

UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PROCESSES OF RETIRED  
PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY PLAYERS

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the processes and influences that underlie the choice of retired elite athletes to further their education and assume the adult learner role. In the current study, focus was applied specifically to professional ice hockey players who were in a period of retirement from active play.

Elite athletes often retire at a time when most other professions are just beginning or reaching a level of stability. Research suggests that many retired elite athletes experience a difficult transition to an early retirement from athletics that is fraught with depression and unemployment. A select number of these elite athletes choose to further their educations after their careers have expired. The literature suggests that some of these retired elite athletes find educational programming a valuable coping strategy in the often traumatic post-athletic career adjustment. Unfortunately, this choice is made by only few athletes. It would be desirable to encourage more retired athletes to consider and engage in educational activities; however, currently, there is only very little knowledge on the processes underlying athletes' choice to participate, or not to participate, in education in their retirement years.

Using a theoretical framework that includes adult learning theory and adult development theory, in conjunction with expectancy-value theory of motivation, the impact of individual characteristics and environmental opportunities on post-athletic career choices made by professional athletes may be better understood.

The primary instrument for data collection was a personal interview with ten retired professional hockey players, conducted over a consecutive six-month period

resulting in significant data. Utilizing the constant-comparative method for data analysis, common themes were identified as indicators of educational engagement: Informal Mentorship, Head Injury Related Retirement, and Pre-Transition Planning. In addition to these themes, the findings reflected an alternative adult developmental model possibly unique to professional hockey players. The findings of this study are valuable to the larger conversation regarding adult learners, adult development, and elite athlete career transition.

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# UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PROCESSES OF RETIRED PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY PLAYERS

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Elite athletes often retire at a time when most other professions are just beginning or reaching a level of stability (Koutaniemi, 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Etizen, 2009). Research suggests that many retired elite athletes experience a difficult transition to early retirement from athletics that is fraught with depression and unemployment (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalley, 2004). A select number of these elite athletes choose to further their education after their careers have expired. The literature suggests that some of these retired elite athletes find educational programming a valuable coping strategy in the often traumatic post-athletic career adjustment (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1998; Stambulova, Stephan, & Japhag, 2007; Drawer & Fuller, 2002; Andrijiw, 2010). Unfortunately, this choice is made by only few athletes. It would be desirable to encourage more retired athletes to consider and engage in educational activities; however, currently, there is only very little knowledge on the processes underlying athletes' choice to participate, or not to participate, in education in their retirement years. Therefore, this qualitative study investigates the processes and influences that underlie the choice of retired elite athletes to further their education and assume adult learner roles. In the current study, focus is applied specifically to professional ice hockey players in a period of retirement from active play.

There are many theories that could be used to attempt to understand these retired athletes' motivation and choice to engage in post-secondary or professional education activities. The literature review focuses specifically on three: adult learning theory, adult development theory, and expectancy- value theory of motivation.

The report is structured to describe this educational problem as well as the purpose of this study. The specific research questions are presented as well as the individual definitions restricted to this research, and resulting delimitations and limitations of the study. Following, the theoretical frameworks and an extensive literature review are introduced with subsequent discussion of the methodology and procedure used. The final chapters are dedicated to the results of the data analysis and rational responses to the research questions presented.

### Statement of the Problem

Presently, little is known about the underlying elements influencing retired elite athletes to choose to engage in educational activities in their retirement years. This phenomenon is important to study because elite athletes often experience a traumatic retirement from their profession at an early age, and research suggests that a number of these individuals appear to consider the potential for education to play a positive role in the development of their personal coping strategies (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999).

The current literature suggests many elite athletes often do not complete a college degree prior to their involvement with a professional sports career (Etizen, 2009), and there is little evidence documenting college attendance or engagement in professional

education in retirement. The general exception to these findings are those athletes who enter the National Football League (NFL); many of whom enter the NFL draft with an undergraduate degree completed, or nearly completed (National Football League Players Association). Additionally, some athletes who enter Major League Baseball (MLB) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) have completed part of an undergraduate degree (Eitzen, 2009); this is not believed to be common for the majority of athletes who enter into the National Hockey League (NHL) (Allen, 2010).

The typical professional sports career is often short-lived (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). For example, statistically the average career of a professional hockey player at the National Hockey League level lasts just over five seasons (Koutaniemi, 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Arguably, these athletes, and those playing in the minor league systems, are often forced to confront life-changing decisions brought about by unique retirement realities at relatively young ages. These new challenges may range in severity and may vary to include dealing with complications of physical impairments, such as head injuries, or psychological impairments like depression. Additionally, these elite athletes may need to confront the ensuing adjustment to unfamiliar psychological characteristics, or identity shifts, and the consequences of unemployment.

Currently, the literature is slender concerning how educational services may be used to assist elite athletes in retirement. However, understanding the education choice process of retired elite athletes may contribute positively to the literature concerning their unique retirement and transition processes after a competitive career.

## Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study sought to identify the underlying factors which play a role in the choice of retired professional hockey players of whether or not to engage in educational activities in retirement. Previous research specifically related to the question of educational engagement of retired elite athletes is unavailable at the time of this writing. Presently, connections must be examined in the literature using related themes in varied subject areas. These areas include, but are not limited to, an exploration of adult learning and adult development theories, a review of the literature about elite athlete retirement and transition, as well as work related to expectancy-value theory of motivation.

Largely, the purpose of the study is to learn more about possible commonalities in this population which might be used to encourage college or professional education enrollments in retirement. This study has the potential to create depth in the currently slender literature on retired hockey players thus providing a new level of understanding about their lives in retirement.

## Research Questions

This study proposes that a relationship may exist in the choice process between the unusual career and retirement paths of elite athletes and expectancy-value theory of motivation. Using a theoretical framework that includes adult learner theory and adult development theory, in conjunction with expectancy-value theory of motivation, the

impact of individual characteristics and environmental opportunities on post-athletic career choices made by professional athletes may be better understood.

The overarching research question is:

- What influences underlie the choice of retired athletes to engage in educational activities?

The specific research question, informed with the expectancy-value model, is:

- How do perceived expectancies, values, and costs influence transitioning or retired professional hockey players' post-career choices?

Answering this specific research question also requires response to the following associated sub-questions:

- What perceived individual characteristics factor into the choice process?
- What perceived environmental opportunities play a role in the choice process?
- What perceived role does the manner, or cause, of retirement play in the post-career choices?
- How do perceived psychological characteristics (i.e., athletic identification) influence post-career choices?

### Importance of the Study

This study is important to the domain of adult education, and has the potential for worth in the fields of sport psychology and retirement transition. In adult education, we are often searching for the underrepresented population that is left out of the higher education conversation. It is possible that retired elite athletes are overlooked because

society assumes that if an individual has “made it” to the highest level of his or her sport, he or she no longer has educational concerns. Conversely, the more likely scenario is that although some athletes, such as professional hockey players, may elevate to the elite level, they are often confronted with a short-life career (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Koutaniemi, 2014), plagued with physical and psychological stressors, the need for a second career (NHL CBA, 2005), and little to no educational training or guidance to support a new career (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Admittedly, there may be those athletes in retirement who do not desire, nor require, additional education to secure a productive career or assist in their personal transition. Perhaps, these individuals, like many adult learners, chose to enroll in degree completion programs, or professional education because of an internal stimulus (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). Conceivably, the idea of college or professional education never emerges as a potential option for some in this population.

This is rather familiar territory for those who work in adult education. We often work with individuals, and populations, who come to the doors of our colleges and universities because they require an educational credential to establish a particular career. Yet, some adult learners enter college while working, or in retirement, because they are inspired to realize an educational aspiration, or to serve as a positive role model for others. Possibly, like other adult learners, retired elite athletes may experience barriers or delayed access to higher education participation. These may include financial constraints, a lack of degree program flexibility, or perhaps, a personal deficit in social capital that must be overcome (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2006; Chao, DeRocco & Flynn, 2008).

Without focused research exploring the choice process, we may never be able to articulate, and address, the needs of this particular population of retired elite athletes.

### Definitions

Key terms and phrases repeatedly used in this work include:

1. Retired elite athlete: Individual whom has played a sport at the professional or Olympic level and is no longer actively competing.
2. Professional hockey player: Individual who has been paid to play ice hockey in one or more of the following leagues: National Hockey League (NHL), American Hockey League (AHL), East Coast Hockey League (ECHL), or Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL).
3. Educational activities: Educational programs offered at a college and/or university leading to an undergraduate credential, or other non-credit bearing programs delivering instruction, certification/licensure in the areas of insurance, securities, fundraising, and real estate.
4. Psychological characteristics: Identification and ownership of personal perceptions, values, roles, goals and their interrelationship (Kaplan, 2011).
5. Transition: Period in an elite athlete's career when the prospect of retirement is imminent or has recently occurred.

6. Retirement: Period in an elite athlete's career when active competition, or play, has ceased.

### Delimitations and Limitations

This study is not designed to provide a generalization about other groups of retired elite athletes and their choice of whether or not to engage in post-secondary education activities. This particular work is delimited to the highly specialized group in the research sample. The rationale for using such a sample is similar to other studies that have focused on particular behaviors of other athletic groups and members of short-life professions. The personal perspectives of the participants about the choice process may aid in informing how other similarly situated individuals approach the choice to participate in educational activities in retirement. However, this specific population has never been studied in the context of the research goals presented in this paper.

### Theoretical Bases

Adult development theory, adult learning theory, and expectancy-value theory are explored as theoretical bases for this research. These theories have been selected for their conceptualizations of behavioral and life stages, the role of goals, and the importance of experiences, values and cost evaluations in making choices.

As we have already learned, elite athletes often retire after short-lived careers and at relatively young ages, thereby entering a new stage of life with an unknown intensity of flux and turbulence. Levinson (1986) presents adult development theory in the context

of an evolutionary cycle that involves multiple perspectives and influences. Levinson (1986) states, “It is necessary, instead, *to create a new perspective that combines development and socialization* and that draws equally on biology, psychology, and social science, as well as on the humanities” (p. 13). Adult development theory may be only one of several appropriate lenses with which to view this process. Adult learning theory for example, is closely interconnected and at times overlapping with adult development theory. Mezirow (1978) explained adult learning theory in terms of a transformative process, meaning that as our personal environments and conditions alter, learning occurs so that we may better understand the changes around us (Taylor, 2008). The foundation of this study is strengthened by using both adult development and adult learning theories, yet is not complete without consideration of motivation theory. Together, these theoretical constructions provide the groundwork for understanding how expectancies and values are shaped, ultimately influencing the choice process.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### EXISTING LITERATURE ON ADULT LEARNING, ADULT DEVELOPMENT, ELITE ATHLETES, AND MOTIVATION

The examination of current literature produces no precise research that can directly respond to the questions raised in this qualitative study; however, related themes have emerged from this exploration and are specifically linked to adult learning and adult development theories, transition processes and retirement issues affecting elite athletes, and motivation theory. The related literature on adult learners and athletes provides a primary framework and foundation for this study.

#### Adult Learning

Understanding the influences that determine educational engagement of retired elite athletes first requires consideration of the historical background of adult learning, today's adult learners, and institutional responses to adult learners. The sample chosen for this study is a highly specialized group and may ultimately create the need for new models outside of the typical adult learner theories. Support for this idea comes from Brookfield (1986) who cautions, with any individual or group in adult learning environments, generalizations about the "nature" of adult learning have little "predictive power" (p. 25). Yet, the knowledge about adult learners and the importance of their place in the world of higher education and beyond is important for the capacity to respond to the research questions posed in this study.

Historically, in the United States, the education of adults traces back to the founding of the country. Adult learning first took shape as informal learning activities in homes and churches, and afterward in the late 1700s when, then Army General, George Washington began a basic skills and literacy campaign for enlisted military personnel (Mead, 2008; Sticht, 2002). The adult education movement grew slowly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in 1901 the first junior college opened its doors in Joliet, Illinois (AACC, n.d.). The creation of the junior college, specifically designed for the education of adults, led to the founding of community colleges all across the United States (AACC, n.d.). Later, the enactment of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill) in 1944 presented millions of American veterans with an opportunity to go to college; an opportunity they acted upon leading to record numbers of adults in formal educational settings (AACC, n.d.; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

### *Adult Learners*

Today, adult learners, numbering in the millions, join the ranks of college students across the United States. According to the *Digest of Education Statistics*, in the fall of 2009, 5,758,723 individuals age 25 and older were enrolled in undergraduate study (NCES, 2010, Table 200). Over 55% of this total comprised enrollees between the ages of 25 and 34 (NCES, 2010, Table 200). Specifically, 2,044,157 were age 25 to 29, and 1,177,534 were age 30 to 34 (NCES, 2010, Table 200). Females age 25 and older made up over 61% of the total 25-and-older undergraduate population (NCES, 2010, Table 200). The volume of adult learners today is having an important impact on higher education. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that students age

25 and older experienced “larger than the percentage increase in the number of younger students” (NCES, Chapter 3, Para. 5) and projects a further “rise of 23 percent in enrollments of students 25 and over” between 2010 and 2019 (NCES, Chapter 3, Para. 5).

The demographics alone however, do not illustrate the diverse mosaic of adult learner characteristics. Morstain and Smart (1977) maintain that adult learners typically fall into one of five categories: 1) those with no specific goal, 2) social learners, 3) stimulation seekers, 4) those with career-related goals, and 5) life change learners. It has been argued that adult learners are different from other learner populations because of the wide range of their individual characteristics. The distinctions are examined on micro-levels in the literature ultimately observing the differences between adult learners and non-traditional learners. Compton, Cox and Santos Laanan (2006), as well as Kasworm (2008), define adult learners as a group possessing the following attributes:

- Adult learners are typically enrolled in a program of study that leads to a degree or a vocational certificate;
- Adult learners tend to have directed goals for their program of study which typically focus on enhancing professional skills;
- Adult learners rarely identify as students, but rather employed persons who attend school;
- Adult learners are likely to enroll in online or distance learning programs;
- Adult learners may have additional barriers to enrollment not common of the non-traditional learner;

- Adult learners are more likely than non-traditional learners to cease enrollment without completing their program of study.
- Adult learners are also inclined to gravitate toward educational environments that value their previous experiential learning and the equating of this learning into formal collegiate credit. (Compton et al., 2006; Kasworm, 2008)

Kasworm (2008) adds to the list of characteristics an exploration of the “emotional challenges” (p. 28) many adult learners face during educational engagement. She suggests that, while adult learners exhibit substantial mettle in attempting the goal of higher education, a significant element of “fragility” (Kasworm, 2008, p. 28) exists and must be considered by both the adult learner and the institution. Bearing in mind all of the widely varying characteristics of the adult learners, educational institutions might consider how the presence of creative and/or alternative curriculum methods may be utilized as an important bridge for this population to engage in education.

### *Curricular Implications*

Colleges and universities, in light of the millions of adult learners now enrolled across the country, may be compelled to take an increasingly active role in focused adult curricula development. Donnelly (2004) argues that there is power in curricular creativity. The arena of adult education grows and survives because of the subscription to this idea. Successful adult education programs are likely those which truly focus on the adult learner population they aim to serve, and deliver the knowledge adult learners seek and require.

Merriam (2008) has said that “adult learning is a complex phenomenon that can never be reduced to a single, simple explanation” (p. 94). The differences in how adults learn are as varied as the characteristics of the adults themselves. These differences lend support to the idea that true learning is “more than cognitive processing” (Merriam, 2008, p. 97) and is based on multi-dimensional aspects of the mind, body and spirit of the adult learner (Merriam, 2008). The diversity of adult learners when compared to what were historically considered traditional students, may lead to deliberation of effective curricula and policies directed at the adult learner population in institutions of higher education (Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Many in higher education have expressed concern that adult learners are overlooked and disregarded politically and socially in our institutions thereby left with “little space, voice, and value” (Sissel et al., 2001, p. 18), to directly impact curricular development.

Creation of successful educational initiatives must consider the *how* and *what* is delivered to adult learners. Merriam (2008) argues that “situation cognition posits that our knowing (cognition) is “situated” or resides in “authentic”, real-life activity” (p. 95). The importance of “narrative learning” (Merriam, 2008, p. 96) is also suggested meaning that “we ‘story’ our lives to give meaning to our experiences” (p. 96). Sealey-Ruiz (2007) also adds that curriculum deemed “culturally relevant” generates increased value of the college curriculum. Sealey-Ruiz’s (2007) research, while specific to adult African-American women, has merit cross-culturally, and across degree programs, when adult degree programs are designed with a goal of “assigning readings and coursework that are relevant to the students’ lives” (p. 58).

If Merriam's (2008) and Sealey-Ruiz' (2007) views are plausible, consideration and evaluation should occur of current teaching methodologies used with adult learners. Knowles (1990) questions why educators, understanding that adult development and learning are not the same as that of children, continue to teach adult learners in the same manner as they experienced as children. Although Knowles (1990) is speaking only to the concept of instruction, a clear link may be extracted from this to curriculum development.

### *Professional Hockey Players*

The demographics of professional hockey players have evolved over the 96 years since the National Hockey League's founding. Today's professional hockey players come from countries all over the globe, yet the largest single population remains that of Canadian-born players (Koutaniemi, 2014). During the 2013-2014 season 52.2% of players were Canadian with an impressive 24.1% hailing from the United States (Koutaniemi, 2014). These percentages are a far cry from the nationality distribution of the 1970s when over 90% hailed from Canada compared to just 7.5% born in the United States in 1975 (Koutaniemi, 2014). The 2013-2014 season also continued the long standing tradition of most Canadian players coming from the province of Ontario (43%) while on the other side of the border, Michigan boasted the most American players (18.1%) (Koutaniemi, 2014).

A large number of players drafted into the National Hockey League come from the elite Major Junior teams of the Canadian Hockey League (Dube, Schinke, Hancock & Dubuc, 2007). Typically, players enter into Major Junior hockey around the age of 16,

leaving home for the first time, living and playing across Canada (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008; Dube et al., 2007). During this time, an enormous amount of pressure is placed on the shoulders of these young men as they learn to cope with adult decision making and assimilation into the culture of elite hockey (Bruner et al., 2008). The early adaptation to, and integration into, professional hockey does not prolong the professional hockey player's career. During the 2013-2014 season, the average age of National Hockey League players ranged from 27.32 for forwards, 27.45 for defensemen, and 28.52 years for goaltenders (Koutaniemi, 2014). Noteworthy, is that as of the 2009-2010 season, the average age of retirement seasons was 28.19 for forwards and defensemen, and 28.80 for goaltenders (Koutaniemi, 2014). With retirement approaching in the later part of their 20s, conceivably, these individuals would begin to seek out post-transition options related to next careers including further education opportunities.

#### *Retired Elite Athletes as Adult Learners*

The review of adult learning literature thus far concludes that recognition of the individuality of adult learners, and an appreciation of the unique back stories brought with them, are essential in the success of the learners. Using the literature, it is possible to make connections between the historical characteristics of adult learners and the potential for these elements to show in retired elite athletes.

Retired elite athletes may fit into most, if not all, of the characteristics outlined by Compton et al. (2006) and Kasworm (2006). The latter of Morstain and Smart's (1977) categories (life change learners) may relate directly to this population in that educational engagement may serve as a reactionary event for the life transition of retirement. For

example, this population may seek a degree or vocational certificate in their post-hockey career years, to provide a foundation for their next employment path, or to use as an enhancement of already identified professional skills. The idea that retired athletes would not readily identify as *students* is plausible. Considering the unique demographics about elite athletes, the reality of becoming adult learners adds complex strata with the mind-body-spirit triad (Merriam, 2008). For example, unlike many professions, the physicality of the career of a professional hockey player begins when the player is young, only to intensify at extreme levels with the player often retiring at a young age (Bruner et al., 2008; Koutaniemi, 2014). It is possible that years of emotional, physical and spiritual stress brings forward educational implications that are not yet understood. For instance, the damage from repeated physical injury (including brain damage from concussions sustained while playing) might necessitate alternative learning activities for this population. Additionally, consideration of the cultural distinctiveness as “retired professional hockey players” should be given. In adult learning, we appreciate that past educational experiences of the individual as a result of culture, or of individual events, may influence adult learner behavior acting as either a catalyst, or a blockade, to engagement (Jackson, 2009). Cultural dimensions described in the contexts of nationality and native language spoken may impact learning as well as the exclusivity of being part of a select population groomed for play in professional hockey at a young age. Actual time spent in the culture of professional sports may also prove important in the ability to adjust to the role of adult learner.

A new study regarding retired elite athletes and their engagement as adult learners adds depth to the adult learning literature specifically directed to retired adults, retired elite athletes, and early career changers

### Adult Development

Adult development theory and adult learning theory are closely linked and at times interconnected. Theories about adult development center on the psychosocial and emotional development of humans as they age. Many of the adult development theorists frame their theories in terms of stages or levels that a person moves through during his or her lifetime. The review of literature for this study is focused on those theorists who have concentrated on both the development of adults, and the psychosocial and emotional development of athletes.

#### *Adult Development Theories*

Many theorists have proposed adult development stages as explanations for behavior in adulthood. The foundation of using stages, or levels, to describe adult development stems primarily from Erik Erikson's theory of the "human life cycle" (Erikson, 1976, p. 19). The theory is based on Sigmund Freud's "original discovery of the psychosexual stages in childhood and their fateful relationship to the major psychopathological syndromes at all ages" (Erikson, 1976, p. 23). Erikson reasons that there are specific stages or levels of growth from infancy to death which people must travel through. The theory also contends that growth cannot occur without passing

through each stage, one building upon another (Erikson, 1976). These stages, and the corresponding life cycles, are illustrated in the chart below taken from Erikson (1976):

THE INTERPLAY OF SUCCESSFUL LIFE STAGES

H. OLD AGE									Integrity vs. Despair, Disgust: WISDOM
G. MATURITY								Generativity vs. Self-Absorption: CARE	
F. YOUNG ADULTHOOD							Intimacy vs. Isolation: LOVE		
E. ADOLESCENCE					Identity vs. Identity Confusion: FIDELITY				
D. SCHOOL AGE				Industry vs. Inferiority: COMPETENCE					
C. PLAY AGE			Initiative vs. Guilt: PURPOSE						
B. EARLY CHILDHOOD		Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt: WILL							
A. INFANCY	Trust vs. Mis-trust: HOPE								

Figure 1: The Interplay of Successful Life Stages (Erikson, 1976, p. 25)

Erikson (1976) presents the life cycles as a series of positive and negative outcomes, each building upon the previous stage, shaping the psychosocial and emotional development of adults.

Additional theorists have used Erikson (1976) as a foundation for their own conceptions of adult development. Levinson's (1986) theory on adult development, for example, also utilizes periods of development but refers to them as "eras" (p. 5). These eras are distinguished as pre-adulthood, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood (Levinson, 1986). Integral to each era is a "life structure" (Levinson, 1986, p. 6) defined as "the underlying pattern or design of a person's life at a given time" (Levinson, 1986, p. 6). Levinson (1986) argues that the principal aspects of any life structure are the "person's *relationships* with various others in the external world" (p. 6). His theory of adult development concludes that the pivotal elements of a person's existence are "marriage-family and occupation" (Levinson, 1986, p. 6) and are the "greatest significance for the self and the evolving life course" (p. 6). Moving from one life structure to another, requires a "transition" leading to life decisions that allow movement into the next life structure (Levinson, 1986). As with other adult development theories, each era, life structure, and transition is associated with an age range (Levinson, 1986). The age ranges are expected based on the norms from Levinson's (1986) research conducted initially with men, but later broadened to include women as well. Levinson (1986) concedes that while the specific age ranges are questionable and controversial in the field, he believes that there is an "*underlying* order in the human life course, an order

shaped by the eras and by the periods of life structure development” (p. 11). The image below illustrates Levinson’s (1986) theory:

**Figure 1**  
*Developmental Periods in the Eras of Early and Middle Adulthood*

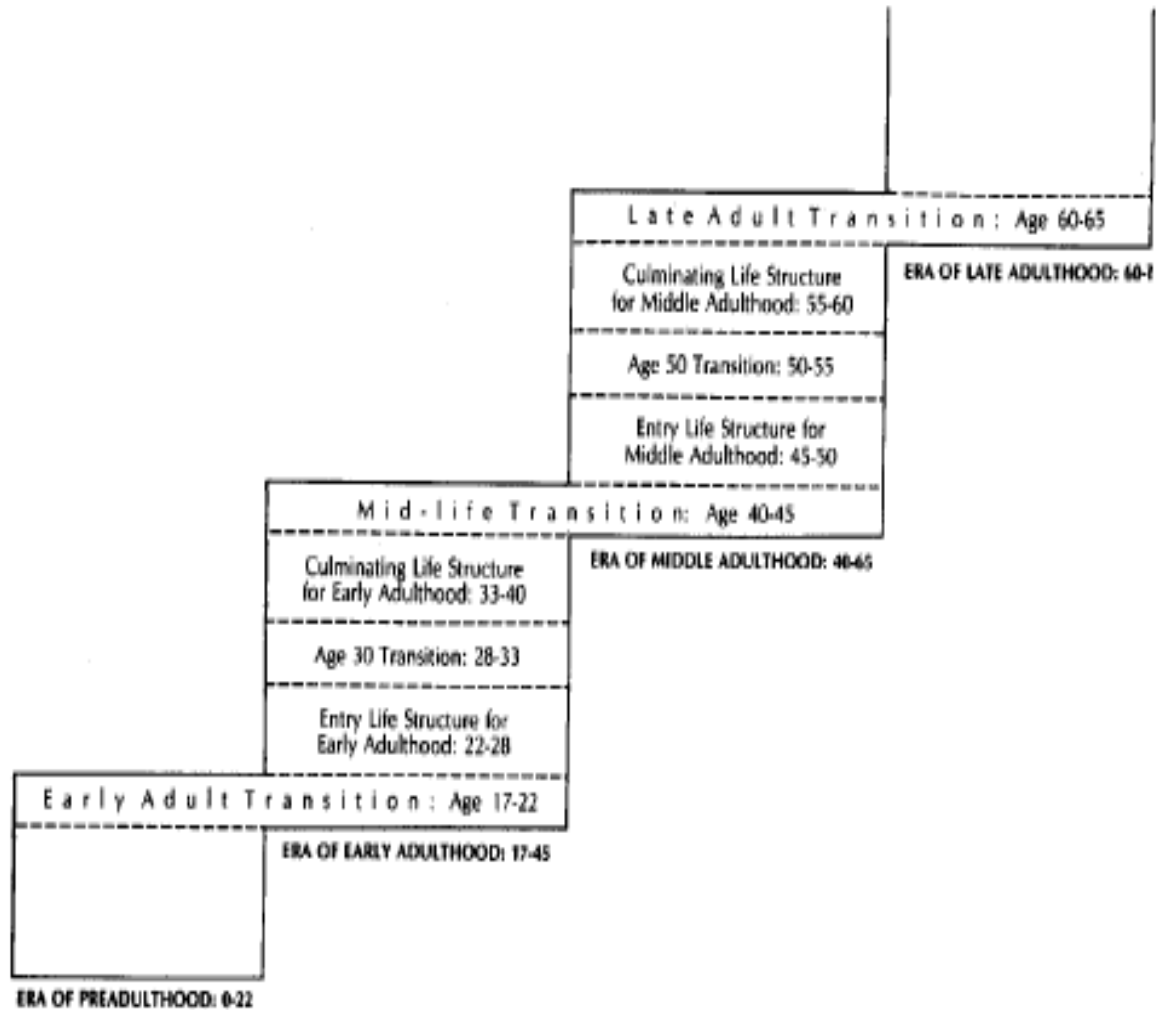


Figure 2: Developmental Periods in the Eras of Early and Middle Adulthood (Levinson, 1986, p. 8)

Lowenthal, Thurnher and Chiriboga (1975) also agree that there are four stages in adulthood: 1) early adulthood, 2) parenthood, 3) post parenthood, and 4) retirement, similar to the foundations of both Erikson (1976) and Levinson (1986). Gould’s (1978)

theory echoes that "...*adulthood is not a plateau*; rather it is a dynamic and changing time for all of us" (p. 14), also repeated by Wortley and Amatea (1982) who believe that adulthood is a period of constant activity.

### Development of Hockey Players

Professional hockey players, similar to other elite athletes, often retire in their late 20s and early 30s, suggesting that the core adult developmental theories may not be appropriate to describe the development stages, periods, or eras, of this unique population. Even upon entry into the world of elite hockey, this population faces a different adult development path than many of their non-elite athlete peers.

The results of a study conducted by Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, and Spink (2008), suggest that the rookie ice hockey player at an elite level (Major Junior) enters into a "long developmental phase" (Bruner et al., 2008, p. 237) in which full focus is solely on the sport and the demands of continual improvement. There is never a period of contentment or complacency. Upon entry into Major Junior A hockey, at the mean age of 17 years old, the participants of the study (Bruner et al., 2008) experienced an intense, high-speed level of play, and the extreme pressures to make the lineup of each game. Coupled with this, Bruner et al. (2008) find that the individual confidence level of the participants appears directly related to "point production" (Bruner et al., 2008, p. 244), and negative feelings of self are directly correlated with lower than desired point production. Emerging from the study (Bruner et al., 2008), are revelations that self-confidence and self-esteem are greatly impacted by the interactions with the participant's

support team (teammates, billets (host families), and coaches). Interestingly, the study found that often the participants were unable to determine if the coach was providing “constructive or negative criticism” (Bruner et al., 2008, p. 245) when the participants looked to them for advice.

The young age at the time of entry into the level of elite hockey (Koutaniemi, 2014; Bruner et al., 2008), may indicate a quickened maturation process thereby placing rookie athletes well beyond the maturation pace of their non-elite athletic peers. One of the participants of the Bruner et al., (2008) study seemed to sum this up when he replied, “You grow up in a hurry” (Bruner et al., 2008, p. 246). Often, the conversation about elite rookie athletes in American society, centers on their economic value to a particular team, and the signing of big-money contracts. The discussion seldom focuses on the pressures of dealing with adult responsibilities during adolescence, and the anxiety thrust upon this population at the tender ages of 16 and 17 (Bruner et al, 2008). While Bruner et al.’s (2008) study is directed on the entry into the realm of elite sports, it could be argued that the message is clearly transferable throughout the elite hockey player’s career as he or she endures further hastening of psychological and emotional development, ultimately facing possible retirement by the age of 30 (Koutaniemi, 2014). Perhaps, this specific population of elite athletes will continually reach developmental milestones out of sync with the traditional theories on adolescent and adult development.

The personal transitions, from the role of “player” to the status of “retired” for professional hockey players, will come when most non-elite athletic individuals are in the “young adulthood” (Erikson, 1976) or “early adulthood” (Levinson, 1986) stages or eras.

Additionally, professional hockey players may find themselves in the throes of marriage, parenthood, career transition and retirement all at the same time, blurring the lines of the proposed stages and eras. These factors strengthen the position that retired professional hockey players may not fit the traditional adult development theory molds thereby supporting the need for a new qualitative study about this population.

### Elite Athlete Retirement and Transition

Elite athletes often face retirement coping difficulties and uncertain futures at relatively young ages. Possibly, this transition forces this unique population to confront distinct challenges uncommon for non-elite athletes who retire typically in later stages of life. Therefore, an exploration of the retirement process and transition challenges should be conducted.

#### *Retirement from Elite Sport*

“From fields where glory does not stay  
And early though the laurel grows  
It withers quicker than the rose.”

(An excerpt from “To an Athlete Dying Young” by A. E. Housman, 1896)

The retirement process of the professional athlete is unique. When the smell of competition is gone, and the locker is cleaned out, a new world emerges often with a turbulent adjustment period. Ideally, the decision to retire from a chosen profession is an individual choice coming at a later phase in life (Levinson, 1986 ; Erikson, 1976). Typically, a potential retiree would have time to adequately plan for retirement, both financially and psychologically. Yet, for professional athletes the inevitable decision to

retire is frequently determined by factors beyond their control and often forced upon them as a result of injury or poor performance level (Wippert & Wippert, 2010; May & Tsai, 2007; Tremaine Drahotka & Eitzen, 1998). Understandably, many professional athletes may feel as Housman (1896) describes, like a core piece of who they are as human beings has bloomed early and withered quickly thus generating complex and emotional paths to navigate.

Research (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Dennison, 1997; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; McKnight et al., 2009; Wippert & Wippert, 2010; Wylleman & Reints, 2010) indicates that the termination from professional sports, both voluntary and involuntary, often produces intense feelings of anxiety, loss and sorrow. Fortunato and Marchant (1999) describe, from their research of Australian football players, what they refer to as a “socioemotional threat” (p. 269) that manifests from poor retirement coping and leads to “a considerable sense of personal loss” (p. 270) for the athlete. Further literature (Wolff & Lester, 1999; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999) compares the retirement adjustment of elite athletics to the actual “dying process” (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999, p. 1044), using the five stages of grief described by Kubler-Ross (1969). Kubler-Ross (1969) determined that human beings experience a grief cycle when confronted with death. The cycle involves specific stages of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). There may be some truth in the application of each stage to the transition and retirement of elite athletes (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999).

Cecic Erpic, Wylleman, and Zupancic (2004) assert that a true understanding of the termination process itself and the catalysts of retirement (both athletic and non-athletic), are required to facilitate appropriate and comprehensive transition services for

elite athletes. Cockerill (2005) argues that there are “four principal reasons for an athlete leaving sport: personal choice, age, injury, and deselection” (p. 880). Cockerill’s (2005) work supports the concept of transition services designed to guide the retiring athlete “before, during and after transition in the form of identifying existing skills that might transfer to a positive career change, facilitating the acquisition of new skills, and also building a database of people who might promote the athlete in a new venture” (p. 880). The concept of identifying transferable skills is critical (Danish et al., 1993; McKnight et al., 2009; Petitapas et al, 1992; Sinclair and Orlick, 1993). McKnight et al. (2009) suggest that “athletic retirement is very different from occupational retirement” (p. 63) and as such the change is not singularly about the stoppage of sport, but rather about a change in identity. This change in identity requires the transitioning player to think differently about themselves and the skills they have, such as “tenacity” (p. 64) and how that skill might translate into a professional setting. Transition services are most needed when the retiring athlete is “failing to cope adequately” (Cockerill, 2005, p. 880) and lacks a mentor.

Webb, Nasco, Riley and Headrick (1998) stress athletes, who retire due to injury, have the most difficult adjustment; however, Webb et al. (1998) also find that the retirement adjustment of athletes who chose to retire, as well as those who retired because they had reached their competitive ceiling, shared the same level of adjustment difficulties. Wippert and Wippert (2008) contend that elite athletes who received support from the coaching staff before termination demonstrated less traumatic stress symptoms than those terminated without coaching staff support at time of termination.

While unusual for upper-level professional athletes in the United States, May and Tsai (2007) find that elite athletes in Hong Kong commonly retire for financial reasons in addition to physiological factors. Elite athletes in Hong Kong make very little money while actively competing and therefore find themselves in financial hardship as they try to maintain their competitive level (May & Tsai, 2007). Although this concept would be an uncommon event in the United States given the traditionally large starting salaries of rookie athletes (over \$400,000 annually in 2013) (NFL CBA, 2011, p. 146) across the NHL, NFL, MLB and NBA, consideration of the retired athlete's finances should be given. Specifically for professional hockey players who reach the National Hockey League, the minimum salary for a rookie player was \$525,000 for the 2010-2011 regular season (NHL, CBA, 2005, p. 49). Non-NHL professional ice hockey players, such as those playing in the American Hockey League, earn substantially less salary than their NHL counterparts, with a minimum salary of \$39,000 for the 2011-2012 season (PHPA, CBA, 2010). Conceivably, professional hockey players, at the NHL level and below, regardless of salary may lack adequate retirement savings given their short-life careers. The lack of appropriate financial security may necessitate the need for a second career. Transition services addressing this issue appear sporadically throughout the professional sports leagues.

The news is not all negative however and the dichotomy among some professional sports groups that have been studied is evident. Lerch (1982) suggests that retirees from Major League Baseball tended to be generally satisfied with life after competition and found the transition to retirement mild. Sinclair and Orlick (1993) find

that those elite athletes who retired after they had achieved their individual professional sport goals had a more positive adjustment post-career than those who did not feel their goals were met.

*Athletic Psychological Characteristics (aka Athletic Identity)*

Historically, the concept of identity, as an element of development, has been extensively researched, defined, and redefined in the last century. Erikson (1978) and Levinson (1986) have each worked with this concept in relation to human development life cycles, or stages. This literature is important to this study as elite athletes often are defined by their sport, both individually and socially.

Conflicting research exists about when athletic identity begins. Houle, Brewer and Kluck (2010) assert that athletic identity begins in late childhood. Their theory is supportive of Erikson's (1978) and Levinson's (1986) life cycles and life stages respectively; however, Bruner et al.'s (2008) research suggests an alternative view. Specifically, Bruner et al. (2008) find that individuals who ascend to the professional level in hockey begin playing the game at a remarkably young age (around 5 years old). It is therefore a plausible conclusion that athletic identity formation is established in youth, reflecting the current research that suggests its occurrence in both early and later childhood stages.

This early formation point, leads one to question whether or not those who strongly identify as "athlete" are capable of alternate, or possible, selves. For example, Stryker's (2007) theory suggests that identity is established because of "internalized expectations derived from roles" (abstract). This concept naturally directs me to the

inquiry of whether or not elite athletes have the ability to significantly alter, or more appropriately to *adapt* their psychological characteristics (to that of the adult learner for example) as their new realities emerge.

Phoenix, Faulkner and Sparkes (2005) find that athletes with strong athletic identity experience difficulty even imagining a future as an older, or aged, individual. Stephan, Torregrosa, and Sanchez (2007) assert that physical changes post-career can negatively affect the psyche of the retired athlete. Masten, Tusak, Fagrel (2006) found those athletes with higher sense of self-identity had much lower anxiety in retirement than those with a higher sense of athletic identity. Stephan and Brewer (2007) argue that understanding the factors that determine athletic identity, and how these elements develop, is vital in creating effective coping programs for elite athletes.

The psychological characteristics which retired elite athletes cling to may also determine potential second-career options. Bookbinder (1955) finds that most former professional baseball players settle into managerial or professional positions within baseball itself; in essence, they never leave the sport. Hinds (2009) echoed this in his findings that retired athletes often attempt to relive their sports careers through other activities connected to their chosen sport, or even other sports. For those who do not remain entirely attached to their sport, Hughes (2010) finds that retired professional athletes are likely to enter into real estate development or the restaurant/bar/entertainment arena.

Internationally, the need for transition services and retirement coping assistance is upheld as an essential service for retiring or transitioning elite athletes. Active-career

athletic identity arguably creates powerful, and often lasting, positive and negative effects. These often continue at the point of retirement and well into retirement frequently establishing threats to a healthy psyche. Recognizing and acknowledging the threats to healthy transition, the National Hockey League instituted their Life After Hockey program (presently called Breakaway) as a mechanism to combat the often turbulent transition. Stambulova, Stephan and Japhag (2007) find that participation in retirement planning of both French and Swedish international athletes played a large role in their ability to satisfactorily cope with life after retirement. Interestingly, Sinclair and Orlick (1993) also find that those retirees who were considered the “problem cases” in retirement (those who had a traumatic experience) did not feel that simply “keeping busy” was an effective strategy for coping in retirement. Here in the United States, we have seen an increased desire for “life-development intervention” among career-transition professional soccer players (Lavallee, 2005). Wolff and Lester (1989) propose the use of a, “three-stage counseling process: listening/confrontation, cognitive therapy, and vocational guidance” to ultimately provide the greatest assistance for the challenges in retirement (abstract).

Understanding the issues surrounding identity and post-career choices could be beneficial in understanding the nuances of the experiences of retired hockey players. It is possible that in retirement, professional hockey players may display similar feelings and behaviors. The research in this study may provide added depth in the transition research related to professional hockey players. The concept of “vocational guidance” (Wolff & Lester, 1989) should be explored more specifically as it relates to professional hockey

players. The use of educational activities is noticeably slender in the literature about transition and retirement services for this population of athletes.

### Motivation Theory

Motivational constructs are not always necessary for an adequate explanation of behavior...However, invoking motivation constructs may allow us to give a deeper and richer explanation of what is happening than would be possible if we used simpler descriptive or analytical statements. (Geen, Beatty, & Arkin, 1984, p. 3-4).

The study ultimately seeks to understand the processes underlying the choices of professional hockey players in retirement. Specifically, the focused goal is to achieve an appreciation of their choices surrounding educational attendance in retirement. While this study relies on the principles of adult learning and development theories as a core foundation, motivation theory was utilized in this study because it could provide an additional framework with which to view the phenomenon of retired professional hockey players in the educational choice process. The exploration seeks to determine not only the underlying processes in choice, but also to establish if juxtaposition exists between the unusual adult development path elite athletes encounter, and an identifiable theory of motivation.

### *Expectancy-Value Theory*

I have selected expectancy-value theory (EVT) to round out the frameworks (adult learning theory, adult development theory) utilized in this study. Expectancy-value theory is often identified as the prevailing theory of motivation among non-

psychologists because it offers a “rational view of motives” (Geen, Beatty, Arkin, 1984, p.162).

Expectancy-value theory grew out of the work of Lewin and Tolman in the 1930s, specifically in regard to the importance of value (Lewin) and expectation of success (Tolman) as influences on activities (Wigfield, Tonks, & Klauda, 2009). Modern thought on EVT is social-cognitive in nature thereby “link[ing] achievement, performance, persistence and choice most directly to individuals’ expectancy-related and task value beliefs” (Wigfield et al., 2009, p. 56). Eccles (the driving force behind modern EVT) and her colleagues over the years, find that “these constructs are the most immediate or direct predictors of achievement performance and choice....influenced by a variety of psychological, social, and cultural influences” (Wigfield et al., 2009, p. 56).

Eccles (2009) suggests personal and collective/social identities bear a direct influence on behavior. Specifically, Eccles (2009) states that “identity can be conceptualized in terms of two basic sets of self-perceptions: (a) perceptions related to skills, characteristics, and competencies...and (b) perceptions related to personal values and goals” (p. 78). Personal identity is defined as the personally valued aspects of “the self that one knows through observation of one’s own behaviors and characteristics” (Eccles, 2009, p. 78). Collective/social identity is defined as “personally valued parts of the self that serve to strengthen one’s ties to highly valued social groups and relationships” (Eccles, 2009, p. 78). Eccles (2009) believes behavioral choices are a way for people to enact and validate their personal and/or collective/social identities (p. 79).

Central to expectancy-value theory are the concepts of expectancies and the perceived value of a task. Expectancies most plainly may be described as one's perception of positive outcomes related to a task. These beliefs come from mastery experiences. Eccles (2009) and Wigfield et al. (2009) describe mastery experiences as those events, often when we are young, in which we learn to complete a task on our own leading to a feeling of competence and control. Parental feedback, formal and systematic evaluation, and social comparison each play a role in the development, or hindrance, of competence and control (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Task values likewise are influenced by prior personal experiences with the task and therefore are subjective (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). These subjective task values vary among individuals and may change depending on the period in an individual's development (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009).

Expectancy-value theory holds that there are four major components of task value: (1) Intrinsic value, (2) Attainment value, (3) Utility value, and (4) Cost (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Intrinsic value is most easily defined as one's interest in, and enjoyment of, engaging in a particular task (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Attainment value is described as the importance of the task (Wigfield et al., 2009) and is measured by whether engaging in the task is "consistent with one's self-image and personal and collective/social identities (Eccles, 2009, p. 82). Utility value is expressed as an individual's perception of how well the task fits into one's goals, both immediate and long-term (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Cost is associated with what has to be given up in pursuit of the task (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Task values are

influenced by non-cognitive elements like satisfaction, cultural or social shared beliefs, perception of one's current self in relation to a desired, or undesired future self, and one's personal experiences (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009)

### *Expectancy-Value Theory Applied to Hockey Players*

I found expectancy-value theory to be the most appropriate motivation theory lens with which to view the education choices of professional hockey players in retirement. Particularly interesting in relation to this phenomenon are the sources of task values. (Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2009). Eccles (2009) and Wigfield et al. (2009) propose that when evaluating value sources, consideration should be given to the developmental stage of the individual. My exploration of the literature about elite athletes suggests that this population experiences child, adolescent, and adult development much differently than their non-elite athletic peers (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008). The intense focus on hockey, and the apparent competency beliefs that follow, may influence (positively or negatively) the individual's beliefs about competency in relation to school-based activities. Specifically, it is plausible that the high level of competency in hockey might discourage competency beliefs related to educational activities because the focus on education from the time the players are very young may be absent. Alternatively, competency beliefs about education may be positively influenced through beliefs that if one is competent at the sport, he or she might demonstrate competency in many other areas such as school-based activities.

Understanding how educational competency develops, and if there are cultural differences in these beliefs between American and Canadian players, may contribute to

the current literature. For example, Major Junior, the elite hockey league in Canada for amateur players under the age of 20, serves as the primary funnel for Canadian players into the NHL. Traditionally many Canadian players embark on this concentrated path. While there are exceptions, American players usually do not seek out the path of Major Junior hockey, possibly due to the rigors and demands of the league, and instead often take the route of playing prep school and, perhaps, college hockey prior to entering the NHL. It is plausible that the post-career choices of retired hockey players who took the path of Major Junior are directly influenced by academic expectations experienced both personally and culturally. Commonly, Major Junior players live away from home with billet families often when they are as young as 15. Living away from the family home, may or may not produce affective memories or mastery experiences with education.

Culture may also have a role in the components of subjective task values (Intrinsic, Attainment, Utility and Cost). The perspectives of American and Canadian players are of specific interest to this study; however, in the broader context, the international composition of professional hockey (Russians, Finns, Swedes, etc.) may illustrate profound cultural influence in regard to these values.

Intrinsic value (anticipated enjoyment or pleasure the task provides) is the origin for any task. Lack of enjoyment or pleasure in completing the task may eliminate any attempt of the task. Perhaps, this is the reality for some retired professional players in their educational choices. Yet, for those who choose to participate in educational activities, there likely is an expectation of gratification to some degree. The explanations for why this occurs might vary. For some it may be the pleasure of participating in life-

long learning activities while for others the joy may be explained by the individual's competitive nature and the happiness derived from undertaking new and unexpected challenges.

The attainment value (needs fulfillment) may be a more complex element to identify than intrinsic value. The pilot study I conducted in 2012 reveals that there are a number of possible "needs" that are fulfilled in the completion of a college degree. These include, but are not limited to: the desire to prove to himself that he is more than "just" a hockey player; the need to be recognized as an appropriate role model for his children; and the fulfillment of the lifelong desire to simply finish the college degree he began many years prior. Additionally, some of the respondents indicated more than one of the above mentioned needs as "motivators" for completing their college degrees. This suggests the possibility of multiple needs which may be common themes among this particular sample.

While the attainment value appears deeply personal, the utility value (usefulness) is by nature much less so. Wigfield et al. (2009) suggest that the utility value associated with a task includes where the task fits in with the individual's future. Perhaps, choosing to complete a college degree or professional education holds some purpose in future employment. Reflecting upon Brooks' (1955) and Hinds' (2009) works, I am reminded that often, retired athletes remain connected to their sport well into retirement. This might include seeking out coaching occupations in college and university settings, which often require possession of an undergraduate degree as a condition of employment. These choices however, are always accompanied by some level of cost.

Cost can be viewed through the lenses of opportunity (e.g., cost of a missed chance), time (e.g., cost of periods away from family, business or other highly valued activities), psychological (e.g., cost of changing psychological commitments or sacrifice/surrender of persona), and financial costs among others. Eccles (2009) describes cost in terms of being influenced by “anticipated anxiety, fear of failure, and fear of the social consequences of success” (p. 83) which may reflect commonalities between the sample in this study and other adult learners.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The study utilizes qualitative methods to inform responses aimed at uncovering possible factors that influence the choice of professional hockey players to engage in educational activities in retirement. This section encompasses the rationale for the use of qualitative design, the role of the researcher, the population and sample for study, data collection and analysis, methods of verification, ethical issues and implications.

#### Rationale for Qualitative Design

The exploratory nature of the research question calls for an inductive process and analysis. This methodology also supports a holistic view of the phenomenon and the process of harvesting data is an experiential learning project in itself. The study employed personal interviews as the primary tool for data collection. The exploration through the use of open questions promoted immersion in the data which led to the discovery of relationships within the data. The personal histories of the population involved indicate a pattern of behavior regarding educational influences. Experimental methods were excluded from this study as it was not possible to control for the behavior of the participants and/or their environments.

#### Role of the Researcher

Examination of the role of the researcher is an important component of the research process. I have committed my career to serving adult learners as a university-

based academic advisor in degree completion programs for adult learners, and a college instructor. Additionally, as a certified career transition coach I have been able to focus attention on the experiences of transitioning professional athletes. As such, I am continually interested in the choice-making process of adult learners. The personal curiosity surrounding the elements that encourage professional hockey players to seek education, or those that discourage enrollment choices, is inspired by both my work with active and retired sports professionals, and my interest in sports and sports psychology. While I do not feel that I possess a particular bias regarding this study, the role of “fan” was compartmentalized during this research endeavor. The desire to assist this population of potential adult learners is sincere and my ability to positively impact their retirement transition may only be realized by first understanding their choice-making processes. The desire for knowledge and information, and my grounded background in higher education, support this endeavor.

### Population and Sample

The study utilized a purposive sample. The sample met the optimal characteristics of the study’s proposal and included 10 individuals retired from active play across all four professional hockey leagues initially identified for participation in this study: National Hockey League, American Hockey League, East Coast Hockey League, and Southern Professional Hockey League. Additionally, the individuals in the sample all identified as either Canadian or American. The study met the goal of inclusion for those individuals who chose to pursue higher education (prior to their professional hockey

career, during their professional hockey career, and post-hockey career), those who engaged in professional education (in retirement), as well as those who chose not to engage in educational experiences at all. Access to the sample was achieved through multiple avenues, including a heavy reliance upon social media and email outreach.

### Methods of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was the face-to-face or telephone interview with each participant, with accompanying detailed field notes. Additionally, statistical data regarding playing career (e.g. games played, goals, assists, etc.) was gathered from public roster records on each participant.

### *Interview*

The interviews were conducted over a consecutive five-month period from June 2013 to October 2013, utilizing pilot interviews conducted in 2011 and 2012. The interview was semi-structured applying an interview-guide approach. Samples of questions posed are provided below:

- Tell me the story about your life.
- Let's talk about your life during your Major Junior/prep school years.
- Tell me about your family.
- Walk me through your professional career and how your retirement came about.
- Tell me what life was like for you when your career came to a close.
- Tell me about your life now.

The goal was to conduct each interview face-to-face. Unfortunately, the distance of many of the participants prevented in-person interviews with the entire sample. Subsequently, 6 of the 10 interviews were conducted in-person with the remaining 4 interviews conducted over the telephone. Regardless of format, the interviews were consistently recorded using a digital device with accompanying detailed field notes. The interviews were personally transcribed in verbatim transcription to facilitate appropriate data analysis. In total, I transcribed nearly 11 hours of recordings with an average session of just over 60 minutes per participant:

Table 1: Participant Interviews

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview Date</i>	<i>Interview Length</i>
Patrick	10/13/2011	55 minutes
David	4/18/2012	48 minutes
Hunter	4/20/2012	60 minutes
Finn	6/12/2013	65 minutes
Kevin	7/12/2013	71 minutes
Liam	7/14/2013	51 minutes
Kane	7/20/2013	28 minutes
Cullen	7/26/2013	110 minutes
Connor	8/30/2013	77 minutes
Chris	10/2/2013	84 minutes

## Data Analysis

### *Constant Comparative*

The interpretation of the data, especially data emerging from semi-structured interviews, consistently poses a threat to the validity of qualitative studies. However, I chose to utilize the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) employing a standard data collection and analysis system to ensure the validity of the data analysis. This “systemic approach” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 102) “is designed to aid the analyst...in generating a theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, [and] close to the data” (p. 103).

Adoption of the constant comparative method led me through stages (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first stage involved hand-coding the data. I entered a period of pre-coding in which I utilized a basic highlighting system and began to determine important areas of the data. Both adult learning theory and adult development theory informed the coding decisions. Specifically, I remained conscious of the common characteristics of adult learners as well as the hallmark stages of adult development theory. The initial coding was created directly from the interview transcripts and began as codes related to: the start of hockey for the individual; family interactions; high school experiences; the professional career; and retirement. Through this process, I believed the participants were linked by some commonalities, yet also had many distinctive experiences. The general codes were then filtered and recoded several times continually refining them and ultimately culminating in 51 unique codes. During the second stage, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest the unit of analysis should shift from comparing “incident to incident” to

“incident with properties of the categories” (p. 108). Interestingly, the various codes which emerged in the data analysis phase of this study did not lead to clear categories. The third stage, identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967) involves delimiting the theory, “occurs at two levels: the theory and the categories” (p. 110). The delimitation did allow for generalizations, or more appropriately, themes to develop. These themes were informed with participants’ perceptions of values, expectancies and costs. The final stage in the constant-comparative method involves writing the theory that has emerged allowing the researcher to speak to “more abstract concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). The “purposeful generation of theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 186) enhances the validity. Specifically, the application of the principles of adult learning theory and expectancy-value theory, as well as an understanding of the common adult development theory constructs provides a foundation for validity.

#### Methods of Verification

Maxwell (2005) suggests that qualitative studies should incorporate appropriate internal validity measures into the study design. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that the validity criteria be based “on the detailed elements of the actual strategies used for the collecting, coding, analyzing and presenting data” (p. 224). Credibility is further enhanced when the researcher experiences “firsthand immersion” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 226), yet maintains “informed detachment” (p. 226). However, Maxwell (1998) takes the issue of validity further providing a list of “tests” to ensure validity is built into the study design.

Specifically, Maxwell (1998) illustrates validity threats in two broad categories: Bias and Reactivity (p. 243). Bias is defined as the “ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher’s theory, values or preconceptions” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 243). Importantly, Maxwell (1998) states that “in qualitative research, the main concern is not with eliminating *variance* between researchers in the values and expectations that they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher’s values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study” (p. 243). Reactivity, defined as “trying to “control for” the effect of the researcher” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 243), is impossible to eliminate and therefore should be recognized so that the researcher’s influence can be used productively (Maxwell, 1998).

Accepting that bias and reactivity are significant threats to validity, the following methods were employed in this study (Maxwell, 1998):

1. “Rich” Data Collection: “Intensive interviews enable [the collection] of data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 244). This method requires verbatim transcripts of all interviews with subsequent detailed and descriptive notes (Maxwell, 1998).
2. Respondent Validation: Systematic solicitation of feedback, from the study participants, about the data and conclusions is critical (Maxwell, 1998). Maxwell (1998) suggests that employing respondent validation is the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on

what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what is observed” (p. 244).

3. Searching for Discrepant Evidence and Negative Cases: Maxwell (1998) states that the identification and analysis of “discrepant data and negative cases is a key part of the logic of validity testing in qualitative research” (p. 244). Maxwell is clear that the “need to rigorously examine both the supporting and negative data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being ware of all of the pressures to ignore data that do not fit your conclusions” (p. 244) is critically important to the study design.
4. Statistics: Qualitative studies, in large part, have an “implicit quantitative component” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 245) and “allows you to test and support claims that are inherently quantitative, but also enable you to assess the *amount* of evidence in your data that bears on a particular conclusion or threat” (p. 245).
5. Comparison: The comparative element is admittedly different than in most qualitative studies due to the lack of similar research; however, recent work involving professional ballet dancers and the official “transition program” of the National Hockey League was utilized for comparison.

I am confident that the threats to the validity of this study were diminished by employing the methods discussed. Specifically, using the constant comparative method of analysis of the data, member checking, and external auditing enhanced the validity of the study and subsequent conclusions.

## Ethical Issues

I recognized the ethical responsibilities in conducting this research. My current role in higher education as both an academic advisor and an instructor demands adherence to the highest ethical standards. Therefore, I feel confident that my work with this study meets the ethical demands and guidelines set forth by the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and ensured that the methodologies employed are trustworthy.

Confidentiality of the participants is a paramount concern and was regarded as such throughout the study. Appropriately, the highest level of confidentiality has been maintained, including the proper storage of all consent forms, recordings, transcripts, and other data records in a secure locked cabinet maintained in my home office. Additionally, researcher bias has been continually addressed and deliberate effort was made to ensure that the respondent's reality is understood rather than a personal interpretation of the data.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Chapter 1 outlined the goal of this study as an endeavor to uncover the factors that influence professional hockey players to engage in educational activities in retirement. The results of the study instead reflect more of a *construction* regarding the processes that underlie choice rather than revelations. For the purposes of this section of the study, all participants will be referred to by a fictitious name in order to preserve the confidentiality of our conversations. Additionally, names of specific hockey teams and/or most places will be replaced with an alternate code (e.g. X Team, Canadian city). The section details the results of the interviews as described in Chapter 3.

#### Interview Results

The results from the ten face-to-face and telephone interviews provided a large amount of demographic data. The interviews supplied facts about each participant's life from the period of his childhood to the present-day. Conducted consecutively from June 2013 to October 2013, with pilot interviews from 2011 and 2012, each interview was digitally recorded and personally transcribed. The data were analyzed and hand-coded as unique codes and, ultimately, themes emerged. Additionally, statistical records regarding the participants' playing careers were incorporated into the data collection. The end result produced a spreadsheet containing 51 individual codes for comparative analysis.

## The Participants

Understanding the data submitted in this study warrants the presentation of the robust participant profiles developed from the detailed personal interviews. The following are brief vignettes on each participant, designed to describe the participant's early life, hockey career, retirement and post-career activities.

### *Patrick*

#### Early Life

Patrick was born in Ontario, Canada and began playing hockey at the age of the young age of 5. Choosing the path of Major Junior resulted in Patrick leaving home at 15 to live with a billet family and attend high school. Patrick's motivation for selecting the Major Junior route was to increase his chances of making it to the NHL and his subsequent performance in Major Junior did lead him led to turn pro at the age of 18:

I started playing when I was five. I grew up just outside of Toronto and like any good Canadian boy, we wanted to grow up and play in the NHL. I moved away from home when I was 15, so I was going into 11th grade, to play Major Junior hockey which is again typical of a Canadian upbringing ... Every kid wanted to play. Thought playing Major Junior led to the NHL.

Patrick describes his parents as firm believers in the importance of getting an education. His mother was a nurse and his father had no more than a high school diploma. Of the four children in the family, his two sisters and he completed undergraduate degrees; His younger brother, to date, has not. Patrick indicated that while

he placed education into a secondary role during his Major Junior career, though short-lived, he did complete some college coursework before he began his pro career:

But when I was playing Juniors, school was secondary to playing Major Junior. ...I finished high school in four and a half years and I took some summer courses because I was always, always education, in our home, education was always first and actually my intention was to use the game of hockey to get a scholarship as well. ... I started taking university courses after my first, sorry, before I started playing and the summer after my first year of pro hockey and then after that I stopped because I didn't, I don't want to say I didn't feel as though I needed it, but my focus was elsewhere.

### Hockey Career

Patrick was drafted into the NHL at age 18 and played at center. His career took him to 2 different minor league teams and 4 NHL teams across the span of his 17-year career. After spending 2 years in the minors, Patrick was called up to the NHL where he remained, continuously, for 15 years. Patrick served as his team's captain before retiring from the NHL in 2006 at the age of 35 due to a severe head injury.

### Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Patrick still struggles with the effects of the head injury sustained at the latter part of his playing career. He has described his retirement from active play as a fairly easy transition because he knew that his career had a finite end:

For me again, yeah, for me, I think it was an easy transition. My wife always thought it was going to be difficult for me to retire. You know they'd have to lock the door and throw away the key. But I think I was always realistic about my career and that it was only going to be a certain part of my life, you know, it was only a window, it wasn't my whole life, and it wasn't, it certainly wasn't going to define me. And so I, you know, I thought I transitioned easily into everyday life, you know, aside from the fact that I was suffering from you know, some injuries.

Patrick achieved the completion of his undergraduate degree in retirement which he describes as something he knew he would always finish. Patrick did not describe the existence of a mentor outside of his parental influence, or anyone who offered options for post-career activities, but did indicate that his wife and children have been, and continue to be, influential in his post-career decisions. The choice to continue his pursuit of an undergraduate degree stems from what Patrick describes, as a desire to satisfy his own need for its accomplishment. He sees no value in the degree completion as it relates to employment or business activities but describes the important role the degree plays as a model to his children:

And, you know, to this day people say why did you go back to school to get your degree and I can honestly say just 'cause I wanted to get it. It wasn't because I felt I needed it for business, but I've also been, I've also always been my own employer, entrepreneurial, in charge, and so, you know, that's different than the person who wants to go work at Smith Barney or something, or be an accountant, or, and they're going to need that on their resume. ...It's a sense of accomplishment. It, it'll, yes it will from the, it's an easier, I mean it's, for me I guess, you know I say for no other reason than I want it but it was also important that my children see and that was probably the second most, single greatest motivating factor was you know, I never ever said to my, although my mother had her education, to my dad, well you only had a grade 12 and my kids seem to think that, well if I only had a high school why do they have to have anything.

Patrick now invests his time in multiple business ventures and has remained connected to hockey through youth coaching activities and work with a minor league team.

## *David*

### Early Life

David was born in upstate New York and began playing hockey at the age of 9. As an American, David did not seek the path of Major Junior and instead left home at 16 to attend prep school with the focused goal of playing hockey. David describes his college possibilities as disappointing options, but a year after his high school graduation, he enrolled in a New England university to play hockey earning an undergraduate degree in business along the way:

Well, obviously grew up in upstate New York playing hockey a kid.... I left home at 16 to go to prep school. Repeated my junior year of high school at prep school at X academy... I did two years there. After graduation, I had some college options, wasn't happy with all my college options ...after that year I chose to go to X University, which is a school in X [New England state], where I played four years...Earned my business degree.

David describes his mother as a firm believer in the importance of higher education, but a strong, guiding force in his decision to pursue collegiate hockey. His mother was a career teacher who elevated to the role of a principal prior to her retirement. David makes no mention of his father at any point during the conversation. Of the three sons in the family, all are college educated. David possesses a master's degree in leadership, with his middle brother in the midst of a doctoral program, and youngest

brother in possession of an undergraduate degree with the intention of pursuing a master's degree:

She was a teacher for, elementary school teacher for, for probably 30 plus years and then she retired as a principal. So there was no getting away with the, with the educational process... It was, it was a pretty big thing. And that's why I think, a major part of why I chose to go to prep school. ... that was a big thing for mom to make sure I was taking classes and not just not doing anything but, the college and the academic side was always a, a big push. You know my brother's two years younger, and he's just finishing up his doctorate now, I have another brother's a senior in college and he's going back to get his master's next year, so that was always number one in her book.

### Hockey Career

David began his professional hockey career at the age of 23 upon completion of his undergraduate degree from a New England university. He played professionally for two years in the Southern Professional Hockey League as a defenseman. After spending 2 years at the SPHL level, David realized that his hockey career was stalled at that level and began to search out alternative career moves, including playing hockey professionally in Europe, and the possibility of leaving hockey altogether:

I guess you could say hockey has probably impacted every major decision I've ever made in regards to life and whatnot...After [undergraduate degree] completion, you know I had a number of options, jobs, you know things like that, but chose I wanted, felt I wanted to, to continue playing so I played for, played for two years in the Southern Professional Hockey League. ...After my second year, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do, after the season got a real job in Boston as a technical recruiter, um, did it for a couple months decided that it really wasn't for me, was pretty torn between going back and playing and, and wasn't really sure what I was going to do. Applied for an assistant position at a school called XXX College...Got it. Was the assistant coach there for two years, and just finishing my fourth year as the head coach here at XXX.

## Retirement and Post-Career Activities

David describes his retirement choice as a difficult decision and expressed that his strong need to be close to hockey continues to direct his life and career decisions. David played professional hockey until 2005, retiring at age 25 due to the financial strain of playing in the Southern Professional Hockey League:

[The retirement choice was a] tough, a very tough, decision for me...I was fortunate to get into hockey, so I, I just kind of at that point made the, made the decision, you know, playing in the Southern Professional Hockey League is not like playing in the NHL. You know, it's, you're not making a million bucks a year, so I think that was a big part of what factored into my decision and, having the ability to stay in the game, I think what was really part of the deciding factor. ...I mean I knew for me personally hockey was never gonna be a way that I could pay the bills. Ah, I mean I played for a couple of years. I did it more to say twenty years from now that I, you know, I did it. And I loved doing it, I had the opportunity to do it, but you're not gonna live off of 250 a week.

David also describes the value of his undergraduate credential in that it has opened doors in his post-play career journey. Specifically, David turned to collegiate coaching as a way to remain a part of the hockey world:

So the education was always, you know, the main focus, the main goal so that I would have something to, to fall back on. At the time, you know I, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do professionally. Of course now, I obviously know what I want to do professionally, but I wouldn't be here without, you know, the degree. I think that's the biggest, you know, you can't work at a university without having you know, a university degree. And I think it's opened the doors to other things. ... But I think that getting the degree was number one all along.

David currently is embarking on his sixth year as a collegiate ice hockey head coach at a Pennsylvania university.

## *Hunter*

### Early Life

Hunter was born in Ontario, Canada and began playing hockey at the age of the age of 2. As a Canadian, Hunter sought out the path of Major Junior at 15 but remained in his hometown to do so. Interestingly, Hunter chose to terminate his path through Major Junior and accept a collegiate scholarship; an uncommon action among Canadian players who typically remain in Major Junior with the hope of getting drafted into the NHL. Hunter completed a degree in business and art prior to joining the ranks of minor league players.

Despite the intense focus on hockey, Hunter describes his parents as important advocates for a college education and the need to have the undergraduate degree as a back-up plan in case his hockey career was short-lived:

My parents always instilled that knowledge is power but also where you get the most, and that's obviously at the college or university level, so it was always instilled in us ... you can I guess, use your strengths as a hockey player to get a quality education and obviously that threat, that your legs are not always with you so you need to have something to fall back on and that was something always instilled in us from a very young age that you need to have a plan.

### Hockey Career

Hunter began his professional career at the age of 22 at the conclusion of his degree program at an American university. He played professionally as a defenseman for 7 years across four professional leagues: the American Hockey League, International Hockey League, United Hockey League, and Southern Professional Hockey League.

Hunter never reached the level of the NHL and began to contemplate retirement when his wife was expecting their second child:

When my wife was going through her second degree at X College for education we were just planning on our second child so it wasn't necessarily forced into retirement but it made most sense that you have to provide, and distance and all those sorts of things, being away from my wife with you know, already a one and a half year old and pregnant, and her finishing a degree, it just made most sense.

#### Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Hunter played in the minor league until 2009, retiring at age 29 due to his need to fulfill his described family obligations. Hunter states his transition from active play was a positive experience. He describes his ability to use both his hockey knowledge and connections through his hockey colleagues to secure employment and develop his new career path:

When I retired it was a good transition that a friend of mine, a fellow retired professional hockey player, needed some assistance running a hockey rink in XXX, New Jersey. And from there ran the rink and the hockey department for the better part of a year and when I got a phone call from XXX, you know stating that we've just lost our women's head coach and want you to come in and apply for it and interview for it. Now we're here at XXX University, so. It's been a great experience. It's been a long career. It's been many turns upside down, but very fortunate.

Hunter also provided a fitting observation about why many players choose to stay connected to hockey for their lifetimes; rather than looking at hockey as an *identity*

Hunter reflects on it as a *trade*:

I think hockey players try to stay in the hockey world as best they can, 'cause it's all we know. It's almost like a trade. It's something my father's taught me in a short time is like why would you get out of a trade you've been doing since you were two years old, it's all you know. It's very difficult to leave it... the mentality, it's what your comfort is you've been doing it. I've been around hockey people which are different breeds amongst other people so yeah I think I knew I was always going to be in hockey ...

Hunter continues to outwardly display great affection for the game of hockey and has reflected on its important impact on his life:

You know I think that this game's given me everything. It's given me two beautiful daughters, a beautiful wife and an opportunity to be at a university level and really impact people's lives where some people don't have the opportunity. See a lot of parts of the world that I don't think I would ever have seen, that in turn is why, maybe I'm so passionate about the game because it's given me so much.

Hunter is entering his fourth year of collegiate coaching and recently moved into a spot at a NCAA Division I university.

### *Finn*

#### Early Life

Finn was born in Ontario, Canada and at the age of five, moved to Peterborough, a town that is often central in the formation of Major Junior players. This move enabled Finn to remain at home while playing Major Junior at age 15 and attend high school in his hometown. Finn recalls that school was important enough to his parents that they did

not allow him to miss school due to late-night hockey returns:

I think I missed one day a year of school playing Junior hockey and it was the one day we left for the one, the one road trip we left early. And you know, as you grow up you learn that you can get off the bus at 2 in the morning and still get up for 7 and get yourself to school.

As a player, Finn recalls that, physically, he was on the smaller side though he feels it never prevented him from competing. Though his hockey ability did not lead to a NHL draft spot, Finn was signed as a free agent by an NHL team at the age of 18:

I'm not an overly big person and you know, probably played at 5'10 probably weighed 175 in a game that back then was more clutching and grabbing, and holding, where the game's a little more wide open now.

#### Hockey Career

After signing as a free agent at 18, Finn was sent to the minor league farm team affiliate of the NHL team which signed him. Over his 15-year professional hockey career as a centerman, Finn played for 3 NHL teams, and 4 minor league affiliates spanning across three leagues: National Hockey League, American Hockey League, and the International Hockey League. The bulk of Finn's career was spent in the American Hockey League with appearances in over 1,000 minor league games.

#### Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Finn retired from professional play in 2003, at the age of 35. He describes his transition from active play as one he was prepared for; however he acknowledges that he believed he had another year of play left in him when his contract was not renewed:

I don't know if it was my decision so much as it was [Team Name]. I was gonna try to play one more year...but I think in the transition I, was mentally prepared after 15 years, hoping to play another year, but knowing in my mind I was ready to make that next step in my life.

Prior to Finn's departure from hockey, he met another retired player who inquired what Finn had planned to do upon retirement. His colleague suggested that Finn might want to think about making the jump to the insurance business. Coincidentally, Finn took advantage of the Professional Hockey Players Association's (PHPA) outreach and completed the career assessment tool offered by the PHPA. The results suggested that Finn might be happy in an insurance-type career. With no desire to remain in hockey as a coach, Finn pursued the appropriate insurance certifications, often studying 8 hours per day:

I'd study about five to eight hours per day. So I'd get up in the morning and do a couple hours, go work out, do some yard work, come back do another couple hours, and do some other stuff, maybe another couple hours and at night.

Finn also dabbled in collegiate coursework from time to time during his professional hockey career. He describes taking a few classes with some of his team-mates onsite at the rink, but when asked about whether he has any desire toward completing a college degree now, he explains that if he was to go for more training, it would revolve solely around the insurance business:

Not anymore. I'll go back, I'll probably go back and take some classes you can take to be accredited as an insurance. You know I have my licenses but you can get some letters behind your name that ah, says you took a couple classes and you know continued your education with insurance.

## *Kevin*

### Early Life

Kevin was born in Ontario, Canada and describes himself as a late-bloomer in regard to hockey suggesting that his hockey abilities did not hit their stride until his teenage years. Interestingly given this late development, Kevin was skilled enough to earn a draft spot into Major Junior. Kevin offers few details about his school life, especially during the years when he was billeted during Major Junior and reflects that “school was normal”. When asked more directly, Kevin affirms that for his parents, school was important.

At the time he was drafted into Major Junior at 15, he was scouted for collegiate play which appealed to his parents. In the end though, the goal of playing in the NHL eliminated collegiate play as an option for Kevin:

Well, it was a big, sticking point because before I went to Kingston, I was offered three or four full scholarships at universities and at that time, and its different today, but at that time, if you looked at the NHL, and of course every kid’s dream is to play in the NHL, the percentages were probably 95 to 5 that you’d come out of junior hockey before you’d come out of college.... That’s different today. That’s changed. The colleges are much more competitive and a lot of players do come out of college now and of course the Europeans and Americans and things like that. So you know, I think my mother would have rather me gone to college rather than Junior and move away from home but you know, I went where the odds were in that regard.

Kevin did enroll in a local community college but admittedly spent more time “playing pool and bowling” than focusing on his studies and consequently did not successfully complete the semester’s coursework.

## Hockey Career

Kevin signed as a free agent with an NHL team at the age of 21. As a right wing, Kevin played just 7 games in his professional career at the AHL level. Kevin also surfaced as the rare player to spend the overwhelming majority of his career (10 of his 12 seasons) with the original NHL team that signed him as a free agent. Kevin was a consistent point producer when he was healthy, but a number of injuries sidelined him for a significant portion of his career. Ultimately, Kevin retired in 1992 at the age of 32 as a result of a knee injury.

## Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Kevin contemplated his post-play career direction while still playing in the NHL. During his last two seasons of active play, Kevin was injured for significant portions of time thus allowing him the time and distance to ponder his potential options. Kevin describes this time period as one of reflection spurred on by his interest in business. He believes that because of this, his transition to retirement was less stressful:

I was always interested in the business aspect of [a new career]... and so for me it was an easier transition 'cause I was interested in the business aspect. I knew what I was going to do.

The career path Kevin chose led him to real estate investment opportunities. Prior to his retirement, Kevin describes learning by example through connections with individuals successful in the real estate market. These relationships encouraged Kevin to

experiment with real estate investments prior to the end of his career:

I was investing in some real estate, doing some buying and selling of real estate and things like that before I even retired from hockey... I had had some relationships with people that were very you know, powerful and successful people, and obviously made some mistakes along the way but fortunately learned from those mistakes and helped me later on. So it was through associations that I was interested in the business side ... yeah it was through people that I knew, I liked how they did things and what they did.

Kevin understood the need for specific training once he had decided upon his next career move and indicated that he participated in the appropriate licensing certifications immediately upon retirement from active play. Kevin also suggests that the financial security gained from playing in the NHL allowed him to pursue the career avenue of his choice:

When I retired, I literally got my real estate license and my insurance license and I went to school and got my securities license so I was able to manage my own money. So I knew right away that I wanted to do my own thing and I was fortunate enough to do that because of the hockey experience.

Kevin has no desire to complete a college degree and believes that he has accomplished all of the goals he set for himself. Currently, he is focused on his real estate company and his family:

You know, I really have done everything I've wanted to do. You know, I had an airplane. I have a pilot's license. You know, pretty much just have done the things I want to do. You know my life now is watching my kids play sports and I don't know what I'll do when that stops.

## *Liam*

### Early Life

Liam grew up in upstate New York, close to the Canadian border, and began playing hockey at the young age of 5 simply because all of his friends were playing. When Liam reached the age of 13 or 14, he began to recognize the strength of his abilities and describes the hopeful realization that he might be able to actually play collegiately, or even professionally. Pursuing this path led Liam to leave home at the age of 15 to attend a New England prep school:

... around town, 13, 14 years old it was apparent that I was pretty good at what I did so that's when I think there was a little bit more. Started to kind of dream the, "Hey, I could probably do this at a collegiate level; I could do this at a professional level". So you know, moving up through, I actually left home at 15, went to a prep school in Connecticut.

Education was clearly a priority in Liam's household as a child. His parents were both very well educated (father possesses a doctorate and mother possesses a master's degree), and both worked as educators themselves. He describes an acceptance that college was in his future regardless of what happened with hockey. Liam's prep school accomplishments earned him a full athletic scholarship to a prestigious New England Division I college and in turn, that performance led to being drafted by an NHL team during his junior year:

You know, I came from a family of, both my parents were teachers, so education was very important, so I was pretty, I was convinced I was gonna be going to college and I know a lot of the, a lot of the guys that I played with and against who played in Junior hockey up in Canada, and I'm forgone and did not play in college. So it was certainly a little bit you know, the being American, we had the collegiate path, is a little bit more common... Yeah, my dad was a, had a doctorate, college professor. My mom was a masters' degree and she was ah, a physical education teacher for 28 years.

## Hockey Career

Liam's professional goaltending hockey career began at the age of 21 and spanned the better part of 10 years. In that time, Liam played for eight minor league teams across the American Hockey League, International Hockey League and the East Coast Hockey League. Liam was never called up to play in an NHL game but appeared in over 300 games with the minor league affiliates. Liam shared that though he was drafted in his junior year his college education was still very much a part of his overall goals. This is illustrated by the negotiated item in his contract that guaranteed he would be given the space, time, and financial resources, to finish his college degree. Liam did go back, each off season, and completed his undergraduate degree in English:

Part of, part of my contract, part of the negotiations, I had three years to finish up where, XXX would pay for it. So yeah, I was fortunate enough I went back each summer for the first three years to get my degree.

## Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Liam describes the last year of his playing career as a year of trying to find direction. At 30 years old, he signed with a team in the ECHL because he believed that he might want to stay in hockey as a coach. Signing with the ECHL team allowed him to assume the role of player/assistant coach. Liam quickly realized that coaching was not something that he enjoyed and made the decision not to pursue a contract with another team after he was waived:

Halfway through my last year there in X, I was waived and kind of a mutual decision and you know, had made that decision during the year that I didn't really want to do this anymore as a profession... You know I had some very good coaches over the course of my career and you know, quite frankly playing was easier. You know the coaches they put so much time into preparation and I just didn't love the game that much, you know?

The retirement transition at 31 for Liam was one of uncertainty. With a wife and two daughters, Liam had not formalized an exit strategy at the time he was waived. Liam, through his own reflection, determined that he was skilled in communication and embarked on the road toward a sales career. Liam quickly found out that having the skill set without having the formal sales experience led to a lack of opportunity:

Yeah, I had no idea. You know, originally I thought that, you know, I am very good at talking to people, meeting people, you know, sales kind of the route that ah, that I felt I would go. So I started interviewing with some pharmaceutical companies and, you know, I talked to a gentleman about insurance and you know, they didn't appeal to me an awful lot. Actually the pharmaceutical role did but you know, I interviewed with a couple different companies and they were both like, "Hey boy, you sound great, but we've got other guys with 10 years' experience, so..."

Liam soon found a role with a national non-profit that launched his now 10-year career in non-profit management and leadership. Liam did stay connected with hockey for a number of years after his retirement in the role of a recruitment consultant for minor league affiliates. Currently, Liam, now divorced, is focused on his career in non-profit and his two daughters.

### *Kane*

#### Early Life

Kane was born in Quebec, Canada picking up hockey at the age of 12. Kane states that he was attracted to hockey because he had "perfected" all other sports at that point in time. After working diligently to become a better player, Kane entered Major

Junior at 18 and was drafted by the NHL at 19. Kane did not elaborate on his school experiences as a child or his family.

### Hockey Career

Kane began his professional playing career at the age of 20 with a minor league affiliate. After playing for 2 years in the minors, Kane embarked on a 14-year, consecutive NHL career. Kane describes his role shift from a goal scorer to a “shutdown man” as an event that he wishes he could go back to and change because he believes it led to the downfall of his career:

Then I got traded to X where I scored 43 goals and then the very next year [coach] said he needed “a shutdown man, I don’t need you to score another goal”. And I said, “I don’t care as long as we’re winning I’ll do whatever.” I should have said, “Trade me.” There’s no money in backchecking or you know, you get paid money to score. They pay players to score. So, my role became, it obviously changed, and then I just became a role player, lasted for a couple of years, got traded to X, traded to X, finished up one year in X, then my body just got old, old and broke down and that was it. It was over.

Prior to actual retirement, Kane considered a transition to coaching because he felt it was something he enjoyed. His calculated plan to acquire a coaching position involved first heading to a minor league team as a player/assistant coach:

So I tried to get into coaching, ‘cause I like coaching. So I went one year to X as a player assistant.

Kane retired from active play in 1996 at the age of 36.

### Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Kane followed through on his plan to get into coaching and in 1997 embarked on a 12-year coaching career that spanned both the North American minor leagues as well as

European leagues. Frustrated and finished, Kane retired from coaching in 2009:

And then the following year got into coaching and stayed in coaching until 2009. Bouncing around from team to team, various, even over to Europe for a couple of years, and then in 2009 said there's enough of that shit and just came back.

Currently, Kane remains connected to hockey in a different capacity. His fame has allowed for a new career in which he earns a living by attending events, promotions, and auctions as a hockey celebrity:

And fortunately, we[‘ve] just been mercifully doing this celebrity circuit where we players show up at appearances and get paid for it... And fortunate enough that it's enough to pay the bills.

### *Cullen*

#### Early Life

Cullen was born and raised in a small Quebec, Canada town. As a member of the English Protestant minority, Cullen lacked opportunities to play formal sports as a youth. Hockey became part of Cullen's life at the age of 12 and by the age of 15, Cullen's stellar performance got the attention of an NHL scout. During this same time, Cullen made the ranks of Major Junior and left home for the first time:

So I didn't play real organized hockey until I was 12. And by 15 I was scouted by the [NHL Team] and went to try out for their Quebec league, Junior farm team ... there were 74 guys at training camp and there were 4 job openings and I was competing against 17, 18, 19, and 20 year olds and as a 15 year old I made it.

Cullen describes education as an important part of his life as a child but primarily because of his need to achieve rather than any type of extraordinary influence from his parents. Cullen does describe his parents as “worldly” in an otherwise small-town

environment. He recalls an abundance of family travel and exposure to the arts:

Well, you know when you're 9 or 10 or 11 years old, everybody's family has a position on education. It's kind of the same, you know, you just go to school and behave and see how you can do...But I was one of those super achievers. I felt as if I'd failed if I hadn't come first in my class so I drove myself way harder than my parents ever had to.

After high school, Cullen enrolled in university at 17, though hockey continued to be his primary focus. Sure of his abilities and the potential to turn professional, Cullen decided that a university degree was unnecessary and undesired. Interestingly, this choice came at a point when Cullen had already completed a significant portion of an undergraduate degree:

The greatest gift my parents ever gave me was the gift to fail. They let me make my own decisions. I was in University by the time I was 17, when I was in [Canadian town] but the emphasis on education started to go [motions his hand in a diving downward action] and the emphasis, I knew that I was gonna be a pro, that I had what it took to turn pro. I heard it from enough people. And, it just went like that. So I spent most of my afternoons in my first year in college, shooting pool and I never did graduate. I ended up going to a couple of intercessions in the summer. The NHL had a program. Some refs went, some players, it was at [Canadian university], and picked up, I don't know, half a degree in commerce and business and at some point decided that I wanted to make enough money to hire the people with those degrees as opposed to being the guy.

## Hockey Career

Cullen was drafted by the NHL and turned professional at age 20. As a centerman, he excelled leaving no need for a lengthy stay in the minor league system:

I was really lucky. I spent one full year in the American League and then a couple of months at the beginning of the next season I got called up, never played another game in the minors.

Cullen spent the next 11 years in the National Hockey League, splitting the time with four teams and reaching the most coveted achievement in professional hockey; Cullen has won two Stanley Cup championships and has appeared in multiple All-Star games.

## Retirement and Post-Hockey Activities

The end of Cullen's playing career was fraught with many uncertainties. Cullen believes he had not prepared for the end of his career appropriately and really had no direction once it was finished. The transition was difficult:

Here's one of the problems with all this support where all the athletes, especially hockey, it's delayed, its delayed adolescence and it delays it until you retire and by then it's very confusing to try to figure out what is life really about. It's an artificial world.

Left with uncertainty, Cullen describes an attempt to "find" himself in other professions beyond hockey. This included a stint as an actor. When asked about the

potential of returning to college to finish the degree he began at 17, Cullen is candid that it has never been a priority in his life to do so:

I took some college classes before [begins to read to self]. At my age I would have to say I would not like to earn my degree. No, I'm too busy earning money! Well you know, when somebody says they don't have time, all that means, I try to explain to people, I said all that means is that it's not a high enough priority because something else can be replaced with that. When somebody says I don't have time it means its' not important to me now. Right? That's what "I don't have time" means.

Cullen is married with four adult children and currently enjoys a highly successful portfolio career; he continues to be involved with hockey as a broadcast analyst, remains especially active with his alumni organization, maintains a non-profit organization he founded, and pursues a very successful writing and speaking career.

### *Connor*

#### Early Life

Connor was born and raised in a prominent Manitoba, Canada town. He learned to skate at the age of 2 and by 5 was playing on his first ice hockey team. Connor moved through the more traditional Canadian ranks of Major Junior and left home at 16 to play in the Western Hockey League.

Connor describes his parents as supportive of his choice to pursue Major Junior. He does confide that his mother was upset that he was leaving home and though never articulated, Connor feels confident that his father was also saddened by his departure. Connor states that he never suffered from homesickness and really enjoyed his experiences even though he was an 8-hour drive from his family. Seeing his family often

throughout the year, Connor went back home in the summers and worked at a construction job; however, the drive to play in the NHL commanded all of his attention and guided his actions:

Ever since I could remember I wanted to be a, you know, a hockey player and I wanted to play in the NHL. And that was the route I had to take... if I stuck around back home I wouldn't have had the opportunity I did ... I never got homesick, I mean, I really enjoyed it. I was only about 8 hours away from my family ... so I saw them fairly often. But hockey was all I wanted to do. I lived with a billet... Went to school and made friends there and, you know I was, when the season was over, went back to [hometown] and you know, worked ...I enjoyed it, I loved it, and it was what I had to do.

### Hockey Career

Prior to his entry into professional hockey, Connor made a calculated decision to become an enforcer. The choice would prove significant and though he entered the ranks undrafted, Connor's new role enabled him to compete for a spot when he would otherwise be outshone in the skills area:

And that was when I made a decision that I was gonna be an enforcer because I was looking at the guys getting called up. There was lots of penalty minutes and lots of goals, and you know, I was going up against the best in the world, and in the points department and figured that was the best... way I could get myself established and get noticed as a physical presence and fighting, and doing it that way, the good old fashioned way. And that's what I did.

After a semi-successful NHL training camp, Connor was assigned to an AHL affiliate. Once there, Connor was reassigned to the Central Hockey League where he participated on a championship team. From there, Connor joined the East Coast Hockey League only to then re-sign with his Central Hockey League championship team after a poor relationship with the ECHL coach. At that point, an NHL lockout was active

leaving less spots open in the AHL system. Despite this, Connor was contacted by an AHL team representative and invited to try out for 25 games with the AHL affiliate. Connor made the team and enjoyed a successful year with the AHL club culminating with a Calder Cup championship win. The next year, Connor was called up to the NHL team and played full-time for them. At the conclusion of that season, Connor was at a crossroads with the decline in his body's ability to withstand the enforcer role and unsure of any other possibilities outside of hockey:

I didn't have options before except go back to training camp, you know, hopefully make the [NHL team] but in worst case scenario, wind up at the [AHL affiliate] and obviously you know, not where I wanted to be. I don't want to be fighting in the minors. I did that on the way up. And down in the NHL, its down with the fighting. It's emotionally draining, spiritually draining, and obviously physically draining as well.

#### Retirement and Post-Career Activities

Connor stated that while he knew that his ability to maintain the enforcer role was declining, he did not feel that he had any other career options other than to go back to the training camps and try to make someone's roster for the next season. Fortunately, Connor was offered a four-year contract at the conclusion of his last season of play that enabled him to transition from a player to an assistant coach with the same AHL affiliate he had won the championship with. Recognizing the short-lived nature of an enforcer's career, and more importantly, the physical toll that the enforcer role had on his body,

Connor signed the four-year contract offer appreciating a once in a lifetime opportunity to remain with the organization he had become so fond of:

I mean, I had run my body into the ground at this point on and off the ice and [NHL General Manager] had, he recognized it and he actually made a phone call to me when I was in [hometown] that summer and I had one more year on my contract and offered me a coaching position in the minor league team. I thought I was probably gonna be sent down to the minors at that point...I just couldn't really go any harder, go anymore, go any harder. So, it was almost a no-brainer for me; an opportunity to stay in the organization, stay in the game I love and fall back on basically a new career in the same sport. So for me it was almost, you know, I was 28 years old and I had played hockey my whole life and I love everything about it. It just ah, you know, it only made sense for me, you know, on a personal level, a mental level, and whatever, a career path as well.

Connor is thrilled with his choice to pursue coaching and the ability to remain in the game he loves so dearly. Though he is coaching full time, Connor is also pursuing a bachelor's degree in nutrition and wellness studies supplementing his deep interest in health:

And that's just an option. ... I have time. I read a lot so I figured, you know, why not try to get a degree while I'm, while I'm coaching and get that stuff done?

Connor is married and is entering his fourth year as an assistant coach with the aspiration to become a head coach one day soon.

### *Chris*

#### Early Life

Chris was raised in Ontario, Canada and began playing organized hockey at the young age of 6. Chris describes a close relationship with his family and gives his father

the credit for inspiring his love of the game. Drafted at 16 into Major Junior, Chris left home and was billeted. He recalls this time fondly and describes it as a period when he was pushed to step outside of his “comfort zone” and mature. Chris also expresses an enduring relationship with his billet family:

So, yeah I lived away from home. I lived with a billet family. I had a great experience with [OHL team]. I’m still close with my billet family today. But, yeah I guess it was good, it helped me to get out of my comfort zone and I suppose grow up a little bit.

During his time in Major Junior, Chris sustained his devoted relationship with his own family. He communicates the comfort in knowing he could “pop home” when he wished as he was only two hours from his hometown. Chris also recounts that his family would very often come to see him play thereby closing the gaps in distance.

Chris’ father was a college-educated engineer and his mother a self-described “domestic engineer”. They believed strongly in education and at one point during Chris’ Major Junior career, his father steered him in the direction of a possible journey through an Ivy League NCAA Division I team. In the end, his father allowed Chris to make the choice of remaining in Major Junior with the hopes of a professional career because that was always the path Chris wanted to take:

And I was always interested. You know I never, my dad at one point wanted me to go play NCAA division I hockey but I told him that wasn’t my dream. I wanted to play in the NHL because that was the best hockey in the world.

The concept of education was not lost on Chris and he credits his Major Junior coaches for positively reinforcing the importance of education.

He was in real estate but he also coached the team at [Canadian] University so there was a lot of emphasis on school and education from those guys as well.

## Hockey Career

Chris, a defenseman, was drafted in the second round of the NHL draft, almost making the NHL team roster at the young age of 19. Instead, Chris spent two seasons with the AHL affiliate honing his skills on a championship team. The jump to the NHL was a fairly easy transition for Chris as he felt mentally prepared for the challenge:

I played two years in the minor leagues and I felt I was ready to make the jump when I did. So emotionally, and physically I wasn't growing anymore, but emotionally I was ready. I was. I realized that when I turned pro how consistent you have to be.

After spending three seasons with the NHL team that drafted him, he suffered a lower arm injury that left him sidelined for the majority of the next season. The next four seasons involved four trades, with two stints with one club. However, amidst all of the trades, Chris did acquire a Stanley Cup Championship, the pinnacle of a professional hockey player's career goals.

## Retirement and Post-Career Activities

The end of Chris' career came, not from his lower arm injury that persisted through a good portion of the end of his playing time, but from head trauma. During a pre-season game, Chris suffered the 12th concussion of his playing career. The concussive symptoms were so severe the medical staff refused to clear him to play. An interesting point to be made here is that this occurred in the mid-1990s, well before the intense scrutiny of concussions in sports; the last concussion must have been far more extreme than any previously suffered for the medical staff to deny clearance in that day and age. Chris was conflicted as to where he stood on the issue. On one hand, he felt sure

that he was young enough that he still had years to play; on the other hand, he knew he likely should retire for his own safety:

They told me that they weren't sure they were going to clear me to play again because they didn't know how to fix [it], or how it would affect my motor skills. ... I kind of had that whole fall to go through the battery of tests with the neurologist and by January I had decided that I probably shouldn't play anymore. ... you know I was 28 I probably still had 4 or 5 good years left, but I didn't want to risk, well they weren't gonna clear me anyway [laughter].

Chris compares his retirement transition to a "death". His transition from playing occurred simultaneously with quite a few other life-changing events. Chris' career ended abruptly, his wife had moved their home base to the southeastern part of the United States, he was about to become a father for the first time, and tragically, his beloved mother passed away. At 28, Chris found himself in a turbulent environment that was flooded with unhappy events. Chris describes the five years post-retirement as "miserable":

Like, it felt like, it felt like a death in my family to be honest with you. I had moved from [New England] to [Southern US state]. My wife was in [Southern US state], she was studying Business. ... But you know moving to [Southern US state], becoming a dad ... I lost my mother. There was just a lot going on. I realized, I didn't like the heat and humidity and I seemed to complain about everything which wasn't really my personality, for about five years.

With no direction, Chris decided immediately upon retirement to enroll in college with the hope of completing an undergraduate degree. Chris describes a need to prove to himself that he could complete the coursework despite the head injury:

I registered for school right away. I went to school full time for 4 ½ years, right away I got my degree. ... Best thing I did was go back and start studying right away because, well I think because of my history with head trauma, it was important to me that I could do the work.

Despite the intense personal difficulty he experienced during his retirement transition, Chris reflects on the transferable skills he believes hockey players possess:

I think the one thing you get from being a hockey player is that you probably develop a pretty good work ethic. It's different and you're only a hockey player for a finite number of years and then it's gone, but you know you have to get yourself up off of the mat and dust yourself off and move on because most of us you know, we have families and children, dependents, so yeah, I had a great run, I loved every minute of it.

A large portion of Chris' time now is spent traveling with his son who, even now as a young teenager, is considered a top Major Junior prospect. Chris also enjoys time with his daughter who just began college, as well as working with his wife on their family business.

### Findings

The vignettes provide a brief, but important view of the participants as individuals and enhance the understanding of the uniqueness of the sample acquired for this study. In addition to the profiles provided, a wealth of statistical data emerged from the interviews and is presented in this section.

The study desired a mix of both Canadian-born and American-born professional hockey players. The data illustrates that 8 of the 10 participants were Canadian-born, with the remaining 2 participants identifying as American-born. This is not unexpected and is consistent with current trends in professional hockey.

Also consistent with prior research, the participants' average age when they began to play hockey is 6.1 years old. There is no significant difference in mean age between Canadian (5.8 years of age) and American players (7 years of age) suggesting that

professional hockey players, regardless of nationality, begin their training at a very young age; however, Canadian players on average begin to play the game of hockey more than a year earlier than their American counterparts:

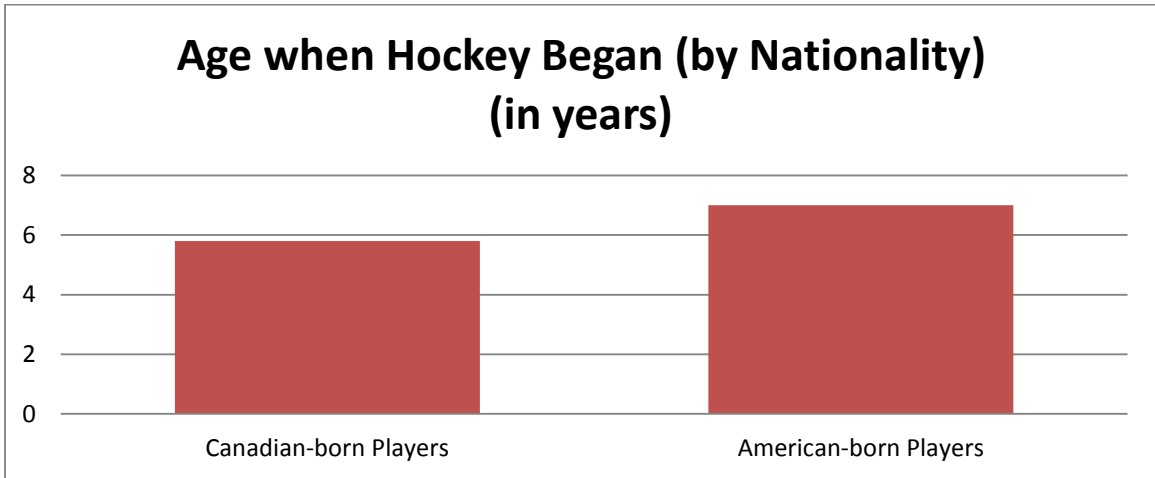


Figure 3: Age when Hockey Began

Not surprisingly, the player positions assumed as children were consistently the positions they continued to develop and remain with in their professional careers. The sample incorporated representatives from each of the player positions with the majority of participants identifying as centermen, followed closely by defensemen:

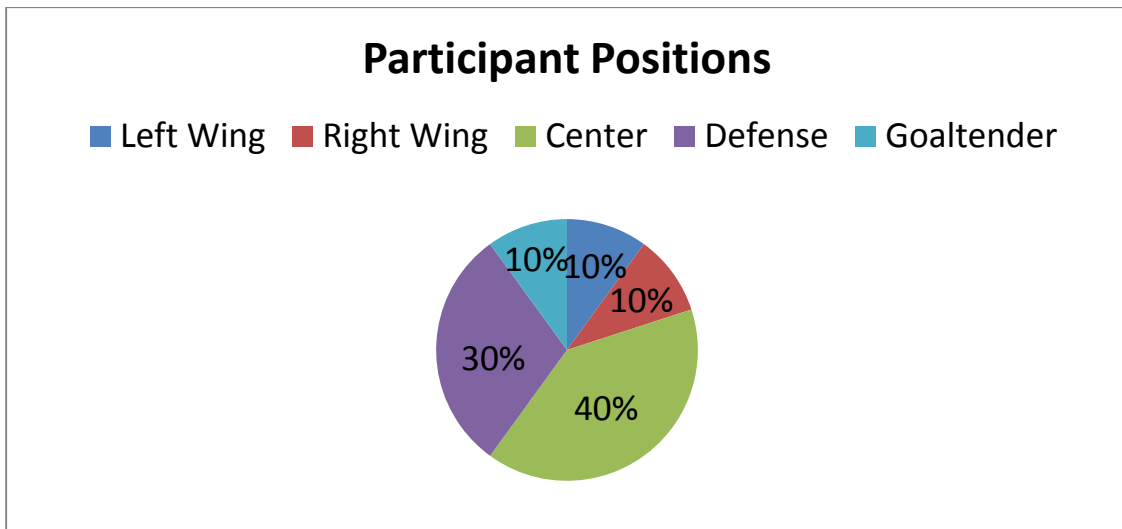


Figure 4: Participant Positions

Those players who excel at hockey throughout their childhood, and wish to pursue the sport at an elite level, often find themselves at the crossroads of choosing to enter Major Junior (the elite amateur Canadian league) or seek out the prep-school/NCAA college hockey route. As expected, 8 of the 8 Canadian participants selected the Major Junior route while 2 of the 2 American participants chose the journey through prep-school to play NCAA college hockey. Interestingly, one of the participants actually played both Major Junior during his secondary school years, and then opted for collegiate play at age 18 rather than remain in Major Junior.

The general perception described by the Canadian players was that the only path to the NHL traveled through Major Junior. Many of the Canadian participants, like Chris for example, described their decision to play Major Junior over prep-school in this way:

You know I never, my dad at one point wanted me to go play NCAA Division I hockey, but I told him that wasn't my dream. I wanted to play in the NHL because that was the best hockey in the world...

In contrast, for the American players, attendance at prep-school was viewed as the necessary step to secure a spot on a top NCAA Division I hockey team. Their general belief was that the NCAA was their best route to playing professionally. Liam, an American-born player, described his journey to professional play this way:

...Around, 13, 14 years old it was apparent that I was pretty good at what I did so that's when I think there was a little bit more, started to kind of dream the "Hey I could probably do this at a collegiate level. I could do this at a professional level". So moving up through, I actually left home at 15, went to prep school in [New England state]. Went to [New England Division I university] on a full scholarship. I had been, during my junior year in high school, I had been actually drafted by the [NHL Team]...so it was certainly a little bit, being American, we had the collegiate path, is a little bit more common.

Forseeably, the choice of playing in Major Junior vs. NCAA, impacts the age at which the participants enter the professional ranks. The mean age at which the participants turned professional was 20.1 years. Examining the data further shows, participants who chose Major Junior exclusively entered the professional ranks almost a full three years earlier than their NCAA counterparts with an average age of 19.2 years compared to 22 years:

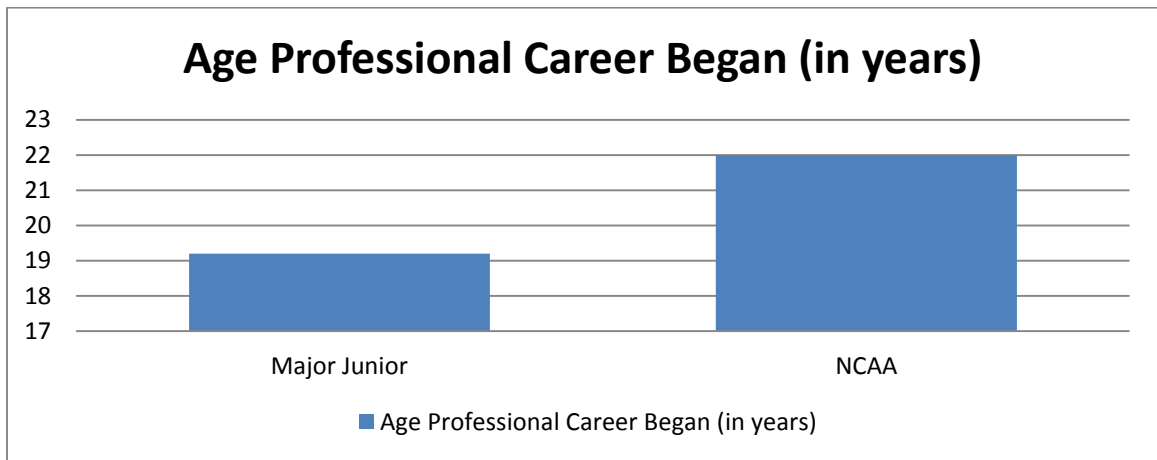


Figure 5: Age Professional Career Began

The study also sought a sample that reflected careers spent in each of the four primary North American leagues: National Hockey League (NHL), American Hockey League (AHL), East Coast Hockey League (ECHL), and Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL). Data revealed that some participants spent time in the Central Hockey

League (CHL) as well as in the now defunct International Hockey League (IHL) and United Hockey Leagues (UHL):

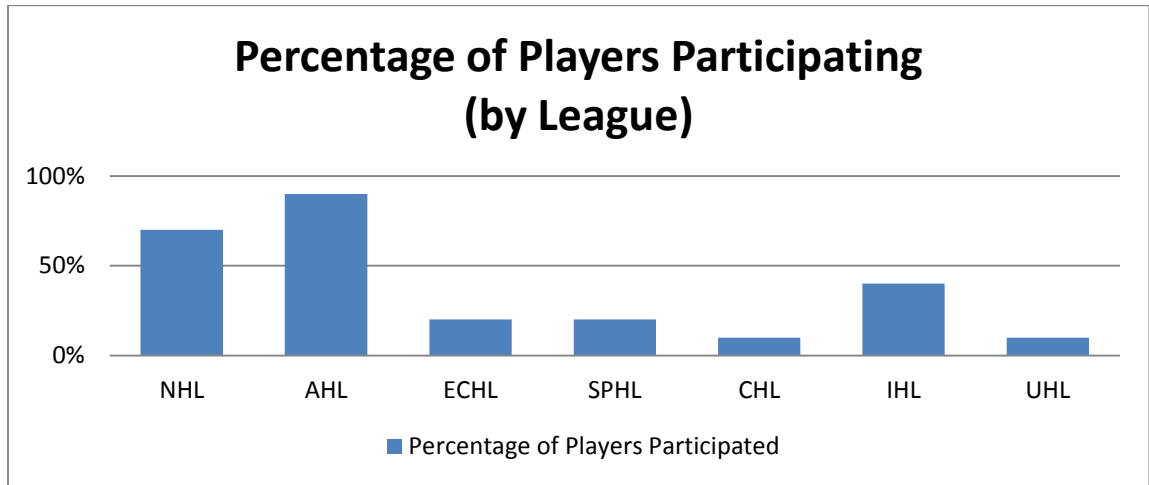


Figure 6: Percentage of Players Participating

The professional experience across the sample was notable. The sample played in excess of 6,500 professional hockey games. Interestingly, 7 of the 10 participants spent the majority of their careers in the two top-tier leagues: the National Hockey League and the American Hockey League. Seventy percent of the participants were active for at least 124 games in the National Hockey League with an impressive median of 655 NHL games played. Remarkably, 9 of the 10 participants were active for at least one game in the American Hockey League with a median of 170 AHL games played:

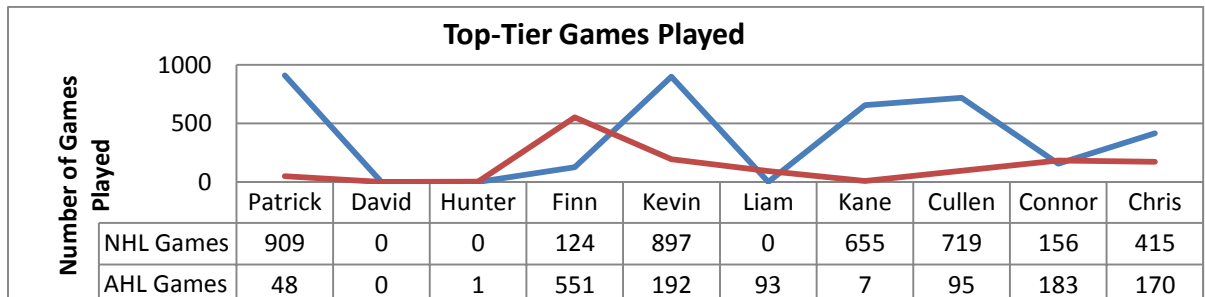


Figure 7: Top-Tier Games

Of those 5 participants who played more than 50% of their professional careers in the National Hockey League, 4 were drafted out of Major Junior supporting the belief that the road through Major Junior led to a professional playing career in the NHL.

The sample also illustrated a variety in lengths of the professional career with a range of 2 years to 17 years. The mean professional career length was 10.8 years with the median professional career length of 11 years. These findings conflict with prior research suggesting that the average professional hockey career is just five years.

Additionally, the participants' ages at the time of retirement were varied. The age range identified was from 25 to 36 with the mean age of 31.1 years and a median age of 31.5. These statistics differ as well from prior research that suggests the average age of professional hockey player retirement is 28 years old:

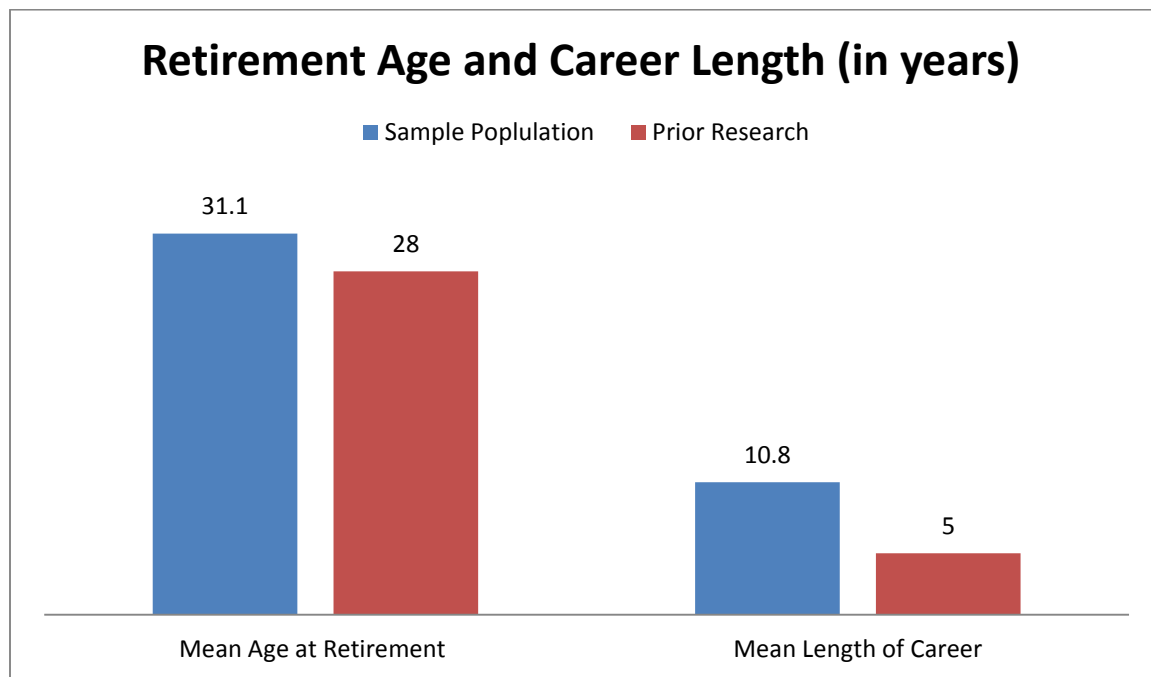


Figure 8: Retirement Age and Career Length

The participants shared many fascinating stories and insights regarding their individual retirements from active play. The data revealed five primary reasons, or causes, for retirement from active professional play: Decreased Performance, Injury, Family Obligations, Financial Hardship, and Loss of Interest. Decreased Performance was defined by the participants in one of two ways: (1) Due to their own sense of decreased ability to perform at the needed level for professional play, the participant decided to retire, or (2) Contracts were not offered/extended because of team/organization belief that the participant's performance had decreased to the point that they were no longer viewed as useful to a/the club. Finn described retirement due to decreased performance in this way:

I don't know if it was my decision so much as it was, [AHL Team]. I was gonna try to play one more year...

Kane described retirement as his choice due to decreased performance in this manner:

So, my role became, it obviously changed, and then I just became a role player, lasted for a couple of years, got traded to [NHL Team], traded to [NHL Team], finished up one year in [NHL Team], then my body just got old, old and broke down and that was it. It was over... Yeah, my body was breaking so I couldn't keep up with the level anymore.

Similarly, Connor recognized the end of his career was upon him due to his own sense of his performance, yet he was also keenly aware of the organization's perception:

I mean, I had run my body into the ground at this point, on and off the ice, and [NHL General Manager] had, he recognized it and he actually made a phone call to me when I was in [Canadian hometown] that summer. I had one more year on my contract and [he] offered me a coaching position in the minor league team. I thought I was probably gonna be sent down to the minors at that point. I just couldn't really go any harder, go anymore, go any harder, and so it was almost a no-brainer for me.

The conceptualization of decreased performance as a cause of retirement from active play surfaced in 4 of the participants. Comparably noteworthy, injury factored into 3 of the participants' retirement decisions. Two of the three participants who indicated injury as the primary reason for their retirement also clarified it as a head injury. The remaining one participant cited lower body injuries as the retirement determinant. Chris described his retirement decision in this way:

I went there and I suffered another concussion in the pre-season and that was the end of my career. I was 28 and ... it was probably on the dozen-th concussion of my career and they told me that they weren't sure they were going to clear me to play again because they didn't know how to fix [it], or how it would affect my motor skills. So in in January of 'XX I officially, we had a work stoppage 'XX-'XX so I kind of had that whole fall to go through the battery of tests with the neurologist and by January I had decided that I probably shouldn't play anymore. ...you know I was 28. I probably still had 4 or 5 good years left, but I didn't want to risk, well they weren't gonna clear me anyway [laughter].

Kevin, who retired because of a lower-body injury, described the swiftness of his decision to retire:

I was with the [NHL Team]. I didn't get protected the one year so I was picked up in an expansion draft and traded to the [NHL Team]. And the next year I went to [NHL Team]. I had knee surgery and decided to retire. Basically that was it. You know there is no... you're, you're done.

While the instances of decreased performance and injury as catalysts to retirement are somewhat expected, the occurrence of financial hardship, family obligations, and loss of interest were less anticipated. David, who retired due to financial hardship, described his choice this way:

I just kind of at that point made the decision, you know, playing in the Southern Professional Hockey League is not like playing in the NHL. You're not making a million bucks a year, so I think that was a big part of what factored into my decision.

Hunter cited family obligations as the primary motivator for choosing to end his professional playing career:

When my wife was going through her second degree at [University Name] for Education, we were just planning on our second child so, it wasn't necessarily forced into retirement but it made most sense that you have to provide and distance and all those sorts of things, being away from my wife with you know, already a one and a half year old and pregnant, and her finishing a degree, it just made most sense.

While both financial hardship and family obligations are generally not surprising, the idea of lost interest which Liam shared is a bit more intriguing given the level of dedication and time invested into his career:

So, halfway through my last year there in [Minor League Team], I was waived and kind of a mutual decision, and you know, had made that decision during the year that I didn't really want to do this anymore as a profession...I just didn't love the game that much, you know?

The participants graciously shared their stories regarding their emotional states during the transitions and adjustments to retirement. Just 2 of the 10 participants in the sample indicated that they had difficulty adjusting to retirement; one participant described an especially difficult maladjustment. Chris expressed the severity of the situation this way:

I was miserable for five years probably. Like it felt like a death in my family to be honest with you. I had moved from, where was I playing? I moved from [Northeast United States] to [Southern United States]. My wife was in [Southern United States], she was studying in [Southern United States] in Business. But you know moving to [Southern United States], becoming a dad, going to school, joining the workforce right away... I lost my mother. There was just a lot going on. I realized, I didn't like the heat and humidity and I seemed to complain about everything which wasn't really my personality, for about five years. And then I just got sick of myself and I've been much happier the past 7 or 8. But yeah, it was a transition, for sure.

Other respondents depicted a relatively mild transition to retirement and many of them offered that they already had a transition plan in the pipeline, in sharp contrast to Chris' experience for example, which possibly affected their transition positively. The data indicates that 6 of the 10 participants had an actual exit strategy in place prior to their retirement from professional play. Additionally, 6 of the 6 participants (100%) who indicated they had a retirement plan described a non-traumatic transition regardless of the cause of retirement. Patrick, who had retired due to a head injury, described his transition this way:

For me again, I think it was an easy transition. My wife always thought it was going to be difficult for me to retire. You know they'd have to lock the door and throw away the key. But I think I was always realistic about my career and that it was only going to be a certain part of my life, you know, it was only a window, it wasn't my whole life, and it certainly wasn't going to define me. So I thought I transitioned easily into everyday life, you know, aside from the fact that I was suffering from some injuries.

Finn also had a path established prior to the end of his playing career:

Near the end of my career, ... one nice thing in the Minors is the PHPA, the Professional Hockey Players Association, and they do give you, if you spend the time and listen to their lectures when they come by and talk to the teams which, if you go on their websites, they have all these "What Color is your Personality?"... and it kept coming up real estate and insurance. ... I was like well after I did all the tests, and insurance kept popping up, I was like "Wow. Maybe these tests are on to something." So I decided, you know, I invested into, bought into the company, so I'm one of the owners.

Predictably, not all retirement plans led away from hockey but rather, were developed as a means to stay connected to the game. Forty percent of the respondents remained bonded to hockey through professional coaching careers. Those that did not opt to coach professionally, stayed connected to hockey in a variety of ways; for

example, operating youth hockey schools, youth hockey coaching, ice rink concession ownership, front office positions, and active and sustained membership in hockey alumni associations. Taking these activities into account, the sample illustrates 100% participation in hockey-related activities in retirement.

Before delving any further into the career paths of the participants, it is helpful to first have the conversation about educational choices. Interestingly, participation in Major Junior does not seem to stifle educational activities prior to the start of the professional playing career. The data reflect that 7 out of the 10 participants enrolled in some college courses prior to the start of their professional playing career. Of those 7 participants who attempted a college education prior to their career, 4 continued to take some college courses during their playing careers. This percentage drops significantly once the period of retirement begins; data show just 1 of those participants who took college courses before *and* during his playing career actually continued on during his retirement. Importantly, 1 participant completed his undergraduate degree *during* his playing career, with 2 participants completing the college degree *prior* to the start of the professional playing career. Surprisingly, altogether 5 of the 10 participants possess a college degree with 1 participant actively pursuing a college degree at the time of the study. Perhaps even more captivating is the finding that 2 of the 2 participants who, at the time of the study, completed their undergraduate degree during the period of their

retirement were Canadian-born players who cited head injury as the cause for their retirement from professional play:

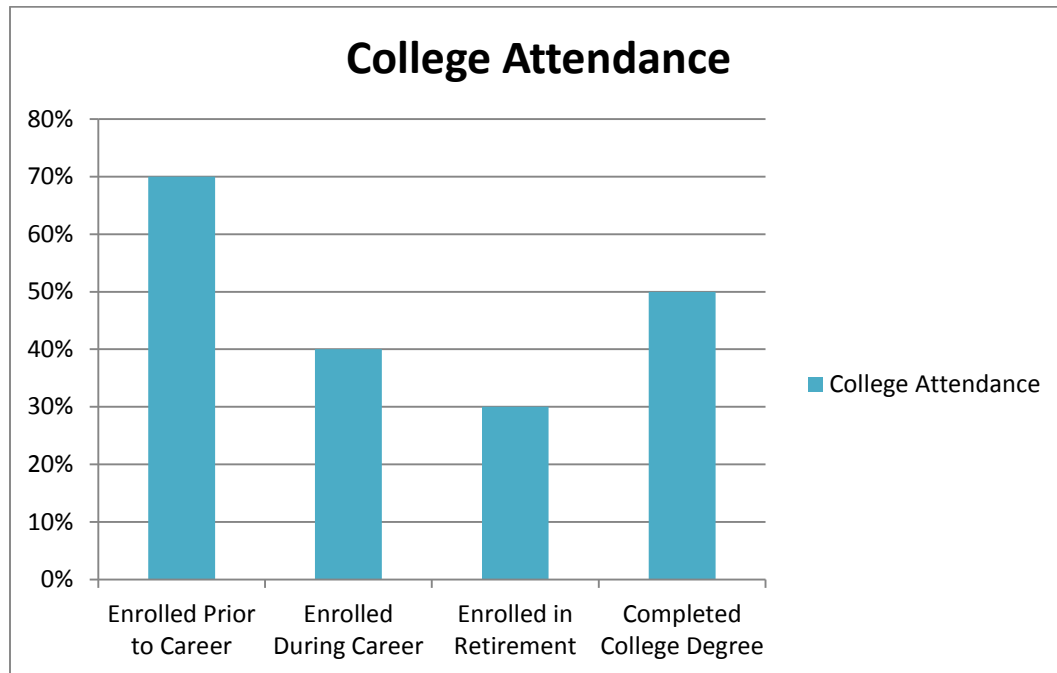


Figure 9: College Attendance

While college enrollment is important to this study, the pursuit of education is not limited to baccalaureate endeavors. Education activities also include professional education certifications and licensures. Specifically, many of the participants who had forgone completing a college degree opted instead for professional education ventures such as real estate, insurance and financial securities licensures. The data show 3 of the 10 participants engaged in some type of professional education with 1 of the participants opting for real estate, insurance and financial securities licensures, 1 participant electing insurance licensure alone, and the remaining 1 participant selecting financial securities licensure *after* receiving the undergraduate degree.

A portion of the interview was designed to facilitate an understanding of how the participants interpreted their parents' opinions on education especially during their childhood and adolescent periods. The data reveal that 7 of the 10 participants perceived that education was important to their parents; however the degree of importance varied. Cullen conveys his memory this way:

Well, you know when you're 9 or 10 or 11 years old, everybody's family has a position on education. It's kind of the same, you know, you just go to school and behave and see how you can do.

On the other hand, Patrick's perception of his parents' attitude on education was that getting a solid education, especially a college education was "their philosophy". Interestingly, the data suggest that the level of parental education might impact the choice of whether or not to pursue education. Upon closer examination, the data show that 4 of the 5 participants who completed an undergraduate degree had at least one parent who graduated from college. In contrast, the level of parental education does not seem to influence whether participants selected the professional education route:

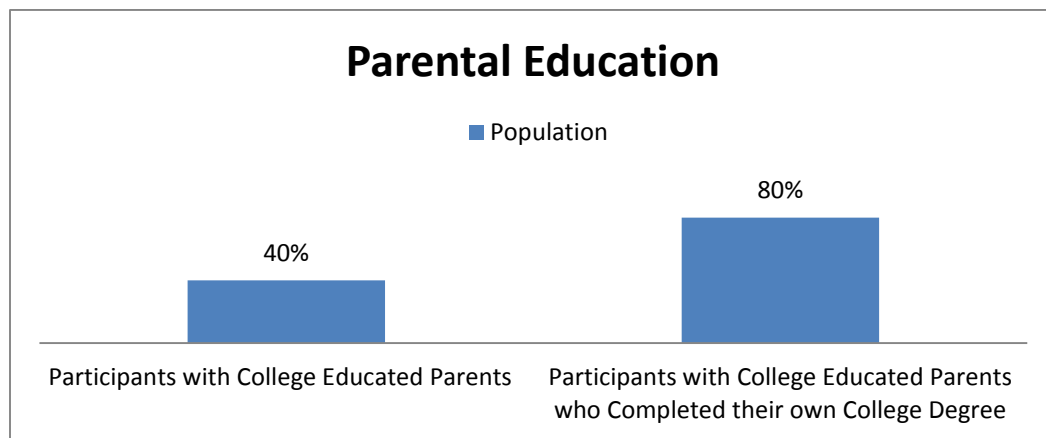


Figure 10: Parental Education

The subject of family emerged often for most of the participants in the study. Many spoke of their parents and siblings, as well as their own spouses and children. All of the participants who mentioned they had children, also revealed that the pursuit of a college education by their children was an assumed progression. Several of the participants described close relationships that impacted or guided countless choices they made prior to, during, or after their professional playing career. These relationships included primarily spouses or significant others, as well as trusted mentors, and often shaped the post-professional play career choices made by the participants.

Several categories of career choices emerged in the data collection. The categories developed into seven classifications of post-play professions reflecting the variety of paths open to the participants upon retirement. The career classifications identified from the data are: Professional Hockey Coaching, Entrepreneurship, Non-Profit Fundraising, and Broadcasting. Interestingly, many of the participants could fit into multiple career classifications as they presently balance numerous careers, such as Cullen for example who currently enjoys a broadcasting career while fulfilling his entrepreneurial and non-profit endeavors.

Four of the ten participants coached as a profession. Half of those who coached opted to do so in the NCAA Division I and Division III arenas. The remaining

half chose coaching positions in Europe, with the CHL, and with the AHL:

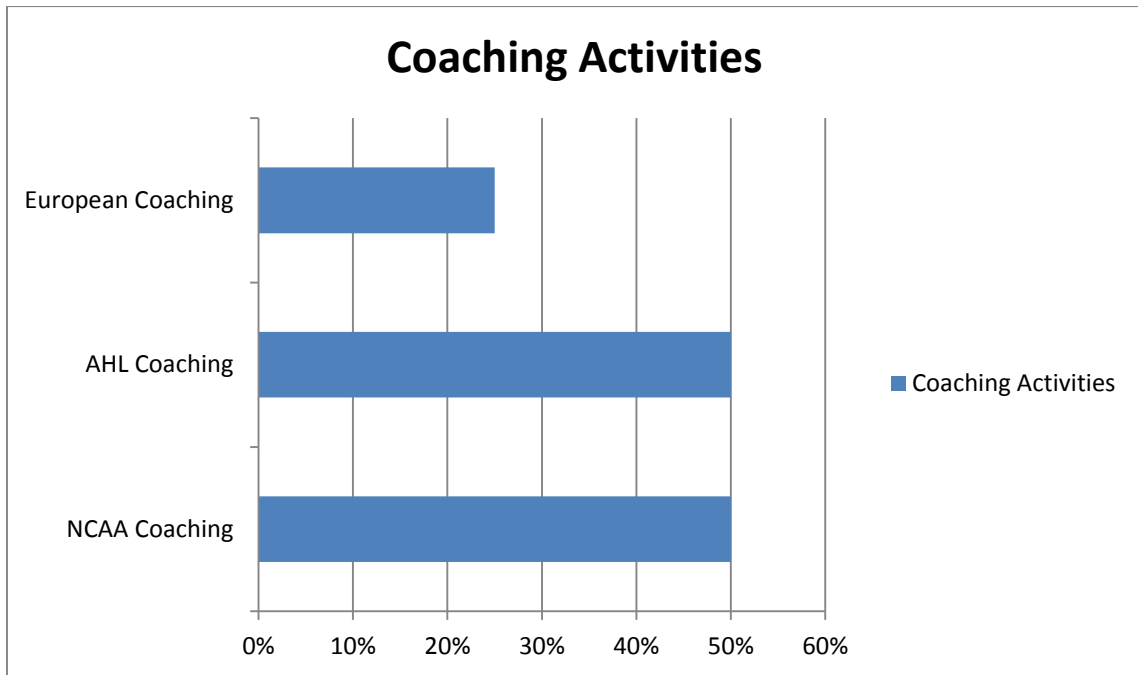


Figure 11: Coaching Activities

Half of all participants self-identified as entrepreneurs owning a variety of business entities from hockey schools to online publication firms. Two of the participants specify that their business ownership involved either real estate or insurance. Two of the participants also identify themselves as consultants. Less common, one participant indicates his primary employment came from work in the non-profit sector, with another one participant currently working in broadcasting. The data suggest that

entrepreneurship appears to be a significant retirement pathway for many of the participants in the sample:

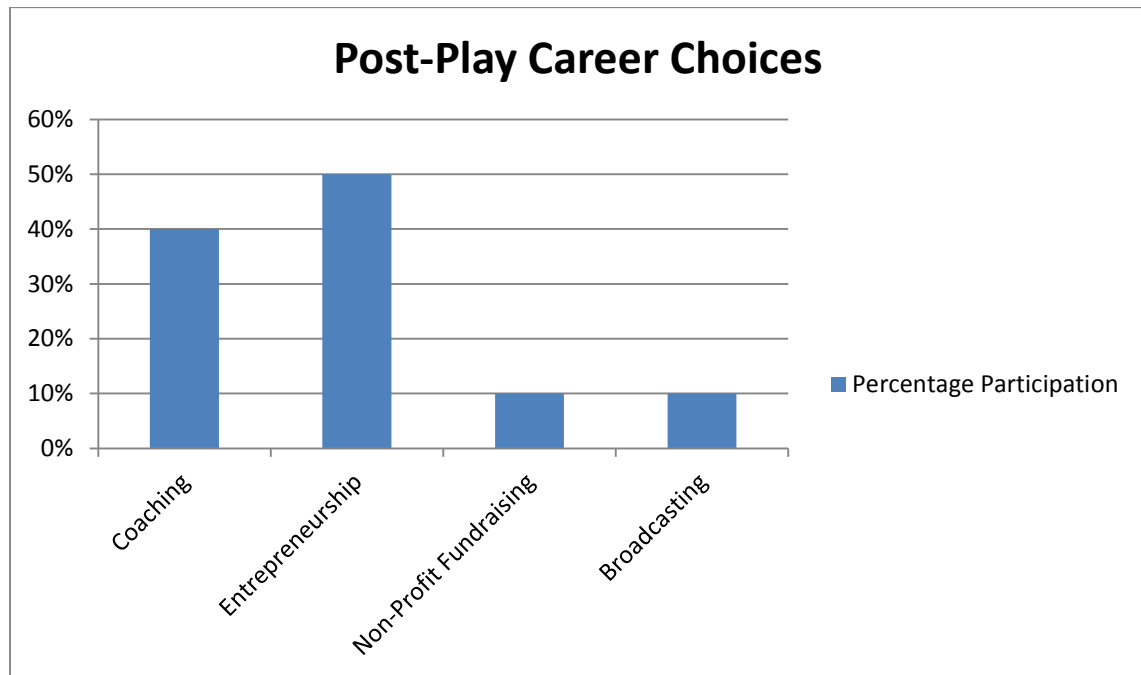


Figure 12: Post-Play Career Choices

### Emerging Themes

Interestingly, the various codes utilized in the data analysis phase of this study did not lead to clear categories indicating those elements that appear to influence college degree completion and pursuit of professional education. Although no categories were indicated as explicit motivators for educational choice, the process was extremely useful in determining how the choice was made by the participants on an individual basis. Incorporating expectancy-value theory in the analysis phase proved to be valuable in creating a thematic analysis that centers on motivational patterns rather than categorical design.

The participants, while similar in many of their hockey lives, came to the study with varied personal experiences ranging from family structures to post-career choices. The lens of EVT encouraged me to evaluate their individual choices regarding education in a holistic way, beginning with their childhoods. The exploration uncovered three motivational themes from those participants that chose to engage in educational activities post-career. These themes relate most directly to: Informal Mentorship; Head Injury Related Retirement; and Pre-Transition Planning.

#### *First Theme: Informal Mentorship*

Informal Mentorship, as defined for the purpose of this study, is the presence of a parent, coach or colleague who reinforced the value of educational activities to the participant sometime between childhood and pre-retirement. Gross (2009) states that "... the meaning of mentorship is up for debate" (p. 515). The literature certainly supports that position which is why it is critical to specify that, for the purpose of this study, mentorship is described more appropriately as *informal mentorship*. The use of informal mentorship pertains more to the emotional connections made between the "mentor" and the participant rather than the formal conventions of the term. The value of the educational activity as described by the mentor of course was subjective and surfaced as such in the participants' responses. Of significance, 4 of the 5 participants who actively engaged in educational activities in retirement indicated some type of informal mentorship relationship at a time in their lives.

For example, Chris described a deep educational mentoring even as a young child playing competitive hockey. The relationship developed with two of his coaches often

led to conversations with the team reinforcing the need for furthering their education:

There was [ex-NHL player] [who] was the assistant coach and [ex-NHL player] he had transformed into the business world. He got into the insurance industry and he's made a really good career for himself in [Canadian town], so I guess we got some life lessons in that from him although probably didn't realize it at the time, although it was all about high school and hockey at the time, but I look back on it fondly and some of the things he would say to us. And then my last year there we had [ex-NHL player] who was our coach. He was a former [NHL Team] and [NHL Team] as well. And he was in real estate but he also coached the team at [Canadian University] so there was a lot of emphasis on school and education from those guys as well.

As an outsider looking into Chris' world of youth hockey, I must admit I was surprised by this information. The assumption that most coaches in Canadian youth hockey emphasize hockey to the point of eclipsing educational focus was certainly called into question and deemed inappropriate, and more importantly, incorrect at least in this case. For Chris, the importance of education was highlighted not just in hockey practice, but in his home. Chris' father, a college-educated engineer, at one point had hopes that his son would attend one of the American Ivy-League universities that were heavily recruiting him:

My dad at one point wanted me to go play NCAA Division I hockey but I told him that wasn't my dream.

Patrick also described the need for education as his parents' "philosophy". This was a very strong sentiment and to understand fully, I inquired further by prompting him with, "So, it sounds like it was pretty important...", but before I was able to finish the prompt, Patrick stated, "It was, it was the *most* important thing in our house." Clearly the value of education for Patrick, much like Chris, was established at a young age.

Connor's reflections on mentorship are very different from those of Chris and Patrick. Connor, who is currently on the road to undergraduate degree completion, does not mention any identifiable mentors that surface from his hockey life or even with his parents. Connor describes his drive for education as the result of an "awakening" yet also communicates that he has a college-educated wife who is in pursuit of a nurse practitioner credential. The informal mentorship relationship, though not explicitly viewed as such by Connor, could be through his spousal relationship.

Finn has had an interesting relationship with education. Like many adult learners, he started and stopped a few times en route to a college degree only to decide that it was not the path he truly wanted to take. Finn was fortunate to have a hockey colleague who encouraged him to consider embarking on the professional education path so that he could easily transition into a new career post-play. Even though Finn had utilized the career inventories provided from his players' association prior to retirement, without the encouragement of his colleague, Finn might have given into the uncertainty of the new career direction thereby delaying his launch into professional education courses.

Kevin describes no single mentor or relationship, but rather a series of relationships that led him to his professional education choice:

I had had some relationships with people that were very powerful and successful people, and obviously made some mistakes along the way but fortunately learned from those mistakes and helped me later on. So it was through associations that was interested in the business side and, but yeah it was through people that I knew, I liked how they did things and what they did.

### *Second Theme: Head Injury Related Retirement*

The second theme to emerge in the analysis pertains solely to the engagement in undergraduate degree completion rather than professional education in retirement. Specifically, two of the three participants who engaged in degree completion post-career left the game of hockey with career-ending head injuries. Of those who had head injury related retirements, 100% completed the undergraduate degree in retirement. The remaining participant is actively pursuing the completion of the undergraduate degree at the time of writing.

Analysis of the data indicates that those participants who retired due to traumatic head injuries left the game not only with physical damage, but with the perception that they had something to prove, either to their children, or themselves.

Patrick, who continues to struggle with the effects of his head injury daily, described the completion of his college degree as an illustration of good role modeling for his children. Patrick expressed it in this way:

I mean it's, for me I guess, you know I say for no other reason than I want it but it was also important that my children see and that was probably the second most, single greatest motivating factor.

Chris was much more explicit on how the head injury factored into the choice to further his education:

Best thing I did was go back and start studying right away because, well I think because, of my history with head trauma, it was important to me that I could do the work.

### *Third Theme: Pre-Transition Planning*

The data indicates that 80% of those who engaged in undergraduate degree completion or professional education post-career had established a career transition plan prior to the conclusion of their playing careers.

Chapter 3 of this study discussed the literature that suggests that transition planning may play an important role in the overall adjustment of the retiring athlete. The data collected in this study certainly supports that work and adds the layer of the professional hockey player to the list of athletes whom might benefit significantly from transition assistance.

### *Significance of the Three Themes*

The data illustrate that the three identified motivational themes of Informal Mentorship, Head Injury Related Retirement, and Pre-Transition Planning appear to be significant indicators of engagement in post-career educational activities. While I have looked at each theme individually, it is important to also view the themes holistically when applied to all participants who experienced educational engagement during retirement.

Perhaps the two greatest indicators of the likelihood of pursuing education in retirement are Informal Mentorship and Pre-Transition Planning. Significantly, three of the five participants (60%) who engaged in post-career education described *both* an Informal Mentorship relationship and the presence of Pre-Transition Planning. The remaining two participants were divided respectively with one participant indicating both Informal Mentorship and Head Injury Related Retirement, and the remaining one

participant describing Pre-Transition Planning alone. Additionally, one of the participants who engaged in educational activities post-retirement described *all* three themes.

Overall, the data suggest that there is no “one size fits all” scenario in relation to motivational gateways for retired professional hockey players. For example, recent research regarding professional ballet dancers (Staplin, 2007) propagates the commonality among athletes to stay connected to one’s sport; however, the study suggests that dancers often feel “discouraged from having an “outside life”, especially an “outside life” that includes academia” (Staplin, 2007, p. 131). The current study regarding professional hockey players did not find similar sentiments.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The data provided in Chapter 4 facilitates discussion and response directly related to the research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this study.

#### Research Questions

The overarching research question posed in this study is, “What influences underlie the choice of retired athletes to engage in educational activities?” The data reflect that there are multiple elements that influence retired professional hockey players to select educational paths. Significant to the study, the presence of a mentorship relationship in the lives of the participants as well as a developed pre-retirement career transition plan surface as key influential elements in the choice process.

The specific research question, informed with the expectancy-value model, is, “How do expectancies, values, and perceived costs influence transitioning or retired professional hockey players post-career choices?” Employing expectancy-value theory proved useful especially when attempting to identify and understand the value associated with the engagement in the educational activity. Specifically, the values uncovered reflected: Attainment Value, Intrinsic Value, and Utility Value.

For example, Patrick describes the completion of his undergraduate degree while in retirement in terms of attainment value. Patrick indicated that that his attendance at

college fulfilled the need to finish the degree he began before his professional career started:

Well, there's no question I would not have started taking classes if it wasn't for the prodding of [University representative]. I mean I knew I thought it's what I wanted to do. I don't know what that time frame was. It may have been, you know, when I was 50, just to say I had it. And, you know, to this day people say why did you go back to school to get your degree and I can honestly say just 'cause I wanted to get it.

Chris, like Patrick, describes the experience of achieving his college degree in terms of attainment value, but with a different slant. Chris' attendance at college was primarily to show himself that he could defy the odds despite his career-ending brain injury and complete the degree:

Best thing I did was go back and start studying right away because, well I think because of my history with head trauma, it was important to me that I could do the work. ...So I guess I always had that 'what was I gonna do next?' I wanted to be educated.

Connor approaches the educational experience with a different lens. For Connor, the value is intrinsic and he describes his decision to engage in a degree completion program for the joy of learning and his interest in the subject:

I probably am glad I started later 'cause I wouldn't have known, when I went to school at 20, I wouldn't have a clue what to go to school for. But since I retired I've had this, kind of this awakening and health and nutrition and just the wellness thing is kind of my thing now and it will be for the rest of my life because the lifestyle I've kind of really bought into. So, I've started taking some classes...And that's just an option. I'm just trying to not just be so magnified that this, to just being into sports. I have time. I read a lot so I figured, why not try to get a degree while I'm coaching and get that stuff done.

Both Finn and Kevin pursued professional education licensures. They each describe the value of the activities in terms of utility in that achieving the professional

certification served a specific usefulness by enabling their new chosen profession to be realized. Finn expressed the utility concept this way:

Look after my hockey career, and it just turned the page and said, ‘okay, here’s the next page’, and you know, ‘what do I have to do to get up and running with this?’ But I think as I was transitioning out, looking at some of my friends who did well in hockey, I didn’t, there was just no certainty of where you would be in five years and I knew with the insurance business, I knew if I could last two years I’d be fine in five years.

Kevin explains that his chosen career path was selected before retirement ensuring an awareness of all that was necessary to generate the reality of the new career:

I knew what I was going to do. And the transition was pretty easy there. I was investing in some real estate, doing some buying and selling of real estate and things like that before I even retired from hockey ... When I retired, I literally got my real estate license and my insurance license and I went to school and got my securities license so I was able to manage my own money. So I knew right away that I wanted to do my own thing and I was fortunate enough to do that because of the hockey experience and financially and things like that.

Those participants who did not chose to pursue educational activities in retirement described the choice in terms of cost. For example, Kane describes the cost in terms of financial:

Ah, no. No, I’m too busy trying to raise, get money to raise the kids. We’ve been lucky enough we put one kid through college. [Child’s name] has one more year and then we’re hoping he gets off the payroll and onto his own.

Cullen describes the cost in terms of time, but clarifies that to mean importance:

At my age I would have to say I would not like to earn my degree. No, I’m too busy earning money! Well you know, when somebody says they don’t have time, all that means, I try to explain to people, all that means is that it’s not a high enough priority because something else can be replaced with that. When somebody says I don’t have time it means it’s not important to me now. Right? That’s what “I don’t have time” means.

In both cases, the determined cost of pursuing any type of educational endeavor was too high for both Kane and Cullen.

Further answering the overarching research question also requires response to a series of associated sub-questions. The first of these sub-questions is, “What individual characteristics factor into the choice process?” Responses to this question were not easily identifiable because of the variances among the participants and their personalities.

There were some common characteristics of their lives and careers that are shared below.

Of those study participants who selected educational activities in retirement:

- 80% were informally mentored in some way;
- 80% described having a pre-career transition plan in place;
- 100% had above-average career lengths;
- 100% were Canadian;
- 80% hailed from the Canadian province of Ontario;
- 100% played Major Junior; and
- 100% were married at the time of their choice.

Of those study participants who did not choose educational activities in retirement the following common characteristics surface:

- 100% hailed from the Canadian province of Quebec;
- 100% had above-average career lengths;
- 50% described having a pre-career transition plan in place; and
- 100% retired from the National Hockey League.

The second sub-question posed, “What environmental opportunities play a role in the choice process?” is not easily answered again due to the variance among the study participants. Two commonalities surfaced: (1) All participants entered a phase(s) of reinvention in retirement, and (2) all participants stayed connected to hockey in some way after their retirement from active play. It is quite possible that this consistent relationship to the hockey environment, or the reinventions that occurred, may have played a role in the choice process; however, any broad generalizations related to this question would be irresponsible without further research into these specific elements.

The third sub-question posed in this study, “What role does the manner, or cause, of retirement play in the post-career choices?” is answered through data analysis.

Unexpectedly, the *type* of injury does appear important to the choice of *some* educational pursuits, and more specifically, in relation to undergraduate degree completion. Data reflect that 100% of the study participants, who completed a college degree while in retirement, but prior to participating in the study, ended their playing careers due to traumatic head injuries. The manner or cause of retirement does not appear to influence the choice of educational endeavors in the professional education realm, or in the population that chooses not to participate in educational activities.

The fourth, and final, sub-question is, “How do psychological characteristics (i.e., athletic identification) influence post-career choices?” While the data does not indicate that athletic identification influences post-career choices across the participants, it does reflect that 100% of participants remain connected to hockey during their retirement years in a variety of capacities. Hunter may have expressed this sentiment most

eloquently when he likened hockey players to tradesmen rather than perpetuating that hockey is engrained as an identity:

I think hockey players try to stay in the hockey world as best they can, 'cause it's all we know. It's almost like a trade. It's something my father's taught me in a short time is like why would you get out of a trade you've been doing since you were two years old, it's all you know. It's very difficult to leave it, the mentality, it's what your comfort is.

Not surprisingly, 50% of all participants morphed their hockey careers from that of player, to professional coach thereby affording the participants with alternative career means of remaining part of the athletic culture. There are others who have distanced themselves, at least professionally, from hockey offering an alternative view of how athletic identification, or lifelong tradesmen behaviors, might be, in essence, terminated.

### Reflection on Theoretical Frameworks

The findings in this study promote reflection on the three theoretical frameworks used in this study: Adult Learning Theory, Adult Development Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory.

#### *Adult Learning Theory Reflection*

Adult learners are often complex beings that exhibit traits which cannot be placed into generic, or universal, categories. Retired professional hockey players have echoed this pattern, yet have illustrated similarities to some of the more accepted theoretical conceptions of adult learners. Below are the individual participant characteristics

reflecting the common principles of adult learning theory:

Table 2: Adult Learning Theory Participant Characteristics

Participant	Adult Learner Characteristics
Patrick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermittent adult learner;</li> <li>• Stopped and started a few times prior to and during career;</li> <li>• Did not identify need for the degree to enhance professional skills;</li> <li>• Enrolled in online courses post-career;</li> <li>• Stimulation seeker; physical injury to the brain (potential unique barrier); and</li> <li>• Goal was clearly focused on completion of the baccalaureate.</li> </ul>
David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant completed degree as traditional student <i>prior</i> to career</li> </ul>
Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant completed degree as traditional student <i>prior</i> to career</li> </ul>
Finn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life change learner;</li> <li>• No physical injuries;</li> <li>• Enrolled in a program of study that led to a professional certification; and</li> <li>• Had directed goals which focused on enhancing professional skills.</li> </ul>
Kevin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life change learner;</li> <li>• Physical injuries (potential unique barrier);</li> <li>• Enrolled in a program of study that led to a professional certification; and</li> <li>• Had directed goals which focused on enhancing professional skills.</li> </ul>
Liam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant completed degree <i>during</i> career as part of his contract</li> </ul>
Kane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not participate in degree completion or professional education in retirement</li> </ul>
Cullen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not participate in degree completion or professional education in retirement</li> </ul>
Connor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulation seeker;</li> <li>• Enrolled for more knowledge about topics he enjoyed;</li> <li>• Has direction as to where college education can lead;</li> <li>• Did not enroll immediately upon retirement; and</li> <li>• Enrolled in online courses.</li> </ul>

Chris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life change learner;</li> <li>• Reactionary involvement;</li> <li>• Physical injury to the brain (potential unique barrier);</li> <li>• No real direction when enrolled;</li> <li>• Enrolled immediately upon separation from career;</li> <li>• No formal intercession to assist in new career path;</li> <li>• Enrolled in f2f courses; and</li> <li>• Additional emotional challenges beyond the role of learner (potential unique barrier).</li> </ul>
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Participants in the study who chose educational activities in retirement generally fell into three of Morstain and Smart’s categories of adult learners: stimulation seekers, those with career-related goals, and life change learners. Also supported are Compton, Cox and Santos Laanan’s (2006), as well as Kasworm’s (2008), work on adult learner characteristics. Specifically, those who engaged in education post-career reflected the following attributes:

- Like other adult learners, they enrolled in programs of study that led to the credential of an undergraduate degree or a professional certification;
- Like other adult learners, some had directed goals for their program of study which focused on enhancing professional skills;
- Like other adult learners, they did not identify themselves as “students”, but rather retired hockey players/working people who attend school;
- Like other adult learners, some chose to enroll in online or distance learning programs; and
- Like other adult learners, they had additional barriers to enrollment not common of the non-traditional learner such as physical and emotional challenges.

The data suggests that the retired professional hockey players in this study shared many of the commonalities that unite adult learners across North America.

### *Adult Development Theory Reflection*

While much of the research centered on adult learners was supported, the findings of this study detract from much of the common Eriksonian thought on adult development. The popular belief regarding adult development is one that focuses on the evolution of our development through, eras, periods, or stages as referenced in Chapter 2. A hallmark in those theories (Levinson, 1986; Erikson, 1976) is that an individual experiences those eras, periods, or stages in a series of transitions and that one cannot move forward without “completing” the prior level. Additionally, often there have been age ranges linked to the eras, periods, or stages that indicate when such actions should occur.

I propose that the professional hockey players in this study largely would not fit into these adult development molds. Instead, I offer an alternative lens suggesting that elite athletes, specifically, the professional hockey players from this study, move through their adult development more appropriately articulated as *concurrent experiences with a subsequent phase(s) of reinvention*. The findings from the data support this concept and are presented below illustrating the individual participant characteristics reflecting

possible synchrony in many of their experiences:

Table 3: Adult Development Theory Participant Characteristics

Participant	Adult Development Characteristics
Patrick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at age 5;</li> <li>• Left home at 15 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey; attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 18;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 17 years, retiring at age 35;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Possessed transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Did not experience a difficult retirement phase;</li> <li>• Physical impairment upon retirement; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came informally based on self-assessment.</li> </ul>
David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at age 9;</li> <li>• Left home at 16 to play hockey at prep-school-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Went to college to play hockey through NCAA ranks;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 23;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 2 years, retiring at age 25;</li> <li>• Not married at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Had no transition plan for retirement; and</li> <li>• Experienced a difficult retirement phase.</li> </ul>
Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at age 2;</li> <li>• Left home at 15 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school locally;</li> <li>• Went to college to play hockey through NCAA ranks;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 22;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 7 years, retiring at age 29;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Possessed transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Did not experience a difficult retirement phase; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came informally based on self-assessment.</li> </ul>

Finn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at 5;</li> <li>• Did not leave home at to play hockey but did begin Major Junior at 15-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school locally;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 19;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 15 years, retiring at age 35;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Had transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Easy retirement phase;</li> <li>• No identifiable significant physical impairment upon retirement; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came formally through career and personality inventories offered by the PHPA.</li> </ul>
Kevin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unknown at what age hockey began – self-identified late bloomer;</li> <li>• Left home at 15 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented early in life;</li> <li>• Later childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 21;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 12 years, retiring at age 32;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Possessed transition plan for retirement; easy retirement phase;</li> <li>• No identifiable significant physical impairment upon retirement; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came informally based on self</li> </ul>
Liam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at age 5;</li> <li>• Left home at 16 to play hockey at prep-school-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Went to college to play hockey through NCAA ranks;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 21;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 10 years, retiring at age 31;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Had no transition plan for retirement; and</li> <li>• Did not experience a difficult retirement phase.</li> </ul>

Kane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at age 12;</li> <li>• Left home at 18 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Unknown if attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 19;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 14 years, retiring at age 36;</li> <li>• Family status at time of retirement unknown;</li> <li>• Possessed transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Did not experience a difficult retirement phase; and</li> <li>• No specific physical impairment upon retirement.</li> </ul>
Cullen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unknown at what age full focus on hockey began;</li> <li>• Left home at 15 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 20;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 12 years, retiring at age 32;</li> <li>• Married with young family at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Had no transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Experienced a difficult retirement phase; and</li> <li>• No specific physical impairment upon retirement.</li> </ul>
Connor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at 5;</li> <li>• Left home at 16 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit; transitioned to professional play at age 19;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 9 years, retiring at age 28;</li> <li>• Engaged with no children at time of retirement;</li> <li>• Possessed transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Difficult retirement phase;</li> <li>• No notable physical impairment upon retirement; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came informally based on self-assessment.</li> </ul>

Chris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full focus on hockey began at 6;</li> <li>• Left home at 16 to play hockey-suggests athletic identity was cemented very early in life;</li> <li>• Childhood and teen years completely focused on hockey;</li> <li>• Attended high school away from structure of familial unit;</li> <li>• Transitioned to professional play at age 20;</li> <li>• Played entire pro career in 8 years, retiring at age 28;</li> <li>• Married with young family just starting at time of retirement;</li> <li>• No transition plan for retirement;</li> <li>• Experienced very difficult retirement phase;</li> <li>• Significant physical impairment upon retirement;</li> <li>• Experienced Kubler-Ross' stages of grief; and</li> <li>• Identification of transferable or motivated skills came informally based on self-assessment</li> </ul>
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*Concurrent Experiences with a Subsequent Phase(s) of Reinvention (CESPR)*

Using Erikson (1976) and Levinson (1986) as frameworks for adult development stages, I have identified a consistent pattern of concurrent experiences, or coinciding life events, intersecting or occurring at the same time. Specifically, the professional hockey players in this study often found themselves in a type of sphere that endures typically from the age of 18 through around 35. In this time, they must deal, often simultaneously, with the complications of moving through late teenage years, acquiring their “adult” career (often before the age of 20), marrying and having children, reaching the pinnacle of their careers (often before the age of 35), retiring from their near life-long focus of sport (often before the age of 35), and sometimes suffering from severe physical ailments.

Beyond the state of concurrent experiences, these professional hockey players appear to enter a phase, or phases, of reinvention. Reinvention refers to the period(s) in

which the retiring athlete must determine two things: who they are now and what career path to choose. Like many who are just finishing high school or college, these retired players can experience a high level of uncertainty and anxiety. For others, the reinvention phase is seemingly natural and causes little turbulence in their lives. Some have little to no formal support to turn to for guidance and no one reaching out to them to extend a mentoring hand. Others begin a reflection period using formal and/or informal methods to determine who they are if not a player, and how they might transition into a new career direction. Importantly, this reinvention phase happens quite often before the age of 35, an age when most adults are perceived as secure in their careers. For some, this period of reinvention begins while they are still actively playing but have begun the preparation for their severance from play. Still, for others, the point of reinvention is thrust upon them very quickly and unexpectedly. The findings also support that this population of hockey players may experience the reinvention phase more than once. For example, Cullen described many experiences in which he faced uncertainty about what he was meant to do and who he was post-hockey. Cullen endured multiple reinventions from actor, to entrepreneur, to author. Presently, Cullen has united many of those prior reinventions and now embraces them simultaneously. Regardless of retirement preparation, the participants in this study each appear to undergo a phase of reinvention

strongly suggesting evidence that the “standard” adult development theories do not apply to this population. The concept is illustrated below:

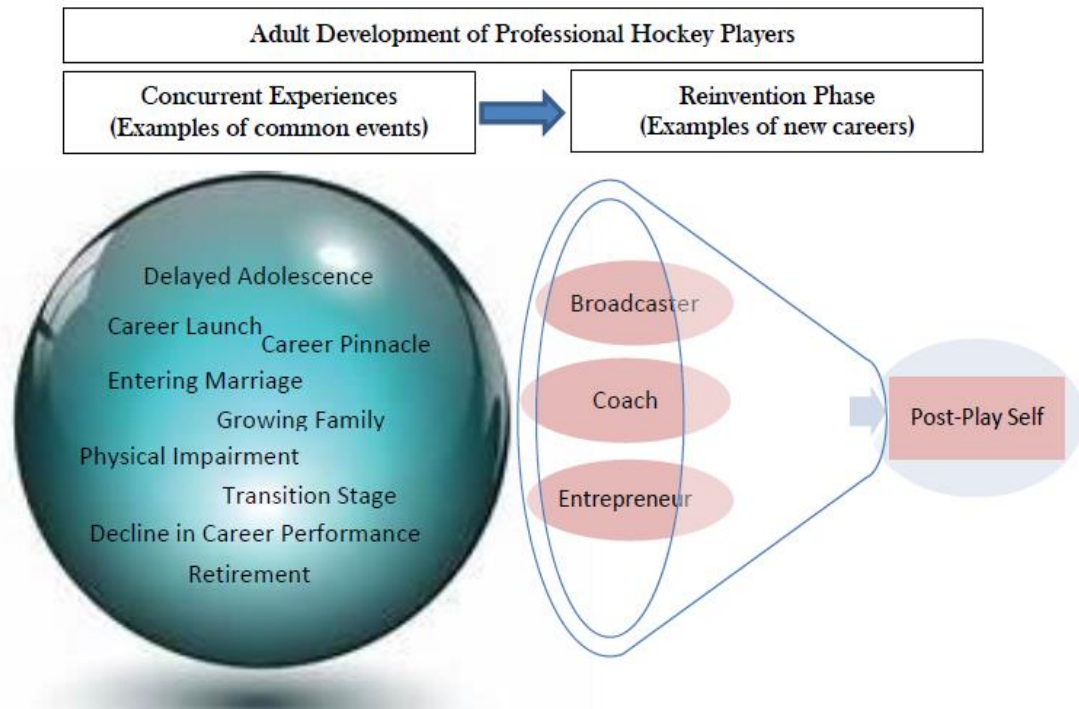


Figure 13: Concurrent Experiences with Subsequent Phase(s) of Reinvention

There is slender, but growing literature relating to non-Eriksonian, or non-stage, theories of adult development. Riegel, as early as 1975, discusses the need to look at adult development with the lens of a non-stage model. Riegel (1975), using what he deems as the “four dimensions of development” (abstract), proposes that adult development is less inclined to be balanced and more prone to occurrences of “asynchronies” (abstract) between the dimensions. Stevens-Long and Michaud (2003) have also strayed from the common stage-model and instead discuss the merits of adult development as a “dynamic systems model” (p. 19). The theory focuses on the interdisciplinary changes that occur throughout human development; however, Stevens-

Long and Michaud (2003) caution that since psychologists have a need for “order and patterning within variation” (p. 19) the nature of the dynamic systems model may require complex analysis methodologies yet to be designed.

While theories such as those proposed by Riegel (1975) and Stevens-Long and Michaud (2003) offer an alternative to the commonly used stage models of adult development, they do little to address the specific development occurrences of the sample in this study. Primarily, these theories fail to offer perspective on the concurrency and reinvention elements common to this sample.

#### *Expectancy-Value Theory Reflection*

Continued reflection on the applicability of using motivation theory was fruitful and I believe that the findings from the data support the expectancy-value theory framework. The data corroborates the proposed beliefs about expectancies detailed in Chapter 3. Specifically, for those who chose to participate in educational activities, there was an expectation of gratification to some degree. The explanations for why this occurs vary. For some it appeared to be the sheer pleasure of participating in life-long learning activities while for others the expectation of success could be explained by the individual’s competitive nature and the satisfaction derived from undertaking new and highly difficult challenges.

The findings from the data are presented below illustrating the individual participant characteristics reflecting task values associated with educational activities for each participant. Specifically, in terms of task values, the study found evidence of each

value (attainment, intrinsic, utility, and cost) across the participants but utility value emerged more often than any other value. Below are the detailed task value findings for each participant in the study:

Table 4: Expectancy-Value Theory Participant Characteristics

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Expectancy-Value Theory</b>
Patrick	<i>Attainment Value:</i> Attendance at college was to fulfill the need to finish the degree he began before his professional career began.
David	<i>Utility Value:</i> Attendance at university served a specific usefulness and provided gateway path to chosen profession.
Hunter	<i>Utility Value:</i> Attendance at university served a specific usefulness and provided gateway path to chosen profession.
Finn	<i>Utility Value:</i> Achieving professional certification served a specific usefulness and provided gateway path to chosen profession.
Kevin	<i>Utility Value:</i> Achieving professional certification served a specific usefulness and enabled chosen profession to be realized
Liam	<i>Utility Value:</i> Attendance at university served a specific usefulness and provided gateway path to chosen profession.
Kane	<i>Cost:</i> Attendance at university posed a financial cost too high to pay.
Cullen	<i>Cost:</i> Completing university degree cost too much in terms of time.
Connor	<i>Intrinsic Value:</i> Attendance at college is simply for the enjoyment of the subject matter
Chris	<i>Attainment Value:</i> Attendance at college was to prove something to himself; To fulfill the need to show himself that he was not damaged and could defy the odds with a brain injury and complete the degree.  <b>And</b>  <i>Utility Value:</i> Achieving professional certification served a specific usefulness and provided gateway path to chosen profession.

## Implications for Practice and Further Research

The findings of this study regarding the elements that influence educational choice processes of retired professional hockey players are significant and support the need for further research. The uniqueness of this population presents opportunities, both for educational institutions and for professional hockey entities, to enhance and improve the transition experiences of retiring professional hockey players.

### *Implications for Educational Institutions*

The study's findings suggest that retired professional hockey players may be more inclined to seek out undergraduate degree completion and professional certifications if they: (1) experience informal mentorship relationships, and (2) develop transition plans for their exit out of active play. Educational institutions could factor into this conversation by offering creative programming and outreach initiatives targeted at retiring players. Specifically, the development, or acquisition, of programs that lead to professional certifications, such as real estate, insurance, and financial securities could be marketed to this population. Those institutions committed to adult education might have the edge in courting this new population of adult learners if they are willing to provide degree completion programs and professional certifications in flexible, convenient, and cost effective ways.

### *Implications for Professional Hockey*

Professional hockey players' associations and alumni associations exist for the benefit of their memberships. The findings of this study support the concept that planned

transitions from an active playing career to retirement encourage healthier transitions. Since many terminations from active play happen without warning, transition plans should be encouraged while the player is still active in his career. The players' associations serve as the ideal platform to bring this conversation to the players directly *before* their careers expire. Specifically, the players' associations might utilize certified career transition coaches to reach players of all levels of professional play. These associations might also consider partnering with established educational institutions whom excel in adult learning programs, or possibly those few institutions that specialize in serving unique populations like the professional athlete, thereby increasing available transition and retirement programming and outreach initiatives.

#### *Further Research*

The study is the first that has attempted to understand how educational choices are made by professional hockey players. Though themes have emerged from this study regarding the importance of informal mentorship relationships and pre-retirement career planning, the study is limited by the small number of participants and its confines to North American-born players. It would be beneficial to encourage a much broader study encompassing many more retired professional hockey players and expanding upon the international population of professional hockey. Additionally, new research might be undertaken to determine the effect of early intervention career transition coaching on this specialized population of career changers.

Finally, additional research should be encouraged regarding the potential implications of the new adult development model proposed in this study: *Concurrent*

*Experiences with Subsequent Phase(s) of Reinvention.* It would be beneficial to expand the research about this concept not only to a larger professional hockey participant group, including active players and with a broad international scope, but also to involve other elite athletes to determine if this model may serve populations of athletes beyond hockey players. The increased data and subsequent findings have the potential to promote a deeper understanding of the unique elite athlete thereby encouraging not only healthier transitions to retirement, but perhaps improved support while still actively playing.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION



**Educational Leadership**  
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May 2013

Dear Hockey Alumni,

I am a doctoral student currently engaged in research about retired professional hockey players. I am working under the direction of Dr. Corrinne Caldwell, who is serving as the dissertation chair of this study, in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education at Temple University.

Specifically, I hope to learn more about how professional hockey players make choices in retirement. It is crucial to gain the personal perspectives of retired players because the slim research that exists suggests that participation in certain activities may help in the retirement transition. The personal curiosity surrounding this topic is inspired by my work with active and retired sports professionals, a strong interest in sports psychology, and my life-long love of hockey.

I am asking for a personal face-to-face interview with those who agree to participate in the research. I will need approximately 60-90 minutes for the interview, although there may be a follow-up phone call, email or Skype conversation if any clarification is needed. I am hopeful that these interviews would occur between June 2013 and October 2013 at the convenience of the participant. In accordance to the requirements and regulations of the Institutional Review Board at Temple University, all information gathered in the course of this study will be kept in the strictest confidentiality.

Participation in this research study has the potential to improve the lives of those in your alumni community whom may be working through a difficult transition to retirement, or may simply want more in their retirement years. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time with no penalty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jillian K. Donnelly'.

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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

**UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL CHOICE PROCESSES OF RETIRED PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY PLAYERS**

**Consent Form for Professional Hockey Players**

**Investigator’s Name:** Jilian K. Donnelly  
**Affiliation:** Temple University, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
**Telephone:** (610) 809-2636 (c) (610) 361-5261 (o)  
**Advisor:** Dr. Corrinne A. Caldwell  
**Affiliation:** Temple University, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
**Telephone:** (215) 204-6174 (o)

I am a doctoral student working under the direction of Professor Corrinne Caldwell, who is serving as the Dissertation Advisor for this project in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Temple University.

I am currently engaged in a study of retired professional hockey players and am investigating the choices professional hockey players make after their playing careers end. To help me gain further insights into this, I will ask you to participate in an interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. In addition, I may contact you for follow-up interviews for further clarification. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon site and follow-up interviews will be scheduled via telephone at a time that is convenient for you. The data that you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you write and/or say will be held in the strictest confidence. Following the interview, all responses will be transcribed and coded for data analysis. Any information obtained from the interview that might identify a participant will be kept strictly confidential.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and identifiers will not be used. If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call or email me (jilian.donnelly@temple.edu) or my Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Corrinne Caldwell (ccaldwel@temple.edu).

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. Your contribution to this study will provide invaluable data regarding retired professional hockey players.

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Participant’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Participant’s Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The objective of our conversation is simply to provide you with an opportunity to share your perspective about retirement. I will begin our conversation with an overarching statement, which will allow you to guide the direction of our conversation. While I will ask you a number of questions in response to the perceptions you will share, I want you to feel free to describe those things that are most important to you.

#### **Overarching Statement**

Tell me the story about your life, as a professional hockey player and your life now in retirement.

#### **Successful Prompts**

Successful follow-up prompts may include the following:

1. I would like to learn just a bit more about your retirement experience. Share with me why you retired and your feelings and emotions at the time of retirement.
2. Tell me about your family.
3. Reflecting as a retired hockey player, tell me your thoughts about playing collegiate hockey vs. major-junior prior to entering the professional hockey.
4. Given your experience with retirement from active play, can you tell me about the options that you have considered for your post-hockey life?
5. When you consider these options tell me about some of the factors that influenced your choices?
6. Tell me what your life would be like if you hadn't been a professional hockey player.
7. Share with me what your future plans are.

## APPENDIX D

### IRB CLEARANCE



Office for Human Subjects Protections  
Institutional Review Board  
Medical Intervention Committees A1 & A2  
Social and Behavioral Committee B

Student Faculty Conference Center  
3340 N Broad Street - Suite 304  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19140  
Phone: 215.707.3390 Fax: 215.707.9100  
e-mail: [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu)

#### MEMORANDUM

To: CALDWELL, CORRINNE  
Education: Lead/Policy Stud (19030)

From: Institutional Review Board

Date: 05-Apr-2012

Re: Exempt Request Status for IRB Protocol:  
20549: Understanding Professional Hockey Players' Decisions about College in Retirement

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It has been determined by Expedited Review that this study qualifies for exemption status as follows:

#### 45 CFR 46 Protection of Human Subjects

Section 101 (b): Unless otherwise required by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

**Exemption 2: Anonymous Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.** Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public, unless (I) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (II) any disclosure of the human subject's responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Nothing further is required from you at this time; however, if anything in your research design should change, you must notify the Institutional Review Board immediately.

Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact IRB at 215-707-3390.