EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ELITE MALE HOCKEY PLAYERS

by

Matthew A. Norris

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the sport experiences of six U Sports (Canadian Interuniversity Sport) male hockey players (three past CHL players and three past NCAA Division I players) through one-on-one interviews with them. The focus was the exploration of how parents, coaches, and peers had influenced current U Sports hockey players’ overall well-being in the transition through the CHL (Canadian Hockey League) or NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association). This study included male participants only, because the CHL, one of the two development leagues investigated, is for males only. Interviews revealed meaningful hockey experiences within the CHL and NCAA, in climates that affected players’ motivation, expectations, and goals. The key findings of this study arose from the analysis of these interviews: (1) coaches need to have a better knowledge of the ‘psychology of performance’ for their athletes; (2) coaches should provide feedback in a more ethical way regardless of competition level; and (3) all social agents, including the athletes themselves, need to create informed and appropriate expectations to avoid realizations that can result in negative outcomes to well-being. Future research should be expanded by broadening the range of interview questions, diversifying the participant pool, and targeting policies in addition to practices.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Canada, I was able to play and participate in one of Canada’s favourite pastimes: hockey. My love of the sport started at the early age of 5. I enjoyed watching hockey on TV, and playing on the outdoor rinks and with the local recreational team. As I got older, I became more infatuated with the sport; I was more knowledgeable about the teams and players in the National Hockey League (NHL). My hockey skills, compared to many of my peers, began to flourish. In middle school, I was able to compete and grow from the local recreational team to the local representative (rep.) team. As I entered high school, I had cemented my name among the other good hockey players on the top rep. team in the area. My friends, hobbies, and goals all revolved around hockey.

As our draft year for the Central Canada Hockey League (CCHL) and Canadian Hockey League (CHL)\(^1\) approached, the feeling around our team was something I had never felt before. The cooperative team-driven endeavour to win became overshadowed by the individual fortunes of being noticed by other teams interested in the skills and talents an athlete could add to their team. Luckily, as this shift emerged, most of the hockey players on our skilled rep. team were noticed and drafted (myself included) to different teams in the CCHL, with some being drafted to the CHL, granting these teams our playing rights (if we were to play in a hockey league, we would have to play for the team that drafted us).

After a summer of intense training, I failed to make the CCHL team to which I was drafted, but felt from feedback and other communication that I had competed

\(^{1}\) The CCHL is a lower development league compared to the CHL. In Ontario, the CHL is represented by the Ontario Hockey League (OHL). The CCHL is often referred to as Junior A.
I was not discouraged about the future opportunities hockey could provide me because it is common for this type of rejection to happen for first-year players. Also to justify my mindset, some of my very skilled friends were unable to make their team in the first year too. After being cut from the Jr. A team, I received interest from the local affiliated Jr. B team. I attended the main camp; they wanted to sign me after the first time they saw me. They told me they liked the way I played and skated, and that I would be a great addition to their team. I signed the contract to join the team and continued to work hard for future hockey success.

As the season started, I continued to work hard in practice to show the coach I was worthy of ice time. I was passing veterans in skating drills with many of them telling me to “slow down because you are making us look bad.” In games, I was on the fourth line receiving limited ice time; however, I was producing well with 3 points (1 goal and 2 assists) in four games.

For our team’s fifth game, we were required to travel 1.5 hours away to visit our opponents at their rink. After arriving an hour early to prepare for our game, the whole team was getting ready for warm-up. When we were all half-dressed, the coach came into the dressing room in front of everyone and told me: “We can’t do it today.” I didn’t understand what that statement meant, so I asked him to explain. He then said, “You won’t be playing today.” I was shocked and upset to be a healthy scratch, and silently undressed in a deserted locker room. As this fifth game was being played, I realized the event I had just experienced was the harsh reality of the competitive hockey world. I felt my hard work was going unnoticed. I decided my time was worth more than being treated unfairly after having decent output. I quit the team and was able to join the Major Midget AA team (final level of minor hockey).
After playing Major Midget AA and Jr. B hockey on a couple of teams that appreciated my contribution, I realized that the time I was allocating to hockey would not generate a significant reward. I decided to quit hockey two years earlier than what the league would allow me to play, to focus on my studies.

Many very good hockey players close to me continued to work hard and strive to have success in hockey for their own reasons. From speaking with many of these players, they grew to dislike the once fun game of hockey because it became very cut-throat and competitive, where limited opportunities, paired with a small margin of error, could negatively affect their value and role within their teams. Team success and victory were the overall goals: players were viewed as assets and could be handled in amotivating or demoralising ways. These really good hockey players eventually had to shift their goals and expectations, as they were met with the realisation they weren’t satisfied pursuing elite hockey any more.

Part of my intention in telling my story was to expose any biases I had with respect to this topic. To help address these biases, I made an effort to rely on the literature as much as possible. I also consulted with my supervisor and committee member on an ongoing basis to ensure I was using neutral language in explanations and in revealing events participants experienced.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived transition experiences of male U Sports (Canadian Interuniversity Sport) hockey players in particular because of the increased likelihood this group of hockey players had experienced at least one major dissonance associated to hockey, while also likely having experienced negative consequences associated with well-being and psychological development. This league was selected because the U Sports league is viewed as a “league of relative failures”
(Chard, 2013, p. 336) for hockey players whose “professional hockey aspirations do not materialize or an injury occurs” (p. 334). The objective of exploring transition experiences of these male hockey players was to determine how their psychological development and well-being were impacted (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008), using Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Achievement-Goal Theory (Elliot, 1999) as lenses.

Using a multiple case study design, one-on-one interviews were conducted with three past CHL players and three past NCAA Division I players, to explore the sport experiences of current U Sports male hockey players. The CHL is the umbrella organization of three major junior hockey leagues in Canada, including the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), and the Western Hockey League (WHL). The NCAA is the association that regulates student-athletes who attend colleges or universities in the United States of America. U Sports is the Canadian version of the NCAA; the governing body and association of university sports in Canada. This study included male participants only, because the CHL, being a development league of interest to explore, is for males only.

The primary research question of this study was: From the perspectives of six U Sports male hockey players (three having once played in the CHL, and three having once played in the NCAA), how were their psychological development and well-being affected during transitions in the highly competitive hockey space? Four secondary research questions supported the primary research question:

1) What effect did influential people have in impacting these hockey players' expectations to compete in elite hockey?

2) What were the motivating factors and created goals for their transition into elite hockey? How did these factors and goals change?
3) What barriers to motivation and goal achievement developed as these hockey players transitioned to a different level or different team? How did these barriers affect them?

4) What supports did these hockey players use when encountering these barriers?

**Rationale**

As young skilled male hockey players get older, they may be presented with the opportunity to continue to pursue their hockey goals; whether it be to earn a free education or to have a chance to achieve the ultimate goal of making the NHL. The first option for achieving this goal is to compete for one of the 60 Canadian Hockey League (CHL) teams; the second option is to compete for one of the 60 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I hockey teams in the United States of America. Many hockey players strive to have the opportunity to play in one of these two leagues, but only a select few do (Parcels, 2002). The question about which of the CHL or NCAA serves as the best development league and option to continue playing hockey at the most elite level has been debated extensively (Reznik, 2011). The 2016 NHL Entry Draft statistics, however, show that over half of the players selected in the first three rounds were from the CHL, with the remaining players coming from a wide variety of hockey leagues including the NCAA (http://www.nhl.com/ice/draftsearch.htm).

The CHL and NCAA both offer athletes distinctive benefits, ultimately requiring athletes to decide what league can satisfy their needs and goals. The CHL is a league for athletes from age 16-20, with a game schedule intensity similar to the NHL, accompanied with a standardized tuition education package across the league, which must be claimed within 18 months of finishing the junior career (Kennedy,
The tuition scholarship typically equates to one free year of tuition and books for each year played in the CHL (CHL, 2016). Additionally, CHL players receive a stipend and are no longer considered amateur; amateur status is an eligibility requirement for the NCAA (College Hockey, Inc., 2015b). Therefore, players entering the CHL are often solely focused on hockey, hopeful for the ideal result of signing a professional contract in the NHL (Grygar, 2013).

Alternatively, the NCAA is a hockey league for older student-athletes aged 18-24. Unlike the CHL, there is a combined on-going focus on higher education and hockey, allowing for a schedule with fewer, but very meaningful, games. The higher age group allows time for athletes to develop before joining the NCAA, and throughout the school years while playing in the NCAA. With this heightened maturity and skill derived from the stronger and faster competition of the NCAA, it is now possible for student-athletes “to jump right from college into the NHL” (College Hockey, Inc., 2015a). Like the CHL, available scholarships can provide free or partially free schooling (Olynyk, 2015), while the student-athlete plays for the NCAA school hockey team.

Skilled hockey players in Canada are considered for the CHL draft at the age of 16, and eventually the NHL draft at age of 18. With the CHL providing the opportunity for athletes to demonstrate their capabilities in a NHL-mirrored environment, and the NCAA providing additional time for development, it is up to individual players to determine how hockey impacts their individual life and decide their ideal hockey and education route. When determining this impact, hockey players should understand certain realities play a large role in making this decision.

Table 1 illustrates these realities. First, being previously paid to play hockey (such as playing a single game in the CHL) can render players ineligible to participate
in the NCAA. Second, the route to play in these leagues depends on typical methods of recruitment, such as the CHL draft for the CHL, and communication with scouts for the NCAA. Third, prerequisite time playing Junior A hockey is required to play in the NCAA, as players need to continue to hone their skills beyond minor hockey. In contrast, athletes who play in the CHL would ideally join the CHL right out of minor hockey, and are therefore not required to play in Junior A. Fourth, free post-secondary schooling in the United States (while playing in the NCAA) and Canada (after playing in the CHL) can be negotiated with either development league, although the country of the post-secondary institution differs. Finally, the CHL is the optimal route to the NHL as CHL competition simulates NHL intensity around the time players become NHL draft eligible at 18 years old, compared to NCAA players who can still make the jump to the NHL, but at an older age.

Table 1, *Comparison of the Two Development Leagues (CHL and NCAA)*

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<tr>
<th>League Realities</th>
<th>CHL</th>
<th>NCAA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paid to Play Hockey</td>
<td>Eligible</td>
<td>Ineligible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Typical Player Selection</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
<td>Scouted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jr. A Experience</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Education</td>
<td>Paid Canadian University Degree (Negotiated)</td>
<td>Paid US University Degree (Negotiated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route to the NHL</td>
<td>Optimal</td>
<td>Possible</td>
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Based on the statistics for unlikeliness of making it to the NHL (Campbell, 2007, 2013; NCAA Research, 2015), many athletes are destined to be eventually met with behaviours or cognitive realities that could be dissonant (Festinger, 1957) from their own self-concept (an idea of one’s self) and performance expectations (expected results from actions and behaviours; Aronson, 1969). Since individuals identify and
react to dissonance in varying ways (Aronson, 1969), hockey players who have had unsuccessful hockey outcomes after progressing into elite hockey (such as the inability to sign a professional hockey contract) will have varying rationalized attributions (Weiner, 1974) to the dissonances and accompanied feelings of displeasure (Rotella & Newburg, 1989; Schwenk, Gorenflo, Dopp, & Hipple, 2007). Indeed, such dissonances can derive from any transition experiences that occur in elite hockey.

**Overview of Thesis**

In this chapter, I described my hockey experiences to understand any biases I might have. I also outlined the purpose and rationale of this study. Chapter Two highlights literature on the social agents, climates (contexts), and motivational factors that influence hockey participation. Chapter Three explains the methodological approach used to capture six elite male hockey players’ experiences, with three hockey players each coming from two different development leagues (CHL and NCAA). Chapter Four (CHL) and Chapter Five (NCAA) display organized chronological results within social agents, climates, and personal motivation themes. Chapter Six discusses the six elite male hockey players’ experiences under these themes with reference to current literature. Additionally, limitations of the study and directions for future research, key implications for practice, and final thoughts are considered.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the well-being of elite hockey players who are currently playing in the U Sports league and their experiences through three stages of sport participation (Côté, 1999) in a competitive hockey environment: the sampling years, the specializing years, and the investment years. When children first start participating in sport, the priority is for them to experience fun and excitement through a wide range of activities with no focus on training, as they sample different sports (Stage 1). Based on their enjoyment and intrinsic motivation, children generally seek to participate in their favourite sport. As children age and choose a preferred sport, sport-specific practice emerges in the specializing years (Stage 2), with more commitment and increased practice time. Enjoyment remains a crucial component of participating in sport at this stage. As athletes shift to the competitive stage of investment (Stage 3), they may become more extrinsically and less intrinsically motivated, as the nature of the competitive sport environment is characterized by a focus on performance success, rather than the freedom to play for fun (Gracey, 2010; Hughes & Coakley, 1991). As such, the increased competitiveness and focus on performance success is most greatly observed with elite athletes.

Every time hockey players adapt to changes in and through the levels of hockey, they are experiencing a phenomenon known as a transition (Oliver, 1990). These changes vary in magnitude. They could relate to on-ice elements, such as, time-consuming training or competitive performance expectations (Coakley, 1983), or off-ice issues (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008), such as, billeting or balance between school and hockey, all of which require different behaviours and cognitions. Based on the inconsistency of the change with the hockey player’s previous self-
concepts and expectations, the desirability of the change, and individual differences, the transition can have varying effects on the hockey player’s psychological development and need satisfaction. When these transitions are not congruent with how players see themselves, there is dissonance (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963) with attendant shifts in athletes’ motivations (Bruner et al., 2008).

The theory that is used to explore such change is Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) hypothesises that individuals strive for inherent consistency among behaviours and cognitions (presented by themselves and others) comparative to their self-concept and expectations (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962). When first faced with a new inconsistent element regarding their behaviour or cognition (either directly or passively), persons must decide whether the new element is for or against their self-concept and expectations; in other words, consonant or dissonant to their beliefs (Aronson, 1969). If a new element is dissonant, a decision is needed to either tolerate the source’s action (as the dissonance is not very impactful or the dissonance involves attractive stimuli [Aronson, 1969]), or belittle the source’s action and prefer the pre-held self-opinion.

If a dissonant opinion or action cannot be tolerated because of insufficient justification (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963), then steps would need to be taken to either change the pre-held self-concept or expectations, or experience negative hedonic effects because of the dissonance (Carlsmith & Aronson, 1963). Ultimately, the way a similar occurrence can affect different people depends on the individual self-concept and expectancy differences people have of themselves. Regardless, everyone is motivated to seek internal thought and external occurrence consistency, while limiting dissonance within these cognitive and physical spaces (Festinger, 1957).
Understanding that dissonance resulting from interactions with social agents can negatively affect hockey players, this literature review explores the social agents who can influence hockey players’ behaviours and cognitions, the contextual climates in which social agents and hockey players operate, and the effects social agents can have on hockey players’ basic need satisfaction, goal creation, and goal attainment.

**Social Agents**

As highlighted by Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2014), the “most consistent and reliable sources of influence across athletes’ sporting experience” (p. 537) are parents, coaches, and peers. As such, social agents effectively play two roles with respect to athlete basic need satisfaction. First, they help create the context through which such needs can be met by providing affordances that promote success and/or constraints that inhibit success (Beltman & Volet, 2007). Second, they help athletes interpret the successes and failures within the sport with respect to their basic needs (Roeser & Galloway, 2002). From creating the context and helping athletes interpret the context, social agents’ influence on basic need satisfaction affects the identities individual athletes hold (Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Duriez, 2009; Pummel, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010), and the “degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237).

Athletic identity “holds a unique status among other situated identities” (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998, p. 339) like a parent identity, coaching identity, peer identity, or fan identity, because of the pressure to perform well to a public audience; a characteristic hardly held in other social roles (Webb et al., 1998). Successful athletes, and those who hold athletic identities, often focus on developing the necessary athletic skills while young with the help of significant adults (Webb et
al., 1998), and subsequently develop an athletic identity. With the psychological and time commitment of improving athletic skill, “successful athletes have internalized the athletic identity, frequently at the expense of other possible social roles,” an identity that “likely dominates the individual’s overall self-concept” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 340).

Athlete identities can range from a single-minded identity solely focused on one sport and its related competencies with no thought of other sports or other areas of life and their competencies (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007) to a more comprehensive set of identities across multiple areas of life and multiple competencies (Mortensen, Henriksen, & Stelterm, 2013). A study by Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher (2012) looked at 175 NCAA student athletes, and the relationships of athletic identity and athlete satisfaction. For the 175 NCAA athletes, having an athletic identity and being concerned about athletic performance was positively related to athlete satisfaction, because they enjoyed and took seriously their athletic identity demonstrated through athletic performance. However, NCAA athletes with an exclusively athletic self-image were negatively related to athlete satisfaction. This negative relation demonstrates the difficulty to rely on success from only one competency to determine a person’s holistic satisfaction level when performance in the realm is poorer than anticipated.

Because social agents influence athletes in creating their athletic identity and self-beliefs, it is important to understand how the most consistent and reliable athletic social agents, namely, parents, coaches, and peers (Keegan et al., 2014), affect athletes throughout their progress through the stages of sport participation (Côté, 1999).
Parents

According to the synthesis of studies by Keegan et al. (2014), parents are significantly involved in young athletes’ lives and are influential by providing instrumental and material support, and socialising them into sport. Through parental involvement as conveyed through praise and understanding, young athletes are more willing to assume their parents’ sport values (Danioni, Barni, & Rosnati, 2017).

However, as athletes progress through the specialisation and investment stages, parents become less influential, and are often indirectly involved in their child’s sport, by becoming a spectator. However, parents often continue to maintain some level of financial and/or emotional support. Parental influence, such as, through support, facilitation, and play-and-teach behaviours (Keegan et al., 2009; Keegan et al., 2010), has the ability to affect athlete basic need satisfaction, and can do so by either being a positive or a negative contribution.

An important consideration for parents is whether or not they support their children’s autonomy, and allow their children to be involved in deciding what they can do (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009). There are inconsistencies regarding the combination of father and mother support styles, with additional considerations when children can influence their parents’ behaviours (Holt et al., 2009). Regardless, autonomy-supportive parents tended to be better at communicating and understanding their child’s mood, where non-autonomy supportive parents tended to be worse at communicating and understanding their child’s mood (Holt et al., 2009). However, the times parents experienced empathy with their child’s mood depended on the contextual circumstances (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008).
In a study by Lavoi and Babkes-Stellino (2008), 259 young hockey players displayed good or bad sports behaviour dependent on the forms of parental influence they experienced. These parental influences included: (a) encouragement/discouragement to participate in sport, (b) communication about perceptions of their child’s athletic competencies, (c) reactions to their child’s athletic success or lack of success, (d) expectations about their child’s athletic competence, and (e) direct or indirect involvement in their child’s sport participation (Babkes & Weiss, 1999). These instances of influence can occur when parents perceive themselves to possess expertise in and knowledge of sport, which they believe allows them to comment to their children (Holt et al., 2008). For example, Babkes and Weiss (1999) determined that, for 114 female and 113 male athletes in the sampling and specialization stages, and 160 mothers and 123 fathers, parents who displayed and communicated positive beliefs about their child’s competency and possible performance successes were associated with their child’s higher enjoyment, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation.

For 22 specialization stage swimmers (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), parents provided both positive and negative developmental experiences. The primarily positive developmental experiences with parents included: the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with parents and an athletic work ethic influence by parents. Negative developmental experiences with parents included: pressure to succeed and pressure to stay in sport. Although few participants reported experiencing negative parental pressures, these pressures tend to negatively influence young athletes and can cause athlete burnout (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996). In a study using focus groups with 24 tennis coaches of specialization stage athletes (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008), most parents were positive influences, by being supportive
and emphasizing total development, with many fewer negative parents who were demanding and overbearing.

As noted by Keegan et al. (2014), as athletes progress into more competitive sport, parental influence declines with that influence tending to shift to coaches and peers (Silva, Lott, Mota, & Welk, 2014).

**Coaches**

As an athlete progresses through the stages of sport participation, the expertise of the coach often increases. According to the synthesis of studies by Keegan et al. (2014), coaches in the sampling years tend to be helpful and friendly, but are often not trained coaches. In the specializing years, when sport becomes more competitive, more coaches generally are trained, with coaches in athletes’ investment years often being specialist coaches.

For 238 Canadian athletes, coaches were perceived to provide more training advice, instruction, and autocratic behaviours than peer leaders in team sports (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). Besides the power-dependence relationship (Emerson, 1962) that exists between the coach and the athlete, athletes generally accept the regularly occurring influence of coaches because coaches are perceived to be knowledgeable, and can instill the acceptance of discipline and guidance (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2011). The varying levels of training specialization coaches have can form their knowledge and the way they approach their sport. Their behaviours and feedback can affect the outcome of their influence, and make it either a positive or negative sports experience (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). For example, compared to untrained coaches, coaches who were trained to increase technical instruction behaviour and reinforcement, while decreasing punishment, behaviour
control, and non-reinforcement, created a more fun and unifying team environment (Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993).

Athletes recognize that sometimes coaches do not realize how their behaviours influence athletes (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Negative coaching behaviours can result in conflicts between coaches and athletes by affecting athletes’ basic need satisfaction and ultimately their motivation (Farrell, Crocker, McDonough, & Sedgewich, 2004). Coach influence, whether as constructive, mixed, or negative criticism (Bruner et al., 2008), is significantly related to perceived competence and satisfaction (Allen & Howe, 1998). Lower perceived competence and satisfaction can affect athlete self-efficacy and ultimately performance (Escarti & Guzmán, 1999). Negative effects to self-efficacy are related to athletes’ inhibited mental skills and may require athlete coping (Gearity & Murray, 2011).

Keegan, Harwood, Spray, and Lavallee (2009) interviewed 40 children between the ages of 7 and 11 years old. The themes of coaching influence during the sampling/specialization stage included: sports instruction (for the team or one-to-one), ability to provide equal and fair treatment, and the ability to evaluate and make selections; often with the latter two being contentious. Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2010) had similar findings after interviews with 79 specialization stage athletes (43 males, 36 females) between the ages of 9 and 18.

For 22 specialization stage swimmers (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), coaches provided both positive and negative developmental experiences. Positive developmental experiences with coaches included: meaningful adult relationships with adult role models, communicating and connecting with coaches, coaches believing in athletes, constructive feedback to meet high expectations, and the teaching and guiding of goal setting. In addition, positive developmental experiences
and effective coaching for 12-18 year olds (80 males, 80 females) included coaches who were knowledgeable about the sport, fair, and involved in the sport with their athletes (Humbert et al., 2006). On the other hand, negative developmental experiences with coaches included: poor communication, coaches’ favourites, intimidating coaches, and coaches who modelled poor work ethic and inappropriate behaviours (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009).

Regarding the investment stage, Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) asked 280 college investment stage athletes about their coach’s behaviours: training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, and autocratic and democratic behaviour. Coaching behaviours such as training and instruction, positive feedback, autocratic and democratic behaviour, but not social support, mediated and significantly predicted athlete perceived competence, autonomy, and/or relatedness, and ultimately intrinsic motivation. If negative coaching occurs, like poor teaching related to the sport, being uncaring, or being unfair, the result could be athletes who are distracted from the sport itself, athletic self-doubt, demotivation, and division of the team (Gearity & Murray, 2011). Often, such “abusive coaching practices” (p. 66) in elite sport are normalized and made sense of as being necessary to endure in order to avoid negative consequences, such as being seen as a whiner or not being able to take the pressure (Smits, Jacobs, & Knoppers, 2017).

Peers

According to the synthesis of studies by Keegan et al. (2014), peers play a functional role during the sampling stage, likely for the appeal to sport and relatedness purposes. As athletes progress through the increasingly competitive specialisation and investment stages, when experiences with diverse peer groups increase (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009), peers become more influential and help address athlete
emotional needs. Peers can have influence through: friendship and affiliation, peer collaboration and caring behaviours, competition between peers, bragging of successes, and emotional support (Keegan et al., 2009; Keegan et al., 2010). Additionally, during the specialization and investment stages, Loughead and Hardy (2005) suggested that peer leaders often provide more social support, positive feedback, and democratic behaviours than coaches.

As athletes transition through the stages of sport participation, they develop higher levels of cognitive capacity and the ability to compare themselves to their peers (Stodden et al., 2008). These comparisons can exist in multiple peer climates including: cooperation, effort, improvement, mistakes, intra-team competition, intra-team conflict, equal treatment, normative ability, autonomy support, evaluation of competence, and relatedness support (Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005). Depending on the perception of the comparison in the climates and how other peers respond, the situation can provide positive or negative experiences. An example is provided in McLaren, Newland, Eys, and Newton’s (2017) study where “competitive youth soccer players who perceived a climate lower in ego-related behaviors were more likely to perceive the group as more task cohesive” (p. 97).

For 22 specialization stage swimmers (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), peers provided both positive and negative developmental experiences. The primarily positive developmental experiences with peers included: meaningful peer relationships built on a common interest and positive work ethic influence. Negative developmental experiences with peers included: jealousy, competitiveness, poor role modelling, and poor work ethic. Negative experiences can result in conflicts with teammates, which can affect basic need satisfaction, and ultimately motivation (Farrell, Crocker, McDonough, & Sedgewich, 2004). In this sense, peer influence
parallels that of parents and coaches, in that all three can contribute to the sport context and create situations where players are more likely to act in positive or negative ways (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Miller, 2006).

Overall, athlete “positive perceptions of social relationships [are] associated with more positive motivational outcomes” (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006, p. 193). These social relationships are with other individuals and represent sources of (a) support, (b) pressure and control, (c) competence-relevant information, (d) socialization of achievement orientations, and (e) models to emulate (Garcia Bengoechea & Strean, 2007). Although Keegan et al. (2014) highlighted “the most consistent and reliable sources of influence across athletes’ sporting experience” (p. 537) are parents, coaches, and peers, athletes interact with even more individuals while involved in sport (Garcia Bengoechea, & Strean, 2007). Ultimately, sources of influence emerge in different contexts for the athletes. These contexts can be categorized into varying climates.

**Climates**

Social agents interact with athletes in seven identified climates: competitive climate, training climate, evaluation climate, emotional climate, authority climate, social support climate, and relatedness climate (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2014).\(^2\) The role and effects of the individual social agents in each of the seven climates vary during an athlete’s journey through the career stages.

**Competitive Climate**

The competitive climate encompasses social agent behaviour prior to or during athlete participation in competitive performance. In the competitive climate

\(^2\) All uncited content within the ‘Climate’ section is from the Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2014) study.
throughout the sampling and specialization years, parents, coaches, and peers all
contribute to emphasize mastery, effort and competition with mostly positive but
some negative behaviour. However, as athletes participate in the highly competitive
investment stage, parents and more notably coaches push the expectations of
competition success, containing perception-influencing (Eccles & Harold, 1991)
positive and negative pressuring behaviour. To attain competition success, the coach
tends to emphasize mastery, while parents and peers tend to emphasize effort. To
compete and succeed, positive and negative peer rivalries (Weiss, Smith, &
Theeboom, 1996) guide athlete action, by either pushing teammates to get better, or
by playing mind-games or psych-outs against opponents. Players must display
appropriate athletic behaviour and meet high performance standards (Shogan, 1999).
These standards are achieved through self-sacrifice and self-regulation (David, 2005).

Training Climate

The training climate includes the training and learning situations in which
athletes partake to improve their competence, often when they are preparing for
competition. Coaches and parents initially support athlete training in the sampling and
specialization years using pedagogical teachings of the sport through practicing
various tasks, collaborative learning, and modelling, with formal and informal
support. As athletes join the investment stage, parental support is largely replaced by
peer support: training with peers to build competence with the help of positive
rivalries (Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996). In the peer rivalry, perceived athlete
competence contributes to peer acceptance (Weiss & Duncan, 1992) and higher peer
status (Evans & Roberts, 1987). As competition in the investment stage becomes
fierce, the coach continues to support athlete competence development of individual
athletes, while making athlete selections based on how the athletes fit within team
strategy (Starkes, 1987). The coach evaluates athletes throughout the training climate to put forth the most competent athletes for competition.

**Evaluation Climate**

The evaluation climate includes situations where athletes would be susceptible to social agent assessment, feedback, and behaviour reinforcement, all of which are not limited to competition and training. As athletes progress through the sampling stage to the investment stage, the evaluation of their mastery development, normative performance, and behaviour becomes increasingly dependent only on the opinion of the coach and objective performance standards. Although the feedback that can correspond with a coach’s evaluation of athletes can derive from parents, coaches, and peers, the timing, relevance, and publicity of coach feedback is viewed by athletes as having the greatest motivational influence. The type of coach feedback is positively correlated with the perceived coach-athlete relationship, while unequal athlete recognition is positively correlated with punishment frequency and teammate rivalries, and negatively correlated with the athletes’ perceived role on a team (Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008). Therefore, the manner through which a coach delivers feedback or reinforces behaviour through punishment can affect athletes’ and team motivation to compete.

**Emotional Climate**

The emotional climate covers the various positive and negative reactions from social agents that athletes face while participating in the increasingly competitive career stages. Positive reactions come from achievement and winning, while negative reactions come from athlete mistakes and losing. As athletes progress through the stages, athlete accountability to the team increases; the emotional intensity of peers
and the coach increases, while the parents’ emotional involvement generally decreases.

Successfully achieving goals creates positive reactions for social agents because of positive hedonic outcomes. However, as mistakes and losses occur, involved social agents determine how much negativity can be tolerated. Prolonged mistakes and losing creates negative emotional responses because of the obstruction to the pleasurable outcome, especially for the coach. The coach’s emotional range and sincerity are sources of athlete motivation, especially since the tolerance of mistakes decreases as career stages get more competitive.

**Authority Climate**

The authority climate predominantly contains athlete interactions with parents and coaches, as these two social agents have the ability to control athlete autonomy to various extents during participation in the career stages. When parents first introduce their children into sport, the young athletes are reliant on the parents (especially in the early years) for transportation to training facilities, accessibility to sports equipment, skill development, and influence. Parents play an important role in socializing their child athletes to adopt different goals and beliefs (White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). As a function of their goal orientations, parents place importance on the aspects they believe are the most important; such as winning and being better than others (Roberts, Treasure, & Hall, 1994) or emphasizing competition (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). Parents do so by making their goal preferences evident when they talk to their children about sports aspirations or experiences (Ames, 1992). As competition and winning start to become more important, parents and coaches simultaneously emphasize to athletes self-regulation, discipline, and the importance of competence in sport, all of which can affect athletes’ perceived autonomy.
As competition becomes even fiercer and athletes join the investment stage, coaches exclusively hold the powerful role in the authority climate. The coach has power over athletes in relation to age, expertise, experience, access to resources, and rewards (Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). The coach has the ability to direct the actions of others (Foucault, 1983), as well as being in charge of equality [of punishment] on the team (Kristiansen, Murphy, & Roberts, 2012), all for the purpose of addressing perceived gaps in athlete performance (Shogan, 1999). Punishment and conformity are used as mechanisms to increase personal and team success (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Ideal athletes are created through the normalization of subjects (Foucault, 1980); a standard docility across athletes perpetuated through the power relationships with various agents who have influence (Markula & Pringle, 2006). As such, there is a lack of peer interaction in the authority climate, beyond some relatedness issues from existing in the same power-dependent authoritative climate.

**Social Support Climate**

Social support can include: emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and tangible support (Rees & Hardy, 2000). Throughout the three career stages, parents and peers take a large part of the responsibility for the emotional support (comforting and guidance) and esteem support (self-confidence) athletes may need. Peers are familiar with the stimuli environment in which support may be needed, while parents often support their child unconditionally, although some conditional support situations can arise. Notably, concerning tangible support (purchasing equipment or providing transportation), athletes are often extremely reliant on their parents for continued access to their sport. Occasionally, some parents in the power position may define social support to their children contingent on athletic success, or create a feeling of indebtedness for the parent support provided (Pummell,
Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). The coach has limited exposure in the social support climate, leaving parents and peers responsible for athlete support. This outcome is most likely generated by a prerequisite coaching concern regarding selecting athletes for competition especially in the investment stage years; a sacrificial decision to force an athlete to stay on the bench (Schlenker, 1980) justified by the purpose of achieving competition goals and winning.

**Relatedness Climate**

The relatedness climate concerns the situations where relationship and belonging needs are addressed through friendship, group dedication, or group acceptance to create meaningful associations. As the competence of athletes increases as they progress through the increasingly competitive career stages, athletes remain related through friendships created through being competent and affiliated within similar contexts of sport. Coaches within the same context affect athletes’ perceptions of relatedness, through the complementarity of their decisions and actions. Parents have limited involvement in affecting athletes’ relatedness in this context. Relatedness is to those individuals directly in the sport, although parents may try to seek relatedness to the sport through their child or by taking on coaching responsibilities.

**Personal Motivation**

As male hockey players transition into elite hockey, they may experience different issues personal to them. These difficulties include both on-ice and off-ice issues (Bruner et al., 2008). On-ice issues encompass: readiness for elite competition, ability to demonstrate competence, earning ice-time, constant evaluation, and comments from coaches. Off-ice issues span: billeting experiences, being traded, personal development, and perceived role with teammates. Issues hockey players encounter may affect their motivation in negative ways. In this study, the lenses that
are used to explore motivation of hockey players are Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1989) because of their combined ability to adequately “permeate the motivational landscape” (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2014, p. 561).

**Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) hypothesizes individuals are intrinsically self-determined (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994) when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these three complementary (Deci & Ryan, 1991) psychological needs are supported and satisfied, individuals experience pleasure-filled circumstances known as hedonic outcomes (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008), which provide positive effects to well-being (Niemiec, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2014). Consequentially, unsatisfied basic needs create orienting motives within individuals to seek experiences to fulfill the missing basic needs (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009) to avoid negative consequences to self-regulation and well-being (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004).

**Autonomy.** Of the three basic needs, autonomy is the most influential in determining if individuals are intrinsically motivated. Autonomous individuals have a high quality of engagement (Deci & Ryan 2000), as they are able to pursue their intrinsic interests and extrinsic self-determined goals (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This freedom of interest and goal pursuance allows for good health and effective behavioural outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2008). On the other hand, individuals who do not make autonomous choices are susceptible to externally introjected regulation, creating a controlling and impersonal environment. Such individuals tend to have diminished well-being, poor functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008), guilt, shame, anxiety (Pelletier et al., 1995), and eventually learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, &
Teasdale, 1978). As a consequence, individuals tend to be the most motivated when actions are autonomously determined (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

The affordances and constraints for athlete autonomy-support are mostly generated by parents and coaches during athletes’ development through the sampling and specialization stages, and become limited to coaches as athletes enter the investment stage. Young athletes are dependent on the authoritative power parents and coaches are able to wield (Emerson, 1962), given the adults’ ability to decide to either support or limit athlete choice to participate in sports. Parents afford athletes autonomy by emphasizing athlete choice, while also providing the means for young athletes to participate in sport with tangible support, including purchasing equipment and providing transportation. However, parents can control the amount of autonomy athletes have by choosing to not commit the time and money in providing tangible support, or by controlling the athlete through imposed regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Pressures of an ego-involved environment induce these imposed regulations, where parents can become aggressive and controlling to encourage desired athletic performance (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). Parent autonomy-support and alternatively regulation can be contingent on athlete success, parent beliefs, and parent commitment to providing tangible support.

As athletes transition into the investment stage, the reliance on tangible support from parents diminishes, and the reliance on autonomy-support and decision-making by coaches increases. Coach discretion to direct the actions of others (Foucault, 1983) for the purpose of addressing perceived gaps in athlete performance (Shogan, 1999) becomes increasingly important, as winning and success become the ultimate goal. Similar to athletes’ relationships with parents, imposed regulation from coaches can impact how much choice athletes have to participate in sport. This
regulation occurs when coaches select athletes for competition based on athlete competence evaluations. Accompanied with athlete autonomy to participate, or the regulation of staying on the bench (Schlenker, 1980), communication and feedback between coaches and athletes positively predict athlete competence satisfaction (Allen & Howe, 1998; Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Sideridis, 2008). Athlete competence evaluations by coaches dictate which athletes will be selected for competition, shaping athlete-perceived autonomy-support, athlete-perceived usefulness, and the type of feedback athletes may receive.

Overall, regardless of goals, those athletes who are more autonomous experience more enjoyment than those in a controlled position; therefore, autonomous athletes tend to stay on task longer and perform better (Spray, Wang, Biddle, & Chatzisarantis, 2006).

**Competence.** Of the three basic needs, competence satisfaction is the most influential predictor in determining individual psychological and physical well-being (Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004). Throughout the three career stages, the three social agents contribute to promoting and constraining athlete competence-support. As athletes progress into the investment stage, competence becomes the differentiator for why some athletes continue to participate in their sport. The requirement for competence growth and output relies increasingly on support from coaches, with decreasing reliance on support from parents, and similar reliance of support from peers.

Parents and coaches initially support athlete competence development formally and informally in the sampling and specialization years using pedagogical strategies, such as, skill drills, collaborative learning, and modelling. Parents and more notably coaches then start to push the expectations of competition success
(Keegan et al., 2014). In the investment stage, coaches tend to emphasize elite competence development to meet performance goals, as parents generally shift from stressing competence development to stressing effort. Parents must shift because they get ‘squeezed out’ of having influence once the athlete enters the investment-mastery space (Keegan et al., 2009). Across all stages, peers tend to stress effort, and start to fill the gap for all lost parent contributions, including emphasizing competence development (Keegan et al., 2009). Peers contribute to competence support through positive and negative peer rivalries (Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996), effort to push teammates to get better, or reduced peer acceptance and peer status based on lack of competencies (Evans & Roberts, 1987; Weiss & Duncan, 1992). Communication and feedback between social agents and athletes positively predicts athlete competence satisfaction (Allen & Howe, 1998; Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Sideridis, 2008), which predicts continued motivation to participate in sport (Cox, Smith, & Williams, 2008). Throughout sport participation, continual social agent contributions to support athlete competence are achieved by emphasizing athlete self-regulation and discipline to achieve desired outcomes for the individual athlete and the team. Thus in all stages, competence and autonomy are intricately connected.

**Relatedness.** Relatedness needs are mostly addressed through friendships with peers by being in a meaningful peer group. The increase of peer influence in adolescence (Silva et al., 2014) and desire to participate in sports with friends (Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, & Aherne, 2012) means those individuals who play sports likely have more friendships (Simpkins, Schaefer, Price, & Vest, 2013). Peers are often related by dealing with similar pressures (Keegan et al., 2014): an association increasingly dependent on hockey competence as athletes enter the investment-mastery highly competitive space.
As coaches become the only remaining authority figures and source of evaluative information in the investment stage, parents tend to lose relatedness with their child in regard to hockey besides supporting their participation (Keegan et al., 2014). The relatedness and complementarity between coaches and athletes play a role in relatedness need satisfaction. The communication and feedback between coaches and athletes positively predict athlete competence satisfaction (Allen & Howe, 1998; Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Sideridis, 2008), resulting in effects to self-attitudes (Tyler, 1987). The perceived amount of appreciation peers have of athletes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Solky, 1996) is linked to coaches’ words and actions. These feelings about athlete competence therefore contribute to peer acceptance (Weiss & Duncan, 1992) and higher peer status (Evans & Roberts, 1987). If participation in the sport context does not feel inclusive or socially oriented (because of feelings about competence; Ryan & Deci, 2000) for athletes, their will to continue participating is generally reduced (Podlog, Lochbaum, & Stevens, 2010).

**Basic Need Satisfaction.** As athletes progress toward the investment stage, perceptions of self-worth (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca, & Moller, 2006; Dweck, 1999), and competency-based performance expectancies (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962) help shape athletic identities and the goals they perceive as attainable (Hall & Kerr, 2001). The evaluation of athlete competencies compared to expectancies and related feedback influence goal pursuit and goal orientations (Hall & Kerr, 2001; Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005), based on athlete perceived progress to achieving goals and ultimately need satisfaction. Athletic identities become implicated in how these athletes determine the extent to which their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being satisfied in the pursuit of goal achievement. Reciprocally, creating and pursuing goals satisfies the fundamental needs of autonomy, competence,
and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As a consequence, satisfying needs and achieving goals are more feasible with explicit goals compared to “do your best” goals (Smith, Hauenstein, & Buchanan, 1996).

**Achievement-Goal Theory**

Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT) hypothesizes two achievement goals originally referred to as task and ego goals (Nicholls, 1989), but now more commonly known as mastery and performance goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The aim of a mastery goal is to develop one’s competence in relationship to oneself, whereas the aim of a performance goal is to exhibit one’s competence in relation to others (Ames & Archer, 1988). Adding to the mastery and performance achievement goals, Elliot’s (1999) model provides two motivation dimensions known as approach and avoidance goals. These additional approach and avoidance orientations provide insight to how the competence goal (mastery or performance) interacts with the valence of an individual, with respect to striving for either positive outcomes or avoiding negative outcomes. This 2x2 Achievement-Goal Framework provides four unique profiles for each goal orientation (Elliot & McGregor, 2001): performance-approach, performance-avoidance, mastery-approach, and mastery-avoidance.

As goals are created from either automatized unconscious behaviour (Locke & Latham, 1990) or conscious evaluation of possible incentives and outcomes against one’s values (Miner, 2007), they are positioned in mastery or performance achievement goal orientations. Pursuing and achieving these mastery and performance goals is naturally embedded in the fundamental human necessity of satisfying the three needs of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), with perceived competence being a direct mediator (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997) in determining whether the approach or avoidance motivation orientation is employed. The advantage of having an approach orientation
is the healthy positive focus on achievement, whereas the disadvantage is the real possibility of being unclear about the risks of failing (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Mann, Webster, Schofield, & Marshall, 2004). Alternatively, the advantage of having an avoidance orientation is the ability to directly target the recognized risk factors with interventions (Mann et al., 2004). The disadvantages of struggling with a reoccurring threat to perceived competence resulting in avoidance orientation can include a self-presentational predicament (Leary, 1992), a loss of identity (Rotella & Newburg, 1989), the fear of failure, decreased self-determination, decreased performance (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), and decreased well-being (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), resulting in eventual helpless processes (Elliot & Church, 1997).

Motivational orientations for both achievement goals flow from the environment in which they are situated. Environmental stimuli affect individuals’ emotional states based on the environment’s ability to satisfy three areas (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974): pleasure of affiliation (relatedness), the allowance of dominance or submissiveness (autonomy), and the degree of arousal (desire to improve or compete; competence). Individuals evaluate the degree of satisfaction the goal environment provides, and recruit motivational orientations (Elliot, 1999) reflective of the effects the continuous elements of the environment have on the likeliness of goal attainment.

Social agents influence athlete goals, expectations, and beliefs. Initially, parents socialize their child-athletes from a young age to adopt different goals and beliefs (White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). These goals and beliefs can include the importance of mastery goals (non-restrictive goals as all athletes can improve their ability relative to themselves; Nicholls, 1984) or performance goals (requiring social comparisons of competence; King & Watkins, 2012). When no goals are provided, athletes make their own goals (Weinberg, Butt, Knight, & Perritt, 2001.)
As athletes join the more competitive space and coaches gain influence, athletes use the typical outcome-oriented and long-term goals set by coaches (Weinberg, 2010). These goals are often mostly extrinsic goals, provoked by being involved in the high performance/high mastery sports environment (Ntoumanis, 2001). However, if there are differences between coaches’ goals and athletes’ goals, these differences can lead to problems (Grove & Hanrahan, 1988), often resulting in athletes changing their goals because of goal desirability and goal difficulty (Weinberg et al., 2001). These new athlete goals are created based on what athletes perceive as attainable (Hall & Kerr, 2001) and relevant to maintain performance and motivation (Weinberg et al., 2001).

Negative evaluations and feedback from social agents can create effortful action by the athlete to close the discrepancy gap between status quo and goals (Bandura, 1997), although sustained failure can generate negative self-evaluations and self-attitudes (Tyler, 1978). These negative self-attitudes require self-regulated tolerance and effort to avoid failure (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997); known as having an avoidance orientation. Athletes with an avoidance orientation try to evade negative outcomes related to goal achievement (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Having an avoidance orientation creates deleterious consequences for achievement and general well-being (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). The positive and negative self-evaluations and feedback relating to goal achievement from influential social agents ultimately satisfies or threatens the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and can affect athletes immensely.

**Affects.** While operating in different climates with contributions from a variety of social agents, athletes may experience certain events known as stressors: objective events that cause a “cognitively mediated emotional response” (Cohen,
Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983, p. 386), a response that may help determine perceived personal need satisfaction. For competitive soccer players (Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2009), stressors were somewhat different for less competitive early adolescents (12-14 years) and more competitive middle adolescents (15-18 years). Important stressors for early adolescents included: opponents, making mistakes, team performance, and family, whereas important stressors for middle adolescents encompassed: coaches, contracts, selection, making errors, team performance, social evaluation, and playing at a higher level. Stressors are examples of what can ultimately influence athletes in determining if they are progressing toward achieving their goals and satisfying their basic needs.

Summary

In summary, the most consistent social agents who influence athletes are parents, coaches, and peers (Keegan et al., 2014). Sources of influence on athletes emerge from different contexts categorized by seven identified climates: competitive climate, training climate, evaluation climate, emotional climate, authority climate, social support climate, and relatedness climate (Keegan et al., 2014). The experienced influence within these climates can affect athletes’ basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and ultimately their self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The effects to athletes’ basic needs can simultaneously affect their achievement goals (Nicholls, 1989) and goal orientations (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).
This chapter focuses on the method and methodology of how this study, ‘Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players,’ was conducted. The methodological approach used for this research was a qualitative case study (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009), more specifically a multiple case design (Yin, 2009), to explore the experiences of six male U Sports hockey players as a single unit of analysis (Thomas, 2011): three having played in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), and three having played Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Since the purpose of this study was to determine ‘how’ the psychological development and well-being of elite male hockey players were affected during transitions in the highly competitive hockey space, a case study was a good method to use because the focus of the study was to answer a ‘how’ question regarding non-manipulated participant behaviour, and there were certain contextual conditions (playing elite hockey) that were relevant in exploring the transition phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

A qualitative case study has the purpose of being instrumental by providing insight into a bounded situation that can include a particular phenomenon, population, or general condition (Stake, 2003). For example, a case study conducted by Rovio, Eskola, Kozub, Duda, and Lintunen (2009) studied “the relationships between performance in a team sport and social psychological group phenomena, [including] cohesion, conformity, groupthink, and group polarization” (p. 421), determined from the experiences of junior-league hockey players from a single team. In this situation, a single hockey team was the bounded situation representing the population of athletes playing on a team, where the researchers were exploring a particular phenomenon and
general conditions the hockey players (single unit of analysis) on the team experienced.

A multiple case study, or similarly a collective case study (Yin, 2003), is extended to several cases that are purposefully similar or different in context or characteristic (Stake, 2003) to analyze within and across settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For example, a multiple case study conducted by Gilbert and Trudel (2002) examined “how model youth sport coaches learn to coach through experience” (p. 16). Participants included six youth team sport coaches as a single unit of analysis (Thomas, 2011), and consisted of two cases: three coaches in competitive hockey and three coaches in competitive soccer, which generated data that were nested in the broader picture (Thomas, 2011) of youth sport coaching. Similarly, the present study included six elite U Sports league hockey players as a single unit of analysis (Thomas, 2011), consisting of two cases distinguished by development leagues chosen: three former CHL players and three former NCAA players. The experiential data gathered from these two cases generated data that were nested in the broader picture (Thomas, 2011) of playing elite hockey. This methodology gave the ability to look at the uniquely bounded lived experiences these six hockey players growing up in Canada had endured, progressing through development leagues, and ultimately ending in the U Sports league.

This multiple case study methodological approach provided the ability to add to and address the minimal number of studies specifically examining the negative effects of hockey transition experiences for males through elite hockey development leagues, and the resulting effects to psychological development and well-being (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008). Little is known about player experiences of transitioning through elite development leagues (Allain, 2014; Smith & McManus,
2008), as many hockey institutions are closed communities; restricting researchers from accessing the people within the institution including its players, possibly to limit negative exposure (Allain, 2014; Bruner et al., 2008; Robinson, 1998).

Regarding the CHL league, Grygar (2013) studied the experiences of harassment, abuse, and exploitative practices CHL players endured, and their resulting welfare using a Foucauldian theory approach for power relationships. McCoy (2015) also studied CHL hockey players’ ease of transition, coping, and support. Regarding NCAA hockey players, a study by Heller, Bloom, Neil, and Salmela (2005) examined the stress female NCAA hockey players endured, which included hockey pressures, relationship issues, and educational demands. Currently, there are no studies that dually consider the popular and best male hockey development leagues for Canadians known as the CHL and NCAA (Lopez, 2010), the male hockey players who play within these two leagues, and the transition experiences they endure and how these experiences impact their psychological development and well-being.

Overall, the multiple case study approach provided a structure for gathering experiential data of individuals within the organizational and social landscape of playing elite hockey in Canada, and the ability to focus on the experiences within the two cases (CHL and NCAA), thereby addressing the gap in the literature.

**Data Collection**

After having received General Research Ethics Board (GREB) clearance from Queen’s University (see Appendix A), interview data were collected from three former CHL players and three former NCAA players using semi-structured interviews. These interviews were all conducted over the phone for the sake of
convenience, since all U Sports hockey players were busy with school and hockey during the week, and away on road trips most weekends.

**Recruitment**

Participant recruitment was purposeful as it was grounded in logic to accumulate participants likely to have experienced (Patton, 1990) playing in either the CHL or NCAA as development leagues, and likely to have experienced some sort of dissonance or negative experience playing in these leagues. As such, even though the U Sports hockey league is still competitive and skilled hockey, it is seen as an “acceptable alternative in the absence of better options” (Chard, 2013, p. 335) and a “league of relative failures” (p. 336). Players who enter the CHL or NCAA do not see these development leagues as a “stepping-stone” (p. 334) to the U Sports league, which is an option often “exercised when professional hockey aspirations do not materialize or an injury occurs” (p. 334). Therefore, U Sports hockey players were purposeful in that they had a high probability of being able to contribute information-rich experiences to help answer the research questions, while being in a position that could avoid potential recruitment difficulties through the CHL and NCAA development leagues themselves; these development leagues likely want to limit the exposure of negative occurrences in their leagues. Additionally, this group of purposeful participants would allow for comparison between the experiences within the two development leagues, while being able to represent a larger elite male hockey player population.

Participants were successfully recruited using the snowball sampling method (Goodman, 1961). A former U Sports hockey player, with whom I was already in touch, recommended potential participants who matched the recruitment criteria and provided their e-mail addresses. Participants were contacted by e-mail and provided
with a standard recruitment script, Letter of Information (LOI) and Consent Form (CF), all of which had received ethical clearance (see Appendix B). The LOI/CF provided potential participants with the purpose of the study, the fact that the identities of all participants would remain confidential to the extent possible in the analysis and reporting of the data, and withdrawal procedures. All consenting participants were contacted by phone at a scheduled time. Semi-structured interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 50 minutes.

**Procedure**

The semi-structured interview questions were designed using previous research to guide their construction: considering (i) typical progression of athlete participation through sport (Côté, 1999) including critical hockey instances like the CHL draft, and (ii) people within sport have power (Markula & Pringle, 2006) and influence (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2014) to affect athlete motivation, goals, and wellbeing. Questions targetting this study's purpose and holistic design, to my knowledge, were unavailable in the literature.

The guiding questions were created respecting three main factors including:

- need to consider the holistic accumulation of events through which the athletes had progressed that enabled them to get to their current mental and physical state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014);
- consideration for the elements associated with Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1989); and
- an understanding that feedback and communication from social agents affected athlete expectations and perceived need satisfaction (Allen & Howe, 1998; Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Sideridis, 2008).
The interview guide had three main sections of questions, each of which was accompanied with instructions from the interviewer for participants to have one of three different mind frames while answering questions. These instructed mind frames primed the participant regarding the direction of the interview questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and the particular time and experiences the interview questions were targeting.

The first questions for U Sports hockey players were broad questions about their sports career, accompanied by instructions to answer the questions using the mind frame “when they were young and before they were being scouted.” Example questions from the first set of questions include: “Who has supported you throughout your hockey development?” and “Before you started to become scouted, what feedback and communication do you remember experiencing from other people?”

The second section included questions about the players’ transition into and through elite development leagues; chronologically including their transitioning experience into and through the selected CHL or NCAA elite development league, and their transitioning experience into the U Sports league. The beginning of this section was accompanied with instructions to answer the questions using the mind frame “as you started to become scouted, and as you were deciding on what development league to play in.” Example questions from the second set of questions include: “Looking back on making the decision to play in the CHL/NCAA, what memorable events or communication occurred to help you make your decision?” and “After playing in the CHL/NCAA for the length of time you did, why did you decide to play hockey in the U Sports league?”

Finally, the third section included questions about overall motivation and goals, accompanied with instructions to “consider events throughout your whole
career.” Example questions from the third set of questions include: “How have your goals changed throughout playing hockey (up to now)?” and “How did your motivation change throughout playing hockey?” These guiding questions provided structure to uncover meaningful moments the athletes found imperative to their journey playing hockey, and their reflections based on these events (see Appendix C).

During interviews, the U Sports male hockey players were able to recall hockey experiences retrospectively (Ericsson & Simon, 1980); likely vivid flashbulb memories (Brown & Kulik, 1977) accurately retained because of their meaningfulness compared to mundane events (Pillemer, 2009). These stand-out incidents provided the ability to explore the lived transition experiences of U Sports hockey players.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded on a personal recording device. Once the interviews were transcribed and all identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms, the interviews were deleted from the recording device, and interview transcripts and audio were stored on the Principal Investigator’s password-protected desktop. Once the data have been used for this thesis, they will be entrusted to Dr. John Freeman, who will securely password protect them for a minimum of five years, with the coding list being stored separately and securely from the data by the Principal Investigator (Matt Norris).

Initially, an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) was used to read through the six transcribed interviews. Field notes were written in the margins using ATLAS.ti, noting patterns and themes that appeared (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and building a logical chain of evidence from a summary of code frequency (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
However, recognizing the patterns generated from the inductive approach were similar to identified themes from Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee’s (2014) synthesis study, a deductive approach (Yin, 1989) was then used to adequately describe the case and context (Creswell, 2013). The themes provided by the Keegan et al. (2014) study included social agents and climates, which were used as imperative themes to categorize all studies used in the synthesis, as well as a non-explicit theme of personal motivation, which was derived from a recognition by Keegan et al. (2014) that the elements of two theories in particular are “compatible” (p. 561) and provide a “fuller and more nuanced understanding of the various ways that athlete motivation is socially influenced” (p. 561). Personal motivation included contributions matching Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Achievement-Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1989) because of their ability “to permeate the motivational atmosphere” (Keegan et al., 2014, p. 561).

**Reporting Results**

Results for the interviews of the three former CHL players and three former NCAA players were organized chronologically through narrative representations within three themes: social agents, climates, and personal motivation. Results were reported separately based on which development league the U Sports male hockey players had participated in. This organization of data and having multiple cases provides for a stronger study, because of the ability to compare the differences and similarities among these cases, and determine if occurrences are replicated across cases (Yin, 2003). These two hockey development league experiences may also be able to be considered nested in the broader picture (Thomas, 2011) of playing elite hockey.
CHAPTER FOUR: CHL PLAYER RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the interview responses of the three former Canadian Hockey League (CHL) players who were participants in this study: Bruce, Chris, and Will. Their responses are organized in chronological order, based on their progress through their hockey career, within three themes: Social Agents, Climates, and Personal Motivation.

A. Bruce is a Canadian male hockey player currently playing in the U Sports league. Bruce played a season of Jr. B and a season and a half of Jr. A before joining the CHL mid-season. He continued to play in the CHL for a season and a half before returning to Jr. A to play his last remaining year of eligibility before continuing on to the U Sports league.

B. Chris is a Canadian male hockey player currently playing in the U Sports league. After being drafted to the CHL, Chris played with five different CHL teams across two CHL leagues over five years. Afterwards, he made appearances in two professional leagues in North America, before joining the U Sports league.

C. Will is a Canadian male hockey player currently playing in the U Sports league. Although Will was undrafted to the CHL, he joined the CHL out of minor hockey. He played for four years in the CHL with two different teams, before continuing to the U Sports league.

Bruce

Social Agents

Bruce was introduced to sports at a young age because it was a big part of his family’s life: “My dad met my mom through sport, both big athletes.” Being the
youngest with two athletic older siblings also influenced Bruce to become involved in sport: “I believe I was brought into sport just from that.” He played soccer in the summer and hockey in the winter: “I played competitive soccer all the way up until 14, at the highest level.” Bruce enjoyed hockey like his dad and brother, and wanted to play hockey to be like his brother, “following in his footsteps.”

Bruce eventually had to choose a sport on which to focus and “decided to take on hockey because it was a full-year thing.” Bruce enjoyed the “physical nature of the game” because “it was more his style,” plus he was “so much more involved in [hockey] over the fact [that he] was playing”: “The fact my brother was playing hockey, we were always watching hockey at home…my good friends were hockey players, and I guess I was just more passionate about hockey.”

Growing up playing minor hockey, Bruce said “everyone supported me.” His parents were a positive influence; they were always there for him and didn’t pressure Bruce to play hockey: “They just wanted me to keep doing what I enjoy, and to do it the best I can, I guess. They gave me all the opportunities to do it, as much as I could have pleased.” Bruce’s parents additionally provided tangible support to him: “Drove me to the rink, and made sure I had everything I needed to enjoy it.”

Bruce’s minor hockey coaches also were positive influences for him: “I think the coaches were great!” They made sure all the players were there to enjoy hockey: “It was more, you know, ‘Are we having fun?’ ‘What can I do to make this experience a little bit more fun for you?’” Hockey was fun for Bruce in minor hockey, and soon all his hockey teammates were his close friends: “All my friends that I went to school with, and hung out with outside of school with were all hockey players. So it became my life in a way.”
As hockey became more competitive, all of Bruce’s hockey friends were highly rated and influenced him to get better: “I trained with them, so it was kind of a way to pushing me to my end goal of following in their footsteps.” Although Bruce was not drafted to the CHL, he continued to work hard and improve; playing Jr. B the season after minor hockey and moving up to Jr. A the year after. During his “late development,” Bruce’s coaches helped him “in personal ways to get better, and kind of be bolder.” This improvement resulted in Bruce having a “really really good year” and looking to the future.

Ever since joining Jr. A, Bruce was “always set on NCAA,” as the hockey route to the next level. Bruce’s Jr. A coach was impressed with his performance and reinforced Bruce’s belief about what could happen: “My coach in [Jr. A team] was saying ‘you know what, you keep on this pace, and you’re going to be having NCAA teams calling you.’” However, halfway through his second year in Jr. A, Bruce received a phone call from an influential and well-known CHL coach, changing his mind on what the next step in hockey would be: “I changed…that phone call from [CHL coach], I think that’s what really put me over the top, what set my mind to what I wanted to do with hockey.” This phone call influenced Bruce to go to the CHL: “It was kind of a special thing…That is something iconic, you know it doesn’t really happen that often to be on the phone and chat with him, and to say ‘We are interested in you.’”

Bruce went to visit and practice with the team, and ultimately decided to join the CHL team mid-season because it seemed like a good fit: “It was just the way the guys were treating me. It was totally different than Jr. A.” Bruce’s parents supported him to go to the CHL: “My parents obviously supported me, and said you know what ‘you should kind of chase the dream.’”
Playing in the CHL, Bruce quickly realized how well the players were treated by fans around town: “The way we were treated in [CHL town], you know I was very thankful. It’s crazy, we were almost treated like NHL players. In that regard, it was kind of like what I was expecting, if not beyond.” As well, throughout his time in the CHL, Bruce was positively influenced by his billet family. They made him feel welcome and “were a really really big help” with any issues that came up. “They welcomed me with open arms. They kind of knew how it worked because they had a bunch of kids before…Made me feel at home with the team and everything.”

After his time in the CHL and final year in Jr. A, Bruce was influenced by his peers to play hockey in the U Sports league because it was still competitive: “I knew a few guys on the team as well, and they just preached the fact that the hockey, you know, was still something competitive.” His peers were “kind of what led me to make that decision.”

Climates

In minor hockey, Bruce thought hockey was fun because the competitive nature was not prevalent yet: “At that age, everyone just wants to play hockey. It’s not the reality of being scouted. It’s not this competitive nature upon each other yet. It’s about going out there and playing hockey and having fun.” With the help from coaches, all the hockey players were able to train and improve to become better: “From the coach’s standpoint, they were just looking to develop. They wanted the kids to get better, and you know, us to become more knowledgeable.”

As hockey became more competitive, Bruce thinks “it changed a lot,” specifically with coaches as “it became more a winning mentality”: “Hockey

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3 Words in bold reference Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee’s (2014) seven climates: (a) competitive, (b) training, (c) evaluation, (d) emotional, (e) authority, (f) social support, and (g) relatedness.
becoming more competitive, there’s no more fair play. The best players are going to be there to help us win, and it kind of changed the whole mentality of actually running the hockey itself.” Particularly, the emotional intensity and pressure from the coach in the CHL escalated: “As far for the hockey itself, with coaching, it was kind of a wake-up call ’cause like the intensity was wild. The pressure that was put on us and everything like that was not what I was expecting.” Likewise, the intensity from the CHL coach reflected the demand of the CHL team fan-base: “Also I think the pressure in that city, we had…a big fan-base, a lot of pressure on these kids, and, you know, we were still young.”

While in the CHL, Bruce received social support from his parents and brother, his roommate/teammate, and billet family. First, Bruce’s parents and brother were “always there” for him and supported Bruce any way they could: “They came down a number of times, you know, they watched all the games online, and would send me massages at all times.” Next, Bruce’s roommate, who was also his teammate, provided guidance and “helped me out along the way.” Finally, Bruce’s billet family helped him with hockey and non-hockey issues. They helped Bruce with the transition and “pressure” of “being on my own for the first time,” and with motivational hockey issues. They were particularly helpful when Bruce was not playing much during his first year in the CHL. “My billets had seen it before with other guys who had either just kind of given up on themselves, or made an effort and were later awarded for it. So they kind of helped me through that.”

**Personal Motivation**

Playing minor hockey, Bruce was motivated to have fun: “That’s kind of why it was such a passion of mine, and I think that’s why I enjoyed it so much.” He was motivated to be like his “brother and sister playing hockey” and “to be surrounded by
my friends and to do what I was enjoying.” Hockey was a huge passion for Bruce in minor hockey. He wanted to play hockey “until I don’t enjoy it anymore.” His goal was to be a hockey player, “and that’s what I aspired to do with my life.”

As Bruce started to play increasingly competitive hockey, he created personal avoidance goals because he thought he “was really never a top player.” Bruce was “kind of always happy to be in the shadows of the better players, and just wanted to go out there and have fun and win.” These personal goals were created at a time when “it became more of a team-oriented goal” and “a business.”

Bruce improved his competencies and made the Jr. A team that owned his playing rights. He had a really good year in his first Jr. A season, and, in his second season, “my 17-year-old year,” he decided his goal and motivation was to go the NCAA route: “Throughout that year…is when I really said ‘this is my motivation to what I want to do.’” This goal changed when, half-way through his second Jr. A season, Bruce received a phone call, which “came out of the blue,” from an influential and well-known CHL coach, who was interested in Bruce playing for him. This event was “eye-opening” and proved to be what initiated Bruce’s shift from avoidance to approach goals: “‘Oh wow, like am I ready? Is this something I can really do?’ You know, was it something I want to do at this point?”

Bruce thought about his initial NCAA goal and switched motivation to the CHL route: “Well I had been talking to quite a few schools” and “nothing was too set in stone,” so “this was the first real thing that was concrete; I could leave the next day and start the new chapter.” This switch to the CHL was also preferred over the alternative: “Had I gone the NCAA route, I would have continued to play Jr. A. I was on a team that [wasn’t the best]…kind of a frustrating path. The coaching was not what I was hoping to have.”
Bruce realized he “can’t pass this opportunity” and joined the team after practicing with them for a week, for what Bruce described “was kind of a leap of faith from both sides.” Jumping on to the CHL team mid-season, Bruce was provided with reasonable expectations; he had to work hard and earn his opportunity to play: “They kind of said ‘this is something we’re not just going to hand to you, right? You need to work for it.’” The opportunity to play in the CHL motivated Bruce to work even harder, because his goal appeared to be achievable: “I just said, ‘Wow, you know, this could become a possibility.’ And it kind of motivated me, I started working out, working really hard, and started doing extra things I had to do.” Bruce wanted to prove himself: “Get out of the shadow and be a player that can score goals and put more importance on myself.” This opportunity continued the change to approach goals for Bruce: “And it was kind of just like being in the spotlight, like I said, it’s kind of like getting out of the shadows of the people around me…I have to take this opportunity and run with it.”

I think my goals changed then to saying, “How can I become the best hockey player I can be?” and “How can I make the jump to the next level and continuously make that jump to the next level?” My goals got to the point where I wanted to make the NHL, I wanted to play hockey, that’s what I wanted to do.

As Bruce started playing in the CHL, he “was kind of an outsider at first” and felt unrelated to his other teammates: “I went into a team half-way through a season, so for me it was kind of a big big change ‘cause I was getting thrown into the mix of things. All the guys kind of knew each other.” Bruce persevered and continued to play and practice hard, and successfully made it on the NHL draft list: “That’s what set my goal. This is now what I’m in for. To get drafted; it was kind of the first step to what I
wanted to do in many chapters.” Bruce felt the “hard work has been paying off, and I’m starting to get recognized.” He was motivated to “keep doing what I’ve been doing and then some.”

Unfortunately, an accumulation of events hindered Bruce in his draft year, causing him to change his goals and motivation. Bruce got sick with mono for 12 weeks; that was a “big chunk of the season, and that was part of a really big setback.” During this time, Bruce’s goals changed, as he thought “maybe getting drafted wouldn’t be realistic this year.” Upon his return from being sick, Bruce started to play less; his CHL team “brought in three of the top players and made some big trades” to do well in the playoffs. Bruce “knew [staying on the team] wasn’t an option” to attain his goal of getting drafted to the NHL. Bruce “did have the opportunity to play elsewhere in the [CHL league].” He was aware of “times when people will make it [to the NHL] if they weren’t drafted,” but instead Bruce decided it would be better “to be closer to home, and focus on different things, and kind of enjoy it a little bit more.” Bruce went back to Jr. A, “and that’s when the motivation changed”: “Enjoy my last year of Jr. hockey then instead of going through the same stuff I had been going through.” Bruce recognizes that, during his time in the CHL, his whole life revolved around hockey. Bruce “put it all on the line the best I could, worked hard every day, [and could] never look back and say ‘I wish I could have tried harder to make it.’”

It’s kind of what your life becomes…That’s all I did. We had these road trips that were weeks long [far away]. Every morning it was hockey. At night, if I wasn’t at the rink, I was thinking about hockey. If I wasn’t working out, I was on the ice, and if I was at home doing nothing, I was watching hockey. I think at that point, when I was away, it was really just hockey-oriented.
Now Bruce is playing in the U Sports league, and is motivated to play hockey for the same reasons as when he was a kid: “It’s kind of a weird thing but it’s kind of back to where I started…I just want to enjoy it, some good friends, some good people, and just play because I’m still enjoying it.” Bruce “wasn’t ready to give up hockey.” The opportunity to go to school “and really take pride in that,” and play hockey and “still move on from [U Sports league] to potentially play pro” meant Bruce “could still make something of it.”

In the U Sports league, Bruce’s goals are now more holistic, as he focuses “on being successful at hockey and school.” However, “school took over a lot of my motivation and my goals.” Regarding hockey, Bruce still wants to be “the best player I can be,” but is motivated by other things rather than just performance goals: “Making new friends, having fun, staying in shape. You know still doing the thing that I love, but more on a balanced level rather than having hockey be my whole life.”

Chris

Social Agents

Chris started playing hockey when he was 4 years old: “My mom started me in minor hockey, like just house league.” Chris and his younger brother both played hockey in the “same year” and played on the same team: “So we grew up playing together and stuff like that.” At this young age, Chris’ mom took care of Chris and his brother by doing whatever she could to make sure they could get to hockey: “Well she took us to practices and games, and all that, she kind of just did everything to make sure we could get to hockey.” During minor hockey, Chris’ mom provided tangible support for them, and influenced Chris to want to do well: “My mom always, well not pressured, but wanted me to do well.”
While playing competitive AAA minor hockey, there was inter-team parent conflict that created groups of people within the team; ultimately affecting how parents, coaches, and peers could influence Chris. “A lot of parents would be fighting. A lot of wealthy kids’ families, like the whole team was broken up into little clans when I was a kid. Some parents would hate each other, and things like that.” The effect of conflict on the team limited the influence social agents could have had on Chris: “[Parents and coaches], like they didn’t really care…Well they did care but they had this crew thing, like the people they hung out with and stuff.”

Coming out of the conflict-filled minor hockey experience with limited influence from others beside his mom, Chris was not familiar with the process to progress playing hockey: “When I was growing up, I didn’t really know…I knew who the [CHL teams] were but I didn’t know how you became the [CHL team], and I knew what the NHL was, but didn’t know what the NHL draft was and stuff like that.” Social agents generally informed Chris how to progress through hockey only as he reached the need to know: “When I started to become scouted, it was like ‘okay you do this, and then you go to the [CHL league], and then hopefully you go to the NHL’, but I didn’t know about all the leagues in between.”

As a result of good hockey performance in minor hockey, Chris had his playing rights protected at the CHL entry draft, and quickly signed with a CHL team: “Through the draft…I went to camp and I did well at rookie camp, then I went back to main camp and I signed at main camp.” Chris found himself in an environment that brought with it some positive fan interactions: “Like I said it is nice, like people, fans and all that which is nice, like there are good fan-bases and you are like a local hero kind of thing, local celebrity.”
However, Chris highlighted a few negative influences he had while playing in the CHL, including billets, coaches, and the league itself. Chris recognized billets were the worst influence on his experience in the CHL: “Bad billets would be the worst thing.” One of his billets set an “amount we could have every day and it was in the fridge upstairs that was unlocked, and the one downstairs had all the extra stuff that was for the next day and stuff, and it was locked.” Two other separate billets were alcoholics. One “was an older lady who was a huge alcoholic. She would always walk around with booze in her hand.” Another couple who billeted Chris “would just get home every day and drink two bottles of wine each. They would get so drunk, they couldn’t even talk. And they would get really jealous when I wasn’t at home to watch [TV] with them.”

Chris also spoke of coach experiences that were negative influences: “I think also in [the CHL], you can tell they don’t care about the players really, at all.” Although there was some team-to-team variance in that “some teams care about school,” Chris noticed some teams cared exclusively about hockey performance: “All they care about is if you play hockey, they don’t care about anything else. …They don’t care about your school or anything extra.” This feeling of negative influence was exemplified by one particular CHL coach Chris had: “Like I had a really strict coach. Like he really didn’t talk to anyone. I think I said a few hundred words to him in the three years I was there.”

Third, Chris felt certain CHL leagues were not a supportive influence during his experience in the CHL: “The league is super cheap on stuff.” These leagues “try to screw you out of your school money, and like try to not pay you for stuff they should pay you for, stuff like that,” despite advertising that “they help the players, like they present that all over their website, but they don’t really.” However, there was a
distinct difference between the two CHL leagues in which Chris played: “Yeah, the [CHL league 1] was especially bad, the [CHL league 2] was much better. The [CHL league 1] sucks for helping players or getting anything you need.”

**Climates**

Ever since a young age, Chris recognized that training and improving competencies could benefit him in playing hockey: “It started young, my mom helping me trying to help me do well, and if I could do well I would have more seriousness to it.”

Chris wanted to train and get better to continue “having fun, and get good results” by competing successfully against others: “I would say it was fun, and I liked doing well.” In minor hockey, Chris focused on training to succeed at competition, so he could be rewarded one day: “Even before I was scouted, I always just wanted to do better and stuff like that, so I could get into [the CHL].”

When Chris first started to get scouted, he experienced positive evaluations that made him happy: “When I first got scouted, I was obviously happy.” However, after Chris joined the CHL as a result of these positive evaluations, he experienced competitive and authoritative realities, both away from and at the rink, which were perceived to be not very positive. He experienced coaches and management that only cared “if you can play the game, it’s all they care about really, and do well.”

**Competition** success and winning were the main foci of the CHL league: “The league overall, it was good, but they don’t care about anything else besides hockey. Their team winning games, like they don’t care.” In addition, Chris experienced authoritative hockey discipline for issues not related to hockey: “The GM… took [my assistant captain designation] away” and “sent us home for a week” “because we
didn’t show up… to school with 13-year-olds, and do our online school, so someone could watch us, which is just dumb.”

To deal with some of the perceived difficulties that existed in the CHL, Chris relied on social support from his mom as a constant source, and others dependent on his situation at the time: “I guess depending on where I was playing, my billets would be good…I guess my billets, if I had a girlfriend at the time, my mom. I guess I had a smaller circle I guess.”

After playing in the CHL, Chris played some professional hockey in North America. He experienced frustration with some of the unique quirks that come with professional sports: “I thought that if you were outplaying someone you would play, but kind of in pro, there are contracts. You have to play certain guys and stuff, and that I really didn’t understand.” This unique competitive situation, where those who have a contract get to play, augmented the authoritative environment of seeking competent hockey players: “I enjoyed playing there, it was nice, but also again-pro…They really just trade a guy, play him and cut him, trade a guy like really every day.”

Throughout his time playing in the CHL and professional hockey, Chris came to realize that training could only take him so far; training does not always mean improved competencies and results because sometimes natural skill cannot be taught or achieved.

There’s some things you can work on and can’t get better skill…like you can’t stay after practice for the entire year and think you’ll pass one of the European guys in like stickhandling; that’s just not how it works. It’s like growing up and thinking you do ‘x’ amount of whatever drills and you do get better. But like, for instance, me personally, I’m not going to do a bunch of wrist shots
and have a better shot magically than the 25-year-old European guy that is a goal scorer. Like it’s developed when you are younger and it’s a skill set you grow with. Like everyone has their different skills and you just can’t do one-timers, and have better one-timers than the guy who is naturally just unbelievable at taking one-timers.

**Personal Motivation**

Ever since Chris started playing minor hockey, he thought “it was fun,” but he “thinks the whole time [he and his peers] have always taken it seriously, and took it more than just having fun.” Hockey was everything, and it was the only thing with which Chris was concerned: “It was just hockey, going to the rink and play hockey, that’s all that mattered.” He was motivated to improve his competencies to succeed at competing in hockey: “I always wanted to do well in hockey.” Chris thought training would help him achieve his main extrinsic goal: “I just wanted to play hockey, because I thought that was the only way to be successful and make good money.” These financial aspects helped Chris decide on his hockey route.

The financial aspects of the CHL were very appealing compared to the costs of going through Jr. A to go the NCAA route: “Growing up we didn’t have much money, so going to the CHL; I would get free sticks, free skates, and free hockey. So getting paid was the #1 thing…you still had to pay for things in Jr. A.” Next, Chris believed that not being good in school at a young age limited his ability to go the NCAA route: “I really didn’t try in school growing up, that was something my mom really didn’t focus on was school at all.” Chris “didn’t even consider going to [NCAA] school for a second.”

Chris “wanted to go to the CHL [his] whole life,” where his “end-goal was to play in the NHL.” The only influence to Chris’ goal creation appeared to be his peers
from where he came, because everyone wanted to play in the CHL: “There wasn’t many guys who were thinking of going to school.” Chris was motivated by his self-determined goal of making the CHL: “I’ve always been determined, like even when I was younger, I’ve always been self-motivating and having a goal in line for myself.” Chris had little interference in altering his motivation or goals in any way: “For as long as I can remember, I don’t really remember anyone making me decide to change the dream or work harder.” Chris has “been fairly consistent” in maintaining this motivation for approach goals for his whole hockey career.

Going into the CHL, Chris had no expectations and “no clue” “what it’s going to be like.” Chris “didn’t have too much research going into [the CHL]” and “learned as I went kind of thing.” All Chris knew was “that I wanted to play there,” and “kind of went in there blind.” Chris described his experience in the CHL as containing little hindrance to his hockey motivation and goals: “Like I just went to [the CHL] at 16 and worked hard and stuff, I just naturally kept getting more ice time and getting better, and getting opportunities.”

After playing in the CHL, Chris was able to play pro. Once again, he had approach goals because he “had no expectations, just wanted to go there and work hard and do well.” At this point, Chris was able to achieve his extrinsic goal of making money: “It was cool to see the pro-style I guess you could say, and yeah that was fun. It was nice to get paid some decent money finally for playing hockey.”

While playing pro hockey in North America, Chris suffered a concussion, which meant he would be out the rest of the season: “I wouldn’t be playing the rest of the season anyway. So I thought it would be better to start my school now.” He then started playing hockey in the U Sports league to claim “the school package to be honest” before it expired instead of “just waiting there for the whole year and trying
to go back to pro.” Chris plans to go to play pro hockey again: “Even if I was to go after school, I would still be one of the younger ones, which was something I realized when I went there.”

Now playing in the U Sports league, Chris is still motivated to play hockey after attaining his degree: “I have always been driven and focused on…doing well in hockey…I’m still driven…as driven as you can be on one thing since I started, like since everything changed and since I have been playing hockey.” This change for Chris occurred when he started to play in the U Sports league, which enabled him to move beyond focusing solely on hockey as his only goal, and instead, creating more holistic goals, encompassing academics in addition to hockey “because it’s important too.” Chris realizes this change “helps me do better in hockey too because I’m not just focusing on that.”

Overall, Chris concluded the biggest obstacle to his goal of having hockey success (besides the in-part attribution of not having natural skill that cannot be fixed with training) is that, in hockey, “you can do very well, and still not get rewarded for it”: “In school…you work hard at it, and study, you can get a good grade. It only depends on your effort, which is not really like hockey because a lot of other things come into play.”

**Will**

**Social Agents**

Will was interested in sports since the age of 4 years old, when his parents signed him up in soccer, and then, years later, hockey and lacrosse: “It just came naturally because my parents signed me up, I think it was soccer…I was about 4, played soccer for a few years, didn’t start hockey until I was 8…started lacrosse at the same age as hockey.” As Will grew older and started to play in AAA minor hockey,
he realized he had to commit to one sport. Because of the cultural effect in Canada, he chose to play hockey: “You don’t have time to pick each one, and hockey has the cultural effect in Canada. For the most part, it’s the one everyone picks. All the guys pick hockey when it comes down to sports.” Will recognized that some hockey players he knows started “when they were 3 or 4 years old; at the time, it wasn’t even a decision they wanted, they are born into it in a sense.”

For Will throughout minor hockey, Will’s parents supported his autonomy; they ensured he was doing what he wanted to do: “To make sure I was doing it for me and having fun.” Will’s parents additionally supported Will with tangible support over the years: “Bringing you to practice and trying to motivate you to continue on.”

Will recognized his coaches didn’t play a big part for him when he was young: “I guess when you’re young, the coaches didn’t have as big a role.” However, coaches started to play a bigger role for Will at around 14 and 15 years old, while his parents’ role was reduced when he was playing in bantam and midget: “I say midget age, the older you got, your parents had less of a role, and it transitions more into coaches. Maybe around 14 or 15 is when coaches started having a bigger role, like bantamish age.”

Will spoke of a “unique scene in minor hockey” he experienced where parents played politics to influence the coach to help their child: “They want their kids looked at, they want their kids drafted.” To play politics, parents would be “spending time with the coach” in order “to get their kid more ice-time.” Will understands that hockey is “not meant to be equal” and “better players need to be on the ice if a goal needs to be scored obviously,” but when it is “noticeable kids [are] not playing when you’re 14 years old…sitting on the bench all game…being belittled by coaches at practice…that young, it plays a huge part.”
After Will finished playing minor hockey, and feeling like he was on the losing end of political parents and an influenced coach, he went undrafted to the CHL. However, later, quite surprisingly for him, Will was invited to camp and signed to play for the CHL team afterwards: “It happened really quick. I was invited to the camp and it was almost a week later. And then within a couple days of the camp I signed; it was a quick process.”

Will’s friends influenced his motivation to play Major Junior; they were motivated to take a chance in the CHL and see if they could follow their dreams and play pro: “The opportunities and possibilities you get from playing [in the CHL], and some of friends were very pro taking that chance. They all supported that; go and play Major Junior and see whether or not you can play pro or not.” Will’s parents also influenced him in some way to play in the CHL by having their own dreams of him succeeding in hockey: “Like your parents always want you to go, and they have the big dreams of playing pro, going to the NHL, whereas...so there’s that extent.”

Overall, Will talked about how his parents were the largest positive influence to play in the CHL. Will’s parents supported his own desires (autonomy) to go to the CHL, and “were big motivators’ for him to follow his dreams, to “take the opportunity” that “might not come again,” and to get free school: “They were extremely excited to, you know follow your dreams, they were very positive in that sense, and at this point getting an education was very important.” Also, the added bonus of getting “free school was huge.” Will’s parents made sure he pushed for the best contract he could get; to ensure he received four years of school paid for guaranteed: “A lot of the contracts you sign as you enter [the CHL] are just, you get a year of schooling per year played, they were very concerned about getting the full four years, like guarantee.”
As Will started to play in the CHL, he noticed his peers were more concerned with their own goals and had less influence on his own goals: “I guess other players and peers, at this point, we were going our separate ways almost. Coming out of minor hockey…guys get concerned with what they’re doing.” Rather than peers, Will noticed coaches, and the way they communicated with him, influenced how he formed his own expectations and perceived competence capabilities: “Different coaches, it depends on the coaches, like if you have the coach that believes in you and will go, when you’re entering [the CHL], have the high expectations.”

The coaches I guess were supportive, it was a difference especially in [CHL team]. The way he treated us on the ice and outside the rink was very different, and he was aware of that. Like outside the rink, when I was traded, he would treat us with you know, very much respect and cared about the guys as people. But there’s that big separation between as much as they like you as a person, on the ice or as a player, there’s that clear distinction.

The way coaches conducted themselves with the players affected their influence on the players. Will appreciated the distinction between the treatment he received from his CHL coach, dependent on when Will and his coach were away or at the rink. Will understood at the rink it was business, while the coach still treated players with respect and cared about them away from the rink.

**Climates**

At the age of 8 years old, Will started to play hockey to be related to all his friends who were playing hockey: “Didn’t start hockey until I was 8, and I don’t think it was until then because all my friends at school were playing hockey, so I wanted to play hockey.” To gain competence and have fun in hockey at a young age, Will’s friends motivated him to train to improve: “Friends trying to keep you wanting to
improve, and going to the outdoor rinks and stuff.” Will’s parents also encouraged him to train and “be the best I could be” by “trying to keep you wanting to improve.” Will’s parents did not display authority by forcing Will to train because they “weren’t too pushy” and provided social support through “positive feedback; your parents try to, as best they can, to be positive.”

Will spoke generally about how parents are often very involved in minor hockey beyond tangible support, and sometimes over the top emotionally in their child’s hockey: “Most parents have a tendency to go over the top in some aspects because they want the best for their kids…looking at kids now, parents are too involved.” Because of the politics played by other parents, Will felt that, before he was being scouted, he experienced authoritative actions by the coach in the form of limiting his autonomy: “In bantam/midget, 14/15, we had a coach… that got caught up in the politics. It was the issue with sitting kids, kind of demeaning players when we were at an age when it still wasn’t appropriate.”

As the phase of scouting and competitiveness became more relevant prior to the Jr. A and CHL draft, Will’s relationship and relatedness with peers started to change: “Some friends for sure just want the best for each other. But there’s also, you come in contact with lots of guys that care more about themselves, there’s always that kind of competitiveness as you get closer going into [the CHL].”

After Will was invited to camp, he signed a contract to play for the CHL team. During his time in the CHL, Will experienced social support and encouragement from friends and family: “I think always friends and family were always supportive in that sense.” However, he immediately realized “going from minor to playing in the CHL was a very big jump.” This shift was mostly because of the coaches and how they were much more tough and blunt: “From a coaching standpoint, my first coach in
[the CHL], it was a big reality check, different coaches than minor hockey coaches, they were much tougher, much more blunt.” Emotionally, the coaches screaming at him and his teammates in practices was a big shock for Will: “Being screamed at by coaches in practice and stuff, like there was lots of great experiences but that was the biggest culture shock.”

Although Will recognized CHL coaches “definitely try…and they want you to improve,” the business aspect of the CHL meant coaches cared less about improving and training, and only about competition performance. Coaches would use authoritative controls to motivate players to improve and fix their mistakes: “As much as it is still a development league, it’s still very much a business. That was the biggest shock, coaches don’t care so much. Like if you’re playing bad, it’s not like ‘let’s try to work it out.’ They would just scratch you.” For Will, coaches utilized their authority to limit Will’s and his teammates’ autonomy if they did not meet expectations: “The coach I had for two years was very very strict and hard in that sense. There was a big chance of getting scratched, being scratched multiple games.”

In the CHL, Will saw that players were considered to be assets with static ability; if a player was evaluated and did not fit the coach’s expectations, the coach would authoritatively get rid of the player and replace him with another player: “A lot of coaches treat you like less…not like less as a person. Like for them, it’s a business, it’s not a matter of trying to develop players. If you don’t fit in the team you get traded, which happens frequently.” The opportunities to meet expectations through evaluations were also limited: “The same time the patience isn’t what it is in minor. That you only get a certain amount of chances, and you can either keep up, or get released, or you’re traded.” Based on evaluations, players were expendable if not viewed as “an integral part to a team.” Will knows “some players who have played for
five or six teams in a span of four years” because they were shipped from team to team without much thought: “Where you’re getting traded half-way across the country without the team really not even thinking about it, it just becomes a part of the business.”

Will felt that these authoritative choices based on evaluations were related to the timing of the NHL draft (or having the ability to move on to play pro), and the age of players as they progressed through the league. If players didn’t meet coach expectations by producing or improving in relation to the draft year (or progressing to pro teams after the CHL), players would take a less important role on the team, and be replaced by younger players who still had time to produce and improve in relation to the NHL draft (and moving on to pro teams).

I guess the coaches do [hinder the players] to some extent because you kind of get type casted into roles in Junior. That once the draft year for NHL, when they are 17 or 18, you kind of see quickly as you age through the league, as younger guys come through, they now have potential, unless you’ve produced or progressed like you would hope so. For the guys that don’t improve dramatically and have aspirations, or like have scouts looking at them, they will quickly be put down on lower lines or used more as a role player, as opposed as to being a key part to the team because they now see there’s tons of younger guys coming through with potential...Not necessarily 18 as a set point but I think definitely you only have a pretty limited amount of time to either progress or show that you’re improving, because I guess, by the time you hit 18, 19, or 20, if your numbers haven’t improved, if you’re not getting looks from pro teams, it quickly becomes now they’re more worried about the
younger players that have the same amount of potential, but they have more because they are younger and more opportunity for them to improve.

After playing in the CHL for four years, Will went to play in the U Sports league to claim his free schooling. For Will, the U Sports league had more security because of the inability for teams to exercise their authority and trade players: “It was different than Junior. You can’t get traded.”

Throughout his career, Will said his parents had always provided him social support: “My parents have been the biggest ones, they’ve always supported me and believed in me.” Other climates shifted across Will’s hockey career.

**Personal Motivation**

Ever since Will started playing minor hockey, his dream was to play in the NHL: “In a lot of ways, I guess when you’re really young, you get caught up in the dream of playing in the NHL and that’s all you think about.” In addition, Will recognized lots of young hockey players “grow up thinking you are going to be a hockey player, you’re going to play forever, and play in the NHL.”

To achieve this dream, Will was motivated to train and practice to gain hockey competencies: “It was me wanting to go, and training, and going to practice.” Will continued to improve and was able to play competitive AAA minor hockey.

Will noticed that, as hockey became more competitive, goals became much more individualised: “Competitiveness as you get closer going into [the CHL], and that’s when it becomes less of a team, and more guys worry about themselves.” As the competitive atmosphere of minor hockey grew, Will’s interactions with one coach in particular played a large role in Will’s development. This coach “had lots of negative feedback” and exercised authoritative power by “sitting kids, kind of demeaning players,” which “took the fun out of the game for a couple years” for Will.
In contrast to “when you’re really young, it’s very simple, you go out and play the
game and don’t think anything else of it,” Will became somewhat “jaded.” This one
coach’s behaviour affected Will’s perceived competence and perceived autonomy,
while also affecting his perceived relatedness to others and the team. Playing other
sports became a “big part of getting away from the rink. You get a different social
circle as well and different teammates and what not.”

Besides the experience from this one coach, Will said other minor hockey coaches motivated him to progress with hockey: “And again, I had a couple other coaches that very much wanted the best and everything, and extremely motivating and want to help me going forward, and look and try to get a scholarship and try to play pro in some capacity.”

Will’s experience with having an authoritative coach early, as well as getting injured, changed his hockey ambitions, opinion, expectations, and goals about hockey because he likely saw his hockey career ending sooner than what actually occurred. There was “kind of the two-year period in minor that I got hurt so missed most of the season having surgery on my wrist. That and the next year.” During these two years, Will was “not developing like a player like the rest of the guys around you; that kind of shifts your opinion where you kind of see yourself going.” However, for Will, his shifting goals while playing in the CHL did not come from “specific events,” but “a year-by-year basis, depending on how the season goes.”

Exiting minor hockey, Will was scouted and invited to a CHL camp. This invitation caused Will to reassess his goals because of the newly recognized competencies and positive evaluations. Will said his experience in minor hockey left him with different goals compared to before and after he was scouted: “It had gotten to the point where that wasn’t really a goal at that point, because the last couple years
of minor didn’t go tremendously well, so for me it was very motivating in the sense it was a second chance.” Will recognized that going through “different experiences, [such as what Will experienced in minor hockey], either leads you to [playing more hockey], or some guys end up quitting, or some guys like me get schooling out of it.”

When the opportunity to play in the CHL came around, Will did not know what to expect regarding his future and NCAA possibilities; the decision to accept and pursue the CHL offer was easy because it seemed he was getting everything he wanted: “I didn’t have NCAA schools at the time, so I didn’t have to pick between them.” “Going right away, I had free school, and I could go play CHL right off the bat, so it made the decision in that sense a lot easier.”

According to Will, the expectations and goals for players entering into the CHL seem realistic at the time because the opportunity is now available. Players go into the development league optimistic, thinking they are competent and capable, and are given a chance to have a good rookie year and continue to improve and get noticed: “You have high hopes that you’re going to go in and have a great rookie year, and improve the next year and get drafted and going to keep getting better and better. And looking back all this seems realistic.” For some hockey players, it is realistic, and “it does [happen] and those are the guys that play in the NHL, but, for the most of us, that is where the reality check comes.” Will recognizes that “in some capacity, [setting high expectations] is kind of the players’ fault.”

Will largely credited parents for players’ construction of expectations. The parents “believe that their child is better than they are….They want their kids to be as good as possible.” As a result, “a lot of the kids do enter the leagues thinking or expecting themselves to….For things to continue coming easy as they did in minor.” After all, the security and familiarity in minor hockey is very different to the business
atmosphere in the CHL: “A lot of guys…are not ready for that it very much is a business. And in minor hockey, the coaches half the time are parents, you play with the same people year after year, you can’t get traded.”

As hockey players go into the CHL with high performance expectations and thinking their dreams of the NHL can be realized, and then their dreams are not fulfilled, players start to not have fun, to plateau, and to not improve anymore. This shift could initiate a perceptual shift from approach goals to avoidance goals for the player: “For a lot of guys, it comes as a shock and that’s when that reality kind of kicks in, and they kind of plateau in a sense.”

As the end of CHL eligibility approaches, Will recognized players need to start understanding whether their goals are attainable or not, and consider “getting their life started up post-hockey or whether you want to play at another level after Junior.” For Will, he “didn’t have the same steady improvement by the time you’re 20” and “hit a point that going to the NHL is not realistic,” so he turned his “focus to get free schooling out of it.” Will changed his goal to going to school and getting his degree: “It became for me personally school was the biggest concern I guess, that was the most important thing, being able to still go to school and get the degree.”

Will recognized “for a lot of guys, it’s not a specific instance that changed [goals], but more so over the course of a bad year, especially in [the CHL]”: “Those four or five years go by so quickly; one really bad season for whatever reason, be it in the rink, outside the rink, getting traded, whatever it is can really kind of screw you over.”

After the CHL, Will didn’t think he wanted to play hockey anymore, but his peers convinced him to play in the U Sports league to have fun again: “I knew a lot of guys that played [U Sports team] that spoke so highly of the school and kind of give it
a second chance to try playing it and just try to have fun again.” Will enjoys playing in the U Sports league because he is more mature and “past that point” where goals and expectations are now realistic, meaning the experience is a lot more enjoyable: “Now it kind of comes full circle where you are now playing more for fun” because “you’re more mature, it’s a different vibe, and it’s more laid back.” Will recognized “most guys accept they are not necessarily going pro” and are “enjoying the last kind of few years you are playing.”
CHAPTER FIVE: NCAA PLAYER RESULTS

This chapter details the interview responses of three former National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I hockey players, Andy, Drew, and Nick, as sorted chronologically within three themes: ‘Social Agents’, ‘Climates’, and ‘Personal Motivation’.

D. Andy is a Canadian male hockey player currently with the U Sports league. Out of minor hockey, Andy played a season of Jr. B, while playing occasionally for a Jr. A team when he was called up. He then played three years for a different Jr. A team, before accepting a full scholarship for hockey in Division I NCAA. Andy played NCAA hockey for two seasons. He left half-way through his third year due to an injury and the way he was being treated.

E. Drew is a Canadian male hockey player currently playing in the U Sports league. Drew played Jr. A hockey for four years, before accepting a full scholarship for hockey in Division I NCAA. He played one full season in the NCAA before joining the U Sports league.

F. Nick is a Canadian male hockey player currently with the U Sports league. Out of minor hockey, Nick was drafted to the CHL and offered a CHL contract, but decided to pursue the NCAA route instead. He played for two different Jr. A teams within four years, before accepting a full scholarship for hockey in Division I NCAA. Nick played NCAA hockey for two seasons before joining the U Sports league.
Andy

Social Agents

Andy was introduced to sports at a young age since he “grew up playing in a sports family.” Andy played different sports growing up, but he focused on hockey to be like his older brother: “My older brother started playing hockey at a young age, and I just kind of followed suit after him.” Andy realizes he did not have much choice in becoming so involved with hockey: “As much as I wanted to say it was a choice to stick to hockey, it was a lot of just being in a hockey family, and it just kind of worked out that way.” Andy credits growing up in Canada for his pursuing hockey: “Everything was just kind of hockey, hockey, hockey, and the other sports took kind of a back seat towards it. I mean we are in Canada.”

Andy’s “parents were separated at a young age.” Although they were apart, both his parents influenced Andy to “improve in my hockey career” during minor hockey, along with his “brother definitely.” Both Andy’s parents provided tangible support when they could: “I had my mom that drove me to tournaments and also my dad. Just depended on who I was with, who was available.” However, Andy’s dad was “the number one influencing voice”: “My dad grew up coaching me and coaching my brother, and he was always there after every game. To this day, I still call him after the game and hear what he has to say.”

In addition, Andy found “friends and teammates” that he made playing minor hockey were a big part of the hockey experience: “A lot of my closest friends are from hockey. I would definitely say I have more friends in hockey than” any other of his social circles. Andy also talked about how he had “good coaches and bad coaches, but you know that’s just part of it.” Andy found coaches to be influential and “good in moments, you know criticizing or critiquing in the moment, but definitely not as
much as being a backbone support as my dad was from a vocal aspect.” Overall, “definitely friends and family and coaches were all a part of” Andy’s minor hockey experience and “kept encouraging me and pushing me along the way”: “They influence a lot just in the aspect of encouraging something to dedicate myself to…Hockey kept us out of trouble…and a good lifestyle.”

Playing in Jr. A, Andy continued to experience “constant encouragement and support”; however, he felt as he “got older” that he started “having to support myself” in that he was “coming from a broken up family.” Andy “still had a ton of incredible amount of support from my parents,” but their separation had an influence on him, as he “lived on my own from a younger age, so I had to start worrying about paying rent and supporting myself for food and stuff.”

Since Andy was “smart growing up,” Andy’s parents “definitely pushed for a scholarship, and they definitely really wanted me to go to school and potentially lengthen my career at the NCAA level.” Andy’s Jr. A coaches also “were okay with encouraging [Andy]” and “tried to get [the scholarship] for me,” but “it depended on how much I put into the team.”

As coaches and scouts representing NCAA schools talked to Andy while he played in Jr. A, they influenced him to believe “you are stepping into a dream world and you’re extremely wanted.” These interactions influenced Andy to develop different expectations about NCAA and himself. As Andy eventually started playing in the NCAA, the reality of the coach and what was supposed to be a ‘dream world’ where ‘you’re extremely wanted’ was seen as an illusion: “I didn’t enjoy how the coaches treated the players, so meaning as in, I think they affected my love for the game a little bit.”
The negative influence from the NCAA coach affecting his ‘love for the game’ required peer influence to not give up playing hockey and to instead play in the U Sports league: “Memorable event would be maybe friends encouraging me to keep playing the game that I have dedicated my life to, and some of those friends are the ones I’m playing alongside now.”

**Climates**

Ever since a young age playing minor hockey, Andy “was a much smaller player than a lot of people growing up,” so he thought he had to train harder than others to compete against bigger guys: “I had to push myself in different areas than other people had to since being a smaller player, and in a game that was meant for big guys growing up.” As a result of his size, Andy always felt he was at a disadvantage and “definitely behind the eight ball in that aspect of it.”

While playing Jr. A, Andy received positive evaluations when scouts and coaches came to watch him play. These scouting visits motivated him to train because “it seemed more of a reality to get a full scholarship”: “I was being watched or someone was watching me, that I must have been doing something right. It was something that inspired me to keep going, and to improve on my game.”

After joining the NCAA league, Andy learned competing to play hockey was fun until it didn’t become fun, because of the harsh business realities that emerged in competitive hockey. Team competition success was important, so “coaches are getting paid for what they do” and were “thinking about making it to the next level too.”

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4 Words in bold reference Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee’s (2014) seven climates: (a) competitive, (b) training, (c) evaluation, (d) emotional, (e) authority, (f) social support, and (g) relatedness.
Definitely the harsh realities of the game. I mean before all this experience, it is just a game to you and that game is something you love and desire. As you play the game and progress in your career, you see the harsh reality that it is...Becomes a business and some of the aspects of the game start to diminish away and the business aspect starts to take over.

As Andy played in the NCAA, he received social support from “the same people” to stay “sane” by hearing “a voice from back home”: “Friends continue to support you and your parents always. For me, I was lucky enough to have parents to follow me as I went, watch games, come and visited and stuff like that.” Andy believed the NCAA school supported him “to register for classes, register for housing, and stuff like that,” but the amount of help available was “exaggerated”: “I wouldn’t say they had the best help in guiding the players.”

Personal Motivation

Hockey appealed to Andy from a young age because he “was a rough and tough kid” and “liked the intensity of the game.” It was a “dream” to play hockey, and be able “to hang out with your friends, and go be an idiot on the ice, and have fun.” At this age, all of Andy’s goals were “purely hockey-based,” so naturally he wanted “to dedicate more time towards hockey.” Andy was motivated to be like his brother, “who was making the steps before me, and inspiring me to try to be where I wanted to be in life and in hockey.” His goal was to “follow his [brother’s] footsteps growing up,” but, likely referring to his size, “you got a lot of things holding you back.”

Coming out of minor hockey, Andy “started out a bit behind” and at “a slower pace” than what he would have liked: “I wasn’t drafted to the [CHL], I wasn’t actually even drafted into the Jr. A league in my first year...I was maybe 5 foot 5 and a buck 30.” Andy knew he “was going to be a late bloomer” “due to my size,” so, “at
an earlier age,” he decided he wanted to pursue the NCAA route. Andy’s “number one goal was to get a scholarship” to get “the opportunity to have free schooling.” Being scouted for this opportunity was “something I extremely desired.” Andy “wanted to move to the next level” and “to prove to everyone I could do it.”

Some players in Andy’s league, players with whom Andy was “able to compare myself,” were getting offers and “committing in the [NCAA] league.” Andy felt he needed “to get to where other people were getting.” When he was offered a scholarship, Andy thought “it’s all about getting to the next level and making that next step” and “rushed his decision”: “My number one goal was to move on and I wish I had put a little bit more time on to where I had gone.” Regardless, at the time of accepting the scholarship, Andy felt there was justification for the hasty decision: “I think the thought of something like that not coming around again. I couldn’t say ‘no’ to my parents not worrying about paying for my schooling. I think, just in the moment, it was the right time and place.”

After accepting the scholarship, Andy’s goals reflecting hockey success developed: “It’s all life-changing. To make it more of a business and a life career, and be able to play the game, and live the life.” This goal was created based on his expectations developed from interacting with social agents throughout his life: “You’re going to cling on to every story you hear, and every memory you hear, maybe a little bit exaggerated but some of the big [NCAA] schools do have great stories.” Most recently, Andy’s “expectations were more run off of the super high expectations the coaches have. When you’re talking to the scouts, I don’t want to say they exaggerate, but they extremely exaggerate, and you’re desired in every position”:

Interviewer: As you accepted [the scholarship], did they promise you anything, like roles, or ice-time, or expectations?
Andy: Oh, 100%. They promised you the world. They tell you exactly what you want to hear. They make you believe that you are the number one desired person in the world before getting there. And like I said earlier, once you get there, you realize they have said the same thing to 35 other kids to get them in the doorway. I mean yeah, that’s the sad aspect about it.

Andy felt his “expectations were much higher” because he was “from Canada,” and “not knowing much about this prestigious [NCAA] league that everyone puts on a platter”: “They are televised, and they have a lot more attention; I think the attention is what’s close to pro hockey so I think that’s what pushes a lot of kids into the league in Canada in my opinion.”

Andy “was expecting something a little more flamboyant and extravagant than what had come in hand.” His expectations versus what his reality were “definitely different” as he started “to notice a lot of the negative aspects that come along with the business and the game.” Andy “was expecting to be treated a little bit differently” when it came to “the player/coaches relationships”: “Just how you’re treated out there, it’s a little bit different. I didn’t find that the players were very close with the coaches, and it was more of a boot camp, than a team trying to achieve greatness.”

Andy also expected there to be less talk about money, especially since he and some of his teammates received full scholarships: “I found there was a lot more talk about money than I was expecting. I mean a lot of guys were fighting for food plans and stuff like that.” However, Andy did feel his expectations were met when it came to “material aspects”: “I mean, you are definitely spoiled out there when it comes to clothes and stuff like that.” Overall, Andy thinks “it was definitely a good experience,” but there was a lot of “unknown” because the NCAA “was obviously something I knew a lot less about than I thought I did.”
While playing in the NCAA, Andy incurred “an on-going [ankle] injury” that “lingered on a little bit,” causing Andy to feel “alienated when I was injured and away from the team”: “When you’re not able to contribute to your team goal, which is to win games and play hockey, I think that the way you’re treated definitely impacted it.” When Andy “finally blew it out pretty bad, I had surgery on it there, and the surgery ended up not going well…and when I got home, they sent me right back in for surgery.” The injury and having “double ankle surgery” totalled “maybe even a year and a half” of being “in-and-out of the hospital.”

Andy quit the NCAA. The next time he “stepped on the ice again, it was [in the U Sports league].” Andy thought of the U Sports league as a “fresh start” and a way of “just being happy”: “To me, being happy was being back home with family and friends.” The U Sports league was “a place I could finish my degree, instead of just going to play pro hockey or giving up the game in general,” in a “respected program” where he also had “a lot of friends on the team.”

Andy’s goals are now “transformed a bit to more life-based” rather “than just myself and playing hockey.” After losing “a bit of love for the game after playing in the States,” Andy started “to find love in other things”: “building relationships, strengthening relationships, strengthening family ties, and supporting family. It’s also nice to be around your family again compared to always being on the road.” Andy still loves hockey because it “got me to where I am today and the people I’ve met,” but is now more interested in “building a life” and “doing things for myself that I didn’t think would have made me happy, back when hockey was the only thing that made me happy.”
Drew

Social Agents

Drew gained interest in skating and hockey from attending his older sister’s figure skating practice at the ice rink, and “well obviously being in Canada, it was hockey.” Drew began with skating lessons and then moved to playing minor hockey at 5 years old. In minor hockey, Drew had a lot of fun and was overall well supported by his parents, coaches, and peers: “They made you feel like the rink was a happy place to be and that it was always fun, and yeah just that, the overall support.”

Drew’s parents supported Drew’s desire to play hockey since a young age and provided the tangible support over the years to enable Drew to continue: “Well both my parents…like drove you to practice when you were young,…prepare meals, all the normal stuff I’d say.” As Drew continued to improve, he moved on to play competitive minor hockey, primarily to continue to be related with his friends: “A few close buddies…said they’re going to try out for this AA [team] and my parents asked me ‘Do you want to try out?’ ‘Absolutely, of course, why not?’”

In competitive minor hockey, Drew’s coaches were influential and “talked about…the fun but it’s also like a job where you have to show up and be there for everybody.” This guidance shaped Drew into the hockey player he was at the time.

As Drew started to become scouted, the opportunity to go the CHL or NCAA route manifested. Although Drew did not have his playing rights claimed in the CHL draft, he did have the opportunity to play in the CHL, which he declined in favour of the NCAA.

Throughout the stage of deciding and playing in these development leagues, Drew’s parents continued to be a positive influence and supportive of Drew and his self-determined goals: “So really whenever I said that, my parents were like ‘Yes,
we’re onboard. What can we do to support you?’” However, during this time, peers appeared to have little influence on Drew, except in helping with the sharing of experiences to make informed decisions on goal pursuit and development league selection: “I guess peers indirectly because I saw friends, I saw the way that the CHL is basically eating guys up and spitting them out.”

Coaches had a lot of influence on Drew throughout these years. Initially, Drew received contradictory feedback from coaches regarding the difficult decision between choosing the CHL and choosing NCAA, leaving Drew undecided about a “tough decision” that feels “like your fate is all riding on that choice.” Some coaches thought Drew was “built for NCAA, because you have good grades…and you’re also a good hockey player,” where other coaches thought Drew should “make that jump to [CHL] right now.”

To help with this decision, Drew had the opportunity to communicate with an agent. The experience was positive overall because “they do get you in touch sometimes, and they are informative” but ultimately “they were looking for big NHL contracts.”

After Drew decided on going the NCAA route, playing Jr. A in the meantime, coaches were a negative influence. Drew would tell his coaches his goals “at the beginning of the year,” and “would hear nothing” all year: “You’d get to your meeting at Christmas time, and be asked like ‘How are things going?’ and stuff like that.” Drew attributed his success in Jr. A to himself, rather than the coaches: “Personally I was a good player, I don’t think they really did much to promote me if that makes sense.” This sentiment is reflected in an instance when Drew knew a NCAA Division I hockey program “were very interested in me, and they asked my coach about me.” Instead of “looking to succeed as a coach,” and “want to move
players on,” “[the coach] told me that he said that ‘You weren’t ready yet.’” Drew’s “jaw just hit the floor.” Drew also noticed the Jr. A owner, in addition to the coach, was not interested in supporting or promoting players: “Even when players were paying $X000, he was just not interested in helping players out.”

Drew eventually earned a full scholarship for hockey in Division I NCAA. He played his first year in the league and felt he had battled against competition and ended the year successfully holding an important role on the team. For his second year, a new coach was hired and hindered Drew in his pursuit of playing hockey. The new coach told Drew in a meeting at the end of the first year: “It’s up to you, you can stay, do school here and practice with the team, but you’re…literally not going to play a game.” The coach could not be reasoned with to provide Drew the opportunity to earn playing time, because the coach was bringing in his own recruits. This event resulted in Drew quitting the NCAA league.

**Climates**

Beginning at a young age, Drew loved being active and playing sports: “I loved it and staying active, even when I was younger in elementary school, I tried out for every team, like volleyball…everything you name it, and yeah I love it.” This enjoyment of sport and staying active helped lead Drew to recognize the value in improving his competencies by training, particularly in hockey to compare himself to others: “[Skating lessons] helped when I got into hockey because if you knew how to skate, that was the biggest thing. If you were good at skating, you could carry the puck faster than everyone else or that kind of stuff.”

As Drew started to play minor hockey, he enjoyed the environment where he was able to train to improve his competencies, to be related with his teammates and coaches, and to compete against others. Drew’s parents provided social support for
Drew’s training and development: “For me it was a good environment where my parents were always supportive...and they were like watching and encouraging, like ‘Oh yeah that’s great.’” Drew did not experience any authority from his parents because they were always supportive of Drew’s autonomy: “They were never pushy like ‘Oh you have to go and like shoot pucks every day.’” Instead, Drew’s parents were supportive and helped him with training to gain competence: “How to with little things like you weren’t good with stick handling or something, they would say like ‘we could practice’ or something like that.” Drew recognized that “It felt good that your parents loved to go see you play and stuff like that.”

Drew was related to his peers and loved being around these friends and teammates: “I loved the fact being around all your teammates.” His coaches were often his friends’ parents. Drew found these coaches were a great influence to him: “Those guys were my teammates and both those guys were the coaches when we were growing up just young.”

Minor hockey allowed Drew to be a competitive person. Since a young age, he wanted to succeed by being better than others in hockey: “Playing games was fun. I was always a super-competitive person, so I wanted to play games all the time.” Drew successfully competed in minor hockey, and was drafted to, and started playing in, the Jr. A league after making the team. As Drew trained and improved in Jr. A, he had some opportunities to play in the CHL but, through friends, he “saw [what the CHL was like] playing through them, what they were doing.” Drew understood the competitiveness of maintaining a roster spot, as well as the authoritative climate that exists in the CHL: “[Drew’s friend] went and played like 15 games [in the CHL] and sent him back and sewered him out of his education [package].” Understanding the
competitive and authoritative climates of the CHL helped Drew decide on the NCAA route.

Drew continued to improve in Jr. A; however, Drew’s Jr. A team’s competitive climate was not promising because of its inability to address the poor culture: “It was just a bad culture, like winning comes down to that. So we lost a lot. The guys didn’t want to show up to practice. They didn’t care, yeah it wasn’t good.” Even with a poor team culture, Drew was able to take advantage of the situation “as an individual” to compete and perform: “I was succeeding there points-wise and basically I was a big fish in a small pond. So I took that as an opportunity to stand out.”

In Jr. A, Drew was able to achieve positive evaluations from scouts from NCAA schools. Drew remembered this positive attention as being a great confidence builder: “Hearing from different coaches saying they like you as a player, and that they want you to be a part of their future. It’s all good, it’s confidence building, and yeah it’s definitely a positive experience for sure.” However, the extra attention from scouts added extra pressure to perform: “People are here to watch me. I got to like hold my stick tight and do everything really really well right?’ So you get a bit of pressure I would say.” The continuance of performance evaluations started affecting Drew’s feelings about hockey.

It can also be a little bit, not intimidating, but like in the back of your mind because then you start to realize at that age you’re like “Okay these guys are coming to watch now, I got to play well,” which I found sometimes would kind of like deter you from what it was when I was a kid. To go out and have fun, like obviously I still wanted to go out and have fun, but I think it got more
serious like “Okay, I got to treat this more like a business instead of just having fun.”

As a result from being scouted and receiving positive evaluations, Drew eventually agreed to a full scholarship for hockey in Division I NCAA. As Drew’s first year started in the NCAA, he found himself playing a different position than what he was used to. He felt he needed to train and practice extra hard for the unexpected reality of his position on his NCAA team, because he felt not very competent: “I would stay after practice, late, just to work on taking draws, simply I had never taken them before…even like the breakout of the puck…I would stay late literally every single day.”

While playing in the NCAA in his first year, Drew’s parents, friends, teammates, and girlfriend all encouraged him and provided social support: “My parents again, I had good friends I would say, some good teammates, I had a girlfriend at the time...She was always very supportive, like ‘Go chase your dream.’”

Drew trained hard and competed well; ending his first year in NCAA holding an important role on the team. For his second year in NCAA, a new coach applied authoritative controls on Drew’s autonomy. The new coach did not allow Drew under any circumstance to be a part of the team moving forward because he was bringing in a whole new team. Regardless of Drew’s scholarship, hard work, or hockey performance, he would only be allowed to practice with the team while still being able to attend school.

[The new coach] called me into his office and I was like “This is going to be a good meeting. We are going to officially meet and set goals and get real with the professionalism of the program.” And he told me they were recruiting 13 new forwards and that I wouldn’t be a part of the team going forward. So I
kind of looked at him and was like “Whoa, what do you mean, I have a scholarship here? Like I’m on a full ride?” He’s like “Yeah, that’s great and everything, you can keep your scholarship, but you’re not going to play.”

With the new NCAA coach having the authority to limit Drew’s playing time for “no reason,” Drew knew he was not going to have a good time if he stayed in this autonomy-controlled environment: “It’s just going to be a war, and it’s never going to work out. When has a coach and a player argument ever worked out in the player’s favour, like really?”

Drew quit the NCAA league because of this authoritative exercise of power by the new coach. As a result, Drew decided to attend school in Canada and play hockey in the U Sports league.

**Personal Motivation**

In minor hockey, Drew’s coaches stressed that “at the end of the day, it is about having fun.” Drew whole-heartedly believed and followed what his coaches preached: “Like when I was younger, like yeah, all you really thought about was the fun of the game and like the love of it.” While having fun, competitive Drew was motivated and self-determined to train to gain competence: “I wanted to be the one to shoot pucks.” He trained with the intention to compete and to achieve the goal of making the NHL: “I wanted to go play in the NHL; that was my goal. That’s why I shot pucks, that’s why I stickhandled, all that.”

In minor hockey, Drew created his own self-determined goals, and received “not much” communication and feedback from anyone about hockey when he was young: “I was pretty naïve. I mean I watched the NHL when I was young but I guess I didn’t fully understand…how the entire scouting thing worked or how important it was.”
As Drew had success in minor hockey, the CHL and Jr. A draft approached. Drew was not drafted to the CHL, and was a third round pick in the local Jr. A draft. Drew knew the CHL draft “wasn’t the end all and be all,” and his “goal was still to make it into the NHL.” The path of making it there was realized to be through the NCAA route: “That’s where my goal switched. ‘Okay, I’m good at school, I’m good at hockey, the NCAA is a good fit, let’s set that goal before I get too far ahead and think about playing in the NHL.’”

Drew was motivated to go the NCAA route because it “seemed like the safest option”: “It’s a good secure environment where they commit to you for four years, and get your education paid for, and you also get a great hockey experience, which is very comparable to the [CHL league 1].” Additionally, although Drew “had offers to go to play in the [CHL],” he “ultimately decided that I had already given up some years of [the CHL] because I had played in Jr. A.” “It was better for me to go to NCAA…‘Okay, let’s go get the best of both worlds [of hockey and school].’”

While in Jr. A, Drew did what he could to attain his self-determined goal, regardless of the limited coach support: “I would say the goals are created by me, and that I just wanted that so bad I went out and tried to do it myself and promote myself as well because my coaching staff in Jr. A were so bad.” One of the reasons for the poor quality of the coaching staff was the high coach turnover rate: “When I was in Jr. A, I played four years [with Jr. A team], and I had more coaches than I had years played there…Bluntly: it sucked.” The league structure itself also hindered Drew’s goal pursuit when the league became less skilled, or “watered down,” when it turned to “a pay-to-play league”: “Kids simply couldn’t afford the $‘X000’ a year to play…and they went to play in other Jr. A leagues across the country…Basically anywhere they didn’t have to pay they went.” The result of a less skilled league
“made recruitment tougher.” Additionally, the league simultaneously reduced the number of showcase games where scouts could come watch prospective NCAA players: “They went from doing two showcases a year when we paid nothing…to doing only one showcase and that was at the beginning of the year.” For Drew, this ‘showcase’ structure was frustrating and ill-timed, because after “everyone had paid their ‘X’ grand,” “your first games of the year,” when players are often not in peak form, were “in front of 25+ schools.”

Regardless of all these hindering events, Drew was still “self-driven and goal-oriented” and had the goal of making the NCAA to get to the NHL: “When I was playing Jr. A, I just got more informed and I knew education was important to me. I wanted to go play NCAA hockey.” Drew’s self-determined goals were based on his perceived competencies: “Because I was really good at school, I realized that ‘Okay, this is the best of both worlds for me.’ I get to have an incredible hockey experience, and I get to succeed in my education.” Drew expected the resulting experience of achieving this goal would be incredible: “We went on a trip [to NCAA school] and just like experiencing the atmosphere at a college hockey game was pretty incredible.”

Drew’s goals were perceived to be realistic and were created by his perceived competencies, which were in line with what he was told were the expected competency standards to achieve his goal. “‘When you become a top 10 scorer in your Jr. A league, give us a call.’…I was like, ‘Okay, that’s my goal.’” Thus Drew’s motivation in Jr. A was to perform well in order to achieve his self-determined goal of going to the NCAA: “All throughout Junior, I literally lived and breathed, ‘Okay, I’m going to get recruited. I’m going to play in the NCAA.’”
Drew started to get NCAA interest and offers. His goals and expectations regarding the NCAA experience were dependent on the school chosen. The decision of choosing an NCAA school depended on: timing of Drew’s birthday and eligibility policies (“I have an early birthday, so the schools that I was talking to they wanted me for the year after but I was only going to be able to play half my year in Jr. A”), timing of demonstrating hockey competencies in playoffs (“Maybe I needed a full season to show them, like okay, this is who he is as a player, and then also show them what I was like in the playoffs, ’cause that was the kind of talk”), and the question of taking part-time university and losing eligibility to play for Ivy League schools. Drew accepted a full scholarship for hockey to a school he thought was a good fit, although Drew was not content with every aspect of the school. He decided to choose the particular NCAA school he did because of the hockey opportunities it provided, rather than the education it provided: “This other school made the offer. I wasn’t content with every aspect of the school. It was a good fit, and I was not going to get a better offer money-wise because you can’t get anything better than full ride.”

As Drew entered the NCAA environment, the expectations he created from communication with the NCAA school differed from reality; this divergence included his position as well as importance on the team: “For the first game, I’m slotted in on the fourth line as a centre man. And all my life literally since I was a little kid I played right wing, I had never played centre before.” Drew thought the external controls of position allocation and related competence affected his overall goal achievement: “[The position] hindered me just as far as being as successful as I could have been. I feel I could have been a lot more successful playing my actual position that I was recruited for.”
As the first NCAA year continued for Drew, he created more realistic and holistic goals; aspiring to play pro hockey and at least attaining his degree, rather than just saying he was going to make the NHL. “I was more realistic and was like ‘Okay, now that I’m at the NCAA, and I have a great hockey experience, and my education is locked in, let’s set a new goal of not looking too far ahead.’” Drew’s aspirations shifted from the NHL to getting his “degree and also have the opportunity to play pro hockey but, if that doesn’t work out, at least I have my degree to fall back on.”

After having the NCAA achievement taken away through the hiring of a new coach, Drew’s new goal was now to have fun and prove to people that he was competent: “I was pretty down in the dumps, but I told myself I have two options. I could sit here and feel sorry for myself every day, or I can be highly motivated and just like, prove people wrong.”

Drew still aspires to play pro hockey: “Hockey is still very important to me. I want to play professional hockey. I understand it’s tough. I know how tough it is but I still want to do that.” He is motivated and is giving himself the best opportunity he can to have the chance of achieving this goal: “‘How can I be the best I can be but have an opportunity to like still get some of the things I hope for?’ I just have a mindset like, ‘Do all that I can to like maybe get there.’” The noticeable questions of doubt of playing professional hockey in the future are because Drew is realistic and self-aware: “When you see Connor McDavid who’s a ’97 who gets drafted first overall and like tears up the NHL. Okay, like I’m a ‘XX, like let’s be realistic with myself here.’”

As Drew now plays in the U Sports league, he is motivated to show the NCAA coach that he is competent and the coach made a mistake: “Ultimately that coach forced me out of a great opportunity, and like I want to do everything to be able to
like stuff it in his face one day, ‘Hey, I proved you wrong!’” Most of all, Drew is happy to be playing hockey again on his own terms, because hockey is what makes him happy. “Two hours a day, it’s only hockey. I can just, all I have to think about is the ice and playing, so I honestly just love it. I love being around the rink, I love all of it.”

Nick

Social Agents

Growing up, Nick played many sports including “hockey, soccer, and a bit of lacrosse, but mainly focused on hockey” because “hockey was more of a popular sport, so that’s why I stuck to that.” Also, Nick was influenced to play hockey by his older brother: “When I was younger, probably because my brother played hockey, and I just kind of followed what he was doing.” Nick’s parents provided Nick with tangible support and “the means to be successful and push myself to that extent”: “My parents, my brother, and mainly my family. It’s a lot of money, and without them financing it all, it would obviously be impossible to play.”

As hockey became more competitive, and Nick progressed through minor hockey nearing the CHL draft, he had the opportunity to be represented by an advisor: “It was an early age, he was the first one that really approached me for advisor or agent type stuff. He had a few other guys around my age level who were also top-end guys so I thought it was a good fit.” The advisor had a lot of influence on Nick as he “kind of pushed me to a certain direction, like NCAA or [CHL].”

Nick was drafted to the CHL, and had to make a decision to join the CHL or pursue the NCAA route. Nick “had the option of either, and when the decision to play in the CHL came,” he relied on his advisor’s opinion: “When I got the contract offer for the CHL, I was calling a few people to get their opinions and stuff…influenced by
the advisor to stick to NCAA because it would fit me better. So I really didn’t give the CHL a shot.”

After joining the NCAA and playing in the league for two years, Nick recognized the negative influence his coach had on him “because they dictate how much you play”; a thing “a lot of players go through…and a lot of players end up not enjoying hockey anymore.” Nick left the NCAA because he was not satisfied with the amount of ice-time he was receiving.

**Climates**

As hockey became more competitive, Nick noticed that “the inter-competition within your team [increased], so you kind of focus more on yourself.” To perform well against other teams and compared to teammates, Nick received training advice from his advisor “to focus on certain things.”

In minor hockey, Nick experienced no authoritative behaviour from his parents: “They didn’t push it on me, like an intense parent. They let me do what I wanted to do.” However, Nick did experience authoritative behaviour from a coach “when I got to the draft point for the [CHL]”: “I was deserving of ice-time and he didn’t play me or didn’t want me to be successful. It took him a while for him to actually realize it, and he started playing me way more later on.”

As Nick played Jr. A hockey and eventually joined the NCAA, he noticed the desire for competition success added stress to the environment; playing hockey became a job, with one’s hockey future depending on one’s ability to compete.

I think once you get to juniors it changes in general, it’s more of like a job…Juniors was still pretty relaxed and enjoyable, but once you get to NCAA or [U Sports league], it’s more stressful ’cause you know it’s nearing the end, or up to the next stage.
The evidence of added stress was reflected in Nick’s NCAA experience, as a newly hired coach created inter-team competition: “It was a different environment, and because it was a new coach, he made it a different feel because we were all in competition, because he was making cuts, which is pretty unusual in NCAA.” The inter-team competition affected the relatedness among the players: “It ruffled a lot of feathers within the team, because the older guys weren’t really fond of the younger guys coming in because they were scared they would be taking their spots.” Since the new coach preferred his own recruits and Nick was not recruited by him, Nick’s inability to receive ice-time eventually led him to leave the NCAA league: “The coach said at the end-of-year meeting that I wouldn’t be playing much the following year, and he was bringing in his own recruits, so it would be tougher and harder to play.”

During the time Nick competed against his teammates to receive ice-time, he continued to receive social support from his family: “My parents, my brother; just to focus on other things, and not focus on things you can’t control.”

**Personal Motivation**

As a young boy, Nick’s and “everyone’s goal when they are playing minor hockey is to go to the NHL.” Nick focused all his motivation around hockey: “Nothing really, like hockey, and off-ice training for hockey, and the odd hangout with friends.” Nick did what he needed in school to succeed in hockey: “School was [a concern] but I just did what I had to do for school, and get the marks I needed to be eligible for a scholarship.”

As Nick started to become scouted in hockey, he found it “pretty exciting” and that “it made [hockey] a little more intense and something to push for.” Nick became motivated to have success in hockey: “Your goals and expectations change because,
you know, there is an end-goal.” Nick created perceivably realistic goals to pursue: “You make your own kind of goals, and you can be realistic or not, and I was just being realistic with what I thought was possible.”

Nick’s initial goal while being scouted in minor hockey was “to get drafted in the CHL fairly high because the NCAA doesn’t start until later on.” He wanted to “just focus on the CHL draft.” As the opportunity to play in the CHL came to fruition, Nick consulted with his advisor. Nick’s advisor, whom Nick thinks now “wasn’t as knowledgeable or as well-known as” others “that approached me,” advised Nick that the NCAA would be a better “fit.” At this point, Nick became motivated to play in the NCAA: “It’s one of the highest levels where you can play against top guys who are going to be stars in the NHL.” He thought it was a good next step to attain his end-goal: “You can have a hot year and get a chance to play in the [AHL] or eventually NHL if possible.” In the meantime, he needed to “focus on making a Jr. A team if you want to go NCAA” and “focus on yourself and your own personal goals.”

As Nick played Jr. A hockey and became scouted, he got the opportunity to play hockey on a full scholarship in Division I NCAA. He accepted the scholarship based on the things “you are promised” and that you “are going to play four years of college.” Unfortunately, his expectations and reality “were different.”

Well there was a coaching change, so that had a big effect on it…He had his own ways of doing things, and he never promised me anything. So when the coach that recruited me left, everything went out the door. So it was a fresh start and I didn’t know what to expect, and which types of players he preferred to have.
The coaching change occurred because, based on “rumour”: “Everyone on the board wanted [the original coach] to keep the job, but one guy that had a lot of power and wanted his own coach…so that’s why there was the change.”

As Nick struggled through the coaching change and began fighting for ice-time against teammates, he felt hindered. He started losing the passion for hockey like other NCAA players he encountered: “Similar things, but either more or less extreme, but same end result of losing the passion for hockey.” Looking back, Nick “can’t just blame the coaching staff. It has a lot to do with everything, the whole situation you are in.”

Nick decided to quit the NCAA and join the U Sports league. Nick joined the U Sports league because he was told “by a pretty reliable individual” that, if he was still motivated “to continue to play hockey later,” he needed to be given “the ice I deserved” to “still have a chance to go somewhere after college is done.”

Entering the U Sports league, Nick’s expectations changed: “The false hope of making a solid life out of hockey was probably over” but “I could still play [pro] hockey and make a good living for a few years.” Nick feels more “realistic,” as playing hockey would “probably be only a few more years after I’m done college” and might not be able to provide “a lifetime living, even though a lifetime living is rare for millions of people.” Nick still has the goal “to make it to the NHL” and is motivated to “play the best I can,” but realizes the end-goal he created was “at that age” when “you’re still pretty naïve at thinking that you’re going to have a good shot at going far and focusing on hockey.”
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The initial primary research question of this study was: From the perspectives of six U Sports male hockey players (three having once played in the CHL, and three having once played in the NCAA), how were their psychological development and well-being affected during transitions in the highly competitive hockey space? Four secondary research questions supported the primary research question:

1) What effect did influential people have in impacting these hockey players’ expectations to compete in elite hockey?

2) What were the motivating factors and created goals for their transition into elite hockey? How did these factors and goals change?

3) What barriers to motivation and goal achievement developed as these hockey players transitioned to a different level or different team? How did these barriers affect them?

4) What supports did these hockey players use when encountering these barriers?

While the initial research question and sub-questions of this study helped with the creation of the interview guide questions, along with the considerations highlighted in the method chapter, interviewed participants did not talk about the elements of the transition as categorically as initially expected. Instead they talked about significant events that were perceived as being positive or negative, regarding interactions with social agents in different contexts and how these interactions affected their well-being. As my role as primary investigator was to interpret participant realities (Stake, 1995), I used the themes deductively generated by the data and Keegan et al.’s (2014) conceptual framework (Social Agents, Climate, and
Personal Motivation) to structure the results and this discussion, rather than trying to answer the research questions explicitly.

**Social Agents**

Social agents are people who have influence on individuals’ (in this case, athletes’) well-being (Keegan et al., 2014). The influence of social agents tended to shift across stage of participation and varied by development league.

**Parents**

All participants grew up in families that appreciated the importance of taking part in sports and socialised their son accordingly (Keegan et al., 2014). In addition, four participants (Andy, NCAA; Bruce, CHL; Chris, CHL; Nick, NCAA) had brothers who participated in hockey, which likely contributed to their own involvement in hockey, while all participants except Will (CHL) had athletic siblings.

In the sampling and specialization stages, parents helped with training of hockey competencies and facilitated their son’s improvement through play-and-teach behaviours (Keegan et al., 2009; Keegan et al., 2010). Parents were supportive of their son’s autonomy by allowing him to take responsibility in determining his interest for playing hockey and putting in the effort to improve; allowing their son to be involved in deciding what he could do (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009). There were no instances where participants reported autonomy control or negative parental behaviour, contrary to Bean, Jeffery-Tosoni, Baker, and Fraser-Thomas’ (2016) study.

During the progress through the stages of participation (Côté, 1999), parental support was consistent in quality but decreased in quantity. Parental support included tangible support, informational support, esteem support, and emotional support (Rees & Hardy, 2000). While each family had different capabilities and constraints for
providing support, dependent on family dynamics and fiscal situation, the parents contributed insofar as possible.

Through the sampling and specialisation stages, tangible support encompassed transportation, nutrition, and financial access to play hockey. The ability to provide tangible support influenced Chris (CHL) in particular. Chris spoke about not having “much money” growing up, “so going to the CHL, I would get free sticks, free skates, and free hockey. Getting paid was the #1 thing.” For informational support, parents contributed their expertise and knowledge of sport (Holt et al., 2008) to help their son improve his competencies. They also socialized different goals and beliefs (White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004), such as talking to their son about the importance of school or beliefs about goal preferences (Ames, 1992). For esteem support and emotional support, participants were all highly competent hockey players during the sampling and specialization stages, and experienced little to no need for these supports regarding hockey performance. However, some parental esteem support was needed for Nick (NCAA) and Will (CHL) with a coach in the specialization year who made contentious selection and evaluation decisions (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavallee, 2009) and limited their ice-time in minor hockey for a season. Emotional support was additionally required when other parents were ‘playing politics’ (Will, CHL) or creating conflicts causing the team to separate into groups (Chris, CHL). Overall, parents were positive influences by being a “backbone support” (Andy, NCAA; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008).

As these men started to enter the investment stage and were nearing the selection of the NCAA and CHL development leagues, parents gradually lost influence, consistent with Keegan et al. (2014). As athletes progress into more competitive sport, parental influence tends to decline with that influence shifting to
coaches and peers (Silva, Lott, Mota, & Welk, 2014). However, parents continued to provide emotional support when they could at a fairly consistent level.

**Coaches**

All these athletes were competent and able to make their local representative (rep.) hockey teams as they progressed through the sampling stage in minor hockey and made their way to the specialization stage. These local rep. hockey teams are seen as higher calibre teams and “offer young hockey talent such advantages as better coaching, higher level competition, more ice time, greater prestige, and so forth” (Barnsley & Thompson, 1988, p. 171). The demonstration of hockey competence and resulting hockey success early on for these players resulted in generally positive experiences with coaches.

Coaches in the sampling and specialization years often were parents who emphasized having fun. These coaches tended to support development, and stress the importance of taking hockey seriously for yourself and for everybody on the team (Drew, NCAA). Coaches were reported to be good at critiquing in the moment, but definitely not as much being a backbone support as parents (Andy, NCAA). However, Will (CHL) felt coaches “didn’t have as big a role” at this point.

As minor hockey became more competitive, Nick (NCAA) and Will (CHL) experienced negative coaching experiences related to limiting ice-time. These coaches had favourites by giving more ice-time to the sons of parents they liked better (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Both hockey players successfully progressed, one directly into the CHL and one into Jr. A (before playing in the NCAA). Other than these two instances, participants spoke of coaches as being helpful and friendly (Keegan et al., 2014).
As coaches gained more influence in the specialization stage leading into the investment stage, “like bantamish age” (Will, CHL; 14-15-years-old), coach communication and feedback influenced the beliefs, expectations, and goals these men had of themselves relating to perceived competence capabilities. This influence continued into the investment stage, where coaching behaviours relating to training and instruction, feedback, and autocratic behaviour affected participant well-being (Hollembek & Amorose, 2005). Additionally, Drew (NCAA) and Nick (NCAA) reported they had options to play in either the CHL or NCAA, and received differing coach advice on these options.

For four players (Andy, NCAA; Bruce, CHL; Drew, NCAA; Nick, NCAA), Jr. A was the next step after minor hockey. Jr. A coaches were positive influences for Andy and Bruce. They helped Bruce “in personal ways to get better, and kind of be bolder,” while, for Andy, coaches “were okay with encouraging me” and “tried to get [the scholarship] for me,” but “it depended on how much I put into the team.” However for Drew, coaches were a negative influence. Drew “played four years [with Jr. A team], and I had more coaches than I had years played there…Bluntly: it sucked.” The high coach turnover resulted in coaches not understanding what Drew’s goals were, with one Jr. A coach in particular telling an NCAA school interested in Drew that “he wasn’t ready yet.” Drew attributed his success in Jr. A to himself, rather than to the coaches, because they didn’t promote him.

Once participants joined the CHL or NCAA, coaches became the dominant voice with respect to training advice and instruction (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). Regardless of development league, coaches concentrated on hockey performance and competition, and didn’t focus on much else. These coaches acted consistently in an autocratic fashion. With the power-dependence relationship that existed between
coaches and athletes (Emerson, 1962), athletes had little choice but to accept the
discipline and guidance their coaches provided (Smits, Jacobs, & Knoppers, 2017).
Despite the autocratic coaching, Chris and Will played for at least 4 years in the CHL
and got sufficient ice-time. Only Bruce left the CHL prematurely because of the lack
of ice-time and not having his basic psychological needs satisfied, although he didn’t
attribute his difficulties specifically to his coach.

In contrast, NCAA coaches had a great influence on the men who played in
that league (Andy, Drew, and Nick), all of whom played less than two full seasons.
For both Drew and Nick, they made the decision to leave the NCAA because of new
coaches who were hired and decided to bring in their own recruits to replace current
players. For Drew, the coach could not be reasoned with and told him: “It’s up to you,
you can stay, do school here and practice with the team, but you’re…literally not
going to play a game.” In Nick’s case, who was already struggling with the non-
realized expectations provided by the initial and replaced coach who recruited him,
“the [new] coach said at the end-of-year meeting that I wouldn’t be playing much the
following year, and he was bringing in his own recruits, so it would be tougher and
harder to play.” Andy “was expecting to be treated a little bit differently” when it
came to “the player/coaches relationships.” While he was playing, the coach made it
feel like “it was more of a boot camp, than a team trying to achieve greatness.” In
Andy’s second year, he became injured, and felt “when you’re not able to contribute
to your team goal, which is to win games and play hockey, I think that the way you’re
treated definitely impacted it.” The coach’s treatment made Andy feel not related to
the team and unable to contribute. Therefore, because of the injury and the way the
coach treated him, he left the NCAA. Overall, the coaches’ uncaring or unfair
treatment left Andy, Drew, and Nick doubting themselves and feeling demotivated
(Gearity & Murray, 2011). In Nick’s case, the coach had a further effect by dividing the team. These negative coaching behaviours affected all NCAA participants’ need satisfaction (Farrell, Crocker, McDonough, & Sedgewich, 2004).

**Peers**

In the sampling stage, peers were a large positive part of first-time interactions with sport and hockey, and made it fun to be related and part of a group while participating. Leading into the specialization stage, as hockey became increasingly competitive, interactions with peers resulted in both more and less positive situations. While positive rivalries helped the players train and increase their hockey competencies (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), when it came to getting noticed and pursuing performance goals, peers tended to become more self-focused and to care more about their own goals, appealing to those authority figures who made selections based on evaluations (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Miller, 2006).

After hockey players were getting noticed for their hockey competencies, peers tended to help in selecting or influencing each other on the development league route to pursue for the investment stage (Garcia Bengoechea & Strean, 2007). This process was evident based on the culture among peers in minor hockey and what was viewed as the desirable development league to pursue. Also, for those players who eventually went the NCAA route, they talked to current CHL players and saw what negative experiences could happen, and what was likely to take place if they decided to enter the CHL.

Post-investment stage, after participants played in their chosen development leagues, Andy (NCAA), Bruce (CHL), and Will (CHL) said peers were an important reason for choosing to go play in the U Sports league. Peers said the U Sports league “was still something competitive” (Bruce, CHL), to play with “friends on the team”
(Andy, NCAA), and to give hockey a second chance: “Try playing it and just try to have fun again” (Will, CHL).

Canadian Culture

In addition to parents, coaches, and peers, all the hockey players in this study had relatively similar early life experiences. They grew up in Canada where there was a cultural effect to select hockey as a sport to play and on which to focus. “Everything was just kind of hockey, hockey, hockey, and the other sports kind of took a back seat…I mean we are in Canada” (Andy, NCAA). Likely because of this cultural influence, some boys started hockey “when they were 3 or 4 years old; at the time, it wasn’t even a decision they wanted, they are born into it in a sense” (Will, CHL).

Other Social Agents

Other social agents varied by development league. For the participants who played in the CHL, rooming with billet families was a common occurrence. Billet interactions ranged from extremely positive experiences, where they “welcomed me with open arms…Made me feel at home with the team and everything” (Bruce, CHL), to extremely negative experiences, where “bad billets would be the worst thing” about the CHL (Chris, CHL). For Chris, he had three negative billet experiences, with one billet family controlling the food he could eat and another two billet families reportedly being alcoholics.

CHL participants also discussed fans who reacted as if CHL players were NHL players: “It’s crazy, we were almost treated like NHL players. In that regard, it was kind of like what I was expecting, if not beyond” (Bruce, CHL). Beside the pressure to meet the expectations of the good fan-bases, “you are like a local hero kind of thing, local celebrity” (Chris, CHL). NCAA players did not talk specifically about fans.
Hockey agents/advisors were influential in helping provide guidance for two NCAA players regarding which development league to choose. Drew and Nick, two eventual NCAA players, had the opportunity to play in the CHL as they exited minor hockey and spoke to hockey agents/advisors for their input. For Nick, the agent/advisor “was the first one that really approached me for advisor or agent type stuff” and helped “push me to a certain direction, like NCAA or [CHL].” For Drew, agents/advisors “get you in touch sometimes, and they are informative” but ultimately “they were looking for big NHL contracts.”

All three NCAA players previously played Jr. A. The most skilled Jr. A hockey players would gain scout interest; these scouts would communicate about the possibility of going to play for an NCAA school in the future. Scouts were influential in guiding participant expectations regarding making a decision on what team within the NCAA development league would be a good fit for them. Some scouts spoke like “you are stepping into a dream world and you’re extremely wanted” (Andy, NCAA). The communication with scouts would influence Jr. A hockey players in making a decision that ultimately would see them making a commitment to a college for four years.

**Summary**

For all participants, Canadian culture helped guide the selection of hockey as a sport to play and on which to focus. Parents were supportive of their son’s autonomy, and contributed emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and tangible support insofar as possible. Although parental esteem, information, and tangible support decreased as participants progressed in competitive hockey, emotional support remained at a fairly consistent level. In competitive hockey, coaches became the dominant voice with respect to autocratic instruction; focusing on
hockey performance and competition and not much else. In the CHL, Chris and Will played at least 4 years, while Bruce left the CHL prematurely because of the lack of ice-time. CHL players spoke about the additional influence of billets and fans. In the NCAA, Andy, Drew, and Nick left the NCAA prematurely because of the way the coaches treated them and lack of ice-time, and, for Andy, the contribution of his ankle injury. NCAA players spoke about the additional influence of agents/advisors and scouts. On occasion, peer rivalries created conflict in competitive hockey when it came to coaches selecting players, although peer friendships remained mostly enjoyable when player selection did not interfere in participant satisfaction.

**Climates**

The contextual climates common in sport, determined by Keegan et al.’s (2014) synthesis are: competitive climate, training climate, evaluation climate, emotional climate, authority climate, social support climate, and relatedness climate.

**Competitive Climate**

At a young age during the sampling stage, all participants enjoyed “playing hockey and having fun” (Bruce, CHL). They liked training and competing in hockey, hoping to “get good results” (Chris, CHL). They tended to be care-free and wanted “to play games all the time” (Drew, NCAA), because, at this time, “it’s not the reality of being scouted. It’s not this competitive nature upon each other yet” (Bruce, CHL).

As players entered the specialisation stage, the attributes and characteristics of the individual athletes and teams started to become more important, especially for those who spent time in Jr. A as they depended on good competition results to make it to the NCAA. Andy (NCAA) started to have difficulty competing against others because of his size. He was at a disadvantage and “definitely behind the eight ball in that aspect of it.” Drew (NCAA) recognized the poor culture on his Jr. A team
resulted in the inability to compete: “It was just a bad culture, like winning comes
down to that. So we lost a lot. The guys didn’t want to show up to practice, they
didn’t care, yeah it wasn’t good.” At this time when the hockey players became
specialised at their hockey competencies, positive and negative peer rivalries (Weiss,
Smith, & Theeboom, 1996) developed; “the inter-competition within your team
[increased], so you kind of focus more on yourself” (Nick, NCAA).

As players entered the investment stage within either the CHL or NCAA, all
the men found “it changed a lot” (Bruce, CHL), specifically with coaches, as they did
not “care about anything else besides hockey…their team winning games” (Chris,
CHL). “It became more a winning mentality” (Bruce, CHL): “There’s no more fair
play. The best players are going to be there to help us win, and it kind of changed the
whole mentality of actually running the hockey itself” (Bruce, CHL). This element
about being the player who could help the team win meant the elite hockey players
needed to display appropriate athletic behaviour and meet high performance standards
(Shogan, 1999). These standards were achieved through self-sacrifice and self-
regulation (David, 2005). The hockey players’ job was to maintain their hockey
performance or their future might become jeopardized: “It’s more stressful ’cause you
know it’s nearing the end, or up to the next stage” (Nick, NCAA). The struggle to
maintain high performance levels to be counted on to help the team win created inter-
team competition and “a different feel because [the whole team are] all in
competition” (Nick, NCAA).

With the winning mentality came the business aspects of hockey, which
spawned “harsh realities” (Andy, NCAA): “Some of the [enjoyable] aspects of the
game start to diminish away, and the business aspect starts to take over” (Andy,
NCAA). When money became involved in creating a winning hockey team,
competition was fierce to maintain hockey competencies on a team. “Coaches are getting paid for what they do” and were “thinking about making it to the next level too” (Andy, NCAA), while, for players, after leaving the CHL or NCAA and going pro, there were contracts and “you have to play certain guys” (Chris, CHL).

**Training Climate**

Ever since a young age, progressing through the sampling and specialisation stages, all the men enjoyed playing hockey and training to get better at hockey and its related competencies, with training support from parents and coaches (Keegan et al., 2014). Parents helped their sons by “trying to help me do well” (Chris, CHL) and by teaching “how to with the little things. Like you weren’t good with stick handling or something, they would say like ‘we could practice’” (Drew, NCAA). Parents encouraged their sons to “be the best I could be” by “trying to keep you wanting to improve” (Will, CHL), while coaches wanted their players to improve: “From the coach’s standpoint, they were just looking to develop. They wanted the kids to get better, and, you know, us to become more knowledgeable” (Bruce, CHL). Peers also contributed to training by just wanting to have fun and play hockey by “going to the outdoor rinks and stuff” (Will, CHL). The desire for peers to play hockey together meant the hockey players were perceived as being competent, thereby contributing to peer acceptance (Weiss & Duncan, 1992) and higher peer status (Evans & Roberts, 1987).

All the men realized at a young age the importance of training to succeed at competition because if “you were good at skating, you could carry the puck faster than everyone else” (Drew, NCAA). With continued training in the specialisation stage, athletes would be able to meet their competence goals: “I always just wanted to do better and stuff like that, so I could get into [the CHL]” (Chris, CHL). For Andy
(NCAA) to attain his competence goals, he spoke about how training was the way to overcome and achieve them: “I had to push myself in different areas than other people had to since being a smaller player, and in a game that was meant for big guys growing up.” Advisors became an influential social agent for Nick (NCAA) at this time by providing advice “to focus on certain things” to overcome adversity.

For players to enter the investment stage, development league teams considered selecting hockey players based on their training and resulting competencies and competitive performance, and how the athletes might fit within team strategy (Starkes, 1987). Once invested to a development league team, to continue to meet the demand of what the team required of them, the men would train and practice extra hard to meet expectations: “I would stay after practice, late, just to work on taking draws, simply I had never taken them before…even like the break-out of the puck…I would stay late literally every single day” (Drew, NCAA). It soon became clear that training could only take them so far as training did not always mean improved competencies and results. Natural skill cannot be taught or achieved: “Everyone has their different skills and you just can’t do one-timers, and have better one-timers than the guy who is naturally just unbelievable at taking one-timers” (Chris, CHL). No matter how much these players trained and practiced, and how much the development league coaches “want you to improve” (Will, CHL), they were often considered to be assets with static ability. Only competition performance mattered at the end of the day.

**Evaluation Climate**

None of the men spoke about evaluations in the sampling stage; however, evaluations became important in the specialisation stage as the players reached the age where they could get noticed and go play for an investment stage development
league team. Although not all players received positive evaluations by joining CHL teams out of minor hockey, the remaining men (Andy, NCAA; Bruce, CHL; Drew, NCAA; Nick, NCAA) continued to develop their hockey competencies and gained interest from a CHL team, or NCAA scouts while playing in Jr. A. “When I first got scouted, I was obviously happy” (Chris, CHL). It was “confidence building” (Drew, NCAA). Positive evaluations motivated and “inspired me…to improve on my game” (Andy, NCAA) as “it seemed like more of a reality” (Andy, NCAA) to move to the next level.

However, as evaluations became a common occurrence in hockey, the extra pressure to perform when scouts or others would be doing evaluations “would kind of deter you from what it was when I was a kid… It got more serious.” It was necessary “to treat this more like a business instead of just having fun” (Drew, NCAA). Opportunities became limited to meet expectations through evaluations because “the patience isn’t what it is in minor. You only get a certain amount of chances, and you can either keep up, or get released, or you’re traded” (Will, CHL). Based on evaluations, players were expendable if not viewed as “an integral part to a team” (Will, CHL).

Emotional Climate

During the sampling and specialisation stages, there was minimal emotional intensity, besides parents often being very emotionally involved in their child’s hockey: “Most parents have a tendency to go over the top in some aspects because they want the best for their kids” (Will, CHL). As players transitioned into the investment stage, the emotional intensity of the coach drastically increased. Comparing investment stage coaches in the development leagues to coaches in the specialisation stage, participants noted “Jr. A was still pretty relaxed and enjoyable”
(Nick, NCAA), although coaches were “different” “than minor hockey coaches” (Will, CHL). Coach emotional intensity was a “reality check” (Will, CHL) and “a wake-up call ’cause like the intensity was wild. The pressure that was put on us and everything, like that was not what I was expecting” (Bruce, CHL). Coaches “were much tougher, much more blunt” (Will, CHL). It was a “very big jump” (Will, CHL) to “being screamed at by coaches in practice and stuff” (Will, CHL). Players felt they needed to endure these “abusive coaching practices” (p. 66) to avoid negative consequences, such as being seen as a whiner or not being able to take the pressure (Smits, Jacobs, & Knoppers, 2017). In the CHL, coaches’ emotional intensity often reflected the team fan-base: “The pressure in that city, we had…a big fan-base, a lot of pressure on these kids, and you know, we were still young” (Bruce, CHL).

Authority Climate

While in the sampling stage, young athletes rely heavily on their parents for various kinds of support (Keegan et al., 2014), and are susceptible to their parents’ desires because of the inherent power-dependent relationship (Emerson, 1962). Parents can place importance on the aspects they believe are the most important, such as being better than others (Roberts, Treasure, & Hall, 1994) or emphasizing competition (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The male hockey players were all fortunate to have parents who “weren’t too pushy” (Will, CHL), or forced their sons to train: “They were never pushy like ‘Oh you have to go and like shoot pucks every day’” (Drew, NCAA). Parents did not display authoritative behaviour because they “let me do what I wanted to do” (Nick, NCAA).

As hockey became more competitive in the specialisation stage, a power-dependent relationship (Emerson, 1962) with coaches emerged, since coaches have the ability to direct the actions of others (Foucault, 1983). Both Will (CHL) and Nick
(NCAA) experienced a coach who authoritatively controlled their ice-time during games: “[The coach] didn’t play me or didn’t want me to be successful” (Nick, NCAA) and was “sitting kids, kind of demeaning players when we were at an age when it still wasn’t appropriate” (Will, CHL). For Nick, however, he experienced less of this authority climate as time went on: “It took [the coach] a while for him to actually realize it, and he started playing me way more later on” (Nick, NCAA).

All the men continued to develop their hockey competencies and perform well, and were given an opportunity to enter the NCAA or CHL, or both for Nick (NCAA) and Drew (NCAA). For Drew, understanding the authority climate his peers had gone through in the CHL helped him make the decision on pursuing what appeared like a less authoritative route in the NCAA: “[Drew’s friend] went and played like 15 games [in the CHL] and sent him back and ‘sewered’ him out of his education [package]” (Drew, NCAA).

In the CHL, Will experienced coach’s authoritative decisions based on evaluations related to timing of the NHL draft (or having the ability to move on to play pro), and the age of players as they progressed through the league. “As you age through the [CHL] league, as younger guys come through, they now have potential, unless you’ve produced or progressed like you would hope so.” Without player progression, players tend to “be put down on lower lines or used more as a role player, as opposed to being a key part to the team because they now see there’s tons of younger guys coming through with potential” (Will, CHL).

In an effort to increase personal and team success, CHL coaches would use authoritative punishment as their mechanism (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). “As much as it is still a development league, it’s still very much a business. That was the biggest shock, coaches don’t care so much. Like if you’re playing bad, it’s not like ‘let’s try
to work it out.’ They would just scratch you’ (Will, CHL). If evaluations showed player performance was not improving, players could be authoritatively traded “half-way across the country without the team really not even thinking about it. It just becomes a part of the business” (Will, CHL). It “happens frequently,” as there are “some players who have played for five or six teams in a span of four years” (Will, CHL).

The men who played in the NCAA did not talk about trades like in the CHL, but did talk about younger hockey talent coming in and becoming a key part to the team, based on the authority of the coach. For “no reason” (Drew, NCAA), Drew was authoritatively told by a new coach he was unable to play any more games for the NCAA team to which he had committed: “They were recruiting 13 new forwards and that I wouldn’t be a part of the team going forward” (Drew, NCAA). The coach offered no remedy to the situation, saying, “You can keep your scholarship, but you’re not going to play.” Nick (NCAA) experienced a similar situation. Overall, the authority exercised by coaches in the NCAA directly contributed to Drew and Nick leaving the NCAA prematurely.

After playing in the development leagues, Chris (CHL) was the only man who played professional hockey. He spoke about authoritative controls similar to the CHL: “They really just trade a guy, play him and cut him, trade a guy like really every day” (Chris, CHL). Teams made trades looking for competent hockey players to reward them with a contract and some security.

All the men eventually found themselves in the U Sports league, which had more security because of the inability for teams to exercise their authority and trade players: “It was different than [the CHL]. You can’t get traded” (Will, CHL).
Social Support Climate

Social support (Rees & Hardy, 2000) often came from “the same people” (Andy, NCAA) throughout all stages of participation. Siblings and “friends continue to support you” (Andy, NCAA), but “the biggest ones” (Will, CHL), “parents always” (Andy, NCAA). All parents liked “watching and encouraging” (Drew, NCAA), “follow me as I went… visited [while playing in the development league]” (Andy, NCAA), “believed in me” (Will, CHL), and provided advice when things got tough: “Just to focus on other things, and not focus on things you can’t control” (Nick, NCAA). No parents defined social support to their children contingent on athletic success, or created a feeling of indebtedness for the parental support provided (Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008).

For those who played in the CHL, billets emerged as a significant source of social support. “Depending on where I was playing, my billets would be good” (Chris, CHL). For Bruce (CHL), billets helped with the transition and “pressure” of “being on my own for the first time,” and with motivational hockey issues. They were particularly helpful when Bruce was not playing much during his first year in the CHL. “My billets had seen it before with other guys who had either just kind of given up on themselves, or made an effort and were later awarded for it. So they kind of helped me through that.” Overall, besides billets for CHL players, “friends and family were always supportive in that sense” (Will, CHL).

Relatedness Climate

All the men enjoyed playing hockey with friends in the sampling stage, as they created meaningful associations through friendship, group dedication, and group acceptance (Keegan et al., 2014): “All my friends at school were playing hockey, so I wanted to play hockey” (Will, CHL). It was fun to be around friends and teammates:
“I loved the fact being around all your teammates” (Drew, NCAA). Players were also likely to be related with coaches when they were young as coaches were often parents of teammates: “Those guys were my teammates and both those guys were the coaches” (Drew, NCAA).

As hockey became more competitive in the specialisation stage and into the investment stage, the athletes remained related through being affiliated within similar contexts (Keegan et al., 2014) and “some friends for sure just want the best for each other” (Will, CHL). However, relatedness to teammates in increased competition means “lots of guys that care more about themselves” (Will, CHL). The resulting independent pursuit of success can create inter-team competition, affecting relatedness among the players: “It ruffled a lot of feathers within the team, because the older guys weren’t really fond of the younger guys coming in because they were scared they would be taking their spots” (Nick, NCAA).

Summary

In increasingly competitive hockey, the competitive climate, training climate, evaluation climate, and authoritative climate were areas that had the ability to hinder participant need satisfaction. Success in elite hockey depends on the ability to master and demonstrate competencies; all of which is evaluated by coaches who have the power to authoritatively control players’ opportunities to perform their competencies for team success. The emotional climate, social support climate, and relatedness climate are interdependent, and become more relevant when hindrance in the more independent competitive, training, evaluation, and authoritative climates occurs.

Personal Motivation

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) hypothesizes individuals are self-determined (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994) when three
basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Approach and avoidance orientations (mastery or performance) are encompassed under the section on competence. Relatedness has been discussed extensively within social agents and the relatedness climate. It is not further discussed here.

**Autonomy**

Autonomy shifted across stages of participation. In the sampling stage, the players were competent at hockey and had positive parent support, which enabled them all to pursue playing hockey and create their own goals related to hockey autonomously. They “enjoyed it so much” (Bruce, CHL) and created their own self-determined hockey goals with “not much” (Drew, NCAA) influence from others: “For as long as I can remember, I don’t really remember anyone making me decide to change the dream or work harder” (Chris, CHL).

As hockey became more competitive and the opportunity to play in different development leagues emerged, the players continued to set and follow their own goals. However, opportunities became more limited, as entrance into certain leagues was based on others’ (particularly coaches’) determination of the players’ competence. The men were forced to make choices among the options: “I wasn’t content with every aspect of the school, it was a good fit, and I was not going to get a better offer money-wise because you can’t get anything better than full ride” (Drew, NCAA). “I think the thought of something like that not coming around again. I couldn’t say ‘no’ to my parents not worrying about paying for my schooling. I think, just in the moment, it was the right time and place” (Andy, NCAA). These decisions were made hoping for the least controlling environment. For example, for Drew, going to the NCAA “seemed like the safest option” because “it’s a good secure environment where they commit to you for four years, and get your education paid
for, and you also get a great hockey experience, which is very comparable to the [CHL league 1].” For Will (CHL), “going right away, I had free school, and I could go play CHL right off the bat, so it made the decision in that sense a lot easier.”

Injuries, like others’ determinations of competence, reduced players’ autonomy. Will (CHL) experienced a two-year period in [the specialisation stage] where he “got hurt so missed most of the season having surgery on my wrist. That and the next year.” During these two years, Will was “not developing like a player like the rest of the guys around you; that kind of shifts your opinion where you kind of see yourself going.” Similarly, while Bruce was playing in the CHL, he got sick with mono for 12 weeks, and that was a “big chunk of the season, and that was part of a really big setback.” During this time, Bruce’s goals changed as he thought “maybe getting drafted wouldn’t be realistic this year.” As for Andy, while playing in the NCAA, he incurred “an on-going [ankle] injury” that “lingered on a little bit,” causing Andy to feel “alienated when I was injured and away from the team.” In his view, “when you’re not able to contribute to your team goal, which is to win games and play hockey, I think that the way you’re treated definitely impacted it.” Andy’s ankle resulted in “double ankle surgery” and totalled “maybe even a year and a half” of being “in-and-out of the hospital.” Finally, Chris (CHL) suffered a concussion playing pro hockey in North America: “I wouldn’t be playing the rest of the season anyway. So I thought it would be better to start my school now” instead of “just waiting there for the whole year and trying to go back to pro.” For Andy, Bruce, and Chris, injuries and sickness were large contributors to making the decision to leave their teams in which they were invested, and join the U Sports league. Injuries and sickness ultimately limited their ability to participate and increase their competencies, affecting the goals they made and were striving to achieve, thereby reducing their autonomy.
The overall hindrances of the elite male hockey players were recognized as originating from “similar things, but either more or less extreme, but same end result of losing the passion for hockey” (Nick, NCAA). The controlling injuries and others’ evaluations resulted in the players seeking a less controlling environment, where they could get “the ice I deserved” (Nick, NCAA).

The U Sports league is a less controlling environment than the CHL and NCAA, making the men feel they are “back to where I started…I just want to enjoy it, some good friends, some good people, and just play because I’m still enjoying it” (Bruce, CHL). For Andy (NCAA), the U Sports league allowed him to be happy as it was a “fresh start”: “A place I could finish my degree, instead of just going to play pro hockey or giving up the game in general” (Andy, NCAA). The ability to play hockey in the U Sports league “instead of going through the same stuff I had been going through” (Bruce, CHL) and not be controlled made hockey enjoyable again: “Two hours a day, it’s only hockey…All I have to think about is the ice and playing, so I honestly just love it. I love being around the rink, I love all of it.”

**Competence**

Perceived competence in hockey decreased for these players as competition got tougher and the skill levels of other players increased in comparison. In the sampling stage, all players enjoyed playing hockey and believed they were competent at it; motivating players “to dedicate more time towards hockey” and create goals that were often “purely hockey-based” (Andy, NCAA). They created mastery and performance goals relative to their perceived competencies, trying to do their best and win games. At this stage, the participants had visions of playing in the NHL. “I wanted to go play in the NHL; that was my goal. That’s why I shot pucks, that’s why I stickhandled, all that” (Drew, NCAA).
As hockey became more competitive in the specialisation stage (including Jr. A), Andy (NCAA), Bruce (CHL), Nick (NCAA), and Will (CHL) experienced challenges to their competence, creating performance-avoidance goals. Andy was unable to be as competent as his peers because of his size. Bruce held performance-avoidance goals because he “was really never a top player” and was “kind of always happy to be in the shadows of the better players, and just wanted to go out there and have fun and win.” Will (CHL) and Nick (NCAA) had controlling coaches in minor hockey who caused them to re-evaluate their goals: “You make your own kind of goals, and you can be realistic or not, and I was just being realistic with what I thought was possible” (Nick, NCAA). Instead of reaching for the best, these players started to focus on not being the worst. Mastery goals tended to fade as player value was related to being more competent than other players.

Recruitment to the investment stage caused a temporary shift away from performance-avoidance goals to performance-approach goals because of the positive competence evaluations that recruitment represented. “It had gotten to the point where that wasn’t really a goal at that point, because the last couple years of minor didn’t go tremendously well, so for me it was very motivating in the sense it was a second chance” (Will, CHL). Positive evaluations were “eye-opening” (Bruce, CHL) and “made [hockey] a little more intense and something to push for” (Nick, NCAA). Positive evaluations “set my goal. This is now what I’m in for. To get drafted; it was kind of the first step to what I wanted to do in many chapters” (Bruce, CHL). The “hard work has been paying off, and I’m starting to get recognized” (Bruce, CHL).

Bruce (CHL), Will (CHL), Andy (NCAA), Drew (NCAA), and Nick (NCAA) struggled in the investment stage, questioning their competence and changing their performance-approach goals to performance-avoidance goals. Bruce (CHL) got sick
for 12 weeks, and, once he returned, his position was replaced by “top” players. He chose to leave the CHL even though other CHL teams were interested in him. Will “didn’t have the same steady improvement by the time you’re 20” and “hit a point that going to the NHL is not realistic,” so he turned his “focus to get free schooling out of it” and “get the degree.” This shift to performance-avoidance goals did not come from “specific events,” but “a year-by-year basis, depending on how the season goes” (Will, CHL). For NCAA players, specific events triggered the shift to performance-avoidance goals. Andy experienced a severe ankle injury that limited his ability to contribute to the team. For Drew and Nick, new coaches for each of their NCAA teams were hired, and decided that different players whose playing styles matched the coaches would be used.

Only Chris (CHL) was “fairly consistent” in maintaining his performance-approach goals for his whole hockey career, regardless of the events that occurred: “Like I just went to [the CHL] at 16 and worked hard and stuff. I just naturally kept getting more ice and getting better, and getting opportunities.” Chris also has arguably the highest estimation of his own competence, reinforced by having played professional hockey.

Now playing in the U Sports league, the players’ perceived competence and goals are more aligned and realistic. “The false hope of making a solid life out of hockey was probably over” (Nick, NCAA). Now competence goals are “transformed a bit to more life-based” rather than just myself and playing hockey” (Andy, NCAA). “You know still doing the thing that I love, but more on a balanced level rather than having hockey be my whole life” (Bruce, CHL). As such, more balanced competence goals “help[s] me do better in hockey too because I’m not just focusing on that” (Chris, CHL). Limiting competence satisfaction opportunities to only hockey
can ultimately be detrimental, because “you can do very well, and still not get rewarded for it” “because a lot of other things come into play” (Chris, CHL). The balance of mastery and performance goals the players held in the sampling stage is starting to re-emerge.

**Summary**

Controlling events, such as authoritative determination of ice-time by coaches and injuries, hindered participant need satisfaction because of the control over their autonomy. Authoritative determination of ice-time by coaches is often based on competency evaluations, for the team to be successful in the competitive climate. When there were controlling events that did not allow players to act as freely as they had hoped, participants then had to evaluate their expectations and competency goals, and make attributions to why they were unable to continue to compete in hockey. Andy (NCAA) attributed this change mostly to his injury, while Chris (CHL) attributed it to the limitations of training. Bruce (CHL), Nick (NCAA), and Will (CHL) attributed this shift mostly to the competitive climate, whereas Drew (NCAA) attributed it solely to the controlling coach.

**Overall Summary**

For all participants, Canadian culture helped guide the selection of hockey as a sport to play. Parents were supportive of their sons insofar as possible, while coaches became the dominant voice as hockey became increasingly competitive as business aspects took over. CHL players spoke about the additional influence of billets and fans, while NCAA players spoke about the additional influence of agents/advisors and scouts. On occasion, peer rivalries created conflict in competitive hockey, although peer friendships remained mostly enjoyable. In increasingly competitive hockey, the more independent competitive, training, evaluation, and authoritative climates were
areas that had the ability to hinder participant need satisfaction because the mastery
and demonstration of competencies were evaluated by coaches who had the power to
control player playing time. The emotional, social support, and relatedness climates
became more relevant when hindrance in the more independent climates occurred.
The control of athlete autonomy, through injuries or determination of ice-time by
coaches (based on competency evaluations), additionally hindered participant need
satisfaction. When players were not allowed to act as freely as they had hoped, they
had to evaluate why their expectations and competency goals were not being met, and
act accordingly to find an alternative for need satisfaction. For all participants, one
such alternative was to play hockey in the U Sports league.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

There were three primary limitations of this study. First, the focus of the study
on transitions did not match participant experiences; second, participant recruitment
resulted in a homogeneous sample; finally, certain topics the participants raised were
not probed in sufficient depth.

First, one intention of this study was to look specifically at transition
experiences for those male hockey players who experienced unfavourable results in
either the CHL or NCAA. However, participants tended to recall events more
generally, instead of transitions explicitly. Therefore, participants’ inability to speak
directly about transition experiences they encountered entering the CHL or NCAA
development leagues signifies that the transition itself did not play a large part in
negatively affecting their overall well-being. For that reason, it may not be necessary
for future research to explore transitions as specifically.

Second, although the participant recruitment method was favourable because
of its ability to overcome common recruitment issues within elite hockey
development leagues, and provided the ability to capture elite male hockey players’ CHL and NCAA experiences, both positive and negative, the sample was homogeneous. Since the outcome for all participants was similar by joining the USports league, additional experiences that could occur in the CHL and NCAA resulting in different outcomes were not captured with this participant sample. Future research should consider creating recruitment criteria without particular outcomes, but maintaining only that potential participants had played in the development league of interest regardless of length of time in the league, in an attempt to capture a wider variety of experiences.

Finally, with an initial intention to look specifically at transition experiences for male hockey players who experienced unfavourable results in either the CHL or NCAA, the interview questions, combined with lack of interviewer experience in probing more deeply, led to data that failed to uniformly capture contract or development league policy considerations in influencing participant well-being. Future research needs to purposefully include development league contracts and policies as variables in research guide questions, in that vulnerabilities exist for hockey players in both the CHL and NCAA when it comes to contracts and policies.
Key Implications for Practice Based on These Players’ Perceptions

In completing this research and listening to the voices of the participants, three key implications for practice emerged as being important for social agents, to ultimately decrease negative effects to elite male hockey player well-being as they participate through the stages of participation. First, coach training requires a certain level of ‘psychology of performance’ knowledge; second, consideration is needed by coaches about feedback and the manner it is provided to athletes; third, all social agents, including the athletes themselves, need informed and appropriate expectations to avoid realizations that can result in negative outcomes to well-being.

First, coaches hold a high level responsibility when it comes to influencing an athlete because of the input they are able to contribute, and the inherent power the role holds. Unfortunately, coach training does not always include teachings on how coach input should be informed by ‘psychology of performance’ evidence. For example, coach training requirements in Ontario (OMHA, 2016) are attained from the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) run by the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC, 2016). Since the expansion of ‘Make Ethical Decisions’ (MED) course requirement in 2010 replacing ‘Theory 3’ (which included an optional ‘Psychology of Performance’ module), there is currently no element of coach training that teaches coaches about performance psychology for athletes. This knowledge should be mandatory for coaches.

Second, extra consideration is needed by coaches about how they provide feedback. As hockey becomes more competitive, evaluation and emotion become increasingly intense; simultaneously, elite male hockey players become more vulnerable to experiencing negative effects to their well-being as they can see their goals at risk. Coaches need to employ ethical behaviours for the sake of athlete well-
being in fashioning feedback, even as competition success becomes more important, and player selection becomes more frequent.

Finally, for all social agents who are involved in providing influence to athletes, and for the hockey players themselves, appropriate and realistic expectations need to be maintained, so created goals do not result in overly negative effects when these goals are not achieved. Canadian culture plays such a great influence on boys’ visions to play in the NHL, oftentimes abetted by parents, coaches, peers, and the athletes, that other life paths and competencies are ignored.

**Final Thoughts**

In the process of doing this master’s thesis, I have learned different things about myself, and the process of creating new knowledge. What proved to be most difficult in the development of the proposal for this study was organizing my ideas within frameworks and constructs. I had many ideas and different things I wanted to explore, and found myself becoming frustrated, unable to organize my thoughts in a way that could flow in a structured way, while simultaneously finding satisfaction with the extent I could address an issue I thought was important. I was able to persevere and learn how human interactions can be placed within categories and adequately capture the occurrences within the realm in which they exist.

In the process of doing the proposal, gaining ethics clearance, collecting data, transcribing interviews, and writing the six chapters of the thesis, it became clear that doing a thesis was a ‘slow burn’. A lot of effort and brain power is exuded for the various steps of doing a thesis without much of an obvious reward, except for the realization that mastery and progress in itself is rewarding. It is only at this point, as I reach the end of this journey, that I can finally look back and understand how much I have accomplished.
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Motivation of Adolescents (pp. 331–372). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publications.


December 20, 2016

Mr. Matthew Norris
Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Queen’s University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-835-16; TRAQ # 6019793
Title: “GEDUC-835-16 Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players”

Dear Mr. Norris:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-835-16 Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeos/traq indicating that the project is "completed" so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. John Freeman, Supervisor
Dr. Richard Reeve, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Erin Remie, Dept. Admin.
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Letter of Information

Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players

Dear CIS male hockey player,

This research is being conducted by Matt Norris under the supervision of Dr. John Freeman, in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this study is to explore the hockey experiences of CIS (Canadian Interuniversity Sport) male hockey players through one-on-one interviews with them; how coaches, parents, and peers have influenced current CIS hockey players’ overall well-being in the transition through the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) or National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I (NCAA) is a particular focus. Therefore participants currently play in the CIS, and have played in either the CHL or NCAA.

**What is involved to participate in this study?** Participants must be male. The study will require a single interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour, either in person or over Skype/phone. If the interview occurs in person, it will be conducted at a location and time convenient to you as the participant. Your contribution will be audio-recorded. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. The benefit of this study is to shed light on the variety of interactions in elite hockey that have not yet been explored and are often not accessible. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant.

**Is participation voluntary?** Yes. You should not feel obliged to answer any questions that you do not want to. You may choose to withdraw from the study during the interview (by informing the interviewer for the desire to withdraw), or after the interview up until March 31, 2017, after which time, it is expected that the thesis will be published. If you wish to withdraw, contact Matt Norris at 13mn27@queensu.ca or John Freeman at freemanj@queensu.ca. If you choose to withdraw, your request to remove all or part of your data from the study will be granted.

**What will happen to your responses?** Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Only Matt Norris will have access to your interview data and information. Interviews will be recorded on a personal recording device. Once the interviews are transcribed, the interview will be deleted from the recording device, and interview transcripts and audio will be stored on Matt Norris’ password protected desktop. Once the data is used, all data will be kept in Dr. John Freeman’s possession. Results from this study will be published in Matt Norris’ master’s thesis and may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will maintain individual confidentiality. However, despite the attempt to maintain confidentiality, we are sometimes identifiable by the information we share to persons who know us well. In accordance with the General Research Ethics Board
Standard Operating Procedures, data will be securely/password protected for a minimum of five years. If data are used for secondary analysis, they will contain no identifying information.

**What if you have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Matt Norris at 613-889-5124 and 13mn27@queensu.ca, or Dr. John Freeman at 613-533-6000 extension 77298 and freemanj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 1-844-535-2988. Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study.

**Consent Form**

**Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players**

Name (please print clearly): ________________________________________

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in an audio-recorded interview, either in person or over Skype/phone, lasting from approximately 30 minutes to one hour, to discuss my hockey experiences.

3. I understand that my interview data will be used in the study called: Exploring the Experiences of Elite Male Hockey Players.

4. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw up to March 31, 2017. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. Only Matt Norris and John Freeman will have access to my data. The data from this study will be published in Matt Norris’ master’s thesis and may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will never breach individual confidentiality.

5. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact Matt Norris at 613-889-5124 and 13mn27@queensu.ca, or Dr. John Freeman at 613-533-6000 extension 77298 and freemanj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 1-844-535-2988.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate.

Signature: ________________________________________
Date: ________________________________________

**PLEASE RETURN ONE COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO MATT NORRIS AND RETAIN A SECOND COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.**
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Broad Lens Questions: Sports Career

1) When and how did you get involved in sport?

2) What sports have you played during your life?

3) How did you feel about these sports?

4) Who has supported you throughout your hockey development?

5) How did these people (coaches, parents, or peers) influence your feelings about hockey while you were young? Why did you like hockey as a kid?

6) In your development years, did anyone hinder you from participating in hockey?

7) Before you started to become scouted, what feedback and communication do you remember experiencing from other people? Who exactly? What would you hear from these people?

Transition into and through Elite Development League

8) As you started to become scouted, how were your feelings about hockey affected?

9) As you started to become scouted, how were your goals and expectations influenced by parents, coaches, peers, or others? From whom exactly?

10) Looking back on making the decision to play in the CHL/NCAA, what memorable events or communications occurred to help you make your decision? Probes: With whom? What were your options?

11) As you joined the CHL/NCAA and started to play in the league, how were events the same or different than your expectations and goals?
12) Who supported you playing in this league? How?

13) Who hindered you playing in this league? How?

14) After playing in the CHL/NCAA for the length of time you did, why did you decide to play hockey in the U Sports league?

15) What memorable events were related to making this decision?

**Motivation and Goals**

16) How have your goals changed throughout playing hockey (up to now)?

17) What caused you to change your goals?

18) How did your motivation change throughout playing hockey?

19) Off-ice, throughout playing hockey, what other time-invested activities or concerns not related to hockey did you have?

20) After reflecting on your current position in your current league, and understanding the progress you’ve made through hockey, is there anything in particular you are more aware of?

21) Is there anything you would do differently?