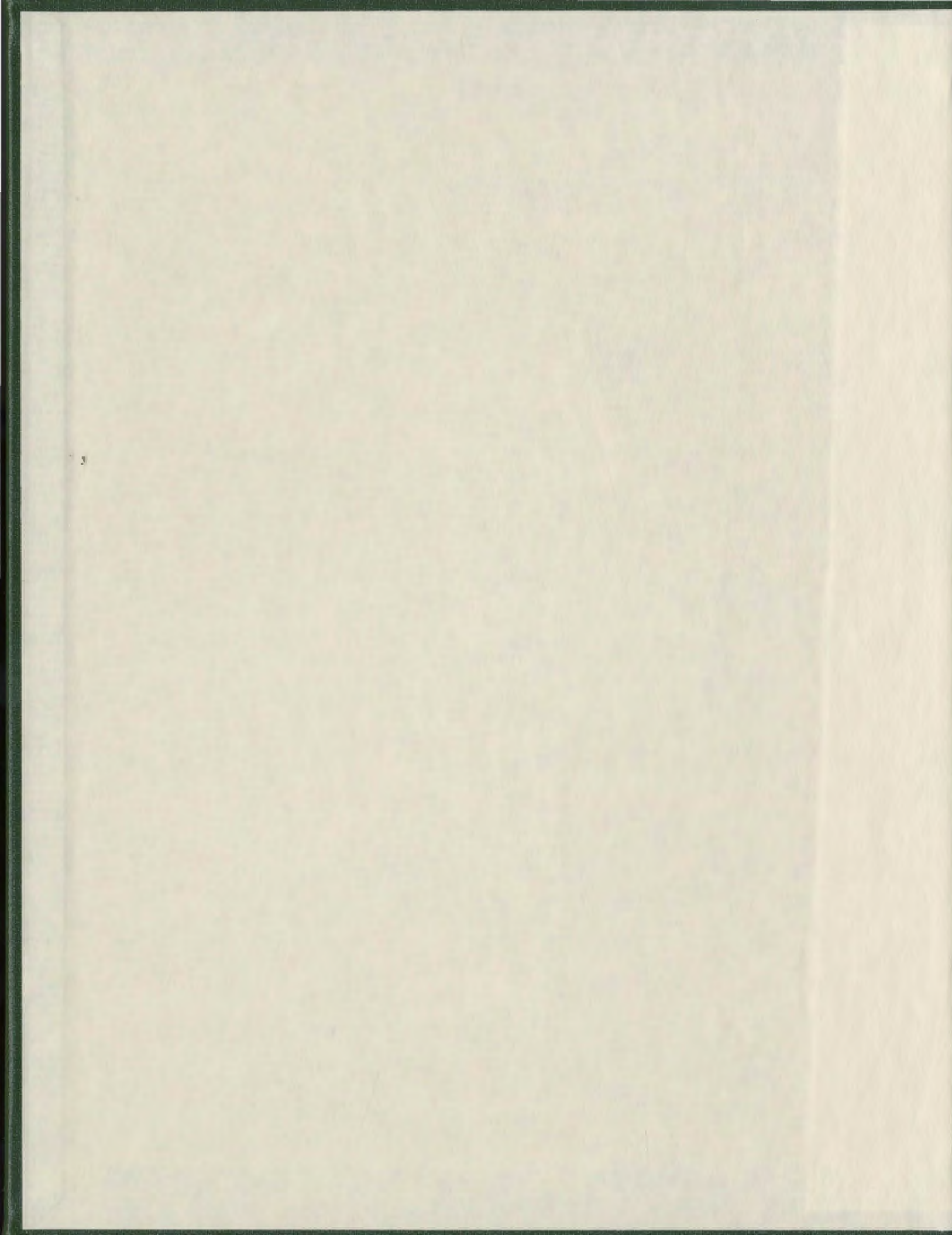


HOCKEY PLAYERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF
AGGRESSIVE AND SPORTSMANLIKE BEHAVIOUR IN MINOR HOCKEY

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Hockey Players' Perceptions and Experiences of
Aggressive and Sportsmanlike Behaviour in Minor Hockey

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine minor hockey players' perceptions and experiences of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours. In-depth open-ended interviews were conducted with six male minor league hockey players ages 12 to 14. Côté, Salmela, and Russell's (1995) guidelines were used to analyze and interpret the data inductively. Results of the investigation indicated that there were five themes that emerged and were labelled; the aggressive nature of hockey, personal experiences, sportsmanship in minor hockey, experience of sportsmanship, and recommendations for decreasing aggression and increasing sportsmanship. These results provided evidence that players perceived the NHL as being the most influential source of aggressive behaviour, their parents as the most influential source on sportsmanlike behaviour, and retaliation as the main cause of aggressive behaviour. Practically, these findings provide sports administrators, parents, and coaches with information on how to decrease aggressive behaviour and how to increase sportsmanlike behaviour in minor hockey.

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Dedication

This thesis is in memory of an amazingly generous and loving man, Jarnail Singh Hallate – my dad, who I lost during my journey to grad school. To a courageous man who led by example, teaching me that through good work ethic, determination, and courage I could accomplish anything. Had I not learnt that lesson at an early age, I would not be who I am or where I am today. Thank you dad for allowing me to grow into the person I wanted to be and supporting me in recognizing that I did not have a glass ceiling. The lessons you taught me, along with your unwavering faith and pride in me, got me through this journey. I miss you every moment of every day. I wish you were here to celebrate this accomplishment.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hockey plays an important role in Canadian culture with over 500,000 youths playing organized minor hockey in Canada (Hockey Canada, 2012). While playing hockey, players engage in a variety of behaviours. Some of these behaviours are aggressive and others are more sportsmanlike. One of the reasons parents enrol their children into sports such as hockey, is that mainstream media and research repeatedly imply that participating in youth sport programs can be an effective method for promoting positive development, to build character (Coakley, 2004), to teach team effort, and to encourage fair play, all which contribute to sportsmanship (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006). Research has found that positive character building is not inherent to sport; however, it does provide an environment in which children are given the opportunity to display positive characteristics (Eitzen, 2003). While positive sport behaviour is most likely the norm in most youth sporting contexts, empirical evidence also suggests that aggressive behaviours occur at an alarming rate (Kavussanu, 2006; Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005). Given the social nature of sport, it presents players with the opportunity for lying, cheating, intimidating, and hurting other participants; in other words, behaving in a manner that can have harmful consequences for others. Unfortunately, the competitiveness in youth sport settings, in conjunction with the physical nature of sports, has paved the way for youth displaying negative behaviours. In particular, aggression has become common in youth sport settings (Colburn, 1986).

Aggressive behaviour is often cited in studies and media as being a natural by-product of the speed and physical component inherent within the game of hockey. This

could be due to the fact that hockey is played at a fast speed in an enclosed space and permits body contact; therefore, it is not startling that while playing this game hockey players are susceptible to committing aggressive acts (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1997). Studies on aggressive behaviour in sport have shown that players accept this behaviour as being part of the game and may even endorse such behaviours in certain situations, especially when the act is in retaliation or the score of the game is close (e.g., Conroy, Silva, Newcomer, Walker, & Johnson, 2001; Kavussanu, 2006). For example, if a player intentionally acts aggressively towards an opponent they may take responsibility for their behaviour if the act was unprovoked. However, if the act of aggression was committed in retaliation to an aggressive infraction by the opponent, the player may declare their actions were acceptable, because they were provoked. Studies have indicated that these justifications take place in sport and may influence the rate at which players' commit aggressive behaviour (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007).

According to Pascall (2000) media portrayals of negative behaviours displayed in hockey often focus on fighting. However, fighting for the most part is quickly and efficiently dealt with within the amateur ranks as players are given game misconducts and suspensions. More serious issues are the checking from behind, illegal stickwork, headshots, and the general abuse and antisocial behaviour in which players engage. These are the most prevalent and worrisome forms of violence in hockey (Pascall, 2000). Hockey Canada has begun recognizing the severity of these aggressive behaviours through the implementation of various programs in recent years. For instance, "Shared Respect Initiative", this program focuses on reducing hitting to the head and hitting from

behind by educating and encouraging more respect amongst all participants in the game. Another program, "Fair Play Initiative" focuses on reducing aggressive behaviours by enhancing communication between coaches, players and the referees (Hockey Canada, 2012).

In order to understand the occurrence of aggressive behaviour, research in this area has featured several prominent theoretical explanations. Arguments have been made that aggressive behaviour occurs either as a result of frustration (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939) or because it allows people to release their aggressive impulses in socially suitable ways (Freud, 1925). However, research has not supported either argument, that frustration always produced aggression (Miller, 1941), or the notion of catharsis (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). In fact, research suggests that aggressive behaviour is learned and that aggression tends to breed more aggression rather than serve as a catharsis for its release (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989).

The social learning theory suggests that individuals learn behaviour and will continue to perform this behaviour if they believe it will bring them a reward (e.g., operant conditioning), either because they have been rewarded by performing this behaviour in the past (e.g., the law of effect) or they have seen others being rewarded for performing this behaviour (e.g., vicarious learning) (Widmeyer, Dorsch, Bray, & McGuire, 2002a). Another theory that is useful when examining behaviour is Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. A key component in this theory is moral disengagement, which refers to eight psychosocial mechanisms that permit humans cognitively to reinterpret transgressive actions into benign or praiseworthy

acts. These mechanisms decrease or eradicate evaluative self-reactions, thus lessening consequent constraints on future transgressive behaviour.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were (a) to investigate minor league hockey players' perceptions of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours, (b) to gain an understanding of hockey players' experiences as well as the underlying reasons for aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours, and (c) to gain insight into youth hockey players' perceptions of how aggression can be decreased and how sportsmanship can be increased in minor hockey. While minor hockey consists of male and female hockey players, the focus of this study is on male players as they comprise the majority of youth players.

In order to understand the display of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours in youth hockey better, one-on-one interviews were conducted. In-depth interviews were used to investigate the topic in depth and in detail (Yin, 2009). The qualitative methodology provided flexibility and freedom to explore experiences and overall perceptions of players pertaining to aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours. The participants were six male hockey players between the ages of 12 and 14. These participants were interviewed regarding their perceptions of aggression and sportsmanship and their experiences of aggressive and sportsmanlike acts.

Significance of the Study

Aggression has become a progressively more serious issue in youth hockey and creating environments that promote sportsmanship may assist to battle the inclination

towards aggressive behaviour. Previous sports sciences research has indicated that increasing positive behaviour and decreasing negative behaviour in a youth sport environment is possible. (e.g., Arthur-Banning, Paisley, & Wells, 2007; Wells, Ellis, Arthur-Banning, & Roark, 2006). The results of the current study could assist in developing a better understanding of the reasons and/or motives underlying players' aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviour.

Limitations

As with any study, these findings should be considered in light of study limitations. One of the limitations was participants had to recreate past experiences which may have generated distortions from what actually occurred, despite the methodological precautions utilized (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). Moreover, participants were interviewed about a potentially sensitive topic and may have given socially desirable answers. In order to address this in future research, observational data could be added to assess the consistency of different data sources (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Furthermore, due to the limited sample size, generalizability of the findings may be questioned. Future research should examine a broader range of participant, including males and females, various age groups, and levels of calibre. This would provide a broader understanding of hockey players' perceptions of aggression and sportsmanlike behaviours in minor hockey.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is categorized into six chapters. The main focus of each of the six chapters is research on aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours. Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the topic, the study objectives, the study significance, the research

question, and operational definitions. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of relevant current and past research that has investigated the topic of aggressive and/or sportsmanlike behaviour within a sporting environment, specifically, hockey. Chapter 3 provides a road map of the methodology. In particular, recruitment procedures are discussed, along with a detailed description of the method of and measures used for data collection. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the data collected. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, which includes links to current and past research. The final chapter provides implications and recommendations based on the findings and additionally discussed are the possibilities for future research that will add to the understanding of aggression and sportsmanlike behaviours in minor hockey.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves as a review of the literature for this thesis. Specifically, past and current literature on the following topics are examined: (a) aggression and sportsmanship are defined in order to provide an understanding of the broad concepts; (b) a brief history of aggression in Canadian hockey is provided; (c) a theoretical framework is provided, as it aids in the understanding why individuals may act aggressively or in a sportsmanlike manner; (d) an overview of the sources of aggressive behaviour in minor hockey players is provided. This details how coaches, parents, teammates, media and the game itself can impact players' aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviour; and (e) there is a discussion regarding aggression in the game, in particular how hockey associations throughout the ranks are attempting to make the game safer for players by implementing new rules and sportsmanship programs. An overview of the new rules and programs is provided.

Aggression

Aggressive behaviours are overt physical or verbal actions that are intended to cause psychological or physical harm to another individual (Silva, 1980). Aggressive behaviour has historically been further divided into two types of aggression: instrumental aggression and hostile aggression (Silva, 1979). With both forms of aggression, the intent is to harm. However, there is a distinction in terms of the objective of the act. The purpose of instrumental aggression is to act as a means to an end. In this case, the intentionally harmful behaviour is employed in order to achieve some external goal beyond simply harming the individual on the receiving end. An example of instrumental

aggression in hockey is a player who intentionally high sticks or elbows an opposing player while in pursuit of scoring a game-winning goal or while attempting to stop another player from scoring. This type of injury is impersonal and intended to restrict the efficiency of the opposing player (Russell, 1993). Whereas, the sole purpose of hostile aggression is to injure another person deliberately. The objective is to make the other individual endure physical and/or psychological pain (Cox, 1990). Hostile aggression serves simply as an end rather than as a means to an end.

However, it has been claimed that all aggressive behaviours in sport are instrumental and conducted with some end in mind (Smith, 1983). Consequently, Smith concludes that not only is differentiating between the two types of aggression invaluable, it is also difficult to separate the two empirically where there may be multiple conclusions for a particular aggressive behaviour. Bushman and Anderson (2001) suggested that with instrumental and hostile aggression there is a likelihood of numerous motives for a particular aggressive behaviour and vehemently disputed that the time has come to, “pull the plug and allow the hostile-instrumental aggression dichotomy a dignified death” (Bushman & Anderson, 2001, p. 273). More recently, several studies examining aggressive behaviour in sport have stopped differentiating between the two types of aggression and have begun to focus their attention on encompassing all behaviours that possess the “intent to cause harm” (Gee, 2010, p. 9). This approach is also employed in the current study.

The definition of aggression employed in this study is based upon Widmeyer and Birch’s (1984) study. Widmeyer and Birch conducted semi-structured interviews with 44

professional and semi-professional players on what penalties should be labelled as aggressive. They found that when players committed certain acts of aggression, their intent at least 80% of the time was to injure. These infractions are charging, boarding, kneeing, elbowing, roughing, fighting, high sticking, slashing, cross checking, butt ending, spearing, instigating, hitting from behind, head butting, unsportsmanlike conduct, and check to the head. This list of infractions has frequently been used when studying sport and has helped to ensure consistency between studies focused on aggressive behaviour in hockey (Gee, 2010). For the purposes of this research, aggressive behaviour is defined as committing one of the sixteen infractions list above.

Sportsmanship

While there has been forward movement in research on sportsmanship, it has been weighed down by major problems, especially the lack of a universally accepted definition (Weiss & Bredemeier, 1986). A multitude of diverse definitions have been suggested without consensus, which in turns leads to multiple interpretations. The following are examples of sportsmanship definitions.

Sportsmanship has often been conceptualized as an enduring and reasonably constant characteristic or temperament. The term sportsmanship describes the ways in which individuals are typically expected to act in sport environments. Generally, sportsmanship entails athletes striving for success, whilst upholding a commitment to being fair, honest, and respectful and to abiding by the rules, all of which equate to being ethical or moral (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Sportsmanship rules honour the spirit and letter of the game and guide the ethical behaviour of athletes.

For the purposes of this research the following definition of sportsmanship is used. Vallerand, Briere, Blanchard, and Provencher (1997) proposed a social-psychological approach to sportsmanship. They suggested that personal and social issues play a role in an individual's sportsmanlike behaviour. The structure of the sporting event has a role in sportsmanlike behaviours which involves the competitive level of the contest. Sportsmanship is learned through the words and actions of coaches, parents, and teammates. In an endeavour to produce a much required conceptual definition, Vallerand and several colleagues (Vallerand, Briere, et al., 1997; Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Briere, & Pelletier, 1996; Vallerand & Losier, 1994) developed a multidimensional definition of sportsmanship which encompasses the essence of sportsmanlike behaviour and orientations. Vallerand et al. (1997) proposed that sportsmanship be defined by five dimensions:

1. Respect and concern for one's full commitment to participation (e.g., showing up on time, acknowledging one's mistakes, and working on improving);
2. Respect and concern for rules and officials (e.g., respecting the referee's decisions);
3. Respect and concern for social conventions (e.g., shaking hands, acknowledging the good performance of an opponent);
4. Respect and concern for the opponent (e.g., lending one's equipment to the opponent, looking after the wellbeing of an of injured opponent); and

5. Avoiding a negative approach towards participation (e.g., not taking a win-at-all-costs approach, not showing anger after a mistake, and not competing for the sole purpose of individual gain; Vallerand et al., 1997; Vallerand et al., 1996).

Canadian Style Hockey

Aggression in hockey is not a new phenomenon, especially hockey in Canada. However, aggression was not always a part of hockey. According to Stark (2001), Canadian men's hockey was historically linked with a "gentlemanly" masculinity, meaning "crowd pleasing offense. . . [and] 'skating and stick-handling elegance'" (p. 3). Stark argued that there was a correlation between the facts that initially international hockey was played by amateur players and that there was less aggression displayed in hockey. This argument was based on the thought that during that time, amateur players wanted to replicate a particular manner of polished masculinity to the international community. This well-mannered identity of Canadian men's hockey was rampant until the late 1940s and early 1950s. At this point, teams from Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Finland, and the Soviet Union became more skilled and international hockey became more competitive. With the competition getting stronger, Team Canada started to lose to teams it had previously won against with ease. In order to compete with these teams filled with professional players, Team Canada started to play a more aggressive and violent style of hockey.

One of the most identifiably violent and aggressive displays in Canadian hockey was the 1972 Canada-Russia hockey series or the Summit Series as it is generally known. Team Canada's roster was filled with the best professional NHL players Canada had to

offer. At the conclusion of this eight-game series, in which Team Canada narrowly beat the USSR national team, Canadian style hockey became known as a game primarily focused on aggressive and at times excessively violent behaviour (Allain, 2008). An example of this violent behaviour includes an infamous episode that occurred during game six of the series. Reportedly at the request of assistant coach John Ferguson, Bobby Clarke slashed one of the USSR's star players, Valery Kharmalov, fracturing his ankle and keeping him out of game seven. Clarke only received a penalty for his actions. Questioned about the incident years later, Clarke said "If I hadn't learned to lay a two-hander once in a while, I'd never have left Flin Flon" (Clarke, as cited in Bernstein, 2006, p. 1).

Today, even though hockey players in Europe and North America are taught the game based on similar rules, the actual style of play by the Europeans is believed to vary considerably from the manner in which Canadians play the game. European hockey, as it is commonly known, is considered to be a game which focuses on passing and skating, while the primary focus of the Canadian game is presumed to be aggression and hard-hitting (Allain, 2008). This Canadian style of hockey can be seen throughout the hockey ranks in Canada and Canadian players are recognized throughout the world as aggressive (Allain, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Many theoretical frameworks have been developed while endeavouring to illustrate the occurrence of aggression and sportsmanship in sports. These theories include instinct theory, the frustration-aggression hypothesis, social cognitive theory, and

social learning theory. The first two are discussed briefly, whereas the last two are discussed in depth, as they are the predominant theories by which this study is guided. Both social cognitive theory and social learning theory offer the necessary theoretical framework which may provide significant insight into hockey players' perceptions and experiences of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours.

Instinct Theory

One of the earliest explanations of why humans engage in aggressive behaviour was proposed by Freud (1925). Freud believed aggression was an innate instinct that could not be eliminated, but instead would amass until it must be expressed. An individual can express this aggression through either attacking another living being or be displaced through catharsis, in which aggression is released or "blown off" in ways that are socially suitable, such as sport. Therefore, for instinct theory, sport and exercise play a very important role in society, in that they allow individuals to release their aggressive impulses in socially acceptable means (Weinberg & Gould, 1995).

Due to the lack of evidence to validate the idea of catharsis, instinct theory has many critics and support is currently almost nonexistent (Coakley, 1990; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). In fact research suggests that sport may produce rather than release aggression (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989).

Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

The frustration-aggression hypothesis was originally proposed by Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sears (1939), who rejected Freud's notion of an aggressive instinct and instead linked aggressive behaviour to motivational antecedents, especially

frustration (Johnson, 1972). Dollard et al. hypothesised that even though human beings have an inherent aggressive drive, aggressive behaviour is drawn out by frustration; in other words, when individuals are frustrated, they react by action aggressively. Originally, it was hypothesized that all aggression was due to frustration and that frustration always led to aggression.

Due to its simplistic and narrow view of aggression, this view has long been abandoned (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1993). Miller (1941) proposed that frustration does not always turn into aggression. The hypothesis underwent another revision when Berkowitz (1969) proposed that frustration only increases one's predisposition toward aggression, rather than directly leading to it. Even though this was an improvement to the hypothesis, many scholars were unwilling to accept the theory because of its implication of an innate mechanism being the cause of the frustration-anger link (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1993).

Social Cognitive Theory

A valuable theoretical framework for understanding aggressive behaviour in sport is Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. According to Bandura, during the development of moral agency, humans construct a criterion of what is right and wrong which acts as a guide for their behaviour. During this self-regulatory stage, individuals examine their behaviour and the circumstances in which it transpires, they judge and compare this behaviour to their moral standards and perceived situations, and adjust their behaviours by the consequences they implement on themselves (Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011). For instance, humans experience guilt when their behaviours go against

their moral standards. Consequently, people tend to abstain from acting in a manner that will lead to negative affect. However, individuals are capable of defying their moral standards and not experience affective self-sanction through the discriminatory use of eight psychosocial mechanisms, jointly called mechanisms of moral disengagement. These mechanisms allow individuals to justify their actions without experiencing negative affect (e.g., guilt), thus reducing constraints on future negative behaviour.

The moral disengagement mechanisms have been categorized into four sets. The first set cognitively reconstructs the culpable act; therefore, it is not seen as being immoral. This comprises moral justification, euphemistic labelling, and advantageous comparison (Bandura, 1999). By using the mechanism of moral justification, culpable behaviour is made socially and personally acceptable by depicting it as serving moral or socially commendable causes (Bandura, 1999); an example in hockey is, fighting in order to protect a teammate. Euphemistic labelling is using words that mask guilty actions as benign and not harmful (Bandura, 1999). This mechanism refers to the perceptive use of language to cognitively disguise blameworthy acts as less harmful. Accordingly, euphemistic language makes culpable activities acceptable or even confers a highly regarded rank upon them. For example, in hockey, players may talk of “letting off steam” to refer to aggressive acts (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007). Advantageous comparison entails measuring acts that are not as condemnable (e.g., trash talking) with acts that are more condemnable (e.g., physical violence) in order to make the former seem inconsequential (Bandura, 1999).

The second set of mechanisms concerns an individual's accountability for their action, and consists of displacement and diffusion of responsibility (Bandura, 1999). In hockey, displacement of responsibility takes place when players view aggressive acts as caused by the demands of authorities rather than being personally accountable for them. These demands may include pressure by the coaches or decisions made by the referees. Diffusion of responsibility occurs when a player obscures the link between the conduct and its consequences. An example of this is when players place blame for their culpable behaviour onto their teammates, which can occur when teammates are part of the decision-making process about rule violating behaviours and practices.

The third set entails disregard for distorting of the consequences of an action (Bandura, 1999), for instance, when players rebuff the gravity of the opponents' injuries (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007). When players choose to act in harmful ways for social incentives or for personal gain, they may evade recognizing the damage their actions caused or they may lessen it. Studies on aggression indicate that it is less probable that humans continue injurious behaviour if the victims suffering is apparent (Milgram, 1974). Therefore, if a player is able to minimize or avoid the harm done, he or she will be more likely to continue to act in harmful ways. In hockey, distortion of consequences takes place when players deny or evade the seriousness of the harm they have inflicted.

The final set of disengagement practices includes stripping the victims of their human qualities as it can be difficult to act in harmful ways towards humanized people without risking distress to oneself and self-condemnation (Bandura, 1999). Once dehumanized, these individuals cease to be viewed as people with hopes, feelings, and

concerns but instead as non-human entities. The player may even portray her or his opponents as “savages” who lack feelings. This set also entails attribution of blame, which happens when individuals cast the blame elsewhere and view themselves as innocent victims (Bandura, 1999). For instance, this occurs when players place the blame onto the injured party for their own behaviour (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007).

Aggressive behaviour can have harmful outcomes (e.g., injuries) and players may focus their attention on various explanations or justifications for these behaviours. Additionally, the desire to explain the motives for their conduct may be more prominent when the aggressive conduct is perceived as unacceptable (Widmeyer, Dorsch, Bray, & McGuire, 2002b). For example, humans could rationalize their aggressive behaviours to uncontrollable reactions such as anger or frustrations, which may justify the behaviour. Tractlet et al. (2009) concluded that soccer players utilized particular justifications (e.g., “it was out of my control”) more often for hostile than instrumental aggressive acts. Therefore, the nature of behaviour (cheating, instrumental aggression, or hostile aggression) that players partake in may impact the rate at which they use justifications for their aggressive actions. Boardley and Kavussanu (2007) also found that team sport athletes engaged in moral disengagement and that this was positively associated to their reported frequency of antisocial behaviours toward opponents. These findings were replicated by Boardley and Kavussanu (2009), who found that in hockey and net ball moral disengagement was a predictor of antisocial behaviour toward opponents and teammates.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory was originally developed to explain the acquisition of aggressive behaviour in humans (Bandura & Huston, 1961). In order to do so, within a controlled laboratory setting, Bandura studied children while they watched adult models commit violent acts. Bandura and Huston (1961) placed a blow up doll, which they called a "Bobo Doll," in an empty room and instructed the child's parent to interact with the doll in a very specific manner (e.g., aggressive, nurturing). The parent was also instructed to use novel behaviour patterns so that any replication of the behaviour by the child could be explained as "newly acquired." The parent was then rewarded or punished by the experimenter in front of the child. The child was subsequently placed in the exact same room with the Bobo Doll and observed. Children who were in the non-aggressive group portrayed almost no signs of aggression. Children who had viewed the aggressive models emulated their behaviour and depicted aggressive behaviour. Children who viewed the aggressive models depicted physical and verbal aggression. Of all children, 88% duplicated the particular aggressive behaviour that the adult had carried out, and not just general aggression. This research demonstrated that children model behaviours that they witness their parents being rewarded for exhibiting, while avoiding those associated with punishment. This phenomenon was subsequently named "vicarious learning."

Bandura (1973) believed that people aggress because they have learned that it is profitable to do so. In other words, aggressive behaviour is not innate (i.e., pre-programmed); rather it is learned. Bandura theorised that two types of social interaction can lead to the development of aggressive behaviours: The first method is through

modelling, which suggests that behaviour can be learned vicariously from models (e.g., parents, teammates, coaches, professional hockey players) in an individual's environment. The second method is learning, or acquiring a new response as a result of reinforcement. When a behaviour is performed and then positively reinforced, the behaviour is strengthened, whereas a response that causes an unrewarding or punishing effect will be discarded. Reinforcement can be either positive or aversive, in the former it is seen in the form of explicit or implicit approval and material reward. In the latter, it is seen in the form of disapproval, criticism, or punishment.

Within the game of hockey, several factors can influence the presence or absence of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours. The behaviours modelled by coaches, spectators, parents, and teammates might all influence a player's current and future actions and beliefs (i.e., a coach shaking hands with the opposing coach might motivate a player to shake hands with an opposing player). Simply being involved in hockey will not ensure that participants will learn sportsmanlike behaviours (Guivernau & Duda, 2002). Shields and Bredemeier (1995) suggested instead that it is the interactions and social bonding that are cultivated by the sport experience that will decide the development of sportsmanship.

Overall, social learning theory has received a considerable amount of empirical research establishing a link between the environment and the individual. In relation to other theories, the social learning theory receives considerable support from research as the most feasible explanation for a significant amount of the aggression and violence pervading modern sport today, particularly at higher competitive levels (Luxbacher,

1986). Bandura (1973) provided significant support for the social learning theory's views on aggression as a learned response pattern, influenced by modelling and reinforcement. Reinforcement for aggressive acts in hockey stems from various sources, one being the immediate reference group of the player, especially teammates, coaches, and parents. Moreover, exposure to mass media has also been shown to influence an individual's behaviour and perceptions. Therefore, these sources, coaches, teammates, parents, and media/NHL (Terry & Jackson, 1985) are discussed further in the next section.

Sources of Aggression in Hockey

Many factors come into play when considering the cause of aggression in hockey. Some of the most prevalent, which are discussed next, are social influences (coaches, parents, teammates, and media) and the nature of the game (rules of the game).

Social Influences

Coaches. Research indicates that the coach is possibly the most important person influencing the amount of aggression or sportsmanlike behaviour that an athlete engages in within a competitive sport context (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010; Cratty, 1989; Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003). Trudel, Guertin, Bernard, Boileau, and Marcotte (1991) conducted a study concerning the behaviour of hockey coaches as reinforcers. The purpose of their research was to discover if, during games, the behaviour of Bantam level hockey coaches encouraged players to be rough and violate the rules of the game. The investigators viewed 27 games utilizing a split-screen technique in order to analyze coaches' and players' behaviours simultaneously. Analysis of the tapes revealed that the coaches often urged their players to apply more intensity

into their physical contacts (legal body checking), but more frequently coaches promoted players to control their behaviour and keep out of the penalty box. Generally, they found that the coaches showed minimal behaviour that promoted aggressive behaviour from the players (Trudel et al., 1991).

Another study observing Bantam coaches' behaviour found that only 2% of all coaching behaviours were encouraging of aggression or in violation of the rules (Côté, Trudel, Bernard, Boileau, & Marcotte, 1993). A more recent study by Arthur-Banning, Paisley, and Wells (2007) examined the positive (e.g., applauding the opposing team and checking on hurt player) and negative (e.g., taunting opponents, screaming at referees, and extreme aggression) behaviours of coaches and athletes in 142 basketball games. Participants included eight- to 12-year-old athletes and their coaches. Results indicated that not only did coaches display more positive behaviours than negative behaviours, but also positive sportsmanlike behaviours by coaches predicted positive player behaviours. In other words, the likelihood that players would act positively was higher if their coaches modelled this behaviour. This research was conducted in a recreational league; therefore, players may not face the same pressures (i.e., to win) than in situations of higher levels of competition (Arthur-Banning et al., 2007).

Although the above-mentioned findings indicate that some coaches model positive behaviour, other studies indicate that other coaches may be encouraging aggressive behaviour. In a study by Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power (2005), athletes stated that coaches had "encouraged cheating or hurting an opponent to help their team win" and "encouraged getting back at an opponent who plays dirty" (p. 47). These coaching

behaviours can potentially encourage moral disengagement, which can happen, in part, when individuals see their behaviour as being a result of the orders of others (Bandura, 1991). Players who view their coaches behaving in a manner similar to those behaviours identified by Shields et al. may opt to morally disengage by displacing responsibility for their behaviour onto their coach, morally justifying wrongdoings in search of a cherished social outcome (i.e., to help the team win), or by placing blame onto the victim in reaction to being provoked (see Bandura, 1991). Therefore, a coach's conduct may impact players' moral disengagement.

Stornes and Bru (2002) examined sportsmanship among 440 male adolescent handball players aged 14 to 16. It was found that players' perceptions of coaches' behaviour style was positively and significantly connected with players' displays of negative (e.g., aggression) and positive (e.g., respect for opponents and officials) aspects of sportsmanship. Players' perceptions of autocratic behaviour (e.g., "My coach speaks in a way that does not encourage players to ask questions") and democratic behaviour (e.g., "my coach allows players to take part in decisions") were significantly linked with scores for the negative and positive dimensions of sportsmanship. These results indicated that players' views of their coaches' behaviours are related to players' sportsmanship orientations.

Shields et al. (2005) investigated young athletes' perceptions of the frequency of their coaches' ethically relevant behaviours. Participants included 803 young athletes between the ages of nine and 15 from various sports and 61 of their coaches. The study investigated cheating, aggression, and disrespect as well as positive sportsmanship.

Results indicated that 48% of youth (compared to 42% of coaches) reported that the coach angrily argued with a sport official and 35% of youth (compared to 36% of coaches) indicated that the coach had angrily yelled at a player for making a mistake. Interestingly, 26% of youth, but only 10% of coaches, reported that the coach encouraged players to “get back” at an opponent. The athletes reported problematic coaching behaviour more frequently than the coaches did. This may be due to the coaches’ self-reports being biased by social desirability factors. However, even the youth, who typically reported liking their coaches, may have likewise been motivated to underreport negative coaching behaviour. It may also be that coaches who act in less desirable ways are less likely to participate in a voluntary survey of coaching behaviours.

Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, and Power (2007) conducted a study which included 676 male and female participants in the fifth through eighth grades. This study examined the perceptions of athletes playing soccer, baseball/softball, basketball, football, hockey, or lacrosse. The athletes completed a questionnaire involving: poor sportsmanship behaviours and attitudes, perceptions of the poor sportsmanship behaviours of coaches and spectators, team sportsmanship norms, and the sportsmanship norms of coaches and parents. The findings were consistent with previous research (Stephens, 2000, 2001; Stephens, Bredemeier, & Shields, 1997; Stornes, 2001; Stuart & Ebbeck, 1995), in that perceptions of the coach were found to be associated with whether youth sport participants behaved in appropriate ways. Concurring with the cliché “actions speak louder than words,” the findings suggested that perhaps it is the coaches’ conduct, as opposed to their expressed attitude, that largely impacts athletes. Therefore, if the coach

would like to be a positive influential source, it might be necessary for him or her to uphold high standards and ethical conduct.

Parents. Unfortunately, very little research has examined parental influence on aggressive behaviour within sport (Gee, 2010). Guivernau and Duda (2002) found that players' perceptions of parental approval for engaging in aggressive behaviours (e.g., attempting to hurt an opponent) was correlated to athletes' views on suitable behaviour within sports. A study by Arthur-Banning et al. (2007) found that positive sportsmanship behaviours by spectators (who were mainly parents) predicted positive player behaviours. This association implies that throughout every game, each time a spectator/parent displayed four positive sportsmanship behaviours, there was a related increase in one positive behaviour by a player. Similar to that of positive sportsmanship, negative spectator behaviour was also an important predictor of negative player behaviours.

Teammates. Research indicates that a player's teammates are also a very influential factor with respect to aggressive behaviour in hockey (Clark, Vaz, Vetere, & Ward, 1978). Stephens and Kavanagh (2003) examined youth hockey players' self-described tendencies to act aggressively towards an opponent. Participants were 330 male hockey players whose ages ranged from nine to 18 and had an average of eight seasons of sport experience. The results of the study indicated that players' perceptions of their teammates' tendency to behave in an aggressive manner was the strongest predictor of their own likelihood to aggress. These findings support previous research using youth sport participants in contact sports (Stephens, 2000, 2001)

Additionally, Vaz and Clarke (1982) conducted interviews with youth hockey players and found that a player who backed away from an altercation or fight was given less respect by teammates. Professional hockey players also indicated that teammates who do not stand up for and protect another teammate by fighting or engage in other aggressive conduct are not afforded the same respect as a teammate that would engage in these behaviours (Lauer, 1998).

Media and the NHL. The media has a powerful influence on the public, especially upon youth. Young hockey players watch their role models on television and the Internet and want to emulate them. This modelling includes young players practicing breakaway moves like Sidney Crosby or taking a slap shot like Sami Salo. However, young players do not stop at mimicking only the positive aspects of professional hockey. Smith's (1983) study of Toronto youth hockey players found that players learn aggressive behaviours from watching professional hockey. Smith's participants were asked, "Have you ever learned how to hit another player illegally in any way from watching professional hockey?" Of the 604 participants fifty-six percent indicated that they had learned how to hit illegally by watching professional hockey. Smith also questioned the participants on which illegal behaviours they had learned. Learning the behaviour, however, does not automatically translate to doing. The participants were consequently asked, "How many times during this season have you actually hit another player this way?" Two hundred and twenty-two stated "at least once or twice," and 90 of these, mainly elite amateurs, said "five times or more." Smith cross-referenced these verbal responses with players' penalty statistics in order to assess whether or not athletes overtly

displayed these behaviours. Official game records confirmed the players' responses; players who responded they engaged in such behaviour took considerably more penalties than those individuals who stated they did not.

The Nature of the Game

Hockey is one of the few areas of our lives where aggression is allowed to flourish and toughness and willingness to pay the price are celebrated (Robinson, 1998). Hockey players realize that regardless of how skilled they are at scoring or passing, they have limited control of their futures in hockey.

As there are no guarantees of proceeding through the hockey ranks, players hold the belief that they must pursue a path that will get them noticed, therefore bringing them closer to achieving their hockey dreams (Robinson, 1998). While some hockey players may have extraordinary talent for scoring, most young hockey players rely on other means to get noticed on the ice. This translates to being overly aggressive, playing dirty, and being eager to fight in order to impress higher level coaches and scouts (Robinson, 1998). However, most young players do not identify their behaviour as being aggressive, but rather as a natural and necessary part of their overall success in hockey (Sheldon & Aimar, 2001).

Research has indicated that competition plays an integral role in the level of aggression. Loughhead and Leith (2001) conducted a study of youth hockey players' and coaches' perceptions on the prevalence of aggression. They found that as players proceed upward through the minor hockey ranks, they develop a more favourable view towards aggressive behaviour and that there is an increase in the number of aggressive acts.

Overall, both players and coaches perceived certain types of aggressive acts as being, at times, part of the game. Consistent with these findings is a study by Visek and Watson (2005) who examined whether the perceived legitimacy of aggressive behaviour in hockey players changed as their level of competitive play increased. The findings indicated that players accepted that aggression was a part of the game and that this became more prevalent as the levels of competition increased.

Player Safety

There is a duty of those involved in hockey to protect players from the aggressive acts of other players. The NHL and Hockey Canada are attempting to do this and have taken some steps and made recent changes to the rules of the game. Hockey Canada has also initiated programs to promote sportsmanship.

Rule Changes

The NHL and Hockey Canada are attempting to make hockey safer for professional and minor hockey league players. However, these changes have not come without opposition. During the blind-side hits debate in 2009, Mike Milbury used his segment on *Hockey Night in Canada* to weep for the “pansification” of hockey (CBC, 2009). A word he coined to emphasize his view that the game was losing its toughness. In essence, Milbury’s comment reflects the old-time hockey attitude made famous by Conn Smythe when he said “if you can’t beat them in the alley, you can’t beat them on the ice” (McFarlane, 1997, p. 66).

The NHL’s Board of Governors approved changes to the wording of Rules 41 and 48 on June 21, 2011. Rule 48 previously afforded the on-ice referees with the authority

to give a major penalty for any intentional hit to the head from the lateral or blind side, however, the re-written rule does not include the words lateral or blind side and the major penalty stipulation has been replaced by the minor penalty provision (NHL, 2012). In other words, a player coming from any direction that intentionally aims for the head and makes it a primary point of contact will be given a two-minute penalty under Rule 48. He or she will also be, as is the case with all two-minute penalties or non-calls, subject to additional punishment (i.e., suspension). Additionally, Rule 41, which entails boarding, was also changed to read, "A boarding penalty shall be imposed on any player who checks or pushes a defenceless opponent in such a manner that causes the opponent to hit or impact the boards violently or dangerously" (NHL, 2012, para. 1). The words "pushes" and "defenceless" were not incorporated in the past the definition of the boarding rule. Defenceless has now been replaced the word vulnerable. This change took the burden off the violence of the hit itself, as the impact is more about the collision with the boards.

After the NHL changed its rules, Hockey Canada amended its head contact rule to institute a complete ban on head contact across all levels of minor hockey starting with the 2011-2012 minor hockey season. Rule 6.5 states that

a minor penalty shall be assessed to any player who accidentally contacts an opponent in the head, face or neck. . . [and] a double minor penalty or major and game misconduct. . . shall be assessed to any player who intentionally contacts an opponent in the head, face, or neck and. . . a match penalty shall be assessed any player who injures an opponent under this rule and a match penalty shall be

assessed any player who deliberately attempts to injure or deliberately injures an opponent under this rule. (Hockey Canada, 2011, para. 4)

While this is a good start for the NHL and Hockey Canada in attempting to reduce the level and frequency of aggression in hockey, more still needs to be done. Vancouver Canucks' Daniel Sedin summed up the matter rather sufficiently,

Players, not suspensions, can make the biggest difference when it comes to reducing head shots. It's a different game now than before the rule changes (i.e., elimination of two line off-side pass). It's a faster game and stuff (is) going to happen. I still think it's up to the players. The suspension is not going to solve the problem. (Stewart, 2012, para. 28)

Sportsmanship Programs

As Sedin suggested, it is the players not suspensions that will make the difference in decreasing aggressiveness in the game. Vaz (1979) conducted a study that included 2000 hockey players aged seven to 18 years old. He concluded that increasing the number of normative rules (fighting, spearing, high sticking, and so forth) and the severity of penalties will not reduce the number of infractions if such conduct is an inherent part of the system. According to Vaz, if sportsmanship can be incorporated into the structure of hockey, then intimidation, violence, and cheating can be eliminated. If games are being won through rule infractions, intimidation, and violence, why cannot sportsmanship be used to accomplish the same thing?

Creating environments that promote sportsmanship may assist in combating overt aggressive acts. There is a growing trend in minor hockey to not only educate young

players about sportsmanship, but also to also reward players for it. The Fair Play System is a system piloted in some Canadian minor hockey leagues that rewards players and teams with lower penalty minutes while punishing players and teams with higher penalty minutes. Advocates claim that the system results in cleaner play and a significant decrease in the amount of player injuries. With hockey's emphasis on "doing anything for the team," a player might think twice about throwing an elbow into an opponent's jaw if he or she knows that he or she might be hurting his or her team.

In Closing

Aggression and/or sportsmanship can be learned and reinforced in many various ways. Numerous sources rather than a single one can influence such behaviours, including parents, coaches, teammates, media, and the hockey environment. This means that influential people in the environment must recognize that they have the potential to impact young athletes either negatively or positively through their own attitudes and behaviours. Individuals involved in hockey should make every effort to demonstrate good sportsmanship at sporting events, as well as outside of the sporting environments, in order to make sure this impact is a positive one (Stuart & Ebbeck, 1995). Young players require positive, suitable, and constructive role models to teach and reinforce sportsmanship.

To conclude, the current study investigates minor hockey players' experiences and perceptions of aggression and sportsmanlike behaviour in hockey. The research questions guiding this research are listed below and the methods used to obtain this data are presented in the next chapter.

Research Questions

1. What are minor hockey players' experiences of aggressive behaviour?
2. What are minor hockey players' perceptions of aggressive behaviour?
3. What are minor hockey players' experiences of sportsmanlike behaviours?
4. What are minor hockey players' perceptions of sportsmanlike behaviour?
5. What are minor hockey players' beliefs of how aggression can be decreased and how sportsmanship can be increased in minor hockey?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes an explanation of the qualitative methodology employed in the current study. It includes a description of the participants, data collection, data analysis, and the methods for ensuring trustworthiness.

Participants

The participants for this study were six male minor league hockey players who had either just completed (two to three months prior) their first or second year Peewee (12 years old) or first or second year Bantam (13-14 years old). Four players had played at the A2 or A3 level (rep teams) and two had played on house teams. All participants played for organizations in a mid-sized Canadian city (including surrounding cities). Table 1 presents players' profile information.

A purposeful sample of six male hockey players was selected. The selection was based upon the following criteria:

The player must be male and between the ages of 12 and 14.

The player must have been playing competitive hockey for a minimum of three years.

The hockey associations in a mid-sized Canadian city and its environs were contacted via email, and invited to participate in this study (see Appendix A). The contact email asked interested organizations to forward the email to parents and/or players within their association on behalf of the researcher. The email explained the purpose of the research and criteria for participation, and asked interested parties to contact me directly. Word-of-mouth was also employed as a recruiting channel by asking

parents and/or players who received the initial email to forward that email to players or parents who fit the criteria for the study, and who might have an interest in participating.

Once contact was made with the parents via email or telephone, the study was briefly described to them (see Appendix B). They were then provided (via email or in person) with the consent form (see Appendix C) and assent form (see Appendix D), which described the study in more detail. If parents and the player agreed to participate once they had read through the forms, they were asked to contact me to set up an interview time. If the forms had not already been mailed back to me, I collected them at the time of the first interview.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Age	Classification	Level	Years of Play	Height	Weight	Position
Jason	14	2 nd yr. Bantam	A3	8	5'8"	120	Centre
Trevor	12	1 st yr. Peewee	A2	7	4'9"	75	Centre
Mike	13	1 st yr. Bantam	A3	8	4'9"	90	Defence
Danny	12	2 nd yr. Peewee	House	7	5'1"	125	Defence
Kevin	12	1 st yr. Peewee	A2	7	5'3"	120	Defence
Andrew	12	2 nd yr. Peewee	House	5	5'1"	95	Forward

Data Collection

I collected data primarily through interviews conducted in May and June of 2012, two and a half months after the 2011-2012 hockey season was over. Waiting to collect

the data until the season was over ensured that the Pee wee players had played a complete season with body checking and contact.

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted in order to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions, interpretations, and past experiences with regard to sportsmanship and aggressive behaviours in hockey. Interview guides were used in order to allow for flexibility and smooth flow throughout the interviews (see Appendix E). The location of the interviews varied from participant to participant, including, for example, a private room at the arena, a participant's home, and a teammate's home. One to four in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the six hockey players. Follow-ups as necessary were conducted via telephone interview. The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. In all, fifteen one-on-one interviews and five telephone follow-up interviews were conducted, all of which were audio recorded so that notes could be taken during interviews. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and each participant was given a pseudonym. The notes indicating participants' names and matching pseudonyms were kept separate from each other and all identifying information was kept in a secure place.

The interviews began with broad, general questions about hockey, which allowed the participants to get acquainted with the process and to converse in a relaxed atmosphere (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As the interview continued, often with the emergence of salient information, these promising leads were followed up with probes, direct cues, or references to earlier elements of the interview. At the end of each

interview, participants were reminded that they would receive a transcript of the interview for verification. Lastly, participants were thanked for their cooperation and sent an acknowledgement email.

Development of the Interview Guide

Open-ended interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework and the research questions. To further assist with the development of the interview guide, a pilot study (Yin, 2009) with two hockey players was conducted. These were a Peewee player (12 years old) and a Bantam player (14 years old). Three 20 to 30 minute interview sessions with each player were conducted. These interviews, along with a review of the literature, allowed for the development an interview guide. The interview questions focused primarily on gathering data concerning (a) the definitions of aggression and sportsmanship, (b) perceptions and experiences regarding aggression, (c) perceptions and experience regarding sportsmanship, and (d) beliefs concerning how to decrease aggression and increase sportsmanship.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place concurrently with data collection in order to realize data saturation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Concurrent data collection and data analysis also allows for emerging themes to be pursued while the researcher still has access to the participants (Gratton & Jones, 2004). In order to analyze data in this study, Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell's (1993) procedures for analyzing qualitative data were utilized. These procedures consist of four main steps: creating *meaning units*, *tags*, *properties*, and *categories*. Following this procedure, I systematically reviewed interview

transcripts several times and divided the interview text into meaningful pieces of information called “meaning units” (Tesch, 1990). Meaning units consist of words, sentences, or even entire paragraphs of raw data that concern one topic. Subsequently, I gave each meaning unit a descriptive name, referred to as a *tag*. Once tagged, meaning units were examined for similarities and I then grouped them together into larger categories called *properties* (Côté et al., 1993). I subsequently assigned names to these properties that reflect the common features of the meaning units (Côté et al., 1995). Lastly, I compared properties and organized them into higher order categories. For example, I combined the properties “influencing factors” and “level of aggression” to create one larger category labelled “nature of aggression in minor hockey.” I then analyzed data until theoretical saturation was achieved (Côté et al., 1995).

Trustworthiness

This study uses a number of methods to increase the probability of producing credible findings. These include member checks, peer review, triangulation, two pilot interviews, and use of quotes (Merriam, 2009).

Member checks enhance trustworthiness (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I emailed participants copies of their interview transcripts to authenticate that the information accurately reflected their perceptions and to verify my understanding of the information they provided. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider this process of member checking to be an essential step in establishing data credibility. Participants were asked to provide their written comments directly on the transcripts. However, participants made no changes; nor did they delete any information.

Peer review is another method that leads to increased accuracy for data, according to Miles and Huberman (1994). Several informal meetings were held with two colleagues possessing graduate degrees in a related field. One of these peers had also played minor hockey over a 12-year period. These discussions revolved around issues related to data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the findings.

In an attempt to increase the accuracy of the findings, quotes were utilized in order to provide a better understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences (Wolcott, 2009). According to Creswell and Clark (2007), using quotes is a way to bring participants' voices into the study. Numerous direct quotes were collected from the participants (presented in Chapter 4) in order to present a full and complete description of the thoughts and opinions of the participants.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter examines the findings of this study's qualitative analysis. In particular, it presents a detailed description of participants' perspectives and experiences with aggression and sportsmanlike behaviour in minor hockey. This chapter has five sections. The first concerns the aggressive nature of hockey and explores the definition of aggression, levels of aggression, body checking, influencing factors (as described in Chapter 2), and circumstances that trigger aggressive behaviour in minor hockey. The second recounts participants' experiences involving aggressive behaviour and provides a detailed illustration of incidents revealing such behaviour. The third is a discussion of sportsmanship in minor hockey and offers participants' views on the definition of sportsmanship, factors that influence sportsmanship, and the benefits of sportsmanship. The fourth, sportsmanship in personal experiences, describes two acts of sportsmanship, one involving giving and one involving receiving. This section presents a discussion of both acts. The fifth section concerns participants' views on how to decrease aggression and increase sportsmanship in minor hockey.

The Aggressive Nature of Minor Hockey

This analysis produced three categories involving the aggressive nature of minor hockey. These categories include participants' definitions of aggression and violence, the competitive nature of minor hockey, and influencing factors.

Participants' Definitions

Aggression. At the beginning of every initial interview, participants were asked what acts constituted aggressive behaviour in hockey. Participants mainly identified aggressive behaviour in terms of physicality, including:

- open ice hits, taking the body, and rubbing the guy out (Mike);
- playing physically and never shying away from taking or giving a hit, using your body to make a play (Jason);
- body checking (Andrew);
- playing physically but not cheaply (Trevor); and
- going into the corners and being really physical (Kevin).

Only one participant mentioned more than mere physicality, mentioning "being overly physical and trash talking" (Danny).

Violence. Participants were also asked what they perceived violent behaviour in hockey to be. Participants identified the following acts as violent behaviour:

- slashing, headshots, and cross checking (Mike);
- going outside of the rules and hitting dirty and using your body as more of a tool to injure than as a smart way of playing hockey (Jason);
- playing dirty, like cross checking (Trevor);
- trying to go in and do something really cheap and hurting a player really badly (Kevin);
- playing overly physically and cheaply, like elbowing somebody in the head (Danny);

- butt-ending, hitting from behind (Andrew).

Overall, participants identified aggressive behaviour as within the rules and “clean,” whereas they identified violence with being outside of the rules and “dirty.” In other words, the difference between aggression and violence was “for violence you get a penalty and for aggression you don’t” (Jason). The other main difference identified was the intent: “Violence is really wanting to injure somebody and aggression is just playing the game hard” (Trevor). The acts identified as violence were mainly in accordance with Widmeyer and Birch (1984) and Widmeyer and McGuire (1997), which identify penalties labelled as aggressive. After the participants had provided their definitions, they were provided a list of Widmeyer and Birch (1984) and Widmeyer and McGuire (1997) penalties and advised that for the purposes of this study, aggression included acts such as charging, boarding, kneeing, elbowing, roughing, fighting, high sticking, slashing, cross checking, butt ending, spearing, instigating, hitting from behind, head butting, unsportsmanlike conduct, checks to the head, and verbal aggression.

The Competitive Nature of Minor Hockey

Participants were of the opinion that aggression is a problem in minor hockey. Participants suggested that the main reason for aggression was competition. While all participants thought aggression at their respective levels should be decreased, some participants were also quick to add that other levels had more aggression when compared to their own. “Midget and Bantam have more aggression because they fight more” (Kevin). Two participants commented on the changes in the extent of aggression as a function of the competition level. “Rep and house are about equal, I’d say about 50-50

for aggression during regular season, but in tournaments rep is more aggressive. House is more for fun and rep there is more at stake. Rep is like a mini WHL or something”

(Danny). “All levels of rep are more violent because there is more competition”

(Andrew). While most participants believed that aggression increased as a function of competitive level, participants also held the view that competition impacted in a different way as well. Participants believed that players were aggressive in order to show coaches and scouts they could be tough and aggressive, which would give them a chance to play on better teams. As one second year Bantam participant commented,

Peewee was much more violent because this is the first year you can hit and some kids go crazy. It was the most aggressive level that I’ve played at. They just want to hit anything and everything. A kid on my team... the one that was six feet tall and whatever he gave three kids concussions because he wanted to show he could hit. Hitting is a skill you need to have. To take a hit and make a hit. If you can’t you’ll never play rep. Your very first tryout in peewee it doesn’t matter how good you are, if you can’t take a hit or give a hit they’ll cut you right away. You can have the nicest hands in the world but they’ll cut you right away... If you’re not ready for the tryouts you’re in trouble cause there’s kids out there that run and hit kids as hard as they possibly can so they can get seen... “Oh I can hit”. “And then they are like OK he can hit, he can make it to the next round.” (Jason)

Several participants were in agreement with the above statement, that players are aggressive to show coaches and scouts that they can be. One participant commented, “they’ll hit you, trying to hurt you cause they want to show that they can be tough

players... it's not just about you scoring goals but you have to show you're tough so you can be on good teams too" (Kevin).

Influencing Factors

This section discusses participants' overall perceptions of factors that are influential with respect to aggression in minor hockey. Conversations concerning influential factors were numerous. Throughout the interviews most participants brought up various external influential factors, namely parents, NHL, teammates, and coaches. Towards the end of the interviews, participants were asked to rank these four factors which were found in the literature to be influential (Bartholomew et al., 2010; Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Smith, 1983; Stephens, 2000). These factors were ranked one through four, with one being the most influential. Table 2 presents the participants' rankings of these influential factors, from most influential to least.

Table 2

Factors Influencing Aggression

Rank	Jason	Trevor	Danny	Mike	Kevin	Andrew
1	NHL	NHL	Parents	NHL	NHL	NHL
2	Teammates	Coaches	Coaches	Teammates	Teammates	Coaches
3	Coaches	Teammates	NHL	Coaches	Coaches	Teammates
4	Parents	Parents	Teammates	Parents	Parents	Parents

Most of the participants thought that aggression in minor hockey was a learned behaviour and the most influential source of this learned behaviour is the NHL. "Every

player watches hockey and wants to be just like them [NHL players]. When players see a player make it to the NHL because he can fight or throw or take hits then they think they can get there too by doing that” (Mike).

If [a player is] not as good, but goes out and hit guys you are going to get a good position on the team. You can make a really good team with fighting and being a hitter. They see it in the NHL, players on the 3rd and 4th line they’re the hitters and fighters... they’re there for a reason – to fight, but they still get to play hockey and make money. What happens there reflects. They change rules; we change ours. We all want to be there and to be like them we have to act like them. So we follow the lead. If your favourite player was Lucic – then you would go out there and hit. Or Chara and you would have the nicest slap shot. Also, when kids see it on TV – fighting – they do it too. They still throw punches and get two minutes – that is after the whistle. It still happens even though it’s not allowed. If it’s bad then you get kicked out but not for a few punches. (Jason)

When I played as a goalie sure I used to hack at the back of players’ legs. I guess got it from watching it on TV. You see a lot of the goalies in our league doing that, it kind of happens all the time. (Andrew)

One participant was of the opinion that parents are the most influential factor when it comes to aggressive behaviour, since they pressure their children to behave aggressively.

Parents are the ones telling them to do that [be aggressive], the children may not want to but their parents are forcing them to. When they are in the stands and

even before the game. If they see a number when a player [is] carrying a jersey in or during a game, they'll come behind the bench and say "*hit this number*". Let's say number 11 – he's a fast, small but fast player and takes good shots, if one of the parents saw this and their kid could hit really hard they'd go up to their kid and say "*hit number 11*" and they would do it. And try to get him out of the game – they do they will get a suspension. But parents sometimes don't care – they are happy they won't lose as bad. (Danny)

All the participants commented that they constantly hear parents being verbally expressive and endorsing aggression during the games. Mike mentioned that parents were exceptionally loud while directing their kids to hit and cheering after a big hit. Mike said "some parents are crazy – you can hear parents from the stands" (Mike). Andrew's comments regarding parental behaviour were similar. "Parents take it pretty seriously, they're yelling and screaming at their kids to hit and stuff." Another participant also commented on how players influenced aggressive behaviour.

I know players who get money if they score. \$2 an assist and \$20 for a goal. Lots of kids get this. This is normal. So if you're on a breakaway and some kid hacks you that is \$20 lost. There is going to be tension there. (Jason)

While the other participants had heard of this practice and knew of players whose parents participated in this, none of the participants' parents paid them for goals or for anything having to do with playing hockey.

Several participants commented on how teammates and coaches encouraged aggression, especially retaliation.

If I get hit, even if it's a clean hit, my teammates will say "*what's his number?*"

My coach will say "What's his number? Go get him back." When my coach says that he usually means go butt-end or crosscheck. My coach and my team are going to get mad at me if I don't go out and hit. Your team will get mad if you totally shy away. (Jason)

If a player gets injured sometimes teammates they ask what number injured you and they'll go after that player and make a dirty hit on them. Coaches will also tell you to play aggressive and like if we are down he will tell us even more because he'll like want us to make them scared so we can have the upper hand on them. Coaches want to us make the other team scared so next time they go into the corners, they will like be scared of us and so we can get the puck easier.

(Trevor)

Two participants commented on how a coach can be even more influential when the coach is also a player's parent.

Coaches play a big role because your coach can also be your parent. I was on this team last weekend. We were winning and the coach told his son and a few other players go out there and start hitting. I don't understand that... Coaches are always telling their kids to go hit more or be more aggressive. I've seen coaches really get mad at their kid for not being aggressive and 'cause they're right there on the bench too; they can get mad right then too. (Mike)

Our goalie was getting picked on; he was trying to save the puck. The ref wasn't calling anything after the play so I had to protect the goalie. Like my dad, who was also the coach told me, protect the goalie even if you have to take a penalty, so I had to protect our goalie... If you try to mess with my goalie you mess with me. I think that is OK [to take the penalty]. If you try to hurt a player badly, that shouldn't happen, just to protect your goalie or your teammates not to injure a guy in the process just showing the guy you won't tolerate it. Trying to protect your goalie is a good penalty, and then there are really bad penalties. (Danny)

Participants also commented on how teammates can influence the desire to be aggressive.

After laying a hard hit teammates on the bench tap their sticks on the boards and also say "nice hit. " It makes you feel good because your team is proud of you and then you want to keep hitting more. (Trevor)

Well when your teammates say good job when you hit someone, and they clap their sticks on the boards it kinda makes you feel like you want to do it again because you like having the attention. (Kevin)

Personal Experiences of Aggression

This section provides a description of incidents in which participants engaged in events characterized by aggression. It also discusses the themes that emerge from these personal experiences. Trevor described an incident that had occurred within a few months prior to the interview.

At the start of the game at the first shift this guy would always be on me and pushing me over even when I didn't have the puck. And then I was skating with it and he pushed me over, I got up and then on the blue line he hit me after I passed the puck so I two handed him in the back of the leg. The ref wasn't looking so I didn't get a penalty but the parents in the stand were yelling and screaming that I should get a penalty. Their coach was really mad too that I didn't get one. I don't know how it happened it just kinda did. He went down and didn't get up for about 4-5 minutes and the coach had to come out and the kid was crying rolling around. He got up and was playing again later... He left me alone after that. He deserved it... Even my mom said so later and that she was happy I stood up for myself.

[Would you have felt bad if he was seriously injured?] A little, not a lot. (Trevor)

Mike was unable to think of an incident where he was aggressive, commenting that "I'm like the smallest kid on the team and usually am. It's not a part of my game to be aggressive and I don't want to until I get bigger and stronger and they can't kill me."

Danny provided a description of an incident that occurred during the 2011-2012 year.

There is always a player who when the ref isn't looking hits and runs, he was doing this all game and not getting called so after a while and the player kept doing it to me I just got fed up so when he tried to again I just turned around and pushed him down as hard as I could. The ref didn't see it so I got lucky and then for the rest of the game the guy didn't lay a finger on me. (Danny)

Kevin described an incident for which he was given a one game suspension late in the 2010-2011 season.

I was suspended for one game but I think the ref got the wrong person... We were pushing and shoving after the whistle blew and the guy just kept on pushing me so I punched him really hard but my teammate also was like really fighting and I think that the ref meant to give him the suspension and not me but I got one. He got a penalty but no suspension. (Kevin)

Jason described an incident that had occurred early in the 2011-2012 season.

This one time, a kid kept on me, he crosschecked and then I went to the net and he cross checked me again. I was getting frustrated 'cause nothing was getting called and so when he did it again I turned around and punched him in the face. (Jason)

After Jason discussed this incident, he mentioned that he had been suspended early in the same season. He had not thought of that incident initially because he "didn't mean to do it". However, he provided the details.

It was an aggressive act I guess. I wasn't trying to injure or be violent. I didn't even hit the kid hard. I went for the puck and his back was towards me and I went to push his back up against the boards to pin him there and I hit him harder than I meant to and he hit the boards. He rotated his back at the last second so I went from hitting him in the shoulder to hitting him in the back. His chest went into the boards. I was kicked out and given a one game suspension. I was pretty angry because (1) I was kicked out of the game, (2) I drove an hour to [city name] to get kicked out in the first period, and (3) I've never been kicked out before and I'm not that type of player so I wasn't very proud of myself either. (Jason)

Andrew described an incident that occurred in the middle of the 2010-2011 season while he was playing goalie.

He [opposing player] kept on hitting my glove, even when the whistle had blown he did this several times and like my players would push at him but he kept on doing it. So this one time he hit my glove pretty hard and I just got fed up with it, so I elbowed him... ah in the face. I got a major penalty but didn't have to serve it, my teammate did. (Andrew)

Triggers

Five of the participants were able to identify an occasion on which they acted aggressively. When discussing what triggered this particular aggressive act, all five participants described incidences where retaliation was the main reason. One player explained his reason for retaliating by stating "sometimes it's just easier to retaliate than skate away" (Kevin). Participants also commented on how and when retaliation played a role in aggression, "because somebody gets mad when they get hit pretty hard and then they want to get payback" (Kevin). Another participant commented that he retaliated "when somebody makes a dirty or cheap play or intends to injure me or my teammates or goalie" (Jason). Another participant made similar comments about protecting teammates.

If somebody pushes me, annoys me a lot or my teammates I will get involved and push the guy down to teach him a lesson. They can try all they want but you can't really intimidate me that well. To other players it does affect them and they might back down to that player. So they try to do that so they can get a bit easier off. It

doesn't really seem right and they should just take it [like] a man. But some of them aren't really that strong let's say. (Danny)

When questioned about their intent players stated that their intention was not to injure. Frustration was the main reason participants retaliated. As one participant stated, "I just wanted him to leave me alone" (Andrew). Another player made a similar comment, "I guess I was just frustrated and mad because nothing was getting called against the guy and he just wouldn't stop" (Trevor). Another participant commented, "It's not done to hurt him but you feel better because it's like you can get it out. So when you skate away it's even and I feel good and not frustrated" (Jason).

Moral Disengagement

When participants were providing reasons for behaving aggressively, they demonstrated moral disengagement. As stated in Chapter 2, there are eight mechanisms of moral disengagement. Of the eight, participants demonstrated four. These four mechanisms and examples of the behaviours will be described below.

Displacement of responsibility. This mechanism occurs when a player is absolving himself of responsibility by suggesting he has no choice but to act this way (Long, Pantaléon, Bruant, & d'Arripe-Longueville, 2006). The displacement of responsibility was reflected in the responses of three of the participants. The behaviour was primarily directed toward the referee and associated with perceptions of injustice following a call made or not made by the referee. One participant said: "The ref wasn't calling anything, he was letting the player get away with being all over me, so I hit the guy back because it wasn't getting called" (Trevor).

Moral justification. This mechanism occurs when the player is construing the act as morally acceptable because it serves the socially commendable purpose of defending a teammate (Long et al., 2006). This mechanism was mentioned by five of the participants to justify their aggressive behaviour. Andrew noted “their team had already injured like three of our players and so I was just defending myself and my team.”

Attribution of blame. This mechanism suggests the perpetrator may be perceiving his action as a forced reaction to the victim’s own action (Long et al., 2006). Five participants suggested they were acting in response to something the opposing player had done. One participant commented, “he just kept on me, he crosschecked and then he cross checked me again so then I hit him” (Jason). Another participant stated, “He was just pushing me and pushing me so I hit him back cause I just wanted him to leave me alone” (Kevin).

Minimizing or ignoring the consequences. This mechanism was reflected in the responses of five participants. Participants indicated that their aggressive behaviour was not serious as it did not result in serious physical injury (Long et al., 2006). The following quotes illustrate minimizing of consequences. “I two-handed him in the back of the leg... and the kid was crying rolling around. He got up and was playing again later, like the next shift or something, so he really wasn’t even hurt” (Trevor). Another player commented, “When I hit the guy and he went down, he only stayed down so I would get a penalty. I was suspended but he was like back on the ice the next shift, he wasn’t even hurt” (Jason).

Sportsmanship in Minor Hockey

Throughout the interviews sportsmanship in minor hockey was discussed in detail. This section is divided into three subsections dealing with participants' views on the definition of sportsmanship, the levels of sportsmanship, and influential factors.

Definition of Sportsmanship

The participants were asked for their definitions of sportsmanship. Responses included the following:

- being helpful, respectful to coaches refs, parents, and the other team (Trevor);
- being a good sport and trying until the end and not giving up (Mike);
- playing clean and fair and staying with the rules (Jason);
- after a goal don't rub it in the other team's face, don't retaliate – just take it (Danny);
- shake hands after the game (Kevin); and
- being respectful to referees, coaches, and players (Andrew).

The examples of sportsmanlike behaviours the participants provided are in accordance with the operational definition being utilized for the present study. However, it was the combined definitions of the participants that made up the operational definition; therefore, participants were provided the operational definition for the study.

Levels of Sportsmanship

Generally, all participants believed that when it comes to sportsmanlike acts in minor hockey, there “aren't that many” (Jason) and that “there should be more” (Andrew). One participant's view of why there is not more sportsmanship was “some

teams think they are better and don't show class" (Kevin). Participants also commented on when players should show sportsmanship. "There should be more – a lot of players if they hit somebody they will laugh at them, and you shouldn't hit from behind and if you do you should make sure they are OK" (Trevor). "I think there should be more because that is what makes hockey a fun game, there should be hitting but not dirty hitting – just regular hitting in a game" (Danny).

Factors Influencing Sportsmanship

Throughout the interviews, most participants mentioned parents, coaches, and teammates as being influential with regard to their sportsmanlike behaviours. Table 3 shows how each participant ranked these influencing factors, from the most influential to least. Most participants thought the biggest influence on their sportsmanlike behaviour to be their parents, and commented as follows:

My dad, he tells me not to play cheap and from watching (name of older brother)

he's not like that so I guess I learned (Trevor);

My parents tell me all the time to respect the coach (Andrew);

Parents, because your parents are usually always supporting you and if you made

a good decision and they would be like good job and stuff (Kevin); and

My parents have said, don't be cheap or dirty, that's not the type of player you

want to be (Jason).

Another participant provided a more detailed explanation of how parents are influential.

Some of the parents like I said to you try to teach aggression; well most of them want to see sportsmanship. Parents are the most influential for sportsmanship and aggression because they have more power and control to keep them on the track they want them on. Some of them want them on aggression, that's their view and some of them want them on sportsmanlike. Some parents have evil ways and don't promote sportsmanship. (Danny)

The same participant also added that coaches can be influential; however, his coach was also his parent.

Some coaches do [teach sportsmanship] and some think you'll learn it off the bat. My dad who is a coach, he teaches sportsmanship – he teaches don't be cheap, don't retaliate, so a lot of my sportsmanship comes from my dad since he used to coach Bantam. (Danny)

Table 3

Factors influencing sportsmanship

Rank	Jason	Trevor	Danny	Mike	Kevin	Andrew
1	Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents
2	Coaches	Coaches	Coaches	Coaches	Coaches	Coaches
3	NHL	NHL	Teammates	Teammates	Teammates	Teammates
4	Teammates	Teammates	NHL	NHL	NHL	NHL

Personal Experiences of Sportsmanship

Participants described incidents where they acted in a sportsmanlike manner and other incidents where opposing players displayed such behaviour toward them

Participants recalled the following incidents:

When one of my players was injured I went over to him and went to see if he was

OK and helped him up (Trevor);

A teammate got hit really hard and looked like he was really hurting so I went

over and helped him to the bench (Andrew); and

There's this guy on my team and he goes out there and hurts someone, some of

our teammates, including me ask him why did you go out there and hit him –

he wasn't even near the puck (Mike).

Another participant recalled an incident where he was able to use his size to stop one of his teammates from injuring an opposing player.

Once, one of my teammates got really mad at this guy and he went to hit him and

I went in between them so he wouldn't get hurt. I thought the other player was

gonna get hurt really bad. He [teammate] was really big, and just the way he was

coming at him. (Kevin)

Yet another participant described an incident where he felt that if he did not do something his teammate was going to seriously injure another player,

Bunch of stuff happened in front of the net and a teammate was punching another

player, I pulled him off and said, "Stop and go to the bench." I wanted him to

stop and calm down. (Trevor)

Danny described a time he kept positive, because he was the team's captain.

One game we were losing pretty bad and we were down, and another player got a goal and you know some players just want to rub it in your face and I just said "nice goal" quietly to him because if my teammates heard they would bug me.

And he went back to the bench and was smiling. Some of the teammates really think that if you say good game to the other player during the game, some of them just don't think that's cool. Some of them if we lose even by one point get so down. So I just say to them come on, it was a good game. Let's keep going. But there is usually one or two that will say "wow you should be pissed like us also".

They just can't take a loss; they are poor losers. (Danny)

When participants were asked why they acted the way they did in their personal experiences regarding sportsmanship, several of them stated "I don't know." Two participants, who potentially prevented their teammates from seriously injuring an opponent, stated "I just didn't want the other kid to get hurt badly" (Jason). "I thought the other player was gonna get hurt really bad" (Kevin). Another participant made a similar comment on why he and his teammates wanted a teammate to stop acting overly aggressively: "It's like taking advantage of somebody. We don't want him to do that because he could really injure somebody" (Mike).

Participants also described situations where other players acted in a sportsmanlike manner toward them. Three participants described times opposing players showed sportsmanship after hitting them, one stating "this guy hit me pretty hard, like not on purpose, he helped me up" (Kevin). Mike commented that "one time when I got hit from

behind he came up to me and asked if I was all right so that was pretty good because he didn't need to ask if I was all right and stuff" (Mike). Another participant recalled an incident "when I got hurt my foot a couple of my teammates asked if I was OK."

Another participant described an incident that he thought was "pretty cool."

At the face off I was resting on my stick and a player from the other team said

"You need a band aid?" And one of his teammates told him to shut up and leave me alone. I thought that was really sportsmanlike. (Jason)

Another participant described a time where an opposing player went above the usual *good game* comment while shaking hands.

We were playing a team and we won the game, after the game everybody was saying good game and only one came over and said "great game, you really put us to the test." So at least some players on some teams have sportsmanship and can talk to the other teams and put them up and the other team will say "great game too." (Danny)

Decreasing Aggression and Increasing Sportsmanship

The final section of this chapter is focused on participants' perceptions as to how aggression can be decreased and how sportsmanship can be increased. Participants commented on how acts of sportsmanship could reduce aggression. Participants' comments suggest that the most beneficial act of sportsmanship was checking to see that an opposing player was "OK" after being hit. One participant commented, "it [sportsmanship] could stop some of the retaliation. Then people aren't as mad." Another

participant suggested that the benefit of sportsmanship could be “that people won’t retaliate” (Mike). Another participant’s comments were similar:

[After a lengthy delay] I’m trying to think what it would be. I’m not sure if it’s a benefit but I think everybody should be more sportsmanlike because then people... like maybe the person who got injured knows the person that injured you knows and cares they injured you. (Trevor)

One participant, however, stated that “it wouldn’t change my mind from wanting to retaliate” (Andrew) even if an offending player apologised or asked if he was all right.

All participants suggested that bigger suspensions and penalties should be given to reduce the amount of aggression. One participant commented, “Players my age need motivation to change and not hit. They’re not going to change for no reason.” He suggested that one motivation could be “two hits to the back and you should get suspended.” Another participant also provided his thoughts on why longer suspensions may work, saying that “if the one guy gets suspended for not that bad of a hit, others would be like ‘oh OK they are trying to make it safer,’ so they aren’t going to be running around injuring anyone” (Mike).

While participants thought suspensions would help reduce aggression, they also offered other suggestions, such as “have to go to anger management” (Danny). Another participant’s suggestion for increasing sportsmanship was “giving sportsmanlike players the ‘C’ or ‘A’ would help as they could act as role models” (Mike). One participant, who was the captain of his Peewee team, mentioned several times during his interview that he felt he needed to “act in a sportsmanlike manner in order to set an example for the rest of

the team” (Danny). Two other participants suggested “lower sportsmanship points” (Jason) and “people should hit the person the way they want to be hit, don’t go try to kill and injure the person” (Mike).

Under provincial regulations, teams receive points for showing sportsmanship and for taking fewer than an allotted amount of penalty minutes per game. Teams can receive up to six penalty minutes in Peewee and sixteen in Bantam per game and still receive sportsmanship points. There were differing views on the sportsmanship points. Two Peewee participants thought the points could be beneficial:

I think it’s a good idea ’cause my coach will be like OK guys we only have like two more or we’ve already got three penalties so we can’t get any more penalties. Or you’ll play a little more cautious. (Trevor)

They can sometimes really hurt the team, but yeah I think they help, if we got all our points our coach would take us all out. (Kevin)

One Bantam participant had a different outlook on sportsmanship points.

They should lower sportsmanship points. You can get eight penalties so coaches don’t say “don’t take anymore” until you are at six or seven. I think sportsmanship [points] helps a bit but not much. I don’t like it ’cause it wins or loses a season. We won because we got all the sportsmanship points. I don’t think it should affect your season. But it is important to keep kids safe. (Jason)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter evaluates and interprets the results of this study. As aggression and unsportsmanlike behaviours are increasingly serious problems in youth sport programs (Wells, Ruddell, & Paisley, 2006), it is important to develop a better understanding of these behaviours in minor hockey. The aim of the present study has been to contribute to the literature in this area by exploring the perceptions and experiences of minor hockey players in relation to aggression and sportsmanship. This may provide further insight into the complexity of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviour in hockey. A better understanding of hockey players' behaviour could ultimately lead to the development of hockey programs that decrease aggression and increase sportsmanship, which in turn would provide a safer and more enjoyable minor hockey experience.

Five themes emerged from the analysis of the data; they were labelled *the aggressive nature of hockey*, *personal experiences*, *sportsmanship*, *experience of sportsmanship*, and *decreasing aggression and increasing sportsmanship* (to be discussed in Chapter 6). Each of these topics is discussed in relation to previous literature in the field.

The Aggressive Nature of Minor Hockey

Players suggested the main reason aggression occurred in minor hockey was due to the competitive aspects of the game. Most players suggested that as a player goes through the hockey ranks, the levels get more competitive and therefore more aggressive. These findings support previous research that suggests the length of athletes' participation in organized sport and participation at a more advanced level of competitive play is

positively associated to aggression (e.g., Gardner & Janelle, 2002; Visek & Watson, 2005). McIntosh (1979) and Webb (1969) surveyed over 1,200 participants from grades 3, 6, 8, 10, and 12 and found that attitudes towards fairness in competition were negatively impacted by the length of participation in the particular organized sport. These results would suggest that the longer players are involved in an organized sport, the less they are concerned about fairness and the process of the game and the more concerned they are with the outcome, namely winning.

More recent research investigating the association between level of competition and measures of aggression continues to support previous research and shows consistently that as the level of play (and the player's age) increases, aggressive behaviour also increases (Loughead & Leith, 2001; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Silva, 1983). Loughead and Leith (2001) studied hockey players' perceptions of aggression. Pee wee (12-13 years old) and Bantam (14-15 years old) hockey players were more accepting of hostile aggression than the younger Atom (10-11 years old) players. It appears that as players go through the competitive levels of minor hockey, they begin to recognize what actions are necessary for them to partake in if they are to continue their upward journey to elite levels (Loughead & Leith, 2001; Silva, 1983).

Another finding in the present study was that players named the NHL as the most influential source of their on ice aggressive behaviour. As one participant commented,

If [a player is] not as good, but goes out and hit guys you are going to get a good position on the team. You can make a really good team with fighting and being a hitter. They see it in the NHL, players on the 3rd and 4th line, they're the hitters

and fighters... they're there for a reason – to fight, but they still get to play hockey.

(Jason)

These findings were consistent with Smith (1983), who found that young players model violence prevalent in the professional game. Almost all participants suggested that the biggest influence on their aggressive behaviour was the NHL, as NHL players serve as “role models” (Mike).

Personal Experiences

In the present study, five of the six players were able to identify incidences where they had behaved aggressively. All of these acts were directed against an opposing player. The main trigger of the aggressive behaviour was retaliation. One player explained his thoughts on why retaliation was so prevalent by saying “even if a hit is a clean hit, the opposing team is always going to think it's a dirty hit so then there is retaliation” (Jason). These findings support previous research, which has found that an attack from another player has been cited as the primary reason for aggression in men's ice hockey (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1993). Brice (1990) surveyed 78 males from four Canadian university hockey teams and found that 83% of them acted aggressively towards an opposing player because that player had either injured or attempted to injure them or a teammate.

When questioned about their intentions in regards to their aggressive behaviour, players stated it was not their intent to hurt or injure the opposing player. However, all of the aggressive acts that players described were included in Widmeyer and Birch (1984) and Widmeyer and McGuire (1997), which means that penalties were labelled as

aggressive. Widmeyer and Birch (1984) and Widmeyer and McGuire (1997) found that when players committed these particular acts of aggression, their intent at least 80% of the time was to injure. The acts in the present study consisted of fighting, roughing, elbowing, and slashing.

Aggressive acts can have extremely negative consequences (e.g., injuries) and athletes may provide various explanations or justifications for these behaviours. Researchers have recently begun to examine moral disengagement in sport. Long, Pantaléon, Bruant, and d'Arripe-Longueville (2006) interviewed young elite athletes and found that when describing their transgressions in sport, athletes often used moral disengagement to justify and minimize personal accountability for their actions. Players in the current study mainly used moral disengagement to justify their behaviour.

When providing explanations for their aggressive behaviour players utilized moral disengagement. The two of the main mechanisms of moral disengagement utilized were attribution of blame and displacement of responsibility. Players utilized attribution of blame by suggesting that they were acting in response to an aggressive act an opposing player had committed. This indicates the player may have perceived his conduct as a necessary reaction to the victim's behaviour. Utilizing attribution of blame allows the retaliating player to misconstrue the situation in a manner that allows him to justify his culpable conduct because of a perceived notion of having no other choice but to react this way (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011). These findings support research by Corrion, Long, Smith, and d'Arripe-Longueville (2009), whose findings suggest that individuals project fault onto others for their own transgressions.

The other mechanism of moral disengagement participants used was displaced responsibility. Participants mainly displaced the responsibility of their conduct on the referees by attributing their aggressive behaviour to bad officiating. For example, participants stated that lack of impartiality or inconsistency in the referees' decisions led to their feelings of being aggressed upon unfairly. Believing the referee is to blame allows the player to absolve himself of responsibility by implying he has no choice but to behave in this manner (Long et al. 2006). These results support Shapcott, Bloom, and Loughead, (2007) who found that that bad officiating is one of the primary causes of misconduct in sport. Long et al. (2006) also suggested athletes may shift the responsibility of their acts to the referees.

Sportsmanship

When discussing sportsmanship acts in minor hockey, all players made similar comments as to the lack of sportsmanship; for instance, two participants stated "there aren't that many" (Jason) and that "there should be more" (Andrew). These findings support Beller and Stoll (1993), who found that sportsmanship appears contextually out of alignment and may not even exist anymore in everyday practice and in the play of the game. Beller and Stoll's suggestion is to some extent confirmed by the evidence of in-your-face players, fist-throwing after the whistles, and excessively involved spectators who continually push and disregard the boundaries of acceptable behaviour (Gehring, 2001). In addition, these examples of unsportsmanlike behaviour at sporting events are demeaning all levels of sport (Rudd & Stoll, 1998) and as such, sportsmanship problems

and behaviours seen at the youth levels may often remain with these individuals throughout their recreational and competitive athletic careers.

When asked the meaning of sportsmanship, players commented about their need to be a helpful to the coach, the desirability of shaking hands with opposing players and coaches after a game, and only one player mentioned playing fair. When players described their sportsmanlike acts, ones of theirs or ones of an opposing player, they all involved actions after the whistle had blown (i.e., not during the actual play time of the game). Their definitions of sportsmanlike behaviour included neither compliance with the rules of the game nor giving one's opponent an even break during the game. These findings support Vaz and Clarke's (1982) study, which noted that the rules and rituals that are used to teach sportsmanship seem as though they have been designed to manage the behaviour of the hockey players off the ice rather than to control their actions during the game, because they have been taught the value of violating the rules of the game. Consequently, as young hockey players become increasingly "professionalized" into the world of hockey, they come to realize that hockey games are not won by sportsmanlike behaviour on the ice.

Players identified their parents as the most influential sources of their sportsmanlike behaviour. This is consistent with the Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory. A significant amount of literature suggests the existence of a strong influential relationship between messages communicated in the behaviours modeled by adults and the actions of young individuals who perceive these adults as individuals of significant importance, or role models (Arteaga, Chen, & Reynolds, 2010; Arthur-Banning et al.,

2007; May, 2001). Studies have confirmed this association in various areas, including alcohol consumption (Yu & Perrine, 1997), smoking (Goddard, 1992; Jackson & Henriksen, 1997), and prosocial and antisocial behaviours (Wyatt & Carlo, 2002).

Research directly related to moral behaviour development in youth sports indicates a multifaceted situation and in which adults play an influential role and can impact youths attitudes and behaviours through the modelling that takes place in the environment (Guivernau & Duda, 2002; May, 2001). Most frequently modeling transpires through the major influences in an individual's life. Within this process the most important component is not the person's actual beliefs, but the individual's perception of these beliefs (Carr & Weigand, 2002; White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). For instance, children who witness parents screaming at and berating other teams, or the referees, are likely to consider sportsmanship to be an invaluable quality, regardless of what their parents claim. Conversely, if they watch a parent partaking in positive sportsmanlike behaviours, such as congratulating the opposing team for a good game, they may accept these types of behaviours as genuinely important. Based on these perceived standards, children will frequently decide to meet their parents' expectations either in an unsportsmanlike or sportsmanlike manner, basing their decision on which they perceive as being more in alignment with their parents' behaviours.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Practical Implications

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this study's practical implications.

Findings from the present study have not only shown that minor hockey players believe hockey to be overly aggressive, but also identified what factors influence their behaviour and under which circumstances they find themselves acting in an aggressive manner. Based on these findings, evidence would support the formation and implementation of psycho-educational programs for minor hockey players and for their parents. The foundation of these programs would be the conceptual frameworks of social learning theory and social cognitive theory. The aim of the programs would be to decrease and ultimately cease aggressive behaviour in minor hockey and instead increase sportsmanlike behaviour.

According to Bandura (1977), youth learn about ethical and unethical behaviour through the socialization processes. Children and adolescents observe significant others, such as parents, coaches, and teammates, and receive reinforcement for demonstrating socially acceptable behaviour or punishment for engaging in inappropriate conduct. This study found that parents were the most influential source for promoting sportsmanship. These findings draw attention the need to educate parents about the goals of organized youth hockey and Hockey Canada's mission statement, which is to "lead, develop, and promote positive hockey experiences" (Hockey Canada, 2012). It is important that the focus of the education be geared toward children's overall sport enjoyment while minimizing parental behaviours and parental acceptance of behaviours that contribute to

negative sport experiences. These findings also suggest that it may be beneficial for parents to discuss sportsmanlike behaviour with their children and to display sportsmanlike behaviour at the arenas so as to model positive sportsmanship orientations for children.

Additionally, the NHL plays a significant role in influencing and reinforcing minor hockey players' aggressive behaviour. These findings support the social learning theory which suggests that behaviours are learned by modeling the behaviours of others. Minor hockey players view NHL players as role models and as Bandura (1977) has suggested, such players will learn by observing the actions of others. According to social learning theory, anticipatory incentives enhance the probability of the type of behaviour that is eventually reinforced over and over again (Bandura, 1977). For instance, a young hockey player with motivation to play in the NHL can participate in overly physical and aggressive behaviour in order to demonstrate to coaches and scouts that he can enforce, intimidate, and dominate other players in the firm expectation that through such conduct he will gain recognition and be rewarded by being promoted to a higher league. Such recognition and reward provide positive reinforcement for this form of aggressive behaviour and, within the framework of social learning theory, is consistent with the anticipated consequences identified by Bandura (1977).

For the above noted reasons, the potential influence of the media should be acknowledged in decreasing aggressive behaviour in sports (Lefebvre, Leith, & Bredemeier, 1980). During a hockey game the commentator should immediately identify aggressive behaviours as rule violations and sportsmanlike conduct. Lapchick (1996) has

disputed that the reprimand given to professional for their aggressive behaviour must be sufficiently punitive to lessen and to prevent such violent behaviour. According to Lapchick, "fines are useless for players making more than \$1 million each year" (p. 192). Suitable and efficient measures for punishing players must be determined.

In addition, psycho-education can also be provided to minor hockey players with regards to what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. According to Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral thought and action, moral standards regulate behaviour through evaluative self-reactions. In particular, humans feel pride when acting in a manner that coincides with their moral standards, and they experience guilt when their behaviours go against their moral standards. These evaluative self-reactions regulate conduct anticipatorily: People engage in activities that will bring them self-satisfaction and abstain from acting in ways that will bring self-disapproval (Bandura, 1989). However, individuals still act in ways that are harmful to others by engaging in moral disengagement. By engaging in moral disengagement people minimize or justify their behaviour and therefore continue to behave in ways normally considered immoral because they do not experience the negative affect usually associated with such conduct. This study has found that players engage in moral disengagement to justify their aggressive behaviour.

If minor hockey players can enhance their awareness of how they are hurting other players while playing, there is a higher probability that they will stop. Lauer and Paiement's (2009) aggression intervention program, "The Playing Tough and Clean Hockey Program," was created to bring awareness and teach youth hockey players ages

12 and older emotional and management skills. By learning these skills players could improve their ability to react positively to their negative emotions (i.e., through emotional toughness). Players were able to reduce the frequency of their retaliations after being trained to respond positively to provocation. These results reveal the significance of teaching hockey players how to deal with provocation and retaliation. Within sportsmanship programs, it would be beneficial if players were provided emotional and moral awareness training in order enhance their awareness, to support them in being more empathetic, and to teach them the emotional toughness skills to be successful.

In addition, prevention measures can also be taken by the sports' governing bodies. Evidence from this research may suggest that referees impact the level of aggression in minor hockey – players act aggressively knowing they can get away with it, that they will not be punished by the referee, or players retaliate because the offending player was not punished by the referee. Findings of this study suggest that to curtail the aggressive behaviour effectively the consequences of such behaviour need to outweigh its rewards by modifying the existing rule (e.g., increased penalty minutes, increased suspensions). If leagues implemented and consistently enforced no-tolerance policies for aggressive acts such as cross checking, this would send the message to players, parents, and coaches that it would not be tolerated and that skill rather than overt aggression was valued.

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Appendix A

Email to Associations

Dear X Hockey Association,

I'm a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland working on my thesis to complete the Masters program in Counselling Psychology. The purpose of my research project is to gather data about hockey players' perceptions and beliefs of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours. Gaining insight into their perceptions and beliefs may help to understand what influences aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours in hockey. I am conducting this research project under the supervision of Dr. Tim Seifert (Associate Dean, Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland) and Dr. Antony Card (Dean of Human Kinetics and Recreation at Memorial University of Newfoundland).

I'm looking for hockey players to participate in this research project. The criteria for participation is; players must be between the ages of 12 to 15, male and have played competitive hockey for a minimum of 3 years.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and includes partaking in audio taped one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The findings from this research project will be published; however, participants' identity will be kept confidential.

For players or parents' of players wanting more information or to participate, please contact me at xxxxx@hotmail.com or at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your time and assistance

Cindy Hallate

Appendix B

Script for Initial Contact with Parent

I'm a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland working on my thesis to complete the Masters program in Counselling Psychology. My thesis is about Aggression and Sportsmanlike Behaviours in Hockey Players. With your permission I would like to invite your child to be a participant in my research project as your child would be able to provide great assistance and valuable insight into the behaviours of hockey players.

It is entirely up to you and your child to decide whether to take part in this research project. This study will include participation in: (a) reading over and signing this informed consent form; and (b) your child reading over and signing the assent form; and (c) participating in an audio taped one-on-one interview with the researcher. The one-on-one interview will take approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, 2 or 3 times. Your child has been chosen to participate in this study, as I believe that they will be able to provide valuable insight into this topic. If you choose not to have your child take part in this research, or if you, or your child, decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for your child, now or in the future.

Just to give you a bit of information about me. I work as a Family Counsellor and as a Crisis Interventionist for a local police department. I can provide a copy of my background check, which is clean.

I can send you an informed consent form for you and your child. It provides more information. If you would like to participate both forms would need to be signed and you can email them back to me. Please call me with any questions or concerns you or your child may have once you have read the form. Once I receive it, if you decide to participate, I will call you again and we can discuss the process, which is also explained in the form.

Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix C

Parental Informed Consent

Title of Project: Aggression and Sportsmanlike Behaviours in Hockey

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject. It is important that you read this form carefully and then decide if you want to allow your child to be a volunteer participant.

Your child is invited to take part in a research project entitled Aggression and Sportsmanlike Behaviours in Hockey Players. Please note that your child must be between the ages of 12 and 15 and have played competitive hockey for at least 3 years to participate in this study.

It is entirely up to you and your child to decide whether to take part in this research project. If you choose not to have your child take part in this research or if you or your child decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for your child, now or in the future. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Cindy Hallate, if you have any questions about the study.

This research is being conducted by Cindy Hallate, (Graduate Student), as part of a Master's thesis. I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Tim Seifert (Associate Dean, Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland) and Dr. Antony Card (Dean of Human Kinetics and Recreation at Memorial University of Newfoundland).

The purpose of this research project is to gather data about hockey players' perceptions and beliefs of sportsmanlike and aggressive behaviour in hockey. Various factors may influence players differently; I plan to ask players about their own personal experiences and their perceptions of professional players' behaviours. For instance, players will be asked about their perceptions on why a professional player would act in a certain way (sportsmanlike behaviour or aggressive behaviour). Some players will also be asked about their own experiences of sportsmanlike and/or aggressive behaviours.

This study will include participation in: (a) reading over and signing this informed consent form; and (b) your child reading over and signing the assent form; and (c) participating in an audio taped one-on-one interview with the researcher. The one-on-one interview will take approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, 2 or 3 times.

Please note, as mentioned above the one-on-one interviews will be audio taped, in addition the researcher might be taking notes. This is for the purposes of attaining accuracy of what the participants have said. The findings from this research project will be published; however, your child's identity will be kept confidential. Although we will report direct quotations from the interviews/sessions, your child will be given a

pseudonym, and all identifying information (hockey association, city of residence.) will be removed from our report. The researcher will only break confidentiality if the health, safety, and well being of a child or adult are in jeopardy. This would include any suspicion of child abuse or any indication that a child could be a threat to himself/herself or others.

Electronic data will be stored in a password electronic format on an encrypted server and hardcopy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be analyzed by me (Cindy Hallate). The whereabouts of the interview tapes will be only known by the researchers and the transcripts and notes will only be accessible to the researchers.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in the study; but it is possible that some questions may evoke some uncomfortable feelings and memories about your child's experience with aggression or sportsmanlike behaviours. There is no promise or guarantee of benefits for participating in this research project. It is hoped that the benefits from this project will be for the field of education, psychology and society as a whole.

After your child's interview, and before the data is included in the final report, you will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of your child's interview, and to add, change, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Furthermore, a general summary of the study results will be made available to any individual participant upon request. However, there will be no information reported publicly that could be linked to your child. Strict confidentiality will be maintained.

It is entirely up to you and your child to decide whether to take part in this research project. If you choose not to have your child participate in this research or if you or your child decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for your child, now or in the future. You can withdraw from the study by notifying the researcher you would no longer like to participate. Should you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, your child's data will not be used in the study. Upon withdrawal from the study the data collected from your child's participation in the one-on-one interview will be destroyed as soon as possible. The documents will be shredded and the audio tapes will be digitally erased.

Your child's continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or information throughout your participation. Your agreement to participate also provides permission for the researchers to use the data in presentations, published articles, and in any other future publications.

By signing below, you certify that; you have read or had this document read to you, that you have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to discuss your child's participation with the investigator and you freely and voluntarily choose to allow your child to participate in this research project.

I provide permission for my child to participate in the one-on-one audio-taped interviews.

SIGNATURE OF LEGAL GUARDIAN

DATE SIGNED

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

For any further information please contact Cindy Hallate at 604 773 1741 or email: suddendeathot@hotmail.com

Appendix D

Assent to Participate in a Research Study

Aggression and Sportsmanlike Behaviours in Minor Hockey

Please read through this form carefully and please check all of the statements that apply.

- ☐ My parents (or legal guardians) have consented to allow me to take part in this study.
- ☐ I understand this study is about aggression and sportsmanlike behaviours in hockey.
- ☐ I understand people are going to talk with me about my experience of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviours and my views of these behaviours in professional hockey players.
- ☐ I am aware I am being asked to take part in this study because I have been playing competitive hockey for at least 3 years and am between the ages of 13 to 15.
- ☐ I understand this interview will be audio recorded.
- ☐ I understand the interview will take about one hour and I might be asked to participate in 2 or 3 interviews.
- ☐ I understand I will be asked very personal questions about my thoughts and feelings of aggressive and sportsmanlike behaviour. Answering these questions may be stressful because they are so personal.
- ☐ I understand I can refuse to answer any question. I may stop the interview at any time.
- ☐ I understand that after the interviews have been completed and the researcher has put together the data my parents will have the option of reading this information.
- ☐ I understand that if I choose to withdraw from the study at any time, my specific data will not be used in the study. The data collected from my participation in the one-on-one interview and the audio tapes will be digitally erased.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this study.

I certify that I have read or had this document read to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss my participation with the researcher. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE SIGNED

Appendix E

Interview Guideline

Background Information:

Name

Age

Grade

Completed hockey level (bantam...)

How many years have you been playing hockey?

What position do you play?

What are your strengths as a player?

Why do you play hockey?

1. How do you define aggression in hockey
2. What is your definition of violence?
3. What is your definition of Sportsmanship?
4. What do you think about aggression in hockey? (perceptions)
5. What do you think about sportsmanship in hockey? (perceptions)
6. How big of a problem do you think it is (aggression)?
7. Personal Experience with Aggression and Sportsmanship – aggressor and aggressed (theme is going to be examples of these behaviours).
8. Do you trash talk? Or play overly aggressive? If so why? Have you been penalized for it? How did you feel?
9. Have you ever been injured playing hockey?
10. Why do you think players are sportsmanlike?
11. What do you think of aggressive/sportsmanlike players?
12. What are the benefits of aggression/sportsmanship?
13. What is the biggest influence for aggression? (this is going to be one of the themes)
14. Rank these sources
 1. NHL
 2. Teammates
 3. Coaches
 4. Parents
15. How do these impact?
16. What is the biggest impact for sportsmanship?
17. What do you think can be done to decrease aggression?
18. What do you think Minor hockey could do to promote sportsmanship?

