've quit if you wanted to or you had to stick it out?*) I had to tough it out. (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

Once this significant decision was made mid-season, it was also evident that the communication channels between the parents and the child were shut down, and further discussion was no longer permitted:

“Are you sure buddy?” “Yeah.” “Well then we won’t talk about it anymore. You’re here. Tough it out. Suck it up.” Did he ever complain? Could I tell in his eyes? Yeah. But he stuck it out. He had his bag packed and went out the door. Did I want to go? I didn’t want to go. Because I knew he hated it ... I hated it. But he signed. He made a commitment. “Make good *choices* buddy!” (Mother, family #3)

Ideological Gender Equality versus Cultural Reality

The influence and underlying pressures by family members, other children, and broader society, as they related to cultural values of gender-appropriate activities, also shaped the children’s decisions for their sport involvement. On the surface it appeared that children could choose any sport activity they wanted. It was also evident, though, that stigma and stereotyping influenced their decisions for their sport involvement at a deeper level. All participants were asked an open-ended question about what they thought about girls and boys playing non-traditional sports (i.e., girls playing hockey and boys figure skating). For the majority of mothers, fathers, and children, their initial response indicated a perception of “fairness” and “equality” for both girls and boys, and their right to play any sport they may choose. Further, the notion of equality was often expressed in very concise and short answer responses.

However, the cultural reality for young boys was that they were quite limited in their sport decisions, and gender stereotypes still shaped their sport involvement. For example, some parents who did *not* have any sons responded that it was socially acceptable for young boys to

become a figure skater, and believed that they should have the opportunity to pursue this option if they were interested:

Oh, I think so. Now there isn't many male figure skaters in our group, but I think there's more that are maybe taking dancing or that kind of thing. (Father, family #5)

Yes. Actually, my brother-in-law used to teach figure skating and all he has are boys. Neither of his boys play hockey or figure skate. He taught my cousin figure skating for many years. (Mother, family #7)

Yet, the majority of the fathers, both with sons and without, did not respond directly to the question of equal opportunity as it related to young boys. Instead, their response alluded to the difficulties that boys who figure skated might encounter. For example, one father without sons noted:

“It might be a little tougher for a boy that's figure skated. (*Why is that?*) Figure skating, maybe just the thought of it as, it's not quite as boyish or manly. But the way the girls can skate on Larissa's team that figure skate too, every boy should take figure skating. They're just amazing skaters.” (Father, family #7)

The indirect response towards the notion of equality and the difficulties a boy would encounter was also echoed by a father whose son played hockey, while his daughters played hockey and figure skated. He also expressed some relief that he never had to encounter his own son wanting to figure skate, although he also did not recognize the potential influence he had on this decision:

Well there's definitely more girls figure skating than boys, but I don't know if Puckville has any or not. But, there are male figure skaters for sure, but I don't think there is any, not that I know of anyways that do both. Like a lot of the girls figure skate and play hockey but I don't know of any boy that plays hockey and figure skates. (*Would you have been comfortable if Travis wanted to figure skate?*) Yeah sure. He didn't want to so we didn't have to! [Laughter] (*Didn't have to cross that bridge?*) Yeah – NO! (*Did you help encourage Travis to play hockey?*) Yeah. (Father, family #6)

The children's perspectives on the boys' opportunities to participate in non-traditional sports were somewhat reflective of their own personal experiences and what they saw in the sporting community. For example, many of the female figure skaters believed that boys should

have the opportunity to figure skate and referred to the one boy who was a member of their club.

As a young figure skater explained:

Guys can figure skate because I remember in my level, when I was in level six I think, there was a boy. (*Was there?*) Yeah, so it just, it's whether they enjoy it or they're not scared to do it. (*Why would they be scared to do it?*) Because they'd be embarrassed because usually there's only girls in figure skating and he was like the only guy. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

In contrast, the young male participants were hesitant to say that boys should actually have the opportunity to play any sport they wanted, including non-traditional activities such as figure skating. The interviews became somewhat strained as the open-ended question concerning male sport participation was asked of them. As one male child stated: "I wish I could say the same things as what I said for the girl answer, but well, I don't know. It would be kind of weird if like ... I don't know any guys who figure skate so." (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

As the children revealed, the struggle for boys to participate in non-traditional sports was influenced by the negative repercussions with their peer groups. It was evident that boys who chose to participate in an activity such as figure skating would receive banter and mockery from their friends. As one young girl expressed it: "Yeah, I think that anyone should be able to do anything. It's just they ... they have to like believe and don't listen to their friends saying: 'Oh that's a girl's sport'." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4) Additionally, a male child revealed what would happen within his peer group if one of his friends decided to figure skate: "He'd take a beating that's for sure. But if he really wanted to do it then you know, good for him. Shouldn't let us lippin' him off I guess you would say ... he shouldn't let them stop him from doing what he wants to do." (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6) Moreover, one young male blatantly showed his disgust and disapproval towards the idea of male figure skaters: "I don't agree with that. I don't think they should. [Mocking laughter as he shakes his head.] (*Why is*

that?) It's just weird watching them because they'll be like hundreds of girls and they'll be like 5 guys. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4)

Other difficulties related to the negative connotations of being a male figure skater and their sexuality. As the oldest female in the study explained, she thought that boys should have the opportunity to participate in figure skating; however, there were others who made judgment upon those who did:

Like I have a partner who I dance with who is male and I don't see any reason, but obviously other people have different opinions on that. (*What are some of the other opinions that you hear or see?*) Well, many people view them as being gay, but it's not always that way. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

The sentiment that connected why young boys remained in traditionally masculine sport related to societal stereotypes and the questioning of a male figure skater's sexuality. This was echoed by one of the mothers:

I think in rural Ontario, I think it is a stereotype. We actually have a client that used to be a figure skater. I laughed because one of the girls said: "Oh, he's one of those gay figure skaters!" (*Really?*) He's not, he's married. He's got three kids. But you know, I guess it's a perception and it only took one or two people to be that way and then it's a perception. (Mother, family #7)

Another parent related the lack of male figure skaters to rural values. He had stated earlier that it was okay for boys to participate in both traditional and non-traditional sports. When asked why there were not many male figure skaters in the local club, he responded:

Male figure skaters ... I think because a rural area plays into that a little bit. Now I don't know how to say this without trying to sound ... (*I've heard it all!*) Well long story, short. You take a boy off the farm or a guy, a male kid that grew up in the country. I think back to the way Bert, Jacob and I grew up, you know we had go-carts and mini-bikes and we were racing around and doing that kind of thing and to me that seems more, something like a boy, the way he goes kind of thing. ... I just think from growing up in the country, they are more apt to be the hockey player. Does that make sense? (Father, family #5)

For this father in particular, he believed that boys were socialized to enjoy more "masculine" activities, and this, influenced their sport choice decisions.

The idea and reality of equality was clearer for the young women as all but one of the girls played hockey. The only girl who did not play hockey was the oldest female participant who went through her pre-adolescent years before the start of girls' hockey in this community. The participants' responses also indicated the concept of equal opportunity for the young women. As one father explained, he believed his daughters could do anything they wanted: "I think it's fairly wide open for them to pick and choose what they want to do." (Father, family #7) This sentiment was echoed by a young male who had no sisters, and stated that girls should have the opportunity to play hockey: "If they want to play they can play. There's no issue, like why they can't play." (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

In fact, six out of ten of the girls who were interviewed for this study simultaneously enjoyed the opportunity to play both hockey and figure skating, at some point in their lives. As one young female explained, she believed that girls should have the opportunity to play whatever they wanted to, and described how in reality this became true for her hockey teammates: "Well I like hockey, I don't think I'd figure skate. I think it's just whatever they want, like half of our team; they're figure skaters and hockey players. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

Moreover, it became clear that there was a sense of broadening perspectives about femininity. Many of the participants, and particularly the mothers, talked about changing perspectives as it related to their daughters' participation in hockey. For some women, their own beliefs had been transformed, and for others, there was an awareness of a broader societal shift. They perceived that young women could now enjoy some of the previously exclusive masculine activities:

They can definitely play hockey. It's really come a long way. I think things are changing. I think you find more and more girls doing that. It just was never a girl's sport for me back then. It didn't make sense. They love it! (Mother, family #6)

And I think you are seeing a lot more changes in theory about what a female can do as far as a sport in general is concerned. So I think there are changes for the better involved for the future ... I think kids today in general look at the household and the family differently than even you and I growing up ... our grandchildren and the next future generations are going to have different opportunities and see things in a different way. (Mother, family #2)

Yet, it was clear too that the sense of change experienced by the mothers had varying degrees.

For example, most women felt that their own families embodied an egalitarian lens towards their sons' and daughters' sport participation, whereas broader society still valued men's sport more than women's sport:

I think girls are very much as accepted. I'm not sure that the view of society is quite the same. You listen to different people involved in different sports, and I still think the attraction in hockey comes from the NHL and male hockey, you know. Women's hockey really hasn't got the same kind of threshold or pull to it. I think there's very, very wonderful female athletic people out there, but I'm not sure society views it the same. As a household, as a family, I don't see that at all. (Mother, family #2)

Another mother, who had three daughters and was involved in the initial start-up of girls' hockey in the community, indicated that inferior opinions of girls' hockey were evident locally.

Moreover, it was suggested that the individuals who felt that girls' hockey was mediocre to boys' hockey were fathers who did not have any daughters:

You always have the parents and that ... it's mostly male. They don't think that the girls' is as good a hockey and there will still always be those people. (*Are they the same dads who have daughters or do they not?*) I would say most of them don't. But there's also people that if they came to - we have one mom and her sister, her boys, two out of three boys played triple A boys hockey and she came to the yearend tournament and we won in triple overtime. Beat a team we've never beat before all year and Abby scored after triple overtime and she goes, "I don't know why people don't come and watch girls' hockey, it's such good hockey" and it is good hockey but there's still that stereotype that its girls' hockey. (Mother, family #7)

Conversely, several of the fathers who had daughters that played hockey expressed a sense of equal opportunity for the young women's participation in a traditionally masculine sport. Unlike the mothers, they did not sense diverse opinions connected to the quality of girls' hockey and their respective abilities on any level. For example, one of the fathers whose wife was cited

above, indicated that: “From a society standpoint, I don’t believe there’s any discrimination at all.” (Father, family #2) Another father noted the changes that had occurred since the onset of girls’ hockey in recent years. When asked if there were more gender-appropriate sports for girls, he responded: “No, I don’t think so. Not anymore. I think that has really changed in the last, even 5 or 8 years. Girls’ hockey is really ... the last couple of years has become really popular.” (Father, family #6)

The sense of changing perspectives to girls’ gender-appropriate sport participation extended to one of the fathers in the study who did not have any daughters. Throughout the interview, this father had expressed some statements that were more reflective of traditional values of femininity and masculinity. The following passage reflects some of the conflicting viewpoints he had about gender issues:

People in their 50’s ... that’s the lucky generation that the guy got to go out and work and the wife got to stay at home. You could afford to do that, whereas now things are changing. I think people understand. Well and of course now you can’t say: “Oh you skate like a girl!” or whatever or “You play like a girl!” because girls usually are better. Anybody who actually understands the sport knows that girls usually develop quicker as a skater. (Father, family #3)

In sum, on the surface it appeared that the children made their own decisions, but underlying this discourse was a sense of parents’ exclusionary discussions without the children, and the subtle and not so subtle pressure exerted by the parents. At times, the children were coaxed in a particular direction and this was shaped by parental pressure related to the family resources (e.g., time, money), parents’ preferences for specific sports, and parents’ notion of commitment and “sticking it out”.

Moreover, underlying pressures by family members, other children, and broader society, as they related to cultural values of gender-appropriate activities, shaped the children’s decisions for their sport involvement. Although on the surface it appeared that children could choose any

sport activity they wanted, it was also evident that stigma and stereotyping influenced their decisions for their sport involvement at a deeper level. The notion of “ideological equality” versus “cultural reality” revealed deeply entrenched opposition to changing ideals of gender appropriate activities, and it was particularly apparent for the young boys. In contrast, the young women’s sport decisions were less controlled with broadening perspectives of femininity. At the same time, this may also further represent and reinforce broader cultural values related to the inferiority of women and their sporting practices (i.e., it’s okay for girls to play boys’ sports and this may even be a “step up”). For that reason, boys who decide to participate in “inferior” girls’ sports will encounter greater stigma and stereotypes.

Whose Leisure Is It?

Parental pressure may also be an outcome of the enjoyment that other family members experience during the children’s sport involvement. In that, family members may “guide” children towards a particular sport if they also receive benefits from their participation. In order to better understand decisions and meanings related to youth sports and the family context, the nature of leisure-like experiences also emerged as an important focus of analysis. This led to the development of the sub-theme “Whose Leisure Is It?”. It became evident that there were a variety of other opportunities family members enjoyed and valued related to the child’s sport participation. Organized youth sport provided the opportunity to enhance relationships within the family unit, and it also created strong connections and friendships with other community members. Yet, at the same time, the parents and siblings expressed contradictory moments of both enjoyment and dissatisfaction, depending on competing interests. Thus, this sub-theme focuses on leisure experiences and meanings for the individual family members, and the family

unit as a collective group, associated with children's sport involvement. In this sub-theme particular attention is paid to the parents' experiences, as well as the children's leisure experiences in reference to their siblings' sport involvement.

Finding Moments of Leisure during Their Children's Sport Participation

As discussed in earlier themes, children's involvement in organized youth sport created hectic schedules and additional responsibilities to the sport organization for parents. However, at the same time moments of leisure could be found during their children's sport participation. For example, once parents were at the sport venue, organized youth sport was seen to provide a sense of relaxation after a hectic day. Watching their children play, provided the parents with the opportunity to be free from other work and domestic responsibilities. This sentiment was revealed by several of the parents, particularly the mothers, as well as the oldest child in the study:

It just kind of takes your mind away from everything else. You kind of get into their mode. You get cheering for them. You know, it just kind of takes stress back, you know? What my house looks like or something that day or you know stuff like that. It kind of takes that away. (Mother, family #1)

She [her mother] just loves ... I think it's kind of relaxing time for her. She just gets to sit out and watch soccer you know. Because she's been going all day and then you get there ... she likes that. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

The social benefit of their children's organized sport participation was clearly evident. Even though organized youth sport was initially for the children's benefit, it became apparent that the parents also enjoyed the social aspect of their children's participation in the activities. Almost all of the parents talked in great detail about the social connections that they had formed over the years. In essence, the relationships that the parents had developed with other parents on their children's teams, had become a major part of their social world:

I like being a part of the team and the people that are there, it's fun. You make really good friends. The kids make good friends. (Mother, family #3)

It actually becomes your social ... I remember for the first little bit, thinking about hockey. I was thinking, I am not becoming a hockey mother. No, no, no – we're not doing that!!! Now, I love it. (*Do you?*) I do, I really like it! I like the social aspect of it. (Mother, family #5)

At times, the arena became a social hub for the parents, where they were clearly not watching their children's participation. For example, fathers would go out to breakfast together while their children practiced, and some mothers would visit their friends while their children were not even playing:

Sometimes they would have like a 7:00 am practice and the guys go out for breakfast and they like doing that so. (*Really?*) Yeah, they'll go out and have breakfast. The kids are on the ice and the dads will go for breakfast. I think it's great because Jacob's not involved in sports or nothing but it's nice that he has that too. (Mother, family #6)

She's a social person too. She likes to talk to her friends and that. Where, you know, if our boys weren't playing, like she'll even go watch other kids. Like, I wouldn't do that. If my boys aren't playing. (Father, family #1)

The weekend tournaments were also deemed to be a social event. Some of the parents viewed the weekend away as their time to kick back and have some fun. As one father explained: "Like, they try to have one far tournament, but that's like a weekend getaway, I think it's more for the parents than the kids. (*Do you enjoy it?*) Yeah. Usually if you're spending a weekend then you get a motel somewhere and the kids hang out and the parents hang out together." (Father, family #1) However, as his wife revealed, diverse perceptions, reflecting some of the previously discussed tensions around the politics of youth sport organizations, were also evident for the nature of the tournament experience:

There's different groups of parents. We like to have fun, and then there's some people that are so serious, and you know, they're, I don't know, they just think ... you know that if you're back at a motel, we'd have a couple of drinks with friends and stuff there. Whereas, the other ones thinking we're crazy! Well, its if we're going to be away its going to be our weekend too, right? (Mother, family #1)

Similarly, several of the older children in the study were also aware of the social connections that their parents made with other parents, and how important these relationships were to them. For example:

For hockey yeah. Well 'cause all their, like my friend's parents and their friends are there so they can like socialize and stuff. And yeah they enjoy watching hockey. Baseball is more just socializing. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Just watching them in the stands like when we're going on a breakaway or something, I can just tell they're enjoying it. Sometimes they're socializing but other times they're watching. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

However, the younger children did not recognize the importance of the social connections to their parents' experience. For example, when asked what they thought their parents enjoyed about their sport participation, the younger children's responses were often about "watching me play" and had no insight to the relationships that parents formed with other parents. As one child revealed: "Sometimes it's a hassle for her, but sometimes when there's nothing else on she just comes to see me play and see how good I've gotten and everything." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6) The younger children's comments appeared to be more centred on themselves, and revealed the serious, yet enjoyable, aspects of their parents "being there" to support them and focused on watching them play.

Moreover, almost every child in the study (young and old) related their parents' enjoyment in the outcome of the game and whether they won or lost. As two children revealed:

I think they enjoy coming to watch my team 'cause we work well together. And I think we're a pretty good team. And I think we're fun to watch. We handle the puck very well ... we don't get mad or anything. It's just for fun. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

(Do you think they like going?) Yeah, sometimes, dad ... I know dad does, but sometimes I wonder if mom does or not. *(Why's that?)* She gets mad at us 'cause we're ... our team takes stupid penalties. She doesn't really like watching. She says it's not good hockey. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1)

Thus, although most parents talked about how much they enjoyed their children's sport participation, it was also to varying degrees. Many of the parents talked about how different contexts altered their level of enjoyment. For example, some parents found it more enjoyable to watch particular sports, and found it to be less enjoyable for other sports as this father revealed: "Well, hockey ties up more, you don't have as much free time, like, but I enjoy watching hockey so I don't have a problem with that. When they play baseball, I find baseball boring ... and I think the kids do too." (Father, family #1)

Another example revealed that practices were deemed to be more work-like, while the games and tournaments were perceived to be more enjoyable experiences: "It can depend. I would say the games and stuff are more enjoyable. Practices maybe not so much! It depends on how long I have to be at the arena for." (Mother, family #1)

When youth sport conflicted with another activity that the parents loved to do, it was also deemed to be less enjoyable:

Yeah, I have to admit at this time of year, like if I'm on my way home because I want to do something in the field and that's my love. I like the farm part better than anything. If I'm keen to get home because there's something I want to do, and then get a call and say "well will you take the kids here and do that?" I say "I will", but I think – God damn it! Oh God, I hope that doesn't take very long, you know what I mean? (*Yeah.*) Do we ever hide it? So I get off the phone with her and I don't then go kick the door and say you guys come on, they don't maybe see it. They maybe know it, that I'd rather be doing whatever else I had planned, so we get through it. You find you'll be searching a long time to find that ideal family that will ... (Father, family #5)

As one father expressed it, some parents had to sacrifice their personal leisure experiences: "I don't play as much hockey, but other than that ... That was a gradual thing I did and the busier they got the less I played type thing" (Father, family #3), and consequently, it appeared that their children's leisure became their primary leisure activities. As two fathers' described:

I kind of consider kids' sports my leisure. I don't play, I used to play baseball but not since we've had kids. There's just no time. (Father, family #6)

It was hard for the first year maybe, yeah, sitting back. But you know, I'm still involved with even their sports. I coach their baseball team and I do all the time keeping for both the home games, so you know, I'm still actively involved I guess you would say in the volunteer basis. (Father, family #2)

Not only did children's organized youth sport shape the families' activities and the parents' own individual leisure activities, but it also shaped the husband and wife's time spent together. For some parents this had become a way of life, and it was difficult to envision it any other way:

Well, Stewart and I don't do anything [any personal leisure], so I would say we probably gave up stuff. The two of us don't go and have dinner, or catch a movie, or do anything like that because there isn't money or time. ... There is no time for Stewart and I. So maybe it does impact on the couple's relationship. Course you don't know any different but it likely does. But if they're gone and there's nothing to do, we look at each other and go "Now what do we do?" So negatively, that would be it ... probably just our own relationship. (Mother, family #3)

Yet, at the same time, the children in the study had very little recognition of their parents' sacrifices, and their loss of other leisure experiences, and appeared unaware whether their parents had any other interests. When asked if their parents had to give up anything to help support them in sports, most of them responded with "no" or "I don't think so". As the youngest child in the study responded: "I don't think so, because they really like going to our games" (Youngest child, female, age 9, family #7), and one of the oldest children replied: "I don't know if there's anything else she would do if we didn't have sports, other stuff. I honestly couldn't tell you." (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Thus, many of the parents had to sacrifice their personal leisure experiences to support their children's sport involvement. However, they appeared to "make the best" of the situation, and at times, they experienced leisure-like qualities while supporting their children's sports. That is, the social benefits with other parents clearly became an important aspect in their lives.

Siblings Are Along for the Ride

Parallel activities also occurred at the sport venue for siblings. It was particularly evident that the siblings, like their parents, would socialize with their friends at the games. Two of the children described what they do at their older siblings' games:

One of my friends is there ... and we like to play mini-sticks. Like, if Kaleb's team is down a lot of points or up a lot ... or if it's just get kind of boring with hitting or goals we go and play mini-sticks. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

I have a friend that her brother plays on my brother's team, so we usually just sit together and watch or we both have cell phones, so we like to text people. We like to watch too though. (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

Other comments from the parents included:

Like as a family, we've always gone, but it's not necessarily that they would watch the game. They have friends there and they go to the food booth. (Mother, family #6)

Daemyn, he likes to watch the bigger boys play. They go down, in the Puckville arena they have a little corner spot that's raised benches up. They call it the dog pound because it's the Puckville Bulldogs. So the kids, a bunch of them will go down and sit at that end. If not, they're playing mini-sticks in the warm part. They're not even into the games, they just want to go and have snacks and play with friends, not into watching it. (Mother, family #1)

Because they were too young to stay at home without parental supervision, many of the younger siblings were forced to go to the game or practice. As one father explained: "Like before, if one of them had a game well, we all went usually. And then they got old enough to be on their own ... when Todd was a Laker everybody would go. Now they stay, they don't go to every game." (Father, family #3) Some of the younger children also said that they did not like to be left home alone, yet would prefer to stay at home if they had the chance: "Well, I don't really like staying here by myself, so. If someone else is here I'll probably stay." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

As children grew older they often chose to stay at home rather than go to their siblings' game or practice. As one older child explained: "For the most part, I don't really go to their practices or games." (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6) This sentiment was echoed by another child who revealed that she often chose to stay home and not go with the rest of her family to her sister's game: "When I was little I had to go and it was okay with me, but now that I'm older and I'm allowed to stay home I usually don't go as much. And I don't like grocery shopping or anything." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6) Several of the parents, also re-affirmed that their children, if they had the choice, would often prefer to stay at home:

From my observation as a parent, now that they are a little older, no, they don't want to go to each other's sport. Well, they'll go watch games, but if it's just practice or something they don't go ... Nadia loves to be by herself! (*Does she?*) Always, like, I got to beg her to come grocery shopping, if like Kyle's got a soccer practice or something. I'll say "Are you coming with me to soccer practice" and she'll say "nope". The house is mine on my own and I've got my "Friends" [name of popular sitcom] DVD. (Mother, family #5)

I sometimes think when they were younger they had to go to everybody's things and now that they're older they don't always want to go. I think they get to be at home by themselves and have some peace and quiet and they get to do their own thing, have a sleep. (Mother, family #4)

According to the older children, the younger leagues that their siblings played in were considered "boring to watch" with "nothing to do". For example, one older child talked about the lack of excitement with his younger siblings' games:

Sometimes I wouldn't mind like going to watch Kaleb play, but Daemyn's just too slow for me. But, I haven't been watching too many of Kaleb's games this year. I went out to one. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1) (*Why don't you enjoy going to Daemyn's games as much?*) 'Cause they're boring and there is nothing really to do there ... (*Why are they boring?*) Because they don't hit [intentional use of physical force to ward off an opposing player and inhibit play]. (Middle child, male, age 13, family #1)

With their parents gone, it also created the opportunity for siblings to have their friends over without parental supervision. As two of the older children explained:

Sometimes, I'm busy like doing other stuff. And, like I'd rather hang out with friends and stuff. And none of my friends really go to those games like for their younger sisters or anything so I would kind of be like sitting there with my parents going, "oh this is fun!" Like, they're young so they don't really ... it's not like fast and exciting hockey or anything. (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #6)

Not too often. Like, I don't mind going, but I don't really like going to the season. I don't mind going into play-offs. I'll go in the play-offs because its better games, there's more on the line and the teams are more into it. (*What do you do when you don't go?*) When I don't go ... maybe depending on the time, watch a movie or something or go hang-out with friends, play video games, or bike or something. (*Do your parents ever make you go?*) No, not too often. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

The decision for the siblings to stay at home alone or to come to the games with the rest of the family could be a source of tension. As one mother explained, from time to time she would force her two older boys to support their younger brother and spend time with the family:

I make the older two go to his games and I make Spence go to cheer on his brothers. You know, I don't always make them, but sometimes I'll make them. If they're not doing anything and they have no plans I'll make them. And you know what, they can't tell me they don't enjoy watching. (*Why, do sometimes they want to stay back?*) Because they're on their own. Call somebody, "Mom and dad aren't going to be here!" "Nope, you're going to the game with us!" (Mother, family #3)

Another father also revealed how family conflict could arise when his daughter wanted to go to her older brother's games, however, because of the late night he did not feel that it was appropriate, considering her own sport schedule:

She's always asking to go to his games and sometimes you have to put your foot down and say, "no you're not going!" I was a bad guy last Friday night. (*Oh, were you?*) Yeah, you know, common sense. His game was a 9:00pm on Monday night so he wasn't going to be home until 11:00pm, and she had a big game the next night that was at 8:30pm, and she was going to have a late night. From a parent aspect you have to say no sometimes. Tough love! (Father, family#2)

On occasion there would be times when the older children would be more interested in joining their parents and siblings, and making it a family event. One of these occasions was when it was deemed to be a high-risk game such as during play-offs. For example:

Depends on what the game's like and when the game is, if its play-offs or something. (*So do you tend to go during play-offs?*) More often during play-offs. (*Why does that*

change?) Because the games are more high stake I guess and it can be the year end of the season so you want to see them play one, twice more. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

When we go to the arena, not very often will anybody sit and watch them play, like each other play. Unless, it's maybe in the final games or something they might. Whereas Daemyn, he's 10 compared to 15, so there's a five year gap and a three year gap. So for him to watch the older boys is more interesting ... more competitive. (Mother, family #1)

When the older siblings had a leadership or volunteer role with their younger siblings' team, they would also attend the games. However, it was time spent once again in a parallel activity, and not necessarily a shared moment with their parent(s) in the bleachers. As these two mothers revealed: "Travis goes to his sister's when he has to run the clock, but normally you don't see him at her games." (Mother, family #6), and, "Manuel would never go to watch Brandy play, I don't think he'd ... unless he was doing the clock." (Mother, family #4)

The physical nature of the game also appeared to be a major draw, particularly for the younger children. As one of the older brothers explained, his younger siblings would often come watch him play as "they like seeing the big hits and stuff ... usually every once in a while there will be an odd fight." (Oldest child, male, age 15, family #1), and this sentiment was echoed by his two younger brothers: "I like going to Devin's 'cause there's more fights." (Middle child, male, age 13, family #1), and "Like I go and watch Devin's team play because there is a lot of hitting and there's like contact. (Youngest child, male, age 10, family #1)

However, the physical nature of the game (i.e., the hitting and fighting) did not appeal to the younger siblings who were female. As one young girl explained, she did not always like to see the "big hits" at her older brother's games:

Well Breeana, this is her first year playing hockey so it's kind of funny to watch her, but my brother, I don't really like going 'cause I'm just scared 'cause he's in Bantam so people are just dropping their gloves and punching each other. (*Oh, really?*) Yeah, I'm a bit scared to watch that, but sometimes I go if it's an easy team that doesn't like to beat people up. (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Moreover, as the earlier quote demonstrated, the middle child would often go to her younger sister's games, even though she was old enough to stay at home without parental supervision. These sentiments of supporting the younger siblings were revealed by a couple of the older girls. For example, the idea of supporting their siblings and spending time with their parents in the bleachers was expressed by one female: "I don't mind going sometimes because the one girl on their team, she's got two little sisters and her mom is really good friends with my mom so I sit with them during the games. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

However, at times, work conflicts and school conflicts were often a barrier to supporting their younger siblings, as the oldest female in the study revealed:

I didn't get to as many hockey games as I would have liked to just because most of her games were on weekends and I work every weekend. So, and she kind of brought it up a few times. "You should come to my games!" and I'm like, "I try, I really do!" Yeah, I got to a few, and a few tournaments, but not too, too many. (*Even though you said you don't like baseball, do you go to those games?*) Yeahish ... I'd rather go to soccer or hockey. (Oldest child, female, age 17, family #5)

Unlike the female children, the older boys never expressed interest in seeing their younger siblings' games, unless it was for a higher stakes such as a play-off game, or because they were in a leadership capacity.

Like the parents, some siblings found enjoyment going to their brothers' and sisters' games, either to watch the game or to socialize with friends. However, as they got older most siblings were less enthusiastic, and chose personal leisure at home or elsewhere, over going to watch their siblings' games.

The Ideal of Family Togetherness

As the analysis progressed it became evident that the significance of children's participation in organized sport was not only about personal leisure and enjoyment, but also about the meanings that this form of collective leisure had for the family unit as a whole. Although initially for the

child's benefit, youth sport was perceived as a family activity, and was idealized to create a sense of "family togetherness". As two mothers expressed it:

It's more for the child's sake, but it turns into a family event. Primarily child experience but it does end up being a family event. (Mother, family #3)

I don't know where they got the notion way back when to get involved in the sport. We've made it family oriented now. It's part of our social and support mechanism and family time too. Yeah, for the kids. (Mother, family #2)

Some parents talked about their children's sport being a night out for the family. With limited leisure opportunities in their rural community, sports provided a source of entertainment for the family unit to enjoy together. Organized youth sport also provided a social venue for family members out in the community. Speaking from their own experiences, two parents revealed:

It's just basically a night out. You're out of the house and somewhere to go in the wintertime. (Father, family #7)

A lot of times you see families going with other families, like moms and two kids. Whereas, we always go as a family. Usually for hockey, it's always Jacob and I and all the kids. (*To all of them?*) A lot of them. Yeah, that's our entertainment I guess. Yeah, it's a family thing. I helped coach Cali's team for a few years so I was always involved with that. I like to think it's a family thing! (Mother, family #6)

Spending family time with their grandparents was also mentioned by several of the children. It appeared that they enjoyed having their grandparents come to their games and support them, and this was a meaningful experience too:

We have a TV in our van so we can watch TV. And, the most fun is that my grandma and grandpa usually come. (*Oh, do they?*) So they hop in the van with us. (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

Yeah, she [grandma] comes to all my competitions. (*Does she go to your hockey?*) Yeah, she likes seeing us playing and doing all that stuff. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

Many of the parents and children also talked about the other activities that they enjoyed while on an organized youth sport excursion. For example, family members would enjoy

shopping at a larger urban centre, going out for dinner together, or having a picnic on the way to the game or tournament. As one father explained:

It's enjoyable watching your kids participating in any sport and whether it be baseball or hockey, we always try to incorporate, not always, but sometimes we incorporate other little side trips with it. You know whether it's going shopping at the mall or if we have to go someplace for baseball, we'll quite often pack a picnic lunch and get a, you know, not an extra 2 or 3 hours, but it's a family experience. (Father, family #2)

Another father's comment illustrated how their leisure opportunities were enhanced when their children played Triple A hockey:

So when all three [kids] are playing hometown, you just stay in this, you know, 50 mile radius, so it was hard to find time to go to the city and shop or do activities in the city. Now we can tie it into a game. (*Right, so it becomes a whole trip...*) So, with Sam's games you gotta be there an hour early. So we can drop him off and we can scoot to the mall for half an hour and then come back. (Father, family #3)

Side excursions were sometimes the primary reason that the siblings would enjoy going: "I don't really go to her competitions anymore, I just go to her Urbanville practices 'cause we sometimes go shopping and stuff like that." (Middle child, female, age 12, family #4)

Tournaments that were far away provided opportunities for family weekends away and/or family vacations. For families with children in higher caliber sports, it was particularly evident that their family trips were coordinated with the children's tournament venues. It was also apparent that these trips provided memorable experiences for all family members. For example, family #2 had experienced a family trip to New York, and all of them talked about it in their interviews. As the parents explained:

Yeah, that New York trip was a neat experience and you know, we treated it as our family holiday for the year. (Father, family #2)

Well, travelling. Some families make a dedicated trip away somewhere for a week. And we don't necessarily do that, but I think that we've seen an awful lot of the world because of different things that the kids are involved in. This year, Kristen was invited to a hockey tournament in New York City. And we would never have gotten there had we not have had this opportunity through hockey. All four of us went. We've had a lot of neat experiences together as a family, and individually with each of our children, because of

some of their opportunities that have been presented to them. We enjoy a lot of neat things together, seeing places we've never been before. (Mother, family #2)

Moreover, the children who played on teams that travelled farther distances, had a greater sense of diverse experiences, and their stories often entailed a broader awareness of new opportunities. As revealed in these statements, the stories related to their travel, were often eagerly told with excitement:

Sports are fun and you get to spend time somewhere else, not at your house! You get to see cool stuff on your way to the game or practice! (*Like what?*) Well, if they are in like, if the game is far away you might see a building or a cool car or something like that! (Youngest child, male, age 12, family #3)

It's really fun and I like to be competitive, like playing competitive hockey. And I really like travelling, I just like travelling! I like to see different parts of the ... cities and things. (*Like what do you see?*) Well, in New York we went as a family and we stayed in a hotel as a family and that was fun. We do a lot of things as a team though, like my team. And we have organized things, like our coaches put together, games and things we can do. Like we were on a cruise and we went shopping, we had free time, but we always had something to do! (Youngest child, female, age 13, family #2)

It was clear, too, that opportunities for other family weekends away and vacations were sacrificed because of children's organized youth sport. Because organized youth sport consumed the family schedule and financial resources, it often dictated the nature of their family vacations:

I think overall, it's been a positive experience. I think we spend a lot of dollars in organized sport, and I often think, jeepers, maybe we could go on a lot of vacations, and have the BMW, and the pool in the backyard and that other stuff! But you make choices! (Mother, family #2)

The biggest thing is the sacrifice, right? Because you give up everything else. ... We love it like I said, but we don't drive fancy vehicles or do trips. Well, we can't take them skiing. Skiing is close, and we say we're going to take them but we never have time, that's the biggest thing. So you kind of, it's a good thing, bad thing. Because you give them this opportunity but the other one you take away. (Father, family #3)

Generally, the children did not have this same perception as their parents, of the limitations that their organized youth sport participation placed on the family resources. None of the children expressed any sense of how youth sport affected their family time and what they were able to

experience together. There was, however, one exception. One child explained that they were unable to go on a family vacation to a specific destination, yet, it was not seen as problematic:

Well, just the amount of money that gets put into our sports, could probably be put into other things. Like, my mom has always wanted to go to Hawaii, so I don't know. (*So things like family vacations?*) Yeah. (*How do you feel about it knowing that you're not able to do the family vacations as much?*) Well honestly, I don't think anybody really minds. Like, going to sports is enjoyable for the family. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Organized youth sport also shaped the nature of family functions with extended family members. Cherished family moments of Christmas dinners and family reunions would often be interrupted and were secondary to the children's games or tournaments. For example:

Sports, like, might get in the way of family reunions or something sometimes. But we go, then we go to our sports, and then we come back, so you just miss that amount of time. But most of the families are usually supportive and they know what we are doing and they don't mind us leaving. (Oldest child, male, age 16, family #3)

In the winter time, our life is revolving around that time. You know, we're going to Christmas dinners and leaving before we eat because we've got a hockey game or we're coming half way through Christmas dinner. Sometimes you can just say, oh we won't bother but when Bob and I both take a role on the team, you've made that commitment. (Mother, family #7)

Although organized youth sport shaped their family time and family vacations, it was also obvious that the parents could not imagine a life without it. It had become a vital part of their shared family experiences and provided a forum to enjoy enriched opportunities together. When asked if they could envision family time without organized youth sport, a common response was:

No! I think if we didn't have the sports what would we be doing – sitting and watching TV all night, no! (Mother, family #6)

Oh it would be terrible! (*Would it?*) Oh, what would you do? No, I can't really imagine. Cause I know once the year winds down, it seems like it goes by so quick, and then we're sitting here on Saturday or Sunday and it's like "What do we do now? And it seems funny because we've never done anything else. (Father, family #3)

Thus, organized youth sport was perceived as a family event and was idealized to create a sense of "family togetherness" via a night out, side excursions at the sport destination, and/or

family vacations that coincided with tournaments. As the analysis developed, it also became evident that understanding family dynamics and activities within the vehicle, was an important aspect of the organized youth sport experience. Unlike the sport venue where the family members were often separated both physically and socially, the vehicle facilitated the opportunity for family members to be in close proximity to each other. This was seen to be central in the development of family relationships and feelings of family togetherness, and will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

The Vehicle as a Medium for Strengthening Family Relationships

The time spent in the vehicle was perceived as an important opportunity to enhance familial relationships and as a medium for communication between family members. In particular, the parents in this study revealed how much they valued the uninterrupted time they could share with their children travelling to and from games/practices. This valuable family time was shared with multiple children at the same time, or equally enjoyable, was the one on one time spent with a single child. Some of the parents described the in-depth and meaningful conversations. As one mother revealed, although the amount of travelling they did had its negative aspects, she also enjoyed this family time:

When you try to split you know 6 games in 3 nights. It's like, it becomes work. But you know, a girl I work with, she is not or she just got married. She's about 33. No children. And she just goes, "I don't know why you do it. Because you go home and it's a rush supper or it's a quick supper and then it's off somewhere and your evenings are done. You don't have your evenings." I think that's my way ... I'm joined with my kids that way. We have going to it and coming home to chat and discuss whatever. If I'm going with just one, its one on one time and I think that makes a difference and you know that's something that we can discuss or we can have in common and you know, I mean you find a lot of things out going to and from the arena. (Mother, family #7)

Another couple, whose daughter was playing competitive hockey and travelled quite a bit, indicated how important this time was in enhancing the quality of their parent-child relationship:

I think it's given us lots of opportunities to communicate a lot of different ways and we're in the vehicles travelling everyday! The conversations that happen ... there's some neat conversations that have happened that I don't know if we would have the opportunity otherwise. (Mother, family #2)

Both Julie and I have said that people think that we're a little crazy for driving an hour to home practices and home games, but we've always said, "Where else could you have one on one time with your son or daughter?" Cause, if you're at home, they're gonna be sitting at the computer or you're doing something else and you're not gonna have one on one. And if they want to discuss something with you, what better place to do it? (Father, family #2)

Indeed, being in the vehicle and the drive to and from the sport venues did appear to enhance the time spent together with parent-child as one of the young men in the study who appeared to generally have very limited family interactions, stated: "Like the only time I really talk to my parents is in the car 'cause we're always in there, going to sports and stuff like that." (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #4)

As one mother revealed, travelling to and from the sport venue also provided her with the opportunity to indirectly learn more about her children's lives. She explained:

I usually have my sister-in-law and Cali [sister-in-law's daughter] with us. So there's the four of us and usually we are just chuckling at what they're saying in the back. Oh it's great! You can learn more in the car than you can learn anywhere especially when they have their friends there. It's like you are a chauffeur and you have one of the blocks up there and they forget. I've learned more driving those kids around. You know good things. This may sound just totally ridiculous but, I think that's where I learned that one of the girls shaved their legs for the first time. I don't know why they would be nervous about telling me that I have no clue because that just seems funny to me. (Mother, family #5)

Further, a father revealed how the time spent in the vehicle could help the parent-child relationship, particularly when they were having disagreements related to other issues. As he saw it: "It helps when we have fights about other stuff. (*Oh, in what way?*) Because then you've got to ... you're in the car ... you can't stop talking. It's something to start up the conversation ... or they can smarten the hell up and they can walk." (Father, family #3)

Interestingly, the children seemed to perceive the vehicle as an important social time; however, primarily with their friends compared to their parents. For example, two of the children explained how car pooling with their friends was seen as fun and enjoyable:

So usually we're just best friends! We like laugh all the way and it's like usually a 45 minute drive, but to us it's just like a 2 minute drive. 'Cause we have so much fun on the way there. (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #6)

Sometimes there's a girl that goes to my school and she's just up the road and we sometimes have to go pick her up. (*Right, so sometimes she needs a ride?*) Yeah, and it's fun. (*Is it fun when she comes? What do you guys usually do then?*) We make jokes and stuff. (Middle child, female, age 11, family #7)

Thus different experiences were revealed between the parents and the children related to the perceived value and relationships that were enhanced in the vehicle. Moreover, similar to being at the sport venue, at times, the family members participated in parallel activities in the vehicle. Although the parents idealized the vehicle as an important context for family togetherness, time spent together was not necessarily interactive, nor a shared, meaningful experiences. For example:

Sometimes if it's just say Keith and I and the kids, we catch up on things that you miss out on or sometimes I just take the magazine and read. My down moment of time! (Mother, family #1)

Well, sometimes we don't really talk a whole lot, just listen to the radio or sleep or bring books or game boys or whatever, homework to work on, on the way there. (Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

If my sisters are with us and we have a van then they'll want to watch a movie so I'll end up watching a movie. I just, I'll just sit there. I just like listening to the radio, so I'll listen to the radio and watch the window as we go by. (Oldest child, female, age 13, family #7)

As two of the children explained, the type of activities that the family members engaged in were often highly dependent upon the frame of mind of the individual family members: "It just depends on the mood. And if we have a fight or something it might be a little different but pretty much we talk and then sometimes I'm tired so I have a sleep or listen to music." (Middle child,

female, age 12, family #4), and, “It depends how I’m feeling. If I’m tired from school that day I might maybe, you know, have a snooze but sometimes when I’m hyper or something, I’ll be talking to my mom about things that’s happening.” (Middle child, female, age 13, family #6)

Time spent in the vehicle could also result in moments of conflict between family members. Tight confines for extended periods of time could create heightened tempers between siblings and parents. As two mothers revealed:

Or like if we have the five of us with us it can cause problems because the kids are fighting. It’s like, then you’re into “if you don’t stop, I’m turning around and going home!” (Mother, family #1)

No iPods or DVD’s. Well now Travis bought an iPod. I don’t know, if we tend to make a comment then sometimes it starts fighting and then everybody’s just sort of quiet after that and it’s like “Just shut up!” So it can be tense sometimes. (Mother, family #6)

In sum, the children were able to seek out moments of leisure during their siblings’ sport participation. Parents also enjoyed moments of leisure and social interaction with other parents. However, for the parents, a central aspect of their leisure was its purposive nature for the sake of the family. Ideologically, the parents believed that their children’s sport participation would facilitate a sense of family togetherness, and provide the opportunity to enhance their familial interactions, communication, and knowledge about each others’ lives. However, at times, the parents and children participated in parallel activities that were not necessarily shared time together; rather it was a time for socialization with friends at the sporting venue or in the vehicle. Further, as the children grew older, this idea of togetherness was less possible as many of them preferred to enjoy social time at home on their own. Moreover, different experiences were shared depending on the individual family members’ current mood, and other conflicting priorities made the experience more leisure-like or work-like.

Chapter VIII: Core Theme - “Upholding Team Family”

From the three major themes, “Understanding Children’s Perspectives”, “Parenting in Public and Private Spaces” and “The Nexus of Family Experiences” a core theme emerged reflecting the idea of “Upholding Team Family”. This core theme represents the culmination of the children’s and parents’ experiences, and helps to capture and integrate the insights gained from the analysis as a whole. The section begins with a conceptual definition of “Upholding Team Family”, which is then followed with a more detailed description.

The theoretical concept of “Upholding Team Family” is defined by the centrality of children’s sport as an important aspect in creating family togetherness. Organized sport was seen to be crucial to the family members’ sense of “family”. Moreover, all family members were an important part of this, and they became a “team” united towards a common goal and identity. All members were expected to play their part (i.e., the children would participate, and the parents and siblings would support them physically, financially, and emotionally). This *sense of unity* and *shared family passion* for a common phenomenon seemed to define who they were as a family unit.

The importance of *publicly* creating the image of “team family” was significant to this theoretical concept. Parents’ discourse on the judgment of other parents’ involvement in their children’s sporting activities reflected the underlying belief that it was an important aspect of being a “good parent”. Further, the creation of “team family” may have been particularly central to these rural families, because rural life meant that few families and their parental practices remain anonymous. Children’s sport participation also created a sense of social inclusion in rural community life and became a major source of leisure and entertainment for all family members.

However, the contradictory aspects in the creation and maintenance of “team family” were evident. The various and contested ideas associate with “good parenting” as they related to the type and intensity of support were sometimes difficult to reconcile. Moreover, considerable strain and tension sometimes developed between parent-parent, parent-child, and sibling-sibling relationships because of the organized youth sport participation. The work needed to create “team family” was also revealed to be gendered in nature. The mothers maintained the primary role of managing their children’s activities in the private sphere, as well as the hidden responsibilities and work in the public sphere.

This theoretical concept is further discussed below, drawing on insights gained from the previous analysis of themes and sub-themes, and presenting a few additional participant quotes to help exemplify this concept.

The Centrality of Children’s Sport to Team Family

Although organized youth sport was initially discussed by the parents to be for the child’s benefit, it became clear in the parents’ and children’s discourse that its significance also lay in the construction of a sense of “family” and the facilitation of family togetherness and belonging. An important aspect of this was the time spent together in the vehicle, at the sport venue, or at home practicing. This quality time was spent either one on one or with multiple children at the same time. The parents believed these shared experiences enhanced communication with their children, and provided an opportunity for parents to learn more about their children’s lives. A sense of quality time without the distractions of everyday life (such as TV, computers, housework) was emphasized. For the parents, this time spent together was very deliberate and purposefully constructed.

The children's discussion, although much less deliberate or intentional, also revealed the importance of family togetherness. The children revealed the idea of "upholding team family" through their desire to please mom and/or dad or gain their approval. Some of the children said that they were still actively involved in a particular sport because it was something that they perceived that their parents wanted. This notion of pleasing mom or dad is best exemplified by one child's comment: "I think one thing my mom really likes about it is that we're following her footsteps, like skating. She likes that. And likes how we're like, getting to spend time with her." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

The children's experiences also revealed that, inadvertently, sibling relationships were strengthened when they had a common sport interest, regardless of age or gender differences. This was illustrated through informal play opportunities connected to the type of sports they were involved in, as well as shared conversations about similar sport interests. A mentoring relationship was also revealed when the older children used their "expertise" to teach their younger siblings new skills and help them get better.

The notion of a shared family experience was also experienced through the parental roles in the sport organizations. The opportunity for a parent to be a coach or trainer enhanced the opportunity to spend quality time with their children, and illustrated a higher sense of commitment to their children's success. Several of the parents talked about feeling a closer connection with their children when they were in these roles, and they hoped that the child recognized and valued their efforts. Indeed, many of the children expressed pride when their parents were in leadership positions, particularly in roles that were highly visible. Some of the children also talked about the enhanced sense of connection and communication when their parents were in such positions.

It was clear, too, that the children's participation in youth sport was idealized by the parents to be a family affair, yet in reality, family members would enjoy moments of leisure that were separate from one another. For example, although family members would arrive at the sport venue together they would often occupy different physical spaces and be socially separated. The athletes would be on the ice, while the parents would sit and socialize with other parents, and the athletes' siblings would play together. Yet, it was the thought of "being together" at the sport venue that provided this sense of family togetherness. It was also clear, that although ideologically the parents believed organized youth sport to be a family event, there were family members who were often absent. These times included when a spouse was absent due to work conflicts, when the family had to split up because multiple children had games/practices at different locations, or when the siblings were older and preferred to stay at home on their own.

Nevertheless, organized youth sport was seen to create a sense of a *shared family passion* and a *spirit of unity* for a common phenomenon. Even when family members were apart, the importance of supporting each child's sport involvement seemed to create a shared sense of being committed to the common ideal of "team family". This ideal of family togetherness is perhaps best represented by one of the youngest participants in the study: "Well I feel that we get to relate to each other, and so we just kind of get to feel like a family of hockey and all those things. So it just makes us really relate to each other and it just makes us more like a family." (Youngest child, female, age 10, family #4)

The centrality of organized youth sport to the construction of team family also provided the parents with a sense of moral worth as they were actively supporting their children's growth and development. In many ways, the very provision of these sporting opportunities facilitated a sense of attainment in being what they deemed to be a "good parent". In some ways, the support (physical, emotional, and financial) provided concrete evidence and satisfaction that they had a

positive influence on their children's development. Indeed, the children's responses demonstrated that they understood the importance of their participation, such as for health and fitness benefits.

Moreover, the centrality of sports and its perceived connection to the construction of family unity may be one reason why the decision-making process was so complex with various levels of discussion and underlying parental pressures. It may also be another reason why the parents and the children were willing to sacrifice so much for organized youth sport.

Sacrificing for Team Family

Throughout the three major themes, it was clear that organized youth sport and "upholding team family" required significant sacrifices to other aspects of family life. The family resources that youth sport consumed (time, finances, physical and emotional energy) seemed to limit other highly valued family activities. For example, family activities such as eating dinner together or simply relaxing on the weekend were sacrificed to accommodate the children's sport schedules. Further, family vacations and weekend get-aways were often synchronized with the geographical locations of away games and tournaments. Children's other leisure opportunities, both structured and informal play, were often limited due to lack of finances, time, or physical energy. Moreover, the parents' individual leisure experiences and physical activity were often forfeited for children's sports, because of limited time and financial resources. Finally, the rural context, and the long distance to activity locales, also appeared to heighten the consumption of the families' time and resources.

The parents' discourse also revealed the work related to "upholding team family". The sense of time stress and fatigue with their hectic schedules was particularly evident for the mothers who were the "managers" of their children's lives. They would often be the one who orchestrated the family's schedules, coordinated the decision-making process, completed the

registration, and chauffeured the children to and from practices. The husbands would assist them in this role; however, the inequality of the distribution of work was not generally recognized by husbands, wives, or children.

Moreover, an additional physical and emotional labour was taken on by many of the women, as their responsibilities had extended into the public domain. That is, the women's participation in organizational volunteer positions had increased, primarily in roles such as the planning and organization of the league or team, and fundraising initiatives that remained largely "hidden". The fathers were also often involved in volunteer positions that required additional physical and emotional work. Yet these positions (e.g., coach or announcer) tended to be in more visible and central positions and were more widely recognized. The children's interviews suggested that they may have recognized both parents' involvement and contributions. However, it was the fathers' more visible roles that were more often discussed with enthusiasm and pride. Further, for both parents, but particularly for the mothers, the less visible volunteer roles were often done out of obligation and guilt rather than personal choice.

Nevertheless, sacrifices made to family life in the creation of "team family", whether they were financial, emotional, physical or relational, were believed to be worthwhile. Indeed, the sacrifices themselves may be evidence of the centrality and importance of youth sport to the development and construction of a sense of family. The comments by this mother and father illustrate the importance of sacrifices made for the benefit of the children:

You make a commitment when your kids are young and I think we're both of the understanding that time comes back again as adults. Some people aren't willing to give that up. Yeah, there's sacrifices I think you do along the way but I don't think it's in a negative manner so much. (Mother, family #2)

And I know Wanda and I have said before, we can't believe that Kaitlin's 17 already, I don't know where those years have gone and one more year of school and she could be gone to school somewhere. So long story short, it seems like it's such a short time that they are here. If they want, do it, let them do it because the next thing you know they are

gone. I think they are appreciative of what we do and it seems like such a short time that they are here. They grow up so fast, and the next thing you know it they are gone, and leave Wanda and I sitting here by ourselves. (Father, family #5)

Achieving and Maintaining Team Family in the Public Eye

The sense of “achieving” team family was evident in not only the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. The theme “Parenting in Public and Private Spaces” revealed the importance of the provision of sport opportunities in defining what it meant to be a “good parent”. This belief was also evident in the criteria used to judge and criticize other parents. Through the criticisms of “absent parents” it was clear that a child’s success in organized sport was not only about the child’s performance, but was also attributed to the quality of the parental support. Being on time, extra lessons, and appropriate parental involvement in terms of *supporting* the child, yet not *forcing* the child, were all important characteristics of what was deemed to be “good parenting”.

The public aspect of “upholding team family” may be one of the reasons that this ideal was so central in the families’ lives. Within the community, children’s participation in organized sport, and the parents’ levels of active involvement, were seen to display the *quality* of their parenting. This *awareness* of being judged was underlying much of the parental discourse as they talked about other families. The importance of visible and public parenting in the community was exemplified by one couple who said:

We’ve met a lot of great people and it keeps us very active in the community. Good conversation with people that aren’t in our family. They know that we are very active with hockey and ball and the conversations quite often lead back to that: “So how are the kids doing in hockey and where are they at in the play-offs?” So there’s lots of that as well. (Mother, family #2)

We’ve been living here for eight years now and I had one of my fellow firemen say to me just last year ... he’s got a young family and he said: “I envy you guys because every time I drive by you’re always doing something [outside] with your kids.” (Father, family #2)

Moreover, the concept of “upholding team family” may be particularly heightened in the rural context. This may be because “team families” are particularly visible in a small rural community where everyone knows each other, and few families remain anonymous.

Further, active involvement in organized youth sport provided family units with the opportunity to be a member of a “*community of families*”. The feeling of a close-knit community with enhanced friendships because of organized youth sport was mentioned by parents and children alike. As described in the “Understanding Children’s Experiences” theme, and “Whose Leisure Is It” sub-theme, the children’s sport participation became the family’s leisure experiences. During the children’s sport activities, friendships and relationships developed amongst children on the same sport team, between groups of parents, and amongst younger (and sometimes older) siblings who would play with other teammates’ siblings. As one mother commented, multiple friendships and connections could develop between members of different families: “Like, my son’s team, the boys on that team have sisters that are the same age as my daughter so you see those same families regularly all the time.” (Mother, family #4)

It was clear, too, that it was more than just time that was shared with other community members. The connections between families, linked through children’s sports, also became a major part of their social lives. With the lack of other cultural and entertainment venues in the area, the sport arena or field became the primary public place for all family members to socialize and build relationships with other community members. Hockey, in particular, often seemed to be the main point of connection, creating the foundation of community-based social networks. Perhaps the limited options for alternate activities may in part explain why hockey appeared to be a way of life for the families in the small rural community, and dominated most of the discussions (even during the spring interviews!) Even though it was one of the most expensive sports to play, as one father explained: “Hockey’s here, everybody does hockey. Because there’s

arenas everywhere. Hockey's easy." (Father, family #3) It was also a sport that was deemed appropriate for both girls and boys, and an acceptable domain for both men's and women's volunteer work (at least in recent years). Despite the fact that some of the children had reservations about whether or not they wanted to continue playing hockey, they also understood the social consequences and sense of isolation that they would endure should they quit.

Thus, in a small rural community the connection of organized youth sport to the development of the children's and parents' social networks was particularly heightened, and to drop out of a sports activity might potentially influence their sense of belonging and socialization within their community. Sport was a vital link in terms of the families' connections within the broader social network of their community. Perhaps, in part, this is why the continual participation of children in organized sport was so central to the entire family unit, and why there were subtle or not so subtle parental pressures on the children's decision-making process. It may also explain why parents often enrolled their children in hockey and/or skating lessons at a very young age before the children could decide for themselves, and even when the children did not seem to enjoy these early experiences.

Contradictions and Tensions of "Upholding Team Family"

It was also clear that there were competing views of what constitutes a "good parent", as this related to supporting children's sport involvement. Some parents believed that quality parenting involved unlimited praise and positive feedback while not being overbearing. Other parents believed that it meant providing honest (but sometimes harsh) criticism and ensuring the children's involvement no matter the impact on the child's life. Moreover, parents were often critical of "absent parents" who did not become involved in their children's sports and/or over-involved or badly behaved parents. Yet at the same time, parents seemed to be able to justify their

own actions, that others might characterize as “bad parenting” practices (e.g., being absent from a game due to work obligations or “yelling” at a game while in the stands).

All of the parents talked about the centrality of organized youth sport in the children’s growth and development as well as facilitating a sense of family togetherness. Further, the parents’ discourse also emphasized the importance of not pressuring their children. However, it was evident that there were underlying parental pressures in the decision-making processes related to children’s sporting participation (e.g., enrolling them at a young age, encouraging them to go to games/practices when they did not want to). Thus, it was sometimes difficult for parents to uphold team family, without deliberately influencing (or forcing) the children’s decisions and continued involvement.

Moreover, the process of “upholding team family” also resulted in conflict within families. Ironically, in creating a sense of team family, the family members would often have to live split lives to manage their hectic schedules, which meant that the family unit was rarely together as a whole. Families would often split up, with one parent going with one child, while the other parent drove another child. Further, the parent-child relationship was affected when parents were in a leadership role related to a particular team. Those parents would commit to one child’s team, which meant that they would often miss watching their other children play. Indeed, some of the children said that they were “missing” their mother or father, and felt like they were left out when their parent(s) did not attend their games or when they were unable to spend time with them at home. (However, the older children enjoyed this sense of freedom!)

The parent-child relationship would also become strained when the role between parent and coach was blurred. In both the children and parental interviews, instances were cited when a parent would exhibit “embarrassing” or “goofy” behaviors that made the children uncomfortable within their peer group. Parents who were coaches also talked about moments when the child

would blur the coach-athlete relationship, and tension was evident when they were not respectful towards their coach, who was also their parent.

Considerable tension between siblings could also develop. This was particularly evident when the younger sibling of the same sex was athletically talented, and the older sibling could not “measure” up to the younger sibling’s success. Interestingly, negative tensions were not evident between siblings based on the unequal distribution of the family’s resources on the athletically talented child’s sport. Rather, perceptions of fairness and equity revolved around the quantity of teams played for, or the number of nights they played.

The contradictory aspects of upholding team family were also evident with regard to gender. As mentioned earlier, the facilitation and organization of the children’s activities were primarily the mothers’ responsibility while the husbands played an “assisting” role. Yet both mothers and fathers said that facilitating children’s sport participation was an important aspect of good parenting. At times, this created tension between the wife and husband. For example, when the fathers had other work or leisure obligations that conflicted with the youth sport schedule, disagreements and arguments over priorities sometimes developed. Further, the extra “hidden work” that women did related to the sport organization roles (e.g., Board of Directors, fundraiser, team manager) for their children’s sport was rarely mentioned, and did not seem to be recognized. Yet, at times, the women did seem to resent the extra level of work that was implicitly expected of them.

Within team family there seemed to be some gender equity and “fairness” in that both female and male children were equally encouraged to participate in organized youth sport. Female children had many sport opportunities such as figure skating, dance, and baseball; although in recent years there was a sense that they were being guided towards girls’ hockey. However, the boys’ participation in figure skating (and other “female” sports) was clearly

stigmatized and the boys were quite limited in their type of sport involvement. The parents, and particularly the fathers, guided their sons into traditionally masculine sports such as hockey, and this may have been because the fathers wanted to create the “right” image for “team family”. Thus, the type of sport involvement may also have had a significant meaning, reflecting the family’s values and underlying beliefs related to gender.

In sum, children’s participation in organized sport was seen to be a family affair that required a considerable amount of work and sacrifices. However, it was also seen to be a central aspect of parenting, both within the individual family unit, and in the broader community. Children’s sense of heightened connection with their siblings and “following in their parents’ footsteps” was also important to them. Thus, children’s involvement in organized youth sport created a sense of family unity that seemed to outweigh any difficulties and tensions. It was clear, that children’s sport involvement was extremely important and a central phenomenon to family life, and it was hard for many of the family members to imagine a future without it. As one mother expressed it:

I’m proud of my kids. I’m glad they play sports and I can’t imagine my life without sports. I’ve often said I’d have to adopt some more kids when they’re out of hockey. It’ll be like: “Oh my God, what am I going to do?” (Mother, family #6)

Chapter IX: Discussion and Future Research

In this study, the findings suggested that the importance of youth sports for the children, parents, and the family unit as a whole was clearly evident in the creation and maintenance of “team family”. Its centrality to the construction of a sense of family, as well as the sacrifices and contradictory aspects of maintaining this ideal were revealed. Further, the importance of upholding “team family” in the public context, and how this idea implicitly and explicitly shaped the children’s sport involvement, was an important dimension to the parenting practices.

Yet, to date, the literature on parenthood ideologies (e.g.,Arendell, 2000; Brannen & Nilson, 2006; Hays, 1996) has remained relatively unconnected to the literatature on youth sport (e.g.,Kay, 2000; Townsend & Murphy, 2001; Trussell & McTeer, 2007). The minimal literature that has connected these concepts is theoretical and speculative in nature (e.g.,Coakley, 2006; Kay, 2006b). These two largely independent streams of research framed the format and nature of the earlier literature review (Chapter II), and separate sub-sections were linked with conjectural notions of how they could potentially be connected.

In light of the core theme, which represents the culmination of the children’s and parents’ experiences and helps to integrate the insights gained from the analysis as a whole, this discussion chapter will ground the core theme in earlier literature to reveal new sociological understandings and theoretical development. New understandings from this study provide preliminary insights and illuminate the important connection between parenthood ideologies, family dynamics, and organized youth sport. Thus, discussion of these three concepts is integrated throughout this chapter.

This final chapter is also framed by the central research questions as outlined at the start of Chapter IV. The first research question “How is youth sport participation seen to influence

family interactions, values, and relationships as perceived by mothers, fathers, and children?” is addressed by the following sections on Constructing Team Family, and Discovering Children’s Insights,. The second research question “What are the connections between these components of family life (interactions, values, and relationships) and achieving and/or resisting socio-cultural expectations associated with parents and/or gender ideologies?” is discussed in the following sections on Changing Parenthood Ideologies, and the Gendered Nature of Children’s Sport Participation. Embedded throughout the above-noted sections is discussion related to three of the four initial sub-questions as outlined at the start of Chapter IV. The fourth sub-question, that specifically called attention to the rural context, is addressed in this chapter in a section that focuses on the Centrality of Youth Sport to Rural Life.

Thus, this chapter will explore new theoretical understandings related to why and how “team family” is constructed, its connection to changing parenthood ideologies, and the insights gained from examining children’s experiences of “team family”. The gendered nature of organized youth sport involvement and how rurality shapes the families’ sport involvement, are also addressed. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

Constructing “Team Family”

The significance of constructing a sense of “team family” and its connection to organized youth sport was central to the mothers, fathers, and children in this study. Organized youth sport was seen to be an integral part of the families’ lives despite its contradictory aspects. Perhaps one of the reasons that it was so highly valued was because of the “sense of family” and the *ideal of togetherness* that it created as well as the perceived *quality time* that they could share together.

The Ideal of Family Togetherness

Organized youth sport was idealized as a “family affair” that enhanced the opportunities for shared experiences. Similar to research on family leisure (e.g., Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and family vacations (e.g., Shaw, Havitz, & Delemere, 2008), facilitating children’s participation in organized sport was seen to strengthen family relationships, create opportunities for positive communication, and develop a strong sense of family.

Regardless of age or gender, the children’s participation in organized youth sport seemed to create (at least for these families) an opportunity for a closer connection between family members. For example, mentoring relationships formed between siblings as the older children would demonstrate their expertise and knowledge to the younger children. Likewise, many of the children and parents expressed a heightened personal connection when the parents helped the children practice their skills at home.

Organized youth sport appeared to give family members a sense of feeling closer to each other, as they had a shared passion for a common entity. Children felt a closer connection to their mother and father if they were able to “follow in their footsteps” and play the sports that their parents had an interest in. Similarly, the parents felt that they had a closer connection to their children by supporting their sport interests, and providing encouragement through the emotional and physical work that was required. The opportunity to take on an organizational role was also seen to contribute to the quality of the children’s sporting experiences.

Yet organized youth sport clearly shaped family dynamics with negative moments of tension and frustration between family members as well as positive moments of togetherness. This reflects earlier research on family leisure activities that showed a gap between the *idealization* and *lived reality* of these family experiences (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Shaw &

Dawson, 2003). This may be because family activities are highly emotionally charged, so negative and positive emotions can easily occur, or even exist concurrently. The work-related responsibilities of organized youth sport (e.g., shuttling children to games and practices) can also detract from the experience and conflict with ideals of family togetherness. Moreover, the conflict and negative emotions can carry over into other aspects of family life and influence the way family members interact. Thus, the gap between ideals and actual experiences of “team family” is not surprising. Perhaps for children this gap between expectations and reality was most evident when they did not meet their parents’ expectations, or felt they were letting their parents down. Some children seemed to struggle to fulfill expectations rather than jeopardize their connection to “team family”.

Spending Quality Time

Central to the construction of a sense of team family were the sacrifices that were endured in the creation and maintenance of this ideal. There was a consensus by all participants in the study that traditionally valued family time such as eating dinners had to be sacrificed to accommodate the children’s sport schedules. Organized youth sport was also seen to alter quality time spent with extended family members as they would often have to leave early or were absent from family holidays and special occasion gatherings. The findings of this study support Kay’s (2000) research that argued that the “time demands of sport affect the daily, weekly and annual rhythms of family life” (p. 157).

The children’s participation in organized youth sport consumed the family’s resources (financial, time, and emotional), and this meant that there was a limited amount that could be used for other shared family activities. For example, family vacations and weekend getaways were often sacrificed due to limited finances or hectic schedules that bound their weekends to

community arenas or baseball diamonds. Even a day-outing such as a trip to public skating or the local ski hill were forfeited because of organized youth sport commitments. For many of the families, Sunday had become a desired day for rest and cocooning, rather than time spent out in the broader community.

Earlier research suggested that a common parental discourse exists around the problem of *time famine* that families are experiencing, and the perceived neglect of time that parents spent with their children (see, for example Daly, 2004). Yet, this study did not reveal a similar sense of the parents' lack of time and involvement in their children's lives. The notion of time famine was evident, but this seemed to be due to prioritizing sport, and valuing sport over simply "hanging out" in the home. Thus, the opportunity to spend quality time with their children through their sport involvement appeared to provide a sense of fulfillment rather than time famine. Important contexts of quality time were the moments they were able to spend together in the vehicle, at the sport venue, or at home practicing. Moreover, references to quality time were made related to both the family unit as a whole and to the time that was spent with a single child.

Yet similar to Snyder's (2007) research, perceptions of quality time were diverse. Snyder defined three categories of quality time in families: (i) structured-planning, (ii) child-centred, or (iii) time available. Some of the parents in this study felt that the scheduled time for their children at a sport activity provided an escape from employment and domestic commitments, and enabled them to set aside time to spend with their children. These parents aligned with Snyder's notion of "structured-planning" parents. For other parents, the importance of organized sport in facilitating meaningful communication in the vehicle, complemented the "child-centred" significance of quality time through "support during everyday moments" (Snyder, p. 331). This view of quality time emphasized the interests of the child and the time spent bonding with one specific child rather than the entire family unit. On the other hand, Snyder argued that parents who identify

quality time as any “time available” (p. 334) believe that they do not need to be interacting with their children per se, rather, simply being in the same room together is perceived as quality time. In this present study, it could be argued that the idealization of organized youth sport as a family affair reflects an extension of the “time available” concept. That is, youth sport often included separate yet parallel activities that were enjoyed by the athletes, parents, and siblings at the sport venue. Even though they attended specific events as a family unit, family members often occupied different areas of the sport venue and socialized with friends rather than family.

The centrality of quality time to the construction of a “sense of family” has also been echoed in the literature that has examined the meanings of family leisure and family vacations (e.g., Shaw, 2008; Shaw, Havitz, & Delemere, 2008). Further, the importance of quality time contributes to, and reflects, broader cultural ideologies. As Snyder (2007) argues, “Quality time has become part of our cultural discourse concerning what it means to be a “good parent” (p. 320). Thus, the central significance of quality time for families may help to explain why families (parents) were willing to sacrifice other aspects of family life for this. That is, the powerful and central role of children’s sports is related not only to quality time, but also to parents’ broader roles and responsibilities, and to their beliefs about parenting.

Changing Parenthood Ideologies

Parenting ideologies are fluid, dynamic and in a constant state of renegotiation. That is, they are shaped within the context of historical realism and the social-cultural values of a particular time. They are socially constructed by institutional discourse, and the discourses expressed by individuals in their everyday lives. As such, ideologies of parenthood are powerful constructs that shape individual and collective experiences. They not only provide an idealization

of “good” parenting practices, but they also set a criteria by which parents may be judged, despite the diversity of social contexts. In this study it was evident that organized youth sport was a central aspect of parenting and a highly significant component of socially constructed parenthood ideologies.

Intensive Mothering and Organized Youth Sport

The power of the ideology of intensive mothering was reflected in the passion and commitment to facilitate children’s organized sport involvement. Similar to Hay’s (1996) conceptualization of motherhood, the narratives spoke of the mothers’ lives as child-centred, self-sacrificing, and *active managers* of their children’s lives. Compared to previous generations, a central aspect of being a good mother today involves the provision and facilitation of enrichment activities, and the willingness to make *personal sacrifices* in order to do this. Organized youth sport appeared to reflect and further strengthen this ideology of self-sacrificing motherhood.

Similar to earlier research on children’s sport (see Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; Thompson, 1999) it was the women who were primarily responsible for the facilitation of such activities, even though both mothers and fathers perceived organized sport to be an important aspect of parenting. That is, it was the mothers who typically handled the decision-making and registration process, prepared the meals, maintained the equipment, and coordinated the transportation of children to and from their sport venues.

As the mothers actively managed their children’s lives, the emotional work tied to organized sport created feelings of time famine and stress. To help alleviate their sense of stress the women used strategies such as *scaling back* (Arendell, 2001) to manage their daily lives. For example, many of the women in this study had scaled back on their paid employment and career goals to accommodate the childrearing responsibilities when the children were young. However,

as their children grew older (9-17 years old), all of the women had resumed full-time employment and made sacrifices to other aspects of their lives. The time and energy required to facilitate their children's sport schedules, often meant that it was at the expense of their own leisure experiences (Shaw, 2001; Such, 2006). Supporting their children's sport involvement was seen as the highest priority, leaving little time for personal leisure. For example, several of the mothers who participated in adult sport leagues, would often miss their own games to watch their children play.

Moreover, as the primary organizers of their children's activities, a sense of relationship tension was expressed by some of the mothers when their husbands were not able to help out with the transportation of the children to and from their sporting activities. At times, feelings of irritation were also expressed by the fathers when asked to help out, and it conflicted with their other priorities (work and leisure related). Thus, as women continued to manage their families' lives, despite working outside of the home (Daly, 2004; Zuzanek, 2000), tense family dynamics sometimes developed in relation to the division of child-related responsibilities.

One of the expressed reasons why the mothers were the primary organizers of their children's activities was due to the "perception" that their employment was more flexible than their husbands'. However, this did not appear to reflect the reality of the employment situations. All of the mothers commuted further distances compared to their husbands and sometimes in excess of an hour each way. Further, most of the women worked standard work hours (9-5pm) and all of the women reported equal or higher incomes compared to their husbands.

It was evident that, for these mothers, involvement in and facilitation of their children's sport was central to their mothering commitment and their responsibilities to their children and to their families as a whole. Thus, despite their employment and domestic responsibilities it was the mothers who invested the emotional and physical energy required to manage their children's

sport involvement. Moreover, the volunteer work required by the sport organization was often fulfilled by the mothers, and seemed to be an expectation, particularly in the administrative type roles. In contrast, several of the fathers justified their lack of involvement due to their work obligations and other conflicting priorities.

Involved Fathering and Organized Youth Sport

The ideological shift of fathering from monetary support to a more involved style of fathering (Yeung, Sandberg, & Davis-Kean, 2001) was exemplified in this study. The value of supporting their children's sport participation through the provision of opportunities and attendance at games was central for the attainment of this ideological imperative. Through children's organized sport participation, the fathers were able to publicly display a sense of their physical and emotional support for their children and meet cultural expectations for the new fathering ideal. In doing so, they were also able to successfully avoid the dilemma of feminizing the fathering role (Gavanas, 2003), while reproducing and strengthening the preservation of hegemonic masculinity through sport (Coakley, 2006).

The father's private (e.g., practicing sports at home) and public support (e.g., attending games) of their children's sport involvement complements Brannen and Nilson's (2006) fathering model of the family man. Six of the seven fathers in this study appeared to align with attributes of the *family man* as someone who upholds the role of primary breadwinner, but who also places a high value on "being there" and helping out to some extent with childcare responsibilities. Yet, in this study, the father's role as the primary breadwinner was "figurative" as all but one of the wives had an equal or higher income level than their husbands. The seventh father, who chose not to participate in the study, most closely resembled the *work-focused* father whose identity is primarily shaped by a work ethic (although his wife self-reported a higher income level than his)

and who has a rather low involvement in his children's lives (Brannen & Nilson). This father in particular, rarely attended the children's games and practices. As Daly (2001) argued "men are more likely to see their work as primary and to fit into the family schedule when they had fulfilled those responsibilities" (p. 247), and this perspective was evident, to varying degrees, for all the fathers in this study.

Yet, consistent with the idea of leisure-based fathering (Harrington, 2006; Such, 2006), most of the fathers in this study appeared to be involved in their children's sporting interests, whether it was practicing in the yard, making ice rinks, attending their children's game, or being their team's coach. Sport has been recognized as an important part of contemporary fathering because it ties to men's interests and provides an opportunity for men to connect with their children (Harrington; Such). In this present study, the fathers' support seemed to heighten when the sports were aligned with their own personal interests. For example, their communication with their children appeared to be more encouraging with sports in which the fathers had a particular emotional investment, and their increased physical presence at these children's games was noted. The fathers' involvement was also heightened when the children participated at a higher competition level which consumed additional family resources (time and money) and had a greater impact on family life.

On the other hand, the fathers' support was also affected by conflicting priorities and interests. For example, going to a child's baseball game was seen as enjoyable one day, yet could be perceived more negatively the next day, if it interfered with another activity that the father would prefer to do. Interestingly, the fathers' involvement in organized sport also provided them with social connections such as fathers gathering on a Saturday morning to have breakfast, while their sons practiced at the arena. Thus, for fathers, it was a connection to sports and to other

fathers as well as to their children which seemed to influence their high level of involvement in organized children's sports.

The Responsibility of a Good Parent

The parenthood ideologies of intensive mothering and involved fathering are often discussed in the literature in isolation of one another. It could be argued, though, that many of the concepts that inform these ideologies are shared and central to both motherhood and fatherhood. For example, at the core of each of these parenting ideologies is the centrality of what it means to be a good parent. In terms of children's sport, Coakley (2006) has argued that parents' "moral worth" may be evaluated by their ability to foster their children's sport participation. Indeed, there was overwhelming consensus with the parents in this study that the provision of sport opportunities was imperative to good parenting practices.

For the fathers, and consistent with earlier research (Harrington, 2006), their own childhood experienced influenced their feelings about the connection between sports and good parenting. For example, many of the fathers had favourable memories of organized youth sport participation in their childhood, and wanted to ensure that their children had the same experiences and opportunities. Moreover, three of the seven fathers felt that, for a variety of reasons, they had missed out on important opportunities as a child, and they wanted to ensure that their own children did not have the same regrets. Two of the fathers (who were brothers) understood their parents' situation and why they were unable to play hockey given their father's work schedule. The third father blamed his parents for not giving him the chance to play at an elite level when presented with the opportunity. Perhaps this is why this father pressured his sons to play Triple A, despite his wife's initial reservations and the coach's abusive behaviour towards the players.

Yet, little attention in the literature has been given to the mothers' childhood experiences, and how these experiences informed their parenting ideals. In this study, two of the mothers talked about their own parents' lack of support for their sport participation during their childhood. Although these women wanted to be involved in organized sport, their parents did not support these interests and the women did not have the opportunity to play sports until their teenage or adult years. Consequently, both of these women believed that a good parent was one who supported their children's sport interests, and this may help explain why these mothers were so actively involved in their children's sporting lives. Disappointment and judgment of their own parents' actions had continued in recent years, as they were upset with their parents' lack of involvement in their grandchildren's sporting activities. Thus, similar to the fathers, this study reveals the importance of the mothers' own childhood sporting experiences, or lack thereof, and how this may influence the nature of the children's sport participation and the parent's organizational involvement.

The *purposive* nature of organized youth sport was also evident for both fathers and mothers, and echoed Shaw and Dawson's (2001) research on family leisure experiences. The parents purposively encouraged their children's participation in organized youth sport for the perceived physical, social, emotional, and moral benefits that they would receive. Yet, diverse parental values as they relate to the purpose of organized sport being "competitive" versus "fun" were evident. This difference may contribute to the culture of judging the nature of other parents' sport involvement. That is, parents who want their children to enjoy the fun and social aspects of sport, may perceive parents who are more competitive as being too intense. Likewise, parents who push their children to succeed, and believe that it is important to provide additional supports (such as power skating lessons), may believe that other parents who do not provide these opportunities represent "poor parenting" practices.

Similar to Lareau's research (2002; 2003), the notion of *concerted cultivation* was evident in this study, and organized youth sport opportunities were purposively sought out to foster children's skills and abilities. However in this study, unlike Lareau's findings, it was not just middle class parents who exhibited this general approach to parenting. Even the families who closely resembled a "working-class" background (families one and three) also emphasized the importance of children's participation in sport, namely hockey.

Lareau's concept of concerted cultivation also emphasizes the use of language between parent and child that encourages the children's growth and development through negotiation and reasoning strategies. In this study, though, a more complex decision-making process was revealed, with multiple levels of discussion that involved parent-parent (unbeknownst to the child) and parent-child interactions. Some of the parent-child discussions revealed persuasive arguments and behaviours that, at times, aligned with the parental interests and preferences and not with the idea of reasoning and negotiation.

Yet, there were implicit class differences in the decision-making processes of the parents. The same families, who resembled more of a "working-class" background and a *natural growth* approach to parenting, appeared to maintain Lareau's (2002; 2003) notion of the working-class's use of language as short, simple, and more directive (authoritarian) during the decision-making processes. In comparison, the other families in this study more closely resembled the middle-class use of language as a tool to purposively enhance the children's growth and development.

There were other ways, too, in which the two lowest income families reflected Lareau's concept of *natural growth* parenting. The children in these families were also limited in their extra-curricular activities to only hockey and baseball (no music lessons, guides/scouts), and the importance of homework was not emphasized. These children also appeared to be less time-stressed compared to the children from the other families who were typically involved in multiple

activities. Further, unlike the other families in this study, the cost of participation in hockey dominated families one and three's lives (and the interviews).

It could be argued that residing in a small rural community may amplify the lens in which good parenting behaviour is evaluated. Thus, to conform to social norms, the parents who may typically identify with a *natural growth* style of parenting may make family sacrifices, no matter the cost, to ensure their children's participation in the minor hockey program. This situation may also illustrate a middle-class value system seeping into working-class lives.

Guendouzi (2006) has argued that mothering ideologies reflect both "hegemonic institutional discourses and the discourses expressed by women themselves in their everyday interactions" (p. 902). As this study illustrates, though, the notion of the reproduction of dominant ideologies through everyday interactions could also be extended to the involved fathering ideals. Ideological assumptions about parenting roles were reinforced by both mothers and fathers, when judgments were made of other parents in regard to parenting behaviors.

These judgments revealed not only that good parenting was highly valued, but also that it was difficult to achieve. On the one hand, a parent would be criticized as *too involved* and certain actions, such as yelling at the game and/or forcing their child to play, were deemed to be inappropriate. On the other hand, parents would be judged as *unsupportive* if they were absent from the children's games and/or did not facilitate their involvement in "extra" performance related programs such as power-skating lessons or specialty camps. A "good parent" was expected to be at the sport venue, watching their children play and displaying the appropriate amount of enthusiasm. A "good parent" was also someone who actively contributed to the sport organization through their (somewhat obligatory) volunteer responsibilities.

Moreover, parents in this study did not recognize the diverse social contexts of people's lives when evaluating other parents' support of their children's sport involvement. Although the

parents in this study might have been expected to understand the conflicting priorities and difficulties that shape families' lives (e.g., work, multiple children's sport schedules, limited finances), there was little expression of empathy and compassion for other family situations. This lack of compassion might reflect the parents' own significant sacrifices for their children's sports, and thus their expectations that other parents should also sacrifice. The few notable exceptions of empathy occurred when there was a personal connection, such as a close friendship.

Judgments of good parenting practices were not only made in the public sphere, but also in the private context, i.e., criticisms of their own spouse's actions. When parents had conflicting perspectives, these criticisms clearly heightened stress levels within the family unit. Further, as will be elaborated upon in a later section, the gendered differences in what constituted *quality time* with their children may have contributed to these disagreements. Yet, in light of some parents' lack of involvement in their children's sport, and/or embarrassing behaviours, none of the parents made a reference to their own partner as being a "bad parent", nor did they seem to perceive their own parenting style as being inadequate.

Both fathers and mothers were highly invested in a sense of themselves as "good parents", and, in this study this notion was closely aligned with sport and the idea of "team family". This may echo Snyder's (2007) argument that parents may rationalize their "choices in a way that affirms their status as a good parent by drawing on popular notions of what it means to spend quality time with their families and accepting or modifying those messages to justify the decisions they have made in regard to juggling family time and their family's job demands" (p. 338). Thus, through the very provision of organized youth sport opportunities, the parents may feel a sense of comfort and accomplishment that they were, indeed, meeting societal expectations for being a "good parent".

Discovering Children's Insights

Most of the research, to date, on youth sport participation has focused primarily on the parental perspective, with minimal interpretive research that has included youth's perspectives. This study provides important insights into understanding youth's sport experiences, in connection to family life, and broader ideologies of parenthood and gender. In the construction of "team family" the children in this study had clearly adopted the idea of sport as a way of life. Children's experiences were primarily positive, but there were occasions when they thought about quitting. As discussed previously, the children valued the sense of family that developed out of the collective commitment to youth sport. The children's talk also illustrated that they had "bought into" broader cultural ideals linking organized youth sport to healthier lifestyles and the productive use of their time.

Living the "Enriched" Childhood

During the children's younger years, their involvement in organized youth sport was typically initiated by the parents. Many of them did not remember "why" they first started participating. This seems to suggest that for the children, sport involvement was "taken-for-granted", and had clearly become a way of life for them. That is, on the whole, they did not seem to question their continued involvement. This is similar to Dixon, Warner, and Bruening's (2008) research on NCAA Division I female head coaches, and their reflective experiences of their childhood sport participation. These authors argued that, "their parents' early influence became foundational to their sport involvement today by constructing sport participation as normal" (p. 553).

For the children in this present study, even though organized sport seemed to have become a part of their routine existence, they also seemed to embrace their sport participation and the idea of "team family". That is, they clearly enjoyed the "fun" aspects of sport participation

and the friendships that they developed with other children in the community. These close friendships were evident through their organized youth sport participation, as well as the informal activities that were often shaped by sports (e.g., pick-up hockey, baseball). The children also spoke highly of the prestige they felt representing their community on the sport team.

Moreover, unlike the parents, the nineteen children interviewed in this study rarely gave any indication that they were unhappy with their sporting experience. For example, some of the parents talked about the lower skill level of the other children and criticized the lack of resources (e.g., facilities, specialty coaching). Yet, from the children's perspectives, there was no indication that this was a concern for them. Rather, simply "having fun" was seen as their primary reason that they liked playing sports. Their sense of frustration with limited opportunities was connected to the desire to participate in different *types* of sports/leagues that were not readily available in their local community such as football, lacrosse or indoor soccer.

The intensity of their schedules meant that these children lived a highly routine existence. The majority of their weeknights and weekends were scheduled; with little time for unstructured play. Many children described how difficult it was to balance their organized sport participation, homework, other extra-curricular activities (e.g., music lessons, Guides), and part-time employment obligations (older children). Yet at the same time, the children in this study seemed to have adapted to this busy schedule. Indeed, several of the children seemed to welcome any additional opportunities that were offered to them.

The findings of this study also demonstrated children as *instigators* in the creation of their highly scheduled lives. For example, in several families the children were unable to make a choice between activities (when introduced to new activities via their friends), and some of them decided to participate in multiple programs during the same season. Their parents (and siblings) talked about their concerns for the "over-scheduled" child, yet at the same time, the parents did

not “force” a decision on the child, but rather sought ways to facilitate these multiple activities. Thus, some children’s highly scheduled lives were shaped not only by the parents’ desire to be good parents and create a sense of “team family”, but also by the children’s decisions to participate in several activities and their decisions to remain active in organized sports.

Reflecting Broader Cultural Ideals

The importance of organized youth sport to the children, and how it shaped their values and beliefs was clearly evident. That is, having their lives highly scheduled shaped their perspectives about how their time should be spent. For some children, the very notion of “free-time” was troublesome, and too much of it was seen in a negative context. It was also important not to “waste” their energy in unorganized activities to ensure peak performance at their sport games and practices. This, in part, echoes Shannon’s (2006) research that argues parents have considerable influence on their children’s leisure choices. She found that “parents and adolescents may focus on the functional aspects of leisure, particularly extracurricular activities, rather than viewing leisure including unstructured activities as an opportunity for pleasure and enjoyment” (p. 398). Further, in this present study, the unorganized activities that the children did participate in often revolved around the type of their organized sport participation, and some of their “free time” was spent playing (practicing) with their friends and siblings.

Broader socio-cultural values related to the *importance* of organized youth sport were clearly understood by the children. The benefits of participation, such as being “active”, “healthy” and “staying out of trouble” were readily acknowledged. Yet, the idea of “having fun” was not cited as an important reason why they were involved in organized sport. Instead, the notion of “having fun” was in relation to what they *liked* about playing, but was not seen to be an *important* reason why they played. This concept is also similar to Shannon’s (2006) study, who

found that the children did not “Engag[e] in leisure as an end in itself or for fun” (p. 417), rather there were functional aspects that were also primary motivators.

Similar to the earlier discussion in the previous section on “Parenthood Ideologies”, the children from the two families, who closely resembled a working-class background, also revealed some distinct differences related to their sport participation. These children seemed to be less stressed, with more unscheduled time and “hanging out” with their friends, in non-organized sports. For example, they participated in only one sport in any season (i.e., hockey in the winter and baseball in the summer), were not involved in a lot of school sports (if any), and there was almost no mention of other extra-curricular activities such as music lessons or Girl Guides/Scouts. Likewise, these children did not appear to be overly concerned that they had an insufficient number of activities, nor did they express that they were “missing out” on anything. At the same time, the children from these two families were also aware of the broader social values connected to the importance of sports (hockey) in facilitating a “healthy” and “active” lifestyle - values that are created and reproduced within the middle-class and upper-class culture.

Connecting to Family

The significance of winning was also important, particularly with the older children, and it shaped their sporting experiences. In part, this may be related to the older children’s recognition of their parents’ increased level of enjoyment, based upon the outcome of their game. Moreover, many of the negative experiences that the children talked about were often related to their parents’ heightened emotional investment in their sport involvement. Moments of tension were particularly evident when a parent was also their coach. The findings echo previous research by Jowett (2008) who used a single dyad to explore the relationship between the familial coach-athlete relationship. A daughter, who was now a young adult, reflected on her earlier experiences,

and one of the key findings was the negative aspects of this relationship that “included athletes’ inability to handle criticism for mistakes and rebellious behavior, as well as coaches’ inability to separate the coaching from the parenting role” (p. 23).

Yet, as this study shows, even though the children did not enjoy their sport participation at times, or thought about ceasing their involvement, the sense of maintaining their connection to “team family” was clearly more significant. The children’s participation in youth sports contributed to a sense of “family” via the time they spent with their siblings and parents practicing their skills. The parents’ (fathers’) highly visible leadership roles in the sport organization also created feelings of pride and enhanced their sense of connection between parent-child.

In addition, the children clearly enjoyed the weekend trips and vacations that organized sport provided. These new adventures with their family, outside of their own community, seemed to unintentionally contribute to the development of “team family” and a spirit of togetherness. The idea of family vacations and constructing a sense of “family togetherness” echoes earlier research by Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, and Havitz, (2008). In the Hilbrecht et al. study, it was noted that the children saw “fun” as the primary purpose of their family vacations. However, underlying this idea were other meanings related to new experiences and adventures. Further, family vacations provided the children with a “sense of belonging to family and other social groups. To many [children], the family vacation was constructed as a source of connection to immediate and extended family members as well as close family friends” (p. 560).

Earlier research has also highlighted the significance of “role modeling” and children’s socialization into sport (e.g., Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008). However, this study reveals a more interactional process whereby children would participate in activities that they knew their parents were interested in and would highly support. That is, one of the significant aspects of

their sport participation was their desire to please their mother and father, and feel a greater connection to them. One way that they could feel a closer bond with their parents was to “follow in their footsteps” and play a sport that their parents clearly liked. Thus, they would participate in activities that they knew would please their mother and/or father and enhance their sense of connection through family tradition. The children also continued their participation in sports for their parents’ sake because of the sense of accomplishment with their successes. That is, scoring a goal or achieving the next level in figure skating was seen as a means of making their parents proud of them.

There was also a “gendered” aspect to this, as the girls were more apt to participate in an activity to “please mom” compared to the boys. Likewise, the importance of “pleasing dad” also affected the selections of children’s sports activities. When the fathers had a high interest in a particular sport, the children were more likely to be involved in it, and it was evident that several of the female children decided to play hockey because of their fathers’ influential opinions. Some of the female children also made the decision to quit figure skating as they knew their fathers were not particularly interested in the sport. Even the two sisters in the study whose father, was a hockey fan but clearly had the opinion that girls’ hockey was not *real* hockey, chose to play the sport to gain their father’s approval. Similarly, all of the young boys in this study participated in the minor hockey league, and emphasized the importance of their father’s presence in supporting their hockey experiences. Ironically, the notion of “pleasing dad” may be a greater influence on their sport choice than pleasing their mothers, who actually facilitated the decision-making and registration processes.

In sum, sport had become a way of life for the children and had become an experience that was primarily positive. At times, there were challenges that seemed to strain relationships with other family members, yet the important sense of connection to the ideal of “team family”

maintained their commitment to their continued sport involvement. Moreover, their sport involvement also reflected broader cultural ideologies related to the connection of organized sport with parenthood ideologies (e.g., the value of enrichment type activities) and gender relations (e.g., valuing fathers' visible leadership roles and opinion on their sport choices).

Gendered Nature of Children's Sport Participation

Doing Gender

West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of "doing gender" relates to the reproduction of traditional gender ideologies embedded within and created through everyday social interactions. In this study, gender relations were reinforced in a variety of ways, including the child-centered nature of women's lives, and their daily responsibilities as the primary caregiver. When describing their relationships, many of the mothers talked about their husbands as taking an *equal role*. However, underlying much of the parental talk was evidence of the husbands' role as *helpers*. That is, the mothers clearly orchestrated the family's activities and were primarily responsible for ensuring the completion of the domestic work, while the fathers helped as needed. The colour-coded calendars organizing the children's extra-curricular schedules with the mothers' work schedules (but void of the fathers' work schedules) clearly illustrated the gendered nature of their managerial role in the facilitation of their children's lives.

As mentioned earlier, the devaluing of the women's paid work also clearly reproduced traditional gender relations and the mother's responsibility as the managers and primary caregiver of their children's lives. That is, in this study, both women and men were involved in full-time employment with the women's (self-reported) income equal to or greater than their husbands. All of the women also commuted greater distances to their place of employment. Yet, their positions

were devalued and seen to be more “flexible” than their husbands, and thus more able to take on domestic and childcare responsibilities. The idealization of their “flexibility” also extended into the justification for their heightened involvement (obligatory volunteerism) related to the sport organizational tasks and responsibilities. The gendered work in both the private and public sphere that the women were involved in connected to their children’s sport participation, and appeared to provide the sense that “good parenting” ideals were being met, by both parents.

This present study also echoes Snyder’s (2007) research in that several of the couples had gendered perspectives on what *quality time* meant connected to their children’s sport participation, and these differences often led to emotional conflict between the couples. The different perspectives may exemplify the distinction between “being with” the child in a leisure-based parenting role versus “being there” for the child in an ethic of care role (Such, 2006). Fathers’ ideals of quality time were more likely to represent “time available” (Snyder) in that their support of the children’s sport participation did not necessarily mean interaction; rather simply being at the sport venue watching their child was a sense of connection. This is similar to the notion of involved fathering and “being with the child”. In contrast, mothers were more apt to perceive quality time as “child-centred” (Snyder) through the development of meaningful relationships and heightened bonding (e.g., conversations that occurred in the vehicle on the way to the sport venue). The idea of quality time via “structured-planning” (Snyder), and setting aside time from employment and daily responsibilities to facilitate the children’s sport participation was also evident. This is similar to the ideology of intensive mothering and “being there” for the child” as active managers and nurturers of their lives (Such).

The notion of “doing gender” was also evident for the boys’ sport involvement. The highly gendered nature of boys’ sport participation (i.e., restricted to “male” sports only) reflected and contributed to traditional gender stereotypes. Unlike the girls, there was not a sense

of changing ideals for the boys. Rather, the restrictions on boys' activities seemed to be related to the continued "inferiorization" of traditionally female sports. Further, the boys seemed to feel a greater sense of obligation to continue their participation in sports, and specifically in traditionally masculine sports such as hockey, if they were to maintain a sense of social connection within their community. Indeed, some of the fathers and mothers *justified* this in terms of the rural culture, while other parents (particularly mothers) also seemed to be aware of the gendered constraints on their sons. There was a consensus by the participants that in their small communities it would be difficult to confront stereotypes, such as being gay, that were associated with boys' participation in traditionally female sports. Further, challenging these stereotypes in a small "fish-bowl" community were a risk that boys perceived to be too great. Yet, the idea of the "doing gender", and the social construction of masculine and feminine behaviours, is a dynamic process that may transform over time in response to changing cultural ideals and norms, and some evidence of changing beliefs about sports and gender were apparent.

Undoing Gender

Similar to Deutsch's (2007) notion of "undoing gender", organized youth sport provided a context in which some social interactions became less gendered, and in this sense sport was a site of change and resistance to traditional gender ideologies. For example, the onset of the girls' hockey league to this rural community five years earlier demonstrated how cultural notions of gender, at least with respect to girls, could be challenged and reconstructed. Although the community members who initiated the girls' teams experienced some difficulties in the early years in receiving the minor hockey executive's support, five years later girls' hockey appeared to be supported and viewed in a positive light by girls, their families, and the broader community.

A sense of changing ideals and beliefs about girls' capabilities was evident among the parents, and within the broader community, in part because of girls playing hockey. Several parents mentioned this change in attitudes and perspectives. For example, one mother revealed that prior to her daughter playing hockey, she did not think it was appropriate for girls to play hockey, and found that it was disconcerting when girls played on her sons' team. However, after supporting her daughters' participation on the newly formed girls' team, she now believed that girls were capable of playing this traditionally masculine sport, and in fact, she had persuaded her youngest daughter to quit figure skating and pursue girls' hockey instead (Although, this may also be another indication of the devaluing of girls' sports and the valuation of traditionally male sports.) Another parent in the community talked about how she advocated on her neighbor's behalf, for the girls to have the right to play on the boy's team, after the creation of the girls' team. Some contrary perspectives on gender were also evident. This was exemplified by a father (who did not have any daughters) who talked about the advanced skating skills of young girls compared to boys. Yet, at the same time he also talked about the "good old days" when women stayed at home and men went to work.

Changing views of gender were also evident in the children's discourse. In particular it was clear that the girls believed that they should be able to play any sport regardless of the gender "appropriateness". This notion was also supported by many of the boys in the study, who also understood the "benefits" of youth sport participation in maintaining an active lifestyle, and believed that girls also needed these opportunities. Moreover, unlike earlier research on elite female hockey players (e.g., Theberge, 2000), if they chose to play hockey there was no indication of the girls being labeled a "lesbian" and the questioning of their sexuality.

In general, too, the fathers' support of their daughters' sporting endeavors showed evidence of "undoing" or resisting gender. Earlier research has shown that fathers are more

supportive of their sons' sporting practices than that of their daughters (e.g., Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). Yet, in the present study this was less clear. Fathers were more involved and supportive in particular sports, such as hockey compared to figure skating, but this may have been related to their sporting *interests* rather than the children's biological sex.

Overall, and consistent with previous research on resistance (Shaw, 2001), the findings indicated that the process of challenging gender was not linear, but was complicated and contradictory. For example, although many families supported new ideas about gender for girls, such support was not evident for changing notions of masculinity. In addition, the broadening perspectives of femininity were often complex and diverse. The contradictory nature of changing ideals about gender was illustrated at a household level when two sisters were given the opportunity to play hockey, yet it was explicit that their father did not believe that girls' hockey was *real* hockey.

Further, even parents (mothers) who expressed support for girls' hockey said that there was still some opposition to girls' sport involvement at a societal level, and a lack of respect for their skills and accomplishments. Contradictory ideals of girls' sport involvement were also apparent for individuals. Although many of the participants believed that girls were capable of participating in traditionally masculine activities such as hockey, there was also a strong sense from parents and from some of the boys, that girls should not be able to play hockey with the boys when they reached a level when physical contact such as "hitting" and "body checking" was allowed. This is consistent with Theberge's (2000) argument that "[a]mbivalence about women's athleticism, in historical contexts where women were powerless, led to strategic accommodations. These accommodations have included adapted models that diminished the physicality of women's sport, thereby minimizing the threat to the association of sport and masculinity, and assertion of what has come to be known as the feminine apologetic" (p. 10).

The current model of hockey, with the acceptance and normalization of physical aggression, is often seen to be appropriate for males but not for females. On one hand, the women's adoption of a different model that does not reproduce traditionally masculine values of power and aggression may be thought of as acceptable and appropriate. Yet, the implementation of a different model could also be seen as a new version of the Victorian ideal and the view of women's sport participation as "risky" (Henderson et al., 1996; Theberge, 2000). Similar to the historical idea that sport and physical activity would negatively affect women's health, this view of women's hockey may also be rejected in the future.

The changing perspectives on girls' sports, as revealed in this study, are particularly interesting since earlier research in rural communities has argued that small town sport participation is highly male oriented (Dempsey, 1990; Hunter & Whitson, 1991; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). The girls' increased participation in hockey seems to represent broadening ideals of femininity. Yet, at the same time, the complexity was also illustrated when some girls' sport opportunities increased, while other girls' opportunities became marginalized. Perhaps, the most pointed example was the girls who had previously played in the boys' hockey league for several years before the onset of a girls' hockey team. When the community's minor hockey association made the political decision that girls were no longer allowed to play on the boys' team, considerable frustration and tension was experienced by some families (it was also evident within the larger community). The girls who decided to stay in their community and to play hockey on the newly created girls' teams, experienced dissatisfaction because their teammates were not of the caliber at which they were used to playing. Others made the decision to leave their own community in search of a higher caliber girls' team that would meet their skill level and needs.

These changes not only limited the sport choices for the girls who had played with the boys in earlier years, but it also altered the family dynamics and relationships. In some cases, the

girls were no longer able to play on the same team as their brothers, and additional family resources were consumed as the more competitive teams required greater commitment (time and financial). Further, not all families were able to make this decision because of limited resources. Thus, the process of “undoing gender” and changing ideals created opportunities for some, but a sense of exclusion and marginalization for others.

The process of ‘undoing gender’ or resisting gender was also contradictory with respect to the mothers’ and fathers’ involvement in sport organizations. Many parents talked in terms of gender equity and equal organizational contributions. Indeed there was evidence that mothers are currently more involved than in previous years and this was emphasized in the positive context of gender equality. In some ways this may be seen as progress, since earlier research by Thompson (1999) and others revealed women’s extensive support roles in hidden activities, such as laundry, care of equipment and food preparation, while the fathers dominated the higher status organizational positions.

In this study, though, the women’s involvement in higher profile organizational roles was often an extension of their *hidden* domestic roles. While a few of the mothers had become coaches or team trainers, almost all of the mothers continued to occupy hidden leadership positions such as serving on the board of directors or being the team manager. When asked about some of their traditional roles and responsibilities, the mothers were hesitant in their responses, which seemed to reflect an unwillingness to challenge these more traditional norms.

The fathers’ more visible public positions such as the coach or scorekeeper provided them with more public recognition and status within the community as well as within the private context of the family unit. That is, the children spoke with pride and excitement of their fathers’ roles and contributions, while the mothers’ roles received less recognition. Further, the quantity and time-consuming nature of the fund-raising work done by the mothers was evident from their

interviews, while the fathers tended to fulfill their fundraising responsibilities in short time spans, such as being a parking attendant for a day at a festival. This difference in time commitment also seemed to receive little attention or comment.

Thus, it could be argued that although women's roles in the public sphere of sport have increased, they have increased in the context of the hidden and invisible positions (similar to the private sphere), and their workload has in fact intensified compared to earlier years. Interestingly, some of the women's paid-employment positions were also seen to justify why they were involved in more administrative/clerical type volunteer positions, with their given "expertise" in these areas. Finally, many of the mothers who occupied these roles were not athletes themselves. It will be interesting to see what public roles future generations of mothers will occupy, as female children, who are athletes in their childhood, become mothers themselves.

In sum, this study supports earlier conceptualizations of resistance (e.g., Shaw, 2001) that recognize that it is a contradictory process, which often simultaneously contains both reproductive and resistant aspects. The findings also reflect Shaw's (2001) conceptualization of resistance as a political practice that can both empower individuals, and foster broader positive social change. For example, the development of girls' only hockey teams in this area empowered the young women who participated, and in turn, encouraged other young women in the community to become involved. It also broadened parents' and other community members' conceptualization of femininity. Yet at the same time, other young women's opportunities were minimized as they were no longer able to continue their participation primarily on the boys' team (they were allowed to "sub" for the boys' team when needed). Further, the contradictory aspects of reproduction and resistance were evident in that broadening ideals of femininity did not mean altering more narrowly defined ideals of masculinity. The findings also reflect Theberge's (2000) comments about how new opportunities for females (e.g., new teams and separate leagues) may

evoke gender equity, but also hide underlying inequalities. Moreover, this study illustrates the complexity of the connections between youth sports participation (and organizational processes) and the contradictory processes of negotiation, construction and reconstruction of gender ideologies.

Centrality of Youth Sport to Rural Life

The context of rural life made important contributions to the construction of “team family”. As mentioned earlier, in the small community where this study was conducted, parenting practices were highly visible, and the judgments of other parents’ type and level of support were magnified. This may be one reason why there was such a strong connection between family life and children’s sport participation. The lack of other leisure facilities and programs also heightened the centrality of youth sports to the families’ leisure practices. The unique sport models in this rural context (compared to an urban context) also fostered a community of families that developed close relationships and connections with each other. This may, in part, explain why the families (parents) were so committed to the organized youth sport programs, even though they had to overcome distant travel to sport venues and experienced frustration with the lack of resources to adequately support their children’s involvement.

Shaping Experiences through Distant Travel and Lack of Resources

The creation of “team family” and the facilitation of children’s sport involvement was not an easy task for the parents. The rural context exacerbated some of the difficulties in the facilitation of children’s sport involvement, and the sacrifices made to other aspects of family life. Similar to previous research (e.g., Thompson, Rehman & Humbert, 2005; Trussell & Shaw, 2007), the

parents in this study described heightened time demands and transportation challenges. The lack of gas stations and restaurants that were open late at night caused additional stress on the parents as they would have to plan and pack food in advance , and/or make sure they had sufficient gas to drive home (or risk being stranded on the side of the road). The high cost of fuel and long distances to sport venues also increased financial stress. Yet, at the same time, traveling long distances to sports venues was also seen by the parent to enhance family relationships. The children valued the time spent in the vehicle to have fun with their friends, listen to music, or time to catch up on their sleep. In fact, many of the children thought of their hometown as being central and only a short drive to their games and/or practices.

Some of the parents also talked about their dissatisfaction with the limited sport opportunities in a rural community and the lack of competitive programs. For example, the children with a range of skill levels (from the highly skilled to those who could barely skate) were forced to play on the same team (this is unlike the urban model where there would be a range of competitive levels). The lack of specialty resources such as high quality coaching and facilities were also a source of considerable frustration for some of the parents. The unhappiness and negative perspectives were particularly evident among parents who wanted their children to succeed and compete at a higher level, compared to parents whose values appeared to be more centred on the “fun” and “social aspects” of sport.

The parents, who were more competitive in orientation, believed that the limited opportunities affected the children’s enjoyment and quality of skill development. As a result, the only option to compete at a higher level was to travel great distances (sometimes in excess of two hours to get to practice), which consumed more of the family resources (time, energy, and money). This decision also had an impact on family dynamics as it meant that one or both parents were often absent from home due to transporting the child to and from their practices and games.

At the same time, this distant travel also provided the parents and their children with a window into the broader world, as their vacations and weekends away were often shaped by the sport travel out of the region, the province, and even the country. Many of the families talked very favorably of these new experiences that the family unit was able to enjoy together.

Creating a Community of Families

The value of youth sport for the families in this study clearly went beyond simply providing an opportunity for sports participation for children. The children's games were the social hub of the community, where social connections and friendships were made. Indeed, the local hockey arena was a principal social gathering place in this community. Further, as mentioned earlier, youth sport created parallel leisure opportunities for the parents, their siblings, and became a *family night out*.

One explanation for this may be the lack of cultural, entertainment, and leisure facilities such as theatres, cinemas, bowling, and shopping centres in rural communities (Haugen & Villa, 2006; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002), and the role of organized sport as a source of community entertainment. Moreover, organized youth sport may bolster *community spirit* and the pride that is felt when local youth play on their hometown team. Indeed, some of the older youth revealed this sense of community recognition when they talked, with some regret, about reaching an age when they could no longer represent their hometown. The "All-Ontario" banners that were hung with pride in their arenas, acted as visual reminders of their contributions. (After winning a provincial championship for their level of competition, Triple "A", Double "A" ... "C", "D", the towns/cities would receive a banner that would be hung in their arena).

Unlike the urban model of youth sports, which typically involves several teams and different competition levels, the organized sport in this rural community involved children

playing on the same team year after year, and across different sport seasons, leading to close relationships with other families. This highly integrative context created a *community of families* and close connections with other families. This, in turn, probably heightened the sense of “team family” for parents and children and helps to explain the centrality of sport in the lives of these rural families. It also helps to explain why participants’ interviews included so much discussion about other parents in the community and their respective parenting practices.

Although children’s participation in organized sport enhanced the families’ social connections, it also may also have its social costs. This close connection among families in the community, and the time they spent together season after season and year after year, may have also created heightened tensions as they had intimate knowledge of each others’ lives, and were judgmental of other families’ parenting practices. This is consistent with Bonner’s (1997) argument that the higher degree of visibility in small rural communities heightens judgments of community members’ parenting practices. In this study, judgments were made about the quality of parenting, as it related to the provision of opportunities and the type of support provided for children from a long-term perspective, rather than focusing only on one particular season. It was also evident that parents were aware of the visibility of their own parenting practices, because of discussions with other community members about their children’s sporting achievements, or references made to their family “playing together” on the front yard.

Thus, the rural context of these families’ lives may help to explain the connection of organized youth sport to family life and the ways in which the “moral worth” (Coakley, 2006) of parents is seen in relation to their support for their children’s participation. Residing in a small community may enhance the difficulties for children who want to discontinue playing a particular sport. That is, pressure to remain on a local team was related not only to parents’ emotional and social investment in their sport participation (as it creates a sense of community belonging), but

also to community members (parents and youth) who want talented children to remain on the community team. Further, participation in local sport leagues helped children and families to remain connected to their community, rather than face social isolation. Families whose children (or parents) decided to not participate in organized youth sport risked social exclusion.

In sum, this study revealed the contradictory nature of organized youth sport, including the strengthening of familial relationships, as well as the tensions and disagreements arising out of divergent perspectives. The public nature of parenting in the youth sport context and its relationship to social constructions of being a “good parent” was clearly evident. In terms of broader implications, the study emphasizes the close connection between organized youth sport, and changing cultural ideals and practices associated with gender and parenting. Moreover, the power of these ideologies, their connection to youth sport, and the impact on family interactions, dynamics, and relationships suggests the importance for future research in this area.

Future Research Directions

The present study was limited to the experiences of selected families. Clearly it will be important in future research to capture the experiences and meanings of other families in order to enhance our understanding of children’s involvement in organized youth sport and its connection to family life. For example, the families who participated in this study were a fairly homogenous group with two heterosexual parents who were married (with no indication of it being a “second-marriage”), and Caucasian. Families from diverse family forms such as co-habiting or gay or lesbian families may reveal diverse perspectives with different values. Blended and single-parent families may also have different experiences related to time pressures and conflicting familial demands. Families from different race and ethnicity demographics, as well as families who are

new immigrants to Canada, may also attach different meanings to family experiences and the relationship between family life and organized youth sport.

Further, many of the participants in this present study expressed a clear *pro-sport ideology*, and this may affect the applicability or transferability of the findings to other families who do not have similar pro-sport values and beliefs. Future research that seeks to understand families whose children dropped out of organized sport altogether, and/or who resisted the cultural pressures to become involved early on, may provide new insights into the connection of organized youth sport to parenting ideologies. Research that seeks to explore the lives of children who are not involved in organized youth sport may provide a more holistic understanding to changing parenthood ideologies and judgment of a parents' moral worth. As Lareau's (2003) and Snyder's (2007) research argues, parents evaluate quality parenting and time spent with their children in different ways, often based on how they justify and come to terms with their own parenting decisions.

Future research in an urban context may also be of value in terms of examining the extent to which the concept of "team family" might be relevant in this type of setting. For example, would the greater availability of sport choices in urban areas intensify the complexity of the children's sport decisions? With multiple levels of competition readily available, how do parents and the children decide what level is appropriate? With the availability of other leisure services and facilities, would organized sport be less likely to be the focal point of the family's night out, and would this influence the children's and parent's sport decisions? Would a sense of "belonging to the community" be less evident in a larger urban centre, and how would this affect the parents' role in the decision-making process? Also, how does the urban context shape the socio-cultural values related to notions of gender-appropriate activities?

Moreover, future research that explores different geographic regions may also reveal different meanings and experiences. For example, farm families who reside close to suburban centres promote children's sport participation because they believe that the family farm is "doomed", and they need to prepare them for a life outside of the agriculture community (Trussell & Shaw, in press). Of interest, though, in this present study was that only one family mentioned their children's participation in traditional rural activities, such as youth farming clubs (e.g., "4-H" – a program to promote youth leadership, historically, in rural communities). Even though the participants in this study lived a considerable distance from any urban centre, organized sport also seemed to have become central to raising children, and the families' social integration into the broader community. Further, differences in the families' meanings and experiences may also be found by province, since there is evidence of provincial differences in rates of sport participation (e.g., Trussell & McTeer, 2007). Likewise, differences and similarities in experiences and values (i.e., the centrality of children's sport and its connection to gender relations and parenthood ideologies) may also be found in other parts of North America and/or Europe or even in other parts of the world.

The data from this study revealed some of the family dynamics that were shaped by the children's participation in organized sport. Future research that explores the dual role of parent and volunteer positions and how it impacts the parent-child relationship could be examined in greater detail. For example, how is the relationship shaped when the child is a star athlete versus a weaker player? How does a parent decide what team to coach/manage/train? What impact does this have on their other children who may be playing on a different team?

Exploration into the notion of parents' moral worth based on their children's sport involvement requires greater attention too. For example, what are the experiences and feelings of parents and their children who do not have the resources, who live beneath the poverty line,

and/or are unwilling to sacrifice such a large proportion of family resources to ensure their child's success? Further, what are the experiences and beliefs of parents who do not place the same value on children's sports, or who have children who are not interested in sport participation? Insights into the parents and their children who do not participate in organized sport and their feelings of a sense of connection to their community would make a valuable contribution to the sociological understandings of rural life as well as the broader parenthood ideologies.

Future research could explore the family dynamics when the parents become "empty nesters" and are no longer involved in their children's sporting activities. For example, how do they define a sense of family, and what happens to the construction of "team family" during this particular lifecycle stage? Investigation of the parents' own sporting experiences and whether or not they change during that time period could also be explored to bring new sociological understandings to adult sport participation.

In terms of broader implications, by revealing the connection of organized youth sport to changing gender ideologies, this study calls attention to the transformation of cultural values. For example, future research might examine the nature of gender construction through the experiences of mothers who grew up when new ideas about girls' participation in "male" sports were developing. Will their lives continue to reflect women's hidden work and the concept of "doing gender" much like their mothers, or will they exhibit new perspectives and new practices that challenge sports organizations and assumptions about volunteer roles?

Research that seeks to understand the connection of organized youth sport to recent socio-cultural changes in Canada's rural areas would also be valuable. The changing rural landscape has been influenced by the extraction industries' increasing unemployment levels, and a reduction in health care, education and social assistance programs (e.g., Malatest, Barry, & Krebs, 2002). To date, few researchers have sought to understand the sport and leisure experiences and

meanings of rural youth who reside in this changing social landscape. Thus, future research in this area may enhance our understanding of the unique challenges and positive experiences that rural youth encounter, and how rural communities can better meet their needs. Examining the role of sport and leisure in strengthening family ties in light of youth out-migration and family fragmentation could also help to reveal opportunities for new sociological understandings and theoretical developments related to sport, leisure, family, and rural scholarship.

Chapter X: Post-Script, Charting the Journey

Throughout the study, a journal was used to help identify and record some of my reflections during the research process. In part, this journal was a tool to record emerging thoughts related to data collection and analysis, and helped provide a greater understanding of my role as a researcher in this project. This final chapter explores some of the reflections that I recorded. Excerpts are taken directly from my reflective journal as well as a few selected passages from the participants' on-line journals.

Reflections on Researching Families

Challenges with Family Recruitment

One of the challenges I experienced in the data collection process was the recruitment of participants. My initial plan was to recruit potential families via contacting a rural volunteer organization, and ask if a recruitment email could be sent out to their membership list. However, I learned through time, that it was not an effective method. The progression of my frustration and discouragement is revealed throughout the following journal entries:

I'm totally pumped and excited to begin this project! I'm nervous though in terms of doing this form of recruitment and sending out emails. I'm nervous that the delete button is so easy to do, and I'm not sure how many people I will actually recruit through this method ... but right now it seems like the least intrusive way of trying to recruit families to participate. (Reflective Journal, November 7, 2007)

I'm not confident that this method for recruitment will be helpful. It's frustrating as I sit back and wait ... but hopefully something will happen. I've decided that once a week, every Wednesday, I will try a new potential organization for participant recruitment. (Reflective Journal, November 14, 2007)

I think e-mail as a form of correspondence isn't going to be a good option for this project. I'm definitely going to have to recruit participants by "being there" in the community and

speaking with them in person. I am getting a little bit discouraged in terms of finding participants. (Reflective Journal, December 6, 2007)

After the course of two months (interrupted by the Christmas holidays), I decided to take a more active approach to seek out potential participants. During this time period I had contacted several organizations, many of whom were “disbanded” with a lack of membership and/or volunteer burn-out. I was finally able to make a connection with the “Stickville Community Group” (it turned out to be a “Seniors Group”) and I asked if I could attend one of their meetings. Although, I did not recruit any participants from this meeting, it was a valuable experience for several reasons. First the opportunity to drive to “Stickville” confirmed that this was the right community for this study. Regardless of meeting the rural criteria based on population density and distance to an urban centre, it culturally felt like it was rural:

It took me three passes before I finally found the community centre. It’s a building tucked behind the town’s “general store”. There’s only one main intersection in the community ... it’s a stop sign, no traffic lights. I really feel that I’m in a “rural” community. The guest speaker after me at the meeting was talking about how to “milk sheep”! (Reflective Journal, January 4, 2008)

At that moment I also realized that my personal introduction in the community was important. I decided to abandon (what I thought to be) the least intrusive way of recruiting participants through e-mail. At this point, I contacted the first organization again (The Kinsmen) and speak with the president (rather than the secretary with whom I had initially made contact). The President was not familiar with my prior conversations with the secretary, so I assumed that the e-mail must not have been sent out. The President recommended that I try calling his next door neighbor (also a member of the Kinsmen) to see if they might be interested. This initial connection was the stimulus for the project, and the snow-ball chain flowed relatively easy from this point forward. This in part, may be because of the great rapport I developed with the first family, and the positive messages that were shared with other community members about me.

One further interesting note on e-mail as a recruitment tool was that my earlier doubts were correct. Indeed, some of the families had received my e-mail, but did not act upon their receipt:

“It was interesting – [mother, family #1] made reference to the e-mail that [Kinsmen Secretary] had sent out. She said she saw the e-mail that he forwarded along but she didn’t do anything with it. So, I guess personal contact definitely makes a difference! (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

I also became aware that the snowball sampling method may have its limitations, in that, the families were being “selective” in whom they would refer me to:

It was interesting ... when they [mom and children] were trying to decide who I could get in touch with [the next family] ... the mom avoided certain families that the kids suggested. They would suggest a name and Mom would say “no”. In essence, she was “pre-screening” and being selective as to who she thinks I should speak with. I’m curious why certain families were recommended, while others were not. (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

Thus, using the snowball sampling method for participant recruitment, the families would only refer me to what they deemed to be the “right” type of family to speak to.

It also became evident that many of the families I interviewed were “pro-sport families”. For example, several of the parents had met through a sport team that they were involved with:

Both of the couples/families that I’ve interviewed, met through sporting practices. So, family number one met while playing broomball together, and family number two met when he was coaching her baseball team. I’m interviewing (so far) a very specific type of family with very specific interests. Both families (and the parents) are very pro-sports. (Reflective Journal, March 1, 2008)

The inclusion of only “pro-sport families” in this study shaped the data collected and the interpretations and findings of this study. It is for that reason that in the earlier section on “Future Research Directions” I recommended that future research should investigate families who do not place the same value on children’s sport participation, and who may not be involved at all. Investigation with these families may provide a broader understanding of the connection of organized youth sport to parenthood ideologies.

Time Stressed Families Creating Researcher Stress

Throughout the process of participant recruitment and data collection, it was clear, that the difficulties related to finding participants were exacerbated when studying *time stressed* families.

My first encounter with this phenomenon was during the community group meeting that I attended:

There was one woman who gave me back the information letter and said that her grandkids are playing sports ... but with the parents working, and the kids playing sports and everything that's going on ... that the family would be just too busy to participate in the research. The irony that my very research topic is impeding my recruitment of potential participants! (Reflective Journal, January 4, 2008)

Once my initial family was identified, I was still uncertain if my first set of interviews would actually happen. I used to joke with my fellow peers that I needed a more captive group of participants with schedules that were not so hectic:

Finally, after four long months, I finally have a family set up to meet with on Saturday. As I was joking with Rebecca, my next project will not be with participants who have such busy lives, because it makes it almost impossible to get a-hold of them!!! Two nights ago, I literally played phone-tag with this mother four different times as she was at work, then hockey practice, then parent-teacher night. So tough to get a-hold of them! Anyway, I'm so excited! I hope this actually happens on Saturday! (Reflective Journal, February 6, 2008)

I've often been joking over the last couple weeks that researching time-stressed families really stresses the researcher out ... just in terms of trying to recruit people and families who are simply too busy! (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

One of the most difficult tasks in the data collection phase was reaching the participants and scheduling a day for their interviews where they had a minimum of four unscheduled hours.

My experiences of the mothers trying to find a moment in the family calendar, sensitized me to their hectic lives, and provided a starting point for my interviews. It also impacted the data that I was able to collect with two interviews being cut short:

I had to leave early. I just barely got the last interview done in time before they were off to a hockey game. (There was still one or two questions that I ran out of time to ask.)

These families definitely live time stressed lives. It's hard just to fit in five hours with them all there just to do interviews, and I'm sure they all made a point to be there because they knew I was coming. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2008)

The intensity of the sport season, the type of sport, and the time of year also shaped the recruitment of participants, their availability, and the data that I was able to gather. Data collection was more difficult in the winter time during the hockey season:

Hockey as a way of life is even affecting this study! During the hockey season ... two of the three interviews ... the families had to leave early to go to a kid's game. There wasn't ever a day without hockey that I could talk to families and it was just a matter of what day had a "late game", and that was the day I went! Whereas the three families, I've interviewed in the spring season during baseball have been able to find a day when someone maybe had a sport, but not everyone had to get up and leave and go, so was able to do the full duration of interview time, etc. (Reflective Journal, May 10, 2008)

Unintentional and Spontaneous Group Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were the primary tool for data collection. However, after my interviews with the first family, I quickly discovered that the time spent in-between interviews were a highly informative experience, as I would learn a great deal about individual family members and the family unit's dynamics. I would go with the ebb and flow of family life during my time in their home, and would begin an interview only on their cue. Thus, for five of the seven families, I spent a significant amount of time observing their interactions and engaged in informal conversations about organized youth sport and their daily lives. With several of the interviews, I actually spent more time in their home in informal conversation and observations, than I spent in the formal interview process:

It was great to have lunch with the family. I learned so much. Although I was there for eight hours, I was probably only in interviews for maybe four of those hours. So, I spent a large amount of time with the family in other activities. (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

The opportunity to develop rapport around the kitchen table with the family members also enhanced the data collection, as I was able to gain additional insights about the families' lives. I was able to observe their interactions, listen to their diverse perspectives, as well as build upon their collective ideas.

I'm finding that spending lunch/dinner with the whole family around the kitchen table is one of the more enjoyable ... and insightful experiences. I learn a great deal about the family interactions, dynamics, and perspectives at this time. The informal time spent with the family ... is almost as informing as the interviews (Reflective Journal, March 1, 2008)

I was also cognizant of the fact that the families were also on their "best behavior" while I was a guest in their home: "They definitely put their best foot forward while I was there. For lunch we had lasagna and a salad, and someone went to go and find the paper napkins. It was obvious that napkins are not a part of their normal routine". (Reflective Journal, March 1, 2008)

My earlier dilemma, whether or not to use individual or joint interviews, was also partially addressed during the meal time. Informally, aspects of a group interview would begin as the topic of organized sport and some of the families' experiences would be shared. The discussion would, at times, create opportunity to observe diverse opinions and familial interactions. For example:

When interviewing individual family members there was a sense of family unity, and sometimes, not wanting to talk about any family disagreements related to sport. Yet, it was interesting at lunch. There was a discussion over girls – fighting in hockey – and the mom and dad were clearly split on how they felt. Dad felt that the girls should actually just fight and "duke-it-out" – "take the gloves off". Whereas, the mom, clearly did not support his viewpoint. When dad was expressing his view – I caught mom giving him a dirty look and not being happy with him sharing his perspective with me. So that was kind of great to see ... the different family perspectives happening live! (Reflective Journal, March 1, 2008)

It was clear, too, how one parent (or child) could dominate the conversation. For example, in family one I rarely heard the father speak when we were together as a group. It was during my one-on-one interview that I was able to gain rich information on his experiences. The individual

interviews also provided the context to share some tension-related stories, that would have never been shared in the larger group:

I have to say that I really enjoyed the interview with [father, family #1]. It has become clear to me that it might have been the right decision to do separate interviews. During lunch [mother, family #1] seemed to dominate the conversation, whereas, when I got the one-on-one time with [father, family #1] ... I could gain a greater understanding of his perspective. (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

Yet, there was also some limitations and difficulties in interviewing the family members separately. The days I spent in their homes were long and I was mindful of my low energy with the last interviews:

Pretty tired ... by the fourth interview I was pretty drained. So probably wasn't as sharp with my questions as I could have been. So, I think that's going to be the challenge – trying to conduct four to five formal interviews on the same day. (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

Finding Privacy and Confidentiality in a Busy Household

I was also aware, and concerned, with issues of confidentiality between family members as I conducted the interviews in areas with varying degrees of privacy. A couple of the homes were small, and I only had access to public common rooms (e.g., kitchen, living room) for the interviews. Further, at times, I sensed that the parents may be “listening in” during the children’s interviews:

I was asked if I wanted to do the interview in the kid’s bedroom in the basement, and I said “no”, and we ended up in the family room in the basement. I think overall it was actually one of the more private locations thus far ... though ... there was one time when we [the oldest child and I] sensed that someone was leaning over the stairs to try and listen in. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2008)

Likewise, the children were just as apt to eavesdrop on the parents’ interviews from time to time:

I am worried about the parents overhearing some of the interviews with the children ... yet, it was even harder to shake the kids when the mom was having her interview! The kids always wanted to be a part of the conversation ... and numerous times [mother #1] had to kick the kids out of the room. It was much easier doing the interview with [father

#1] over at the community centre, where it was really a confidential conversation, without the kids listening in. (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

When I sensed that another family member was listening, I would try and shift the interview to a discussion that was less “sensitive”. However, there was one interview in particular that I was troubled by and thought about for several days:

Interviewing in the dining room was not private. The mom was talking about [oldest daughter] in a negative way when I was asking questions about the “star athlete”. I wanted to cut her off because I knew that [oldest daughter] was listening in. I tried repetitively to re-direct the conversation, but mom kept talking, I’m almost certain that she knew her daughter was there. I could have sworn that I saw her [mom] glance at her daughter while she was talking about it. I’m not sure how I could have handled it better ... perhaps, blatantly stopped the interview?!?! (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

The content of her daughter’s interview, re-affirmed that she felt like the “failure” within her family, and her interview gave insight into feelings of low self-esteem and worth. I was concerned how overhearing this conversation with her mother may further heighten these emotions and what impact it would have on her.

I was also aware of the impact I may have on the family unit and the nature of the families’ conversations after I left. These following excerpts from the on-line participant journals, as well as my reflective journal provide such insight:

I thought the interview was a lot easier than I expected it to be. After you left, our family did talk about our personal interviews... or what we remembered of them. We mostly just compared the questions that we all got asked and the answers that we all gave. (Excerpt from On-line Journal, Oldest child, male, age 14, family #2)

Thank you Dawn for coming out on Saturday. We all thoroughly enjoyed speaking with you. After you left, we all sat around the table and laughed at some of the conflicting answers we might have given you. It was a nice bonding moment for our family and for that I thank you. (Excerpt from On-line Journal, Mother, family #6)

Gendered Nature of the Interviews

Throughout the course of the data collection, I also became aware of the gendered nature of the interviews. For all of the families it was the mothers who became the family contact. The mothers

were also the ones who clearly knew the families' schedules, coordinated the day for the interviews, and also facilitated the order of the interviews. With a couple of families, I tried to recruit the families' participation via the fathers (who answered the phone when I called). However, the fathers would refer me to their wives, would take a message, or would ask me to call back at a later time.

I also became aware of the order of the family interviews. As mentioned earlier, I would always go with the flow of the daily rhythms of family life, and would only begin an interview with a particular family member when directed. With all families, a common pattern emerged as the fathers were the last to be interviewed, while the mothers purposively scheduled themselves at a time that would allow them the opportunity to prepare the family meal:

It was interesting; this is the third interview where mom's interviews tend to be in the middle so that they could prepare the family meal. Also, this is the third dad in a row that has been the last family member to be interviewed. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2008)

Moreover, there was the group of questions related to gender in the interview guide, and it was this group of questions that I sensed the participants' most discomfort. This was particularly evident for the parents:

Probably the most difficult series of questions related to issues of gender. I had placed the set of questions in the first half of the guide, thinking that the questions related to emotional life and family disagreements would be more "sensitive" ... when it appears that questions around gender are more difficult to talk about ... and that's when words become "calculated" and body language would show signs of "discomfort". (Reflective Journal, May 10, 2008)

Thus, after interviewing the first three families and sensing the (slight) aversion to openly and freely discussing gender issues, I decided to adapt the questions with more concrete examples. (e.g., Do you think girls can play hockey and/or figure skate? What do you think for the boys? Why or why/not have you (or your son or daughter) decided to play/or not play those particular sports?) This change in the nature of the questions (from abstract to concrete) seemed to enrich

the discussion with more open and honest perspectives about their personal values and societal ideals.

Building a Rapport with the Families

During the day I spent with the families, I encountered different experiences and a “sense of connection” with each of the families. I thoroughly enjoyed spending my time with five of the seven families, and the overall experience was very welcoming and friendly. For example, one of the families, with whom I spent 7 hours, even offered me a room to stay for the night as they knew I was driving back the next day:

So, I just interviewed family number five and it’s like eleven thirty [pm] – actually almost midnight now. Pretty tired – one of those late interviews. You never know how much time you will spend with the family. I was there for about seven hours, with only four family members. And, it was a really great, enjoyable experience. They offered for me to stay overnight because I’m meeting with their next-door neighbours tomorrow, and I was tempted to ... avoid the hour and a half long drive ... but I didn’t think that it would be appropriate. (Reflective Journal, May 9, 2008)

With two of the seven families, I did not experience the same sense of friendliness and a positive social connection:

That whole interview just felt like a complete whirlwind – I felt spun around – not quite sure what to do. I spent very little time socializing with the kids or with the parents beyond the interviews. It was very much - go in - do the interviews - get out. Maybe, because of the time stress of going to the hockey game ... maybe because of the “bad vibes” and “tension” I felt and observed amongst the family interactions ... For example, when I was leaving, Mom made the point of saying to her husband after we completed his interview: “Well you sure talked a long time for someone who doesn’t talk” in a very harsh tone, and he just looked at her, shook his head and walked up the stairs to get ready for the game. I don’t know why But that was a very *tense* experience overall. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2008)

I didn’t feel a sense of real connective spirit with them. Dad was a little shy; Mom’s probably the more vocal one of the group. Even having dinner – you know – I sat in the rocking chair beside them while the family ate their dinner [It was the first time I was not invited to join the family]. No-one talked. They all just watched the TV that was in their kitchen in silence. So, it was a little bit of an interesting experience. I felt a little bit of disconnect. In some ways I wish I had ended the study with family six, which felt like I

ended on a high. So, it's interesting how the relationships happen or don't happen, within the context of the time I spend with the family. (Reflective Journal, May 26, 2008)

I struggled with how my sense of connection (positive or disconnected) with the family unit, could potentially shape the study. During the process of data collection, I consciously tried to maintain a similar presence such as an inquisitive tone and a sense of professionalism. But as my journal notes revealed, I was also aware of the emotional feelings (inwardly) that I experienced related to my interactions with the families:

I shouldn't feel this way, but after interviewing family three, I just wanted to get the heck out of there! And tonight [interviewing family five] I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent there. Tonight was my first night that I sat down and watched T.V., and simply hung out with the kids, while we waited for Dad to come off the land so I could interview him. That was nice ... just sitting, watching TV, and talking. So, that was kind of a neat experience. (Reflective Journal, May 9, 2008)

In part, the rapport that I developed (and my sense of connection) may be related to the time spent with the family. The two families, with whom I felt I had developed a minimal rapport, were also the families that I spent the least amount of time. Likewise, within the same family unit, I felt that I developed the least rapport, with the family member who I had the least informal interactions with during the course of the day. For example:

So, I met with family number six today and it was a really great experience! Almost want to end with family six so the project ends on this nice high! Had a spaghetti dinner with them and really enjoyed the non-interview time almost equally as much ... in terms of getting to know them and their family dynamics, interactions, etc. Dad was a little nervous talking with me during the interview ... you could tell ... but I hadn't had the time to develop a rapport with him because he basically jumped off the tractor and then started talking with me. Whereas, some of the others, I had a chance to develop a rapport with them, before I had my one-on-one interview with them, by simply "hanging out" in the kitchen and living room. (Reflective Journal, May 10, 2008)

Thus, by being actively reflexive of the sense of connection that I developed with each of the family units (and individual family members), I hope that it may have minimized any affect that it had on my interpretations of the data. Moreover, a conscious understanding of the nature of my

rapport may have enriched the process of data analysis, by bringing more clarity and understanding to the data content, and also to the context in which it was gathered.

Reflections on the Process of Analysis and Interpretations

Simultaneous Process of Data Collection and Analysis

The timing of the family interviews afforded me the opportunity to begin the process of initial coding after I interviewed the first three families. The opportunity to begin the coding process helped me identify some of the gaps in the data I was collecting. For example, there was only one daughter in the first three families I interviewed. Thus, I was clearly missing the experiences of female children, and some of the parental insights related to having daughters and their sport participation.

Moreover, I was able to identify some of the interview guide sections where I thought a different approach might be necessary. For example, as mentioned above, the gendered questions seemed to create considerable discomfort with the participants, and thus, by analyzing their interviews I was able to reflect on a different way to approach this series of questions:

I was given a magazine article on “my son, the dancer” by a peer. Rather than questions asking about the notion of “equality” that is obviously making them uncomfortable, perhaps a less direct approach might be better. What if I asked more concrete examples ... such as what do you think about boys figure skating, and girls playing hockey? ... Then ask why or why not their child made the decision (or not) to play those respective sports. Would it provide a more honest answer ... with concrete family experiences ... rather than simply providing the “socially acceptable” and abstract response? (Reflective Journal, April 2, 2008)

Simultaneously, analyzing the data while interviewing additional families, also helped me become more familiar with the data, and enabled me to enrich the content of my interviews with additional families. I was able to further explore potential relationships with emerging concepts and themes as the theory developed. Moreover, a high familiarity with the data also enabled me

to be able to make community connections when stories were shared about other participants (and families) in the community. Thus, another participant perspective helped inform some of the experiences related to youth sport (e.g., when several of the participants from different families talked about the on-set of girls' hockey and how several of the girls felt that they had to leave the community when they could no longer play with the boys).

Recognizing Dominant Ideologies within My Own Value System

One of the issues that I struggled with, throughout the process of data analysis, was how my own parenting beliefs of what it meant to be a “good parent”, may have shaped the analysis and development of the themes. After interviewing family three I was quite “alarmed” with the type of parenting and use of language that the parents exhibited. These two journal entries represent my reflections on the drive home as well as one month later during data analysis:

Very interesting – you know – their interviews talked about how close they are, but very **“hard knocks”** type of parenting style... just even the language used. ... The kids were constantly beating up on each other while I was there. I felt a little bit like “Super Nanny” while I was there. It was just high intensity the entire time, a highly stressed out family. It was not a calm environment at all. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2008)

I'm cognizant of my own personal judgments coming into play, particularly with family three. Statements like on line 204 “sometimes they irritate the hell out of you!” in reference to his kids chattering away at him in the car ... or line 847 “we keep throwing it back in their face once and a while” guilt trips ... or line 1054, “I think there's too much ass kissing in the world”. How do I keep my own parenting beliefs and judgmental thoughts out of the analyses? It needs to happen! (Reflective Journal, April 22, 2008)

At this point in the study, I realized that I needed to look beyond the type of directive language that this set of parents used with their children, and seek to understand the underlying messages that the parents were trying to communicate and teach their children.

The unwillingness of father four to participate in the interviews was also something that I gave considerable thought to:

Dad had no interest in speaking with me, as Mom said would be the case. He was there for about an hour while I was there and then took off and left for the day. I get the sense that he's not actively involved in the kids' sports. I think this may almost be – a potential extension of the sports and/or his absent presence in the family life. (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

[Excerpt taken from the end of the same journal entry.] I need to start thinking about how I'm going to keep my own judgments - in-check here. For example, family number three and the "gruffness" and "crudeness" of dad. And then in family four, the absence of dad from family life and from wanting to be involved in the project ... also, when I was leaving I mentioned that I'd even be willing to just talk to him for ten minutes on the phone, and she gave the comment that that would be more time than they would get with him! So, how do I keep that in-check during analysis and in terms of just thinking about family life ... I wouldn't say my "disapproval" but my own thoughts around absences of fathers? How do I not make my own "judgments" based on time that they're able to give their family? (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

I often wondered to what extent these experiences were shaping the process of data analysis. It was during these moments of reflection that I became vividly aware of how broader cultural ideologies of what it meant to be a "good parent", and the influence of these ideologies on my own value system, could shape the analysis and interpretations of the data:

WOW!!! Interesting thought ... aren't I "judging" dad [father, family #4] for his non-involvement in his children's sport lives ... YET ... he's not the one that wanted them to participate in the first place! The mother is *pushing* her kids' sport participation. It's not *wrong* if he doesn't want them to play and doesn't value sports in the same way... and his absence may simply be a reflection of decisions that were made that he doesn't agree with!?!?! (Reflective Journal, June 25, 2008)

Thus, the process of reflection allowed me to become more aware of my own socially learned values, how they potentially informed the data analysis, and provided me with the opportunity to bring richness and honesty to my research.

Placing Importance on Children's Perspectives

I believe that the inclusion of children's perspectives in this research project provided a more holistic understanding of the family unit's experiences of organized youth sport. The tools that I developed for this project (i.e., the child's information leaflet, assent form, and adapted interview

guide) appeared to aid in the collection of rich data. In particular, when the children signed the assent form I noticed how “special” and empowered they felt when I sought out their permission to speak with them (via positive body language such as smiling, sitting more alert, and a more active dialogue). At this moment, I felt an enhanced sense of how they felt like “experts”, and consequently, it enriched the data that I was able to attain. Moreover, I also had the sense that the children were generally quite open with me during our discussions and their journal entries.

As briefly noted in Chapter IV, the data collection tool of a participant journal had mixed success. I originally developed the idea of an on-line journal to reflect advances in technology and the internet being a preferred method of communication for many youth. However, after review of the journal entries and reflection on the journaling process I realized that the participants, and particularly the children, were more accustomed to an interactive medium of communication. I needed to provide some sort of response and create a personal confirmation that their entries were being read and valued (instead of being sent off into cyberspace). Learning from this experience, I would ensure that the use of an on-line participant journal becomes an interactive and dynamic experience between the participant and me for future research projects.

Further, from the start of data analysis I decided to place importance on the children’s perspectives. In that, I recognized that the sheer volume of the parents’ interviews and the quantity of data collected (often double to triple the length of transcripts), could potentially overshadow the children’s experiences. Thus, I made a point of analyzing the children’s interview transcripts prior to analyzing the parents’ interview transcripts. I also made the decision to write the first theme “Understanding Children’s Experiences” prior to writing the second and third major themes.

Moreover, when writing the first major theme I also became vividly aware of how the process of writing the findings could also simultaneously enrich the process of data analysis.

Writing as a way of knowing was clearly evident here. Subsequent to writing the first section of the children's perspectives, I became aware of how children's socialization and issues of class and child-rearing may have shaped the data collection and my ensuing analysis of the findings. After reading the first draft of this section, I realized that the quotes appeared to be dominated by the children from five of the families, and there was little representation from two of the families. Upon reflection I identified that the children's voices that were missing were from the families whose parenting styles closely resembled Lareau's notion of "natural growth" (as earlier discussed in Chapter IX). These children provided me with very direct and concise responses (congruent with interactions typical with "authoritative" type figures). I could also visualize the lack of eye contact that some of these children displayed, when compared to the children from the other five families.

At this time, I realized that the children who came from the families that closely resembled middle-class parenting styles, had responses that were more fluid and appeared to go into greater depth. Thus, I had been unintentionally drawing upon these narratives in greater detail during the process of data analysis and writing. From that point forward I made a point to consciously ensure the inclusion of all children's experiences in the interpretation and writing of the findings, while trying to minimize the issues related to the children's socialization with authority type figures and my role as the researcher.

Reflections on Uniquely Rural

"The Girl from Sunderland"

There were some unique aspects that I encountered while doing a research project in a small community. Perhaps the most evident one was how quickly I was becoming known within this

small community. I became affectionately identified as “The Girl from Sunderland”. As discussed in the methods chapter, growing up in Sunderland, Ontario had become “in” with this community. Several of the families in this study had travelled to Sunderland two years prior to compete in the “All-Ontario” finals. In essence, it had created a commonality that appeared to open their homes and lives to me, and it was by complete coincidence!

It was also apparent that the families would talk about me in-between the interviews. During the time I spent informally with the families, I would sense that these discussions were occurring:

I think the families must talk to each other after I’m gone because [mother, family #2] asked me something [personal] today that I hadn’t shared with them and I get the sense that she had been talking to [mother, family #1] about something that I had shared with her. So yeah, I think some of the issues of doing research in a small community is you become known to the community ... so you better be liked and develop a good rapport! (Reflective Journal, March 1, 2008)

It was interesting that they made the comment of – the dad made the comment at one point that [mother, family #4] had contacted and called him at work just to tell him about me. So, again, I know there’s this buzz going on about me. Just yet another indicator that once you’re embraced within a rural community it can positively shape the process of data collection (and the study as a whole), but if you’re not accepted ... (Reflective Journal, May 9, 2008)

It was also interesting that on several occasions I was invited to come back to discuss the findings of the study. However, unexpectedly the invite was also extended to my [future] husband. For example:

When I talked about coming back up and sharing some of the findings, I was told it would be barbeque season, and of course Tudor also got the invite to come with me once again. So, interesting that they want my *partner* to come and make it more of a social event! Is this normal? (Reflective Journal, February 9, 2008)

I often wondered if this invite, and the significance of bringing my husband on the trip, would have happened in the urban context. The inclusion of my husband was certainly something that I did not expect to encounter.

Research in a Small Community

One of the methodological issues that I encountered in the data analysis, and the presentation of the findings, was whether or not to include insights that I learned from other families about the participants. As mentioned in the methods chapter, the participants were quite inter-related because of the small population to draw from. For example, two of the fathers were brothers and several of the children played on the same team. Sometimes, I could quite easily make the connections when the stories were about other participants in the study. Some of the insights shared seemed to coincide with other stories and provided a deeper and richer understanding.

Interesting again, how I know the family connections and the references to [mother, family #2] and [father, family #2] and [daughter and son, family #2] - when the decision with [daughter, family #2] left the community to play elsewhere ... and [daughter, family #4] made some comments about her thinking she was better than her and stuff. Shedding some light on some of the other families' experiences and what to do with that information ... because it informs the data analysis – but not necessarily can you actually report or talk about it. (Reflective Journal, May 4, 2008)

Thus, I struggled when I learned a story that painted a “different picture” (sometimes negative) of the other participants' experiences as it related to organized sport in their community. I often contemplated if this additional information should inform the overall analysis and reporting of the findings.

In sum, the dissertation process has been a wonderful experience that has involved both personal and academic growth. It has challenged me intellectually, emotionally, and at times, even physically (I found myself dreaming of “coding” on many occasions). When I look back and see how I grew, throughout the process, I have a deeper appreciation for research that gives us the opportunity to advance sociological understandings, but also our own personal reflections and values within the cultural context in which we do our research.

Finally, throughout the research process there was a passage from an article that I continually reflected upon. It was a paragraph that helped me understand some of my own thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Thus, it seems only fitting that I will end the dissertation with this passage:

Others have seen me grow and change. For some, it has been overwhelming. There is fear on their faces watching my life unroll with intense periods of both joy and anguish. Broken images and shattered dreams. If there was a way to ensure that a doctoral dissertation would keep the world the same, research would not progress. My obsessive-compulsive disorder of a dissertation must make a difference. (Lee, 2005, p.937)

Appendices

Appendix A - Recruitment Email/Poster

Dear [Contact of Community Group]

I would like to thank-you for our telephone conversation last week and your willingness to discuss my project at your upcoming [name of group] meeting. I look forward to potentially meeting with your group in the New Year to share the details of my study.

A little bit of background about the study ...

- This study will be exploring how youth's involvement in sport affects family life. To date, we know very little about youth sport and its connection to family life. Informed speculation suggests that youth sport may bring a family together, but it might also cause a great deal of stress between family members. I hope that the results from this study will inform future sport policy and help families enhance their positive sport experiences.
- A focus of this study is to speak with families who reside in a rural community. Almost no research, to date, has sought to understand sport that occurs in small towns, villages, and/or the rural countryside. As someone who grew up in a small farming community, and a supporter of youth sport, I am extremely excited and looking forward to giving rural youth sport the centre spot light! As such, I am hoping to work with families who reside in a rural community, and in particular, the Township of North Huron.
- Specifically, I am looking to meet with families who have at least one child who is 12-15 years old who is currently participating in organized youth sport, as this is the age where youth drop-out rates increase. Although it would be beneficial to have all family members involved in the study (parents and all children), participation for each member is completely voluntary. Each family member will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved.

I hope that the results of this study will be of benefit to rural families directly involved in the study, other families whose children participate in organized youth sport programs, as well as to the broader research and policy community. I very much look forward to speaking with families in North Huron and than you in advance for your assistance with this project.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (519)-570-0886 or detrusse@uwaterloo.ca

Best wishes for a great holiday season with your family and friends!

Dawn Trussell

FAMILIES

needed for research in a study

**that explores the impact of
organized youth sport on family life.**



As participants in this study, each family member will be asked to take part in individual interviews (approx. 30 minutes to 1.5 hours)

and complete a 10 day journal.

In appreciation for your time, each participating family member will receive a \$10 gift certificate to a local sports store.

Thank-you for your consideration in helping to better understand how youth's involvement in sport affects family life.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Dawn Trussell, Graduate Student

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at: detrusse@uwaterloo.ca or (519) 573-3296.

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo.

Appendix B – Parent Information Letter

Department Letterhead

Date

Dear (insert family's name):

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Susan Shaw. I would like to provide you with more information about this project, and what each family member's involvement would entail, should they decide to take part.

First, I would like to thank-you for your interest and consideration of participating in this study. The aim of this study is to better understand the dynamics of family life in connection with organized youth sport programs. In particular, I will be speaking with families who reside in a rural town/countryside, and have at least one child who is 12-15 years old, who is currently participating in organized youth sport.

Although it would be beneficial to have all family members involved in the study, participation for each member is completely voluntary. Each family member should make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. Further, as this study involves minors, only children with parental permission and minors who themselves agree to participate (in addition to their parent's permission) will be included in the study. Parents and/or the child may withdraw the minor's participation at any given time with no negative consequences (for example, the participant will still receive the gift certificate).

If a family member does choose to be involved, she or he will have an individual interview with me (without other family members present) that will last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. Each family member may decline to answer any of the interview questions if they so wish. With each member's permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.

Shortly after the interview has been completed, each family member will be invited to complete an on-line journal (or a pen and paper journal) for the duration of 10 days. Family members will then have the option to meet with me for a second interview if they would like to further discuss their journal entries.

Each family member may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising myself. Further, all information collected is considered completely confidential except as required under law to report. To support the findings of this study, quotations from the interviews and journals will be reported anonymously. Your name will not appear in any thesis or reports resulting from this study. All paper forms of data collected during this study will be retained in my locked office at the university and will be confidentially

destroyed after three years. Further, all electronic data will be stored indefinitely on a CD with no personal identifiers. Finally, only my supervisor and I will have access to all materials. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director, Office of Research Ethics, at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist your family in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-573-3296 or by email at detrusse@ahsmaail.uwaterloo.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Professor Susan Shaw, at (519)-888-4567 ext. 35019 or email sshaw@healthy.uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to rural families directly involved in the study, other families whose children participate in organized sport programs, as well as to the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with your family and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Dawn Trussell, PhD Candidate
Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies

Appendix C - Children/Youth Information Leaflet

*Portions of this form were modified from an example provided by:
Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2004). Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People. Essex, UK: Barnardo's.

** Note for design – University logo will appear at the top of the page. The leaflet will also be printed on specialty graphics paper appropriate for child/youth's age group.



Dear <Participant's Name>:

Your parents have allowed me to talk to you about a project that I am working on with my advisor. The project is trying to understand your participation and/or your sisters/brothers participation in organized sport and how it affects your family. I am going to spend a few minutes telling you about my project, and then I am going to ask you if you are interested in taking part in the project.

Who am I?

My name is Dawn Trussell and I am a student at the University of Waterloo. I work in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies.

Why am I meeting with you?

I would like to tell you about a study that involves children/youth like yourself and I want to see if you would like to be in this study too.

Why am I doing this study?

I want to find out how you feel about playing sports. I also want to know how you think your mom, dad, and brothers/sisters feel about your sports activities (and how do you feel about your sisters/brothers).

What will happen to you if you are in the study?

If you decide to take part in this study there are some different things I will ask you to do. First, I would like to talk to you for about 15 to 45 minutes about organized youth sports. I would also like to audio record you. There are no right or wrong answers; it is what you think that matters. If you have tried your best and do not know what to say or do next, you can guess or say 'I don't know'. Later, I will ask you to fill out a journal for about 10 days on a computer or in the booklet I will give you. It will take you about 5 to 30 minutes a day to do this task. If you would like to, I can meet with you again after the 10 days you have filled out the journal.

Could there be any problems for you if you take part?

I hope you will enjoy talking to me. A few people get upset or uncomfortable when talking about their lives, and if they want to stop, I stop. I can put them in touch with someone to help them, if they wish.

Will you have to answer all questions and do everything you are asked to do?

If I ask you questions that you do not want to answer, then tell me you do not want to answer those questions, such as "are there things that make you upset or angry when you play sports?". If I ask you to do things you do not want to do then tell me that you do not want to do them, such as filling out the 10-day journal.

Who will know that you are in the study?

The things you say and any information I write about you will not have your name on it. I will change your name, so no one will know they are your answers or how you feel about some of the things that we will talk about.

I will not let anyone other than my teacher/advisor see your answers or any other information about you. Your parents and brothers and/or sisters will never see the answers you gave or the information I wrote about you.

The only time I might have to break this promise is if I think you or someone else might be at risk of being hurt. If so, I will talk to you first about the best thing to do.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in the study. No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to do this. Just tell us if you don't want to be in the study. And remember, if you decide to be in the study but later you change your mind, then you can tell me you do not want to be in the study anymore.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to me or you can talk to someone else at any time during the study. Here is the telephone number and email address that you can reach me at: (519)-573-3296 or detrusse@uwaterloo.ca.

Thanks for all your help,
Dawn ☺

Family #: __

Appendix D - Parent Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Dawn Trussell of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Family #: __

Appendix E - Permission Form for a Minor

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Dawn Trussell of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that my child will participate in the study if he/she agrees to participate and I agree to his/her participation.

I acknowledge that all information gathered on this project will be used for research purposes only and will be considered confidential. I am aware that permission may be withdrawn at any time (by either the parent and/or the child) without penalty by advising the researchers.

I realize that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting about my son's or daughter's involvement in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

Child's Name: _____

Child's Birth Date: _____

Gender of Child: ___ Male ___ Female

I agree to have my child's interview audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of his/her responses.

YES NO

I also agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research, with the understanding that all quotations will be anonymous.

YES NO

Name of Parent or Guardian: _____ (Please print)

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F - Children/Youth Assent Form

Family #: ____

Child/Youth's name, printed: _____

Do you want to participate in this study?

_____ Yes

_____ No

My signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the Researcher: _____

Date: _____



Appendix G – Family Information Form

Family #:

**Comment on Form: Many thanks to Dr. Tess Kay who shared her templates for collecting demographic information that she has used in her past family and sport research. This form is a modified combination of some of the templates that she shared, as well as some of my own additions.*

Section 1: You and Your Family

Including yourself, who lives in your family home? Could you give us details of who they are (e.g. wife/partner, son/daughter, stepson/stepdaughter, grandmother/grandfather, family friend etc.), their age, and whether they are at work/school/preschool/at home.

Household Member's Name	Who? (e.g. wife, daughter, stepson etc.)	Age	Occupation (e.g. store clerk, teacher, home-maker, student ... or combination of occupations)	Highest Level of Education (e.g. grade 12, college, university)	In which range does your individual income fall: - under \$20,000; - \$21,000-\$40,000; - \$41,000-\$60,000; - \$61,000-\$80,000; - over \$80,000 (For adults only)

How many adults in your household work full-time, if any?

0 1 2 3 Members' Name: _____

How many adults in your household work part-time, if any?

0 1 2 3 Members' Name: _____

How many cars does your family own?

0 1 2 3 more than 3

Family #: ____

Section 2: Family Participation in Sport

Please include information about main sport participation, as an **athlete/participant**, for you and other members of the household in the table below.

Household Member	Please state the main sport(s) played in past or present, if any. Most frequently participated in sport first; 4 sports per family member maximum.	Level achieved e.g. recreational, school, club, regional, national, international.	Do they still currently participate? (If, yes – how often, how many hours per week) (If, no – why not?)
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		

Family #: __

Please include information about main sport participation, as a **volunteer**, for you and other members of the household in the table below.

Household Member	Please state the main sport(s) volunteered in past or present, if any. Most frequently volunteered sport first; 4 sports per family member maximum.	Organization volunteered for and role. (e.g., minor soccer – coach; minor soccer - fundraiser)	Do they still currently volunteer? (If, yes – how often, how many hours per week) (If, no – why not?)
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
Member Name:	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		

Appendix H – Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Parents

- ◆ I would like to begin by thanking you for agreeing to participate.
- ◆ Review of information and consent form.
- ◆ Questions before we start?

Section I: Rhythms and Time Use Patterns of Family Life and Youth Sport

- 1) Can you walk me through what a typical week day looks like for you?
Probes: Do you work in paid labor? What do you do? How many hours?
What household chores do you do? How much is shared?
How is the weekend different?

- 2) What is the nature and context of your children's sport participation?
Probes: Has the nature of your children's sport participation changed over the years? In what way?
Has children's sport affected your everyday activities (e.g. paid work, chores, free time, time with children)?
Do you think it has affected your husband's/wife's activities?
How do you feel about this (for all above questions).

Section II: Expectations, Hopes, and Values of Youth Sport Participation

- 3) How do you feel about your son's/daughter's participation?
Probes: What do you hope he/she will gain from taking part in youth sport?
How important do you think these activities are?
Are there any gender differences between your son's and daughter's participation (i.e. what you hope they will gain, how important)?

- 4) If someone just asked you to describe what 'being a good father/mother' involves these days, what would you say it means to you?
Probes: Is organized youth sport something you feel you *should* be doing as a parent? If so, why?
Do you feel any social pressures to do this? What are they? How do they make you feel? Why do you think they are there? How do they affect you and your family's lives?
Do you feel stronger social pressures and/or judged by your son's sport participation versus your daughter's (and their respective success)?

- 5) Are there any negative aspects and/or difficulties associated with your children's participation in organized youth sport?

Probes: Are there things that make it difficult to organize and participate in these experiences? Can you give me some examples?
Is there anything you wish you could change and/or the way sports are organized could be different? Is there any way to make it better for you and/or your family?

Section III: "Family Affair" or Children's Activity

- 6) Do you consider your children's sport participation to be a family activity that all members enjoy and/or only for the children's interest/sake only? Why?

Probes: Do you consider attendance at your children's sport activities to be a leisure activity for you? Why or why not?
How do you think your spouse views the activity? Leisure-like? Work-like?

- 7) Do your other children watch/attend their sibling's sport activities?

Probes: How do you think the other children feel about watching their siblings play?
Positive, negative, varied?
What attitudes/emotions do they express ... supportive, jealous etc.?

- 8) Are you involved in any way in supporting the organization? (coaching, committees, fundraising, score keeping)

Probes: Why do you think you take up these roles? What do you get out of these roles?
What do you think [child's name] thinks about your involvement?
Do you think the expectations are different for you as a mother [father] compared to expectations of fathers [mothers] and your responsibilities with the sporting organizations? How does this make you feel?
What do you do if you are annoyed about these expectations? Do you think there should be some changes in expectations and/or roles in the way things are organized? What are they?

- 9) Has your family or any individual family member had to give up or lessen activities to accommodate/facilitate children's sporting experiences?

Probes: What was given up/lessened? By whom?
If your children weren't as involved in organized sport, how do you think you would spend family time?

Section IV: Emotional Life, Interactions, and Relationships

10) How do you think responsibilities (physical work and emotional work) are typically divided with *other parents/families* in facilitating children's sport participation?

Probes: Equally involved or what parent tends to carry out what responsibility? (i.e. driving to games, laundering, packing equipment, making decisions regarding sport choices, consoling or encouraging child)?

11) How do *you and your husband/wife* work out the various responsibilities (or chores) that need to be done to support your child's sport participation?

Probes: How is responsibility divided? Are parents equally involved/ who is most involved? What do they do? Why?
What do you think your children are learning about parenting roles in watching how you divide it?
How do you and your spouse make decisions regarding sport choice, time, money or organization?
Do you agree with each other? Do you ever not agree with each other?
Does this negotiation and decision making process ever cause problems and affect other aspects of family life?
Is there anything that you wish could be done differently?

12) How does children's sport participation affect the parent-child interactions, relationships, and values?

Probes: Before a practice/game? During a practice/game? After a practice/game?
Do the emotions affect and/or carry over into other aspects of family life during non-sport time/activities? How and in what way?
How does it affect your relationship with the other children in the family?

13) Has a child wanted to drop out of a sport activity or wanted to participate in a different activity?

Probes: If so, what happened? How was this negotiated?
What parent deals with these conflicts/negotiations and/or how does each parent deal with these issues differently?

Section V: Residing in a Rural Context

- 14) How do you think living in a rural context has shaped or influenced the nature of children's participation in organized sport activities?
- Probes: Driving distances? Lack of public transportation?
 What do you talk about on the drive?
 Practice schedules? Nature of leagues?
 Where are the activities located? (Town, major city ...)
 Any positive and negative attributes of children's sport participation in connection to the rural context specifically?
- 15) In summary, what do you perceive to be the overall impact of children's organized sport participation on your life and family life?
- 16) Is there anything else about family life, parenting, and organized youth sport that we haven't discussed, that you would like to add or comment on?

End of Interview Notes:

- ❑ Ask if they would consider filling out a 10-day journal. If yes, go over journal details.
- ❑ Ask permission to be contacted by telephone for a follow-up discussion, to verify my interpretations and to add or clarify any additional points they may think of.
- ❑ Ask if they could suggest any other families I could contact and with whom I could arrange potential interviews.

Appendix I – Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Children/Youth

- ◆ I would like to begin by thanking you for agreeing to participate.
- ◆ Review of information and assent form.
- ◆ Questions before we start?

Section I: Rhythms and Time Use Patterns of Family Life and Youth Sport

- 1) Take me through a typical school day ...
Probes: What activities do you do in the morning? At recess/break/lunch time?
What activities do you do after school? Before supper? After supper?
What activities are your favorites? Why?
What do you do on the weekend?
- 2) What sports do you participate in?
Probes: How often do you participate in them?

Section II: Expectations, Hopes, and Values of Youth Sport Participation

- 3) How important are these sport activities to you and why?
Probes: Why did you first get involved in the activity? Why do you keep playing the sport as you grow older?
Are there sports you wish you could do? Why don't you? Why would you like to do these other sports?
Is there anything you wish you could do other than sports, but can't because of your sport participation?
Do you feel like you are spending too much, too little, or just the right amount of time in sports?
- 4) Are there any things that have upset you or made you angry with your sport participation?
Probes: Are there things that make it difficult to go to practices or games? Can you give me some examples?
Do you have any suggestions of how it could be better?

- 5) Do you think that it is more important for boys to play sports? Why? Do you think it is important for girls to play sports? Why?
Probes: Explain to me why you think it's important for boys because of this ... and important for girls because of this ...?
What do you think your mom thinks? More important for boys? More important for girls? The same? Why?
What do you think your dad thinks? More important for boys? More important for girls? The same? Why?

Section III: "Family Affair" or Children's Activity

- 6) Do your parents and/or brothers/sisters ever go to your sports activities?
Probes: Do you think your parents enjoy being at your practices/games? Why or why not?
Do you think your brothers or sisters like going to your practices/games?
- 7) Do your sisters/brothers also play sports? If so, do you go to their practices/games? Probes:
Do you like going or not? Why?
Do you do other things while they are playing? What do you do?
- 8) Do you think that your mom, dad, brother/sister can't do something they would like to because you play sports?
Prompts: Did they have to give up anything? If yes, what was it? How did this make you feel?
- 9) What do your parents do to help you participate in sport?
Probes: Who decides what activities you are involved in?
Who takes you there? Who gets your food, equipment etc. ready?
- 10) Are your parents involved in coaching, managing, umpiring etc.?
Probes: What does your mom do? What does your dad do?
Do you like them doing that job or not? Why?

Section IV: Emotional Life and Relationships

- 11) Do you like your mom/dad being involved (or not) in your sports?
Probes: Do you think he/she is supportive?
Do you see them ever disagree or fight about something related to your sport?
If yes, what was it?

- 12) Have you ever wanted to quit or play something else? Tell me a bit about it.
Probes: If so, what happened?
How did your dad react? How did your mom react? Did they let you?
- 13) Do you talk to your mom/dad about your sports?
Probes: Are there any other times when your sport affects other things you do? (i.e. can't go to sports unless homework done)
- 14) How do you feel about your siblings' sport participation?
Probes: Proud, jealous ...
Is there anything that they are playing that you would like to? Why?
- 15) How do you feel before a practice/game, during a practice/game, after a practice/game?
Probes: What makes you feel this way?
Is there anything that your mom or dad says or does that makes you feel this way?

Section V: Residing in a Rural Context

- 16) Do you like living in the country? Does it affect your sport opportunities??
Probes: How far are your practices/games? What do you talk about on the way there and back?
Do you think it would be different if you lived in a city (for example, name of closest city)?
- 17) In summary, do you think your sports affects other people in your family? Or things you do as a family?
- 18) Is there anything else about your family and your or your sisters/brothers sport participation that you would like to talk about?

End of Interview Notes:

- ❑ Ask if they would consider filling out a 10 day journal. If yes, go over journal details.
- ❑ Ask permission to be contacted by telephone for a follow-up discussion, to verify my interpretations and to add or clarify any additional points they may think of.

Appendix J – On-line Participant Journal Screen Shots

*Note: As mentioned in the proposal, family members were encouraged to individually complete their journal on-line. However, a modified version of the following content (as illustrated by the web screen shots) was also available in hard copy format, although no participants chose the hard copy method.

**A page for this study will be created on the University of Waterloo website. There was a link to the following cover page. Participants logged in with their user id and password, assigned by the researcher.

**Family Life
and
Organized Youth Sport**
-Online Journal-

University of
Waterloo

User ID:
Password:
Login

Researcher: Dawn Trussell
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

As a reminder, the aim of this study is to better understand the dynamics of family life in connection with organized youth sport programs.

Many thanks for your help in this study!
Hopefully it will help strengthen organized youth sport and its positive connection to family life in years to come!
Dawn

Instructions:

- 1 Over the next 10 days, when you have the time please write about organized youth sport and its impact on your family's life.
- 2 Please write in a style that is most comfortable to you (e.g., bullet point, full sentences, poetry, song lyrics, etc.)
- 3 The entries of this journal will be confidential and will be viewed by only you and the researcher.

Contact Information
(519) 573-3296
detrusse@uwaterloo.ca

Family Life and Organized Youth Sport
Online Journal

Welcome User ID
[Logout](#)

• **New Entry** •

Submit

• **Suggestions** •

First Entry:

- How did you feel about the interview? How did your family interact after I left?
- Is there anything you want to elaborate on or that you forgot during the interview?

Daily Entry
The following prompts may help get you started, however, it is a starting point only. Please write about what is **important to you.**

- What youth sport activities were you involved in today? Who played? Who supported it? (i.e. driving, food, equipment)
- What were the positive or negative aspects of this activity and family interactions?
- Did the emotions/interactions carry over to other sport and non-sport related activities (after the game/practice, next day)?

• **Day 10?** •
[click here](#)

All data collected will be done in strict confidence.

Family Life and Organized Youth Sport
Online Journal

Welcome User ID
[Logout](#)

• **New Entry** •

Submit

• **Suggestions** •

First Entry:

- How did you feel about the interview? How did your family interact after I left?
- Is there anything that you want to talk about more or that you forgot in the interview?

Daily Entry:
The following questions may help get you started, however, it is a starting point only. Please write about what is **important to you.**

- What sports did you play today? Who went with you? Who got you there? Packed your food? Packed your equipment?
- Did you go to your brother/sister sport activity today? Was it fun? Why or why not?
- What made you happy or sad before or after the game/practice at your home or in your car? How long did you feel this way (i.e. that night, next day)?

• **Day 10?** •
[click here](#)

All data collected will be done in strict confidence.

Parent (top) and Youth (bottom) Journal **FINAL** Entry Web Page –
Questions were slightly modified.

Family Life and Organized Youth Sport
Online Journal

Welcome User ID
[Logout](#)

• Last Entry •



[Submit](#)

On Your Last Day...

On Day 10 please answer the following questions about the journaling process.

- What did you think of writing in a journal overall?
- Did you feel that it was confidential from other family members?
- What were the positive and negative aspects of the journaling process?
- Is there anything that you learned about you or your family while doing this activity?

Thanks for all your help & participation in this study!

All the best,
Dawn

All data collected will be done in strict confidence.

Family Life and Organized Youth Sport
Online Journal

Welcome User ID
[Logout](#)

• Last Entry •



[Submit](#)

On Your Last Day...

On Day 10 please answer the following questions.

- What did you think of writing in a journal?
- Did you feel that what you wrote was "private" from other family members?
- What did you like or not like about writing in this journal?
- Is there anything that you learned about you or your family while doing this activity?

Thanks for all your help & participation in this study!

Dawn

All data collected will be done in strict confidence.

Confirmation Pages -
Thank-you page after "submit" button has been hit.
Successfully logged out page.

Thank You

Your journal entry has been successfully submitted.

You can now do one of the following:

[Log Out](#)

or

[Create a New Entry](#)

You have successfully logged out.

Appendix K – Parent Thank-you Letter for Participation

Date

Dear (*Insert Name of Participant*),

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the dynamics of family life in connection with organized youth sport programs.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant, and your family collectively, will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know. When the study is completed, I will send it to you. The study is expected to be completed by the fall of 2008.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director, Office of Research Ethics, at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

I would like to once again thank you and your family for assisting me with this project. It was a great pleasure to have met you, and shared some of your family's experiences and memories.

All the best,

Dawn Trussell, PhD Candidate

University of Waterloo
Department of Recreation & Leisure Services
(519) 883-8116
detrusse@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca

Appendix L - Children/Youth Thank-you Certificate for Participation

* Note for design – University logo appeared at the top of the page. The certificate was also printed on specialty graphics paper appropriate for child/youth’s age group.



I would like to thank _____
for participating in the study on
organized youth sport programs and family life.

{Individualized Personal Message}

Date

*Dawn Trussell,
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies*

If you would like to know what happened at the end of the study after I met with everyone please let me know! Just in case you don't have my contact information anymore: detrusse@uwaterloo.ca or (519) 573-3296.



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