

ALL IN THE FAMILY: AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN  
TRAVEL ICE HOCKEY

By

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## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

### **ALL IN THE FAMILY: AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN TRAVEL ICE HOCKEY**

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A plethora of research exists regarding parents' positive and negative impact on youth experiences in sport. While a considerable amount of attention has been given to the study of youth sport parents, relatively less research has involved the study of all family members (i.e., parents, siblings, youth athletes), specifically related to their functioning in youth sport. It is well documented that sport can have meaningful effects on children and their families; thus, exploring the relationship between family functioning and youth sport may help researchers and practitioners to identify dimensions of functional versus dysfunctional families to better understand and support their sport experiences.

Given the above, the overall purpose of this study was to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey. The Circumplex model of marital and family systems was used to guide this study and is comprised of three dimensions considered essential for understanding family functioning: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The study was conducted in two phases, each associated with a specific purpose. In Phase 1, 35 mothers or fathers of travel ice hockey players between the ages of 8-18 years old completed the self-report Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale – Fourth Edition (FACES IV), a validated measure of perceptions of family functioning. These results were then used to purposefully select four families with maximally different levels of family functioning to complete Phase 2 of this study, which involved in-depth qualitative interviews.

To address purpose one, which aimed to use the Circumplex model FACES IV self-report measure to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey families, Phase 1 results suggested that the sample was comprised of normal, balanced functioning types. Thus, the identification of distinct family types (i.e., functional and dysfunctional families) nor any of the six family types (i.e., balanced, rigidly cohesive, midrange, flexibly unbalanced, chaotically disengaged and unbalanced) derived from the validation of the Circumplex model was found. In an absolute sense, it can be concluded the study findings did not reflect the Circumplex model. To address purpose two, which aimed to conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model to understand family functioning in the travel ice hockey experience, Phase 2 interview data were then analyzed within and across families according to the dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, communication) of the Circumplex model. Findings highlighted the nuances of family functioning by highlighting how the four families were characterized as generally normal, balanced family types, yet functioned differently in the context of travel ice hockey. While differences in family functioning within each family case emerged, core themes across the family cases were identified, which supported dimensions of the Circumplex model, while also showcasing other key considerations outside of the Circumplex model that may be important for understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey.

The current study emphasized the importance of exploring families as one unit, or system, allowing the researcher to move from an individualized, top-down approach toward a more integrated approach that considered the family as a coordinated system. Taken together, this study enriched our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey through use of a systems approach and highlighted the importance of continued research on this topic.

## **ABSTRACT**

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Within the youth sport domain, research has primarily emphasized the broad contributions of parents to the development of youth athletes, and the positive and negative impact they may have on children's psychosocial experiences (Knight, 2019). The importance of family, especially parents, as a direct and indirect influence on a child's development through sport is well-documented (Dorsch et al., 2021). While a considerable amount of attention has been given to the study of youth sport parents, relatively less research has explored the family as a collective system, specifically related to their functioning in sport. Given this information, the overall purpose of this study was to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey.

The Circumplex model of marital and family systems (Olson, 2000) was used to guide this study, which is comprised of three dimensions considered essential for understanding family functioning: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The study was conducted in two phases, each associated with a specific purpose. A retrospective, cross-sectional, mixed methods design was employed by implementing a participant selection model within a multiple case study approach. A participant selection model was implemented to complete Phase 1 of the study. In Phase 1, 35 mothers and/or fathers of travel ice hockey players between the ages of 8-18 years old completed the self-report Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale – Fourth Edition (FACES IV), a validated measure of perceptions of family functioning. These results were then used to purposefully select four families with maximally different levels of family functioning to complete of this study, which involved in-depth qualitative interviews.

To address purpose one, which aimed to use the Circumplex model FACES IV self-report measure to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey families, Phase 1 results suggested that the sample was comprised of normal, balanced functioning types. Thus, the identification of distinct family types nor any of the six family types derived from the validation of the Circumplex model was found. In an absolute sense, the study findings did not reflect the Circumplex model. To address purpose two, which aimed to conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model to understand family functioning in the travel ice hockey experience, Phase 2 interview data were then analyzed within and across families according to the dimensions of the Circumplex model. Findings highlighted the nuances of family functioning by highlighting how the four families were characterized as generally normal, balanced family types, yet functioned differently in the context of travel ice hockey. While differences in family functioning within each family case emerged, core themes across the family cases were identified, which supported dimensions of the Circumplex model, while also showcasing other key considerations outside of the Circumplex model that may be important for understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

In the United States, over 36 million youth ages 6-17 played a sport at least one day during the year, either organized or unstructured. Of those youth, 20.2 million played sports on a regular basis, typically in some organized fashion (Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 2020). Recently, research has suggested youth sports are an estimated \$19 billion industry, rivaling the size of the \$15 billion National Football League (NFL), comprised of segments that represent revenue generation including, but not limited to travel, equipment, team membership, and facility rental (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2020). Aside from these numbers, it only takes a quick glance around the fields, gyms, ice rinks, and swimming pools after school and on the weekends to realize that families are significant contributors to this industry, as sport participation is a prominent aspect of many of their everyday lives. Data according to the Aspen Institute (2016) agrees with this notion, suggesting that three out of four American households have at least one school-aged child participating in organized sport.

Families play a pivotal role in youth sport, acting as key socializing agents and sources of instrumental (e.g., transportation to and from practices and games, equipment, league fees) and emotional (e.g., empathy, positive feedback, respect) support for the millions of children and adolescents involved. Current trends indicate youth sport provides a common context for family interaction, where their involvement is thought to have important consequences for youth such as helping to create lifetime memories (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), highly satisfying and enjoyable experiences (Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013), healthy lifestyles (Coakley, 2006), enhanced personal development (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005), and improved family functioning (e.g., strengthened family bonds, greater adaptability to new situations) (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

At the same time, however, as the climate of youth sport continues to evolve, so too does concern regarding the “professionalization” of youth sport (i.e., increasingly privatized, specialized, expensive, performance-oriented), where adverse experiences and outcomes may not only be witnessed but shaped (Brenner, 2016; Gould, 2019). For example, the stress of constantly traveling to practices and games (sometimes hundreds of miles away), meeting the escalating costs of sport, and concerns over one’s child’s performance can create considerable distress for families, conflict within the family, and family dysfunction (Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015). It is ironic, then, that while the effects of a child’s sport participation on family functioning is often discussed by those in youth sports, it has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature. Specifically, it is unclear what conditions are beneficial or harmful for family functioning, especially in travel sport contexts. A travel team is defined as one that plays at an elite level. These teams travel, often long distances and/or out of state, to competitions and practice. Usually, these teams are part of a private club or sports program, not a recreational league or one affiliated with a school. There is typically a tryout process to join the team and families have to invest financially (e.g., annual team fees, travel and lodging, equipment/uniform purchases) for their child to participate. So, this leads to the question: how does the travel sport experience impact family functioning? This dissertation is designed to address the gap in the literature by conducting one of the first studies to directly examine family functioning in travel sport.

Within the youth sport domain, research has primarily emphasized the broad contributions of parents to the development of youth athletes, and the positive and/or negative impact they may have on children’s psychosocial experiences (Knight, 2019). A plethora of work on sport parents has provided valuable information regarding their roles in this context

(i.e., providers, interpreters, role models) (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004) as well as the supportive (e.g., offering praise, feedback and reinforcement for mastery attempts, unconditional love) and pressuring (e.g., overemphasis on outcome goals, harsh criticism, excessive expectations) behaviors associated with the outcomes of children's sport experiences (Bean et al., 2016; Bois et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2015; Teques et al., 2019). Taken together, the importance of family, especially parents, as a direct and indirect influence on a child's development through sport is well-documented. While a considerable amount of attention has been given to the study of youth sport parents, relatively less research has involved the study of all family members (i.e., parents, siblings, youth athletes) nor considered how family members may function as an integrated system in youth sport.

Bloom's (1985) 4-year longitudinal study of expert performers in athletics, art, and music was one of the first to highlight family members as an underlying factor related to talent development. Findings acknowledged the importance of the hours each expert put into their training as well as the social, emotional, and interpersonal dynamics of both the child and family in their pursuit of talent. Importantly, Bloom's study showed that talented individuals do not reach an exceptionally high level of performance alone. There are always significant others to give advice, support, and companionship along the way. Moreover, the roles and tasks of the parent, mentor/teacher, and coach differ depending on the career stage (i.e., initiation, development, perfection) of the talented individual.

Following Bloom's (1985) influential study on talent development, Côté's (1999) study of sport families extended this line of work by examining the family dynamics of talented athletes throughout their development in sport. Through semi-structured interviews with parents, sibling(s), and youth athletes, Côté identified important changes that occurred at the parental and

familial levels during the child's pursuit of excellence in sport. Importantly, these changes occurred across the child's development (i.e., sampling, specializing, investment years) and included, but were not limited to changes in family member roles, sibling relationships, and resources (i.e., finances, time). For example, families indicated as their child became more invested in his or her sport participation, the financial commitment towards the child's sport participation increased as well. As one father described:

“It started back when they were younger, buying their first set of weights. Instead of going on vacations, we put the money into buying rowing ergometers. [My son] and I also share a single shell. We put some of our spending money or savings into training equipment and then said, “to heck with going to Whistler to go skiing.” – Father 2

A notable change also worth mentioning occurred relative to sibling relationships within the family. Specifically, during the specializing years (13-15 years), cooperation emerged as an important antecedent and outcome of sibling relationships. However, examining the transition from the specializing years (13-15 years) to the investment years (16+ years), Côté found that a serious commitment to sport participation by one child in the family created an uneven distribution of resources within the family, frequently resulting in feelings of bitterness and jealousy of the younger sibling. As one twin brother explained:

“They're almost mental about that [rowing], It's taking right over, especially in mid-summer when they are really into it. Actually, that's when I really get frustrated with it. It's almost like they don't care about what I do.” – Sibling 2

Similarly, Kay (2000) examined how British families provide support for their talented children in sport as well as the other side of this relationship: how the family is affected by providing such support. Comparable to previous research findings, the main forms of family

support for children's sport included instrumental (e.g., finance, time, transport and travel) and emotional support (e.g., praise, encouragement). Novel findings emerged regarding the way in which family life became shaped by the demands of providing support. The two major ways in which the family was affected involved the burden of financial cost and the impact on family lifestyle – particularly on family members' use of time.

The financial cost of participation is a familiar factor that has been documented in previous studies; however, the latter finding regarding family members' use of time illuminated consequences on individual and collective family activity patterns. Striking examples included: a father sleeping in his van at 5 a.m. to catch an extra hour's sleep before work; an older sibling regularly leaving to spend weekends with friends; and the timing, postponement, disruption or cancellation of holidays. These behaviors exhibited by family members may be attributed to the current youth sport culture, which has become increasingly professionalized (i.e., increasingly privatized, specialized, expensive, performance-oriented) (Brenner, 2016; Gould, 2019). Because of this evolving youth sport climate, many families may embrace a "keeping up with the Jones's" mentality, thus leading them to engage in behaviors that affect their day-to-day family dynamics.

Côté's (1999) and Kay's (2000) work made key contributions to the sport family literature, including: (1) consideration of the way in which various aspects of the sport experience impact the family system beyond the individual outcomes of the participating child and (2) how familial beliefs and behaviors change across the child's development in sport. Despite these contributions, much of the research that followed Côté's (1999) and Kay's (2000) original work has emphasized individual family members (primarily parents) influence on children's outcomes in youth sport, with little attention regarding how family's function in youth sport.

## **Overview of the Problem**

Families play a critical role in our society by providing members with a means of financial, social, and emotional support as well as personal development (Bebiroglu et al., 2013). Those who have studied families have highlighted the significance of family functioning, which refers to the social and structural properties of the global family environment and includes interactions and relationships within the family (Lewandowski et al., 2010). The study of family functioning has been mainly applied in the family therapy and family development literature (Walker & Crocker, 2017).

Key dimensions that have been repeatedly considered relevant to the study of family functioning include cohesion (e.g., balance of separateness and togetherness), flexibility (e.g., family balance of stability versus change), and communication (e.g., family listening skills, speaking skills, respect and regard) (Olson, 2000). Such dimensions may have implications for broader health-related family outcomes (e.g., psychological stress, depressive symptoms, enjoyment, satisfaction, emotion regulation, burnout) that seem to receive less attention in the youth sport research domain (Hughes & Gullone, 2008) but have been written about in the popular press or talked about by youth sport parents. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) proposed that families can achieve greater functioning through family leisure activities, such as play. Accordingly, a positive relationship has been found between family leisure activities and positive family outcomes (e.g., lower divorce rates, strengthened relationships, enhanced communication and flexibility) (Orthner & Mancini, 1991).

A leisure context of interest to the current study that involves aspects of play is youth sport. Youth sport is a relevant context to study families because it provides ample opportunity for families to interact on a daily basis (Dorsch et al., 2015; Knight & Holt, 2014). Much of the

family research in this domain has explored the way in which parents contextualize their behaviors through their child's sport participation (Dorsch et al., 2015). We have gained a great wealth of knowledge regarding *what* constitutes parent supportive and pressuring behaviors in youth sport and *how* that positively and negatively impacts children's outcomes such as self-esteem, motivation, and stress (e.g., Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013; Smoll et al., 2011; Teques et al., 2019). More recently, a shift has occurred to understand *why* parents engage in the behaviors they do; particularly related to factors (e.g., stressors) that may influence their behaviors in youth sport (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013a; 2013b; Knight, Dorsch et al., 2016). These findings have provided us with valuable information regarding the demands and challenges parents face in sport (e.g., Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Hayward et al., 2017). As such, efforts have been made to develop effective, individualized strategies to support (and not just educate) parents so they can in turn best help their children enjoy their sport participation and fulfill their potential (Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017; 2019).

There is no question that the avenues of research described above have produced valuable theoretical and practical implications that will continue to shape the sport parent literature. However, this research has one thing in common: a focus on sport parents. While this is a warranted area of study, parents do not function in a vacuum; they influence and are influenced by other members of the family. Given the complex nature of families and the variety of interactions that occur within a family, there has been a lack of emphasis on the whole family system and instead a tendency to explore the family as a collection of individual parts (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). In fact, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, only a few authors have attempted to study the entire family in sport (i.e., parents, youth athletes, siblings), specifically related to how



sport impacts the family system (Knoetze-Raper et al., 2016; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015).

In line with the point above, an individualized approach has been adopted by studying parent or child perceptions alone (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Knight et al., 2011; Tamminen et al., 2016), one parent and his or her perceptions (mother or father) (Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012; Wright, Chase et al., 2019) and sometimes parent-child dyads (including one parent and the child) (Kanters et al., 2008; Neely et al., 2017). Little attention has been given to siblings within the family system (Blazo & Smith, 2018; Osai & Whiteman, 2017). While these are valuable research avenues, very few have adopted a family systems approach, which views the family as one emotional unit and use a system-focused approach to describe the complex interactions that occur within the family unit (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). Using this approach, researchers consider how mothers, fathers, and children interact together to shape the behaviors of individual members and how individual members contribute to family life on the whole (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). To date, there have been a total of four studies in the youth sport domain explicitly guided by a family systems approach (Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015; Osai & Whiteman, 2017; Raimundi et al., 2019; Wright, Gould, et al., 2019).

Questions addressing the potential interconnected nature of families and the youth sport context that may reciprocally influence one another are largely missing from the literature (Dorsch et al., 2020). When studying sport families, an approach that accounts for what goes on at the family or systems level, rather than the individual level alone, is valuable. We know that familial relationships are reciprocal – going from parent to child, and child to parent, and inside and outside the family. Thus, family members can influence and in turn be influenced by one another in diverse ways (Côté, 1999; Dorsch et al., 2015; Holt et al., 2009; Kay, 2000;

Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015). In line with this point, a recent call put forth by Dorsch and colleagues (2020) suggested researchers and practitioners should move toward an integrated understanding of the youth sport system, whereby people and contexts that surround an athlete are viewed collectively rather than independently.

To capture a more holistic understanding of family functioning in youth sport, one must move beyond examining how parents alone shape their child's sport experiences. Instead, researchers and practitioners should aim to address the current knowledge gap that exists in this area, regarding what aspects of the youth sport experience - particularly, more professionalized contexts (i.e., increasingly privatized, specialized, expensive, performance-oriented), such as travel sport, are facilitative or debilitative for *family functioning*. By addressing this knowledge gap, researchers and practitioners may better understand the multiple family relationships and dynamics that occur, which may in turn shape or be shaped by the youth sport context in which families interact. Taken together, future research is warranted in this area to ensure the nuanced complexities of family functioning are captured so that researchers and practitioners can better serve to assist families successfully navigate the youth sport experience.

## **Significance**

The study of family functioning in youth sport is an important topic of inquiry for practical and theoretical reasons. First, the majority of research in this area has examined the influence of parental involvement on children's outcomes in youth sport (Holt & Knight, 2014; Knight, Little, et al., 2016; Sapieja et al., 2011) but has not looked at the youth sport experience in relation to family functioning. For example, does youth sport enhance or disrupt family functioning? In line with this point, the bulk of empirical evidence in this domain has not examined the collective family system in youth sport. Thus, little is known regarding how

researchers and practitioners may enhance family functioning. This is critical as evidence has suggested more functional families lead to greater well-being for family members and ultimately to a healthier and more stable society (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2013). Last, research on sport families have been typically grounded in theory borrowed from other domains (e.g., motivation-related), rather than theory conceptualized specifically for the study of families (Knight, 2019).

**Practical relevance.** The practical relevance of this study will provide insight into *what* family functioning looks like in youth sport. Specifically, the current study will provide a greater understanding of family relationships and interactions that occur within a travel sport context. These findings will be relevant to sport organizations and practitioners who may use this information to assist families throughout their travel sport experience. Because little is known regarding how family's function in travel sport, this study may provide insight into how certain elements (e.g., competition, financial demand, travel) of travel sport improve and/or disrupt family functioning and subsequently impact broader health related outcomes such as psychological stress, family satisfaction, and enjoyment. For example, in their study of elite sport athletes guided by family systems theory, Newhouse-Bailey and colleagues (2015) found time spent transporting and coordinating travel appeared to have greater levels of stress surrounding sport, less time to spent as a family outside of sport, and less quality time to focus on the marital dyad and family unit. Family systems literature supports the notion that these ongoing patterns of behavior will impact family functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Minuchin, 1974, Olson, 2000). As such, athlete and family experiences may be better understood by researchers and practitioners by utilizing what is learned in this initial study about how sport family's function as a larger system. By understanding family functioning, we may uncover ways to make the sport experience better and in turn enhance family functioning in this context.

**Theoretical relevance.** Theories that have been used to guide sport family research have been predominantly borrowed from other domains (e.g., motivation-related) (e.g., Achievement goal theory - Nicholls, 1984; Eccles expectancy value model – Eccles et al., 1998; Competence motivation theory – Harter, 1999) and applied specifically to understand parental involvement in youth sport (Teques et al., 2018). Because the study of family functioning is an area that has received less attention in youth sport, theories do not exist that inform our specific understanding of this phenomenon. However, sport family researchers may benefit from applying theories from other disciplines (e.g., family development, family therapy) that have highlighted the significance of family functioning in their work.

To date, there have been a total of four studies in the youth sport context explicitly guided by a family systems approach (Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015; Osai & Whiteman, 2017; Raimundi et al., 2019; Wright, Gould et al., 2019), with little attention given to siblings within the family system (Blazo & Smith, 2018; Osai & Whiteman, 2017). Accordingly, application of a family systems approach offers great value for enhancing our knowledge of sport families because we are able to study the relationships and interactions that occur at the family level, while also gaining insight on how individual family member's perspectives may be integrated in a systematic manner to understand family functioning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**Guiding principles of family systems theory.** Family functioning is regularly examined and interpreted through a family systems theoretical perspective. Guiding principles of a family systems approach are integrated within the Circumplex model of marital and family systems (Olson, 2000). Guiding principles relevant to the current study are described below.

A basic notion proposed by systems researchers and family interventionists is that it is impossible to understand family life without viewing the family as a *whole* (Broderick, 1993). In this case, families are described as relatively open systems. This differs from other social science approaches, as the unit of analysis is almost always the individual, with other family members playing a supporting role in the story. Thus, when applying a family systems approach, family functioning is understood by viewing the family as one integrated unit rather than individual parts (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974).

Families are thought to be *goal directed*. That is, whether actors know it or not, family systems have a tendency to try and achieve stated or implicit goals. Understanding family life is about understanding how efficient a particular family system is at achieving appropriate goals and aims. With this in mind, if one or more family members do not subscribe to the family goal then one may speculate that the family will be less efficient in solving problems, making decisions, and getting the daily business of family completed (Broderick, 1993). This is explained such that efficiencies of goal achievement are more likely to be achieved when all members involved agree on the desired outcome.

The idea of a *boundary* is also key to understanding systems thinking. Families develop, maintain, and use boundaries. Families draw boundaries between what is included in the family system and what is external to the system. Boundaries occur at every level of the system and between subsystems and influence the movement of people into and out of the system. Boundaries distinguish people from one another and also help to relate people as well. Although the concept of boundaries as applied to family systems is a largely metaphorical one, the permeability of these boundaries often distinguishes one family from another. Sometimes boundaries can be very solid and rigid and other times they are permeable (i.e., not tightly

closed). Importantly, boundaries occur at every level in the system and between systems. For example, some families may have a very open system and members are allowed to come and go without restriction. Boundaries define membership and information flow and help specify membership expectations (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Within a family's boundaries there may be smaller units of analysis, known as family *subsystems*. Research has generally focused on three primary subsystems: marital (or couple), parental, and sibling. Each subsystem is distinguished by the members who comprise the subsystem as well as the tasks or focus of the subsystem. Families may organize themselves into subsystems to accomplish the tasks and goals of the family. A key task of subsystems is boundary maintenance. When the members or tasks associated with each subsystem become blurred with those of other subsystems, problems may arise (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Specifically, when family members build coalitions across subsystems, the family's ability to achieve goals is weakened. For example, if a father builds a stronger relationship with his child through his or her ice hockey participation than he does with his other child not involved in ice hockey, then the family system is weakened. The concept of the subsystem allows one to understand the primary "parts" of the system are not the individuals but instead the interactions between and among the various subsystems within the family. As such, appreciating subsystems and the level of the boundaries found within them is important as these dyadic relationships inform the understanding of the entire family unit.

In family systems theory, triangulation can occur in a number of ways, but always involves a pair of family members incorporating or rejecting a third family member. Triangulation is seen in the cross-generational coalitions or subsystems that can develop within

families (Bowen, 1978). Cross-generational coalitions develop when one or both parents try to enlist the support of the child against the other parent or when one of the parents responds to the child's needs with excessive concern and devotion (enmeshment), while the other parent withdraws and becomes less responsive (Minuchin, 1974). Triangulation is most likely to develop when a dyad is experiencing stress. When tension exists between two family members, one of them (most likely the parent experiencing the greater level of discomfort) may attempt to "triangle in" a third person either directly or indirectly.

Families are dynamic in nature and have patterns of rules and strategies that govern the way they interact. The dynamic nature of family helps ensure that the family can meet the challenges associated with daily living and developmental growth of family members. The concept of *equilibrium* explains how families strive for a sense of balance between the challenges they confront and the resources of the family. Families are not static systems; instead, they are interactive systems that require constant adaptation, change, and response. According to a family systems approach, families strive for a sense of balance or *homeostasis* (Bowen, 1978). When families do not find balance, the rules or dynamics of the family may need to be adjusted to restore this balance. In all families there is an ongoing dynamic tension between trying to maintain stability and introducing change.

Taken together, the study of the patterns of interactions that occur among the family is a key characteristic of a systems approach. Zabrinski and McCormick (2001) summarized family systems by explaining families can be seen as "goal directed, self-correcting, dynamic, interconnected systems that both affect and are affected by their environment and by qualities within the family system itself" (p. 281).

**Circumplex model of marital and family systems.** Olson's (2000) Circumplex model is a well-established conceptual model commonly used to operationalize the family systems approach and was used to guide this study. The Circumplex model merges ideas from prominent family system theorists (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974) by integrating three dimensions that have been considered relevant to the study of family functioning including: cohesion, flexibility, and communication (Olson, 2000) (see Figure 1).

Although most concepts in the family field are linear (meaning the higher the score, the better), a basic discovery derived from the Circumplex model was that cohesion and flexibility are curvilinear (very high and very low dimensions of cohesion and flexibility are problematic for family functioning).

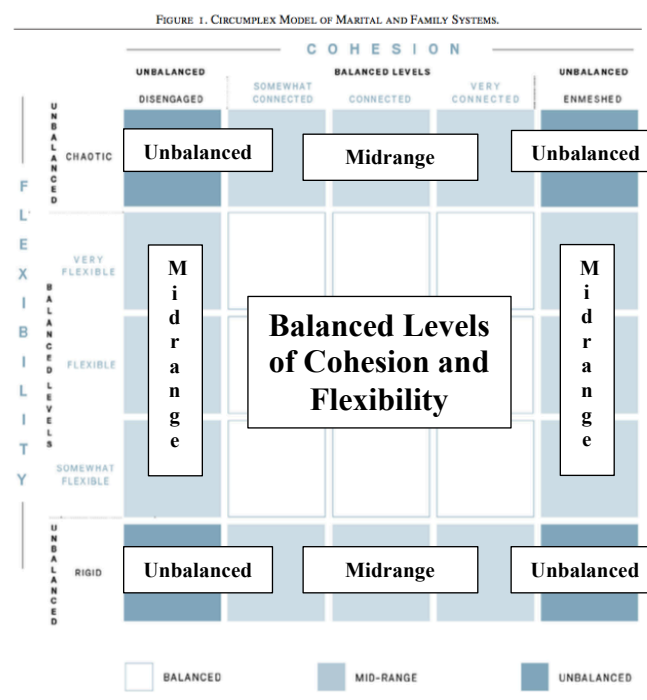


Figure 1. Circumplex model of marital and family systems

The Circumplex model has two dimensions of cohesion and flexibility, and each dimension has five levels. The three central levels of cohesion and flexibility are referred to as



“balanced” (i.e., cohesion: somewhat connected, connected, very connected; flexibility: somewhat flexible, flexible, very flexible). The lowest and highest levels of cohesion and flexibility are “unbalanced” (i.e., cohesion: disengaged – low, enmeshed – high; flexibility: rigid – low, chaotic – high). Combining the two dimensions orthogonal to each other resulted in 9 balanced types (balanced on both dimensions); 12 midrange types (balanced on one dimension and unbalanced on the other); and 4 unbalanced types (unbalanced on both dimensions).

Accordingly, a description of each dimension of the Circumplex model will be provided below followed by a description of the six family types derived through a cluster analyses procedure upon validation of the Circumplex model. Finally, the Circumplex model’s guiding hypotheses will be provided.

*Cohesion* is defined as the “emotional bonding that family members have toward one another” (Olson, 2000; p. 145). Specific variables that have been used to measure family cohesion are emotional bonding, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, interests and recreation. The primary focus of the construct of cohesion is how family systems balance the separateness versus togetherness of their members. The Circumplex model describes family cohesion as a continuum, from disengaged families (extremely low levels of cohesion) to enmeshed families (extremely high levels), crossing several moderate levels of family connectedness. Specifically, there are five levels of cohesion ranging from disengaged (very low) to somewhat connected (low to moderate) to connected (moderate) to very connected (moderate to high) to enmeshed (very high). The model hypothesizes that balanced levels of cohesion (somewhat connected, connected, very connected) lead to adaptive, healthy family functioning whereas extremes or unbalanced levels (disengaged or enmeshed) lead to less adaptive, unhealthy family functioning.

In the model's balanced area of cohesion (somewhat connected, connected, very connected), members are able to be both independent from and connected to their families. Somewhat connected families have some emotional separateness, but it is not as extreme as the disengaged system. While time apart is important, there is also some time together, some joint decision making and marital support. Activities and interests are generally separate, but a few are shared. Very connected families have high emotional closeness and loyalty to the relationship. Time together is more important than time alone and emphasis is placed on togetherness. Shared interests are common with some separate activities. Connected families fall somewhere in between these two balanced levels in terms of their functioning.

Unbalanced levels of cohesion are at the extremes either very low (disengaged) or very high (enmeshed). Members with very high cohesion levels (enmeshed systems) often experience too much consensus within the family and not enough independence. Those in enmeshed relationships are quite dependent and reactive to one another. Minuchin characterized enmeshment as a relationship in which boundaries between individuals are blurred, and there is not enough independence or autonomy of the members within the relationship. At the other extreme (disengaged systems), members are independent, with limited attachment to their family. In a disengaged relationship, boundaries between individuals are strictly enforced, and the individuals are psychologically and emotionally distant (Minuchin, 1974).

Flexibility refers to the "quality and expression of leadership and organization, role relationships, and relationship rules and negotiations" (Olson & Gorall, 2006; pp. 6). A basic underlying theme involves the way families adapt to change, how family members contribute to the decision-making process, and the extent to which rules and roles can be changed as the members of the family and situational demands require. Accordingly, the variables of interest

include leadership (control, discipline), negotiation styles, role relationships, and relationship rules. Flexibility focuses on how the family system balances stability versus change. This relates to changes in family's leadership, roles, and rules. Systematic understanding of family functioning tells us that families require both stability and change, because they have to meet the individual needs, the same way they must maintain a sense of unity/stability. Moreover, the ability to change when necessary distinguishes functional families from dysfunctional ones.

Like cohesion, the Circumplex model describes family flexibility as a continuum, from rigid families (extremely low flexibility) to chaotic families (extremely high flexibility), crossing several moderate levels of family flexibility. Specifically, there are five levels of flexibility that range from rigid (very low) to balanced (somewhat flexible, flexible, very flexible) to chaotic (very high). Balanced levels of flexibility suggest overall less authoritarian, controlling leadership and instead, more shared leadership and negotiations among the family. A flexible relationship is more open to change with shared roles and changing rules when necessary.

Unbalanced family systems tend to be either rigid or chaotic. A rigid relationship is where one member is in charge and highly controlling. There are limited negotiations, the roles are strictly defined, and the rules do not change. A chaotic relationship is characterized as having either limited or inconsistent leadership. Decisions are impulsive and not well thought out and roles are unclear and often shift from one member to the next. Importantly, families need both stability and change, and the ability to change when appropriate distinguishes functional families and dysfunctional families.

The Circumplex model suggests that balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility lead to more adaptive family functioning whereas extremes or unbalanced levels of cohesion

(disengaged or enmeshed) and flexibility (rigid and chaotic) lead to more problematic, maladaptive family functioning.

Communication is the final dimension in the Circumplex model and acts as a facilitating construct and is critical as it leads to movement on the other two dimensions (cohesion and flexibility). Communication is measured in regard to listening skills (empathy and attention), speaking skills (speaking for oneself instead of others), tracking (staying on topic), and respect and regard (the affective aspects of communication). The model suggests that balanced systems tend to have exceptional communication whereas unbalanced systems tend to have poorer communication.

**Development of six family types.** Following the development and validation of the Circumplex model (Olson, 2000), researchers were interested in determining if there were naturally occurring patterns in describing family systems across the six scales of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale – Fourth Edition (FACES IV) (Olson & Gorall, 2006). The FACES IV was developed to measure dimensions of the Circumplex model including cohesion, and flexibility. The FACES IV also measures family communication and satisfaction regarding family functioning.

To determine if naturally occurring patterns in describing family systems across the six scales of the FACES IV could be identified, a cluster analysis was conducted using percentile scores for each of the six scales to address issues of differing variability and skewness of the subscales. The sampling was a modified convenience and snowball sample. Participants were recruited from a junior-level family systems and diversity university course. This initial sample pool consisted of 124 students and represented the convenience portion of the sample. Of the 124 students asked to participate, 87 returned at least one research survey and were encouraged to

have family members, friends, fellow students, or coworkers' complete additional surveys. A total of 487 respondents completed the survey and 469 had usable data with about 15% being family members. The final sample had an average age of 28 and a range of 18-59 years. About two thirds of the sample was single and female, and one third of the sample was married. About half had a salary of \$50,000 or higher. The majority of the same (80%) were Caucasian, with smaller percentages that were Asian American (7%), African American (6%), Hispanic (2%), or Native American (2%).

After several analyses using multiple criteria, a clustering group with six clusters was chosen. The six family types range from the most healthy and happy to the least healthy and most problematic. They are: *Balanced*, *Rigidly Cohesive*, *Midrange*, *Flexibly Unbalanced*, *Chaotically Disengaged* and *Unbalanced* (see Table 1). Accordingly, the six family types have been used as a frame of reference for understanding and describing family functioning mainly in the clinical population (Olson & Gorall, 2006).

Table 1. Summary of six family types.

<b>Family Type</b>	<b>Characterization of Scores</b>	<b>Description of Functioning</b>
Balanced	Highest scores on balanced cohesion and flexibility; lowest scores on all unbalanced except rigidity (near the lowest).	High levels of healthy functioning; low levels of problematic functioning
Rigidly Cohesive	High closeness and high rigid scores; moderate change and enmeshed scores; low disengaged scores and low chaotic scores.	Function well at times given high degree of closeness; may have difficulty making changes required by situational or developmental changes due to high rigidity
Midrange	Moderate scores on all subscales with exception of	Function adequately; displaying neither high levels

Table 1 (cont'd).

	rigid. Fall into either high or low grouping.	of strength and protective factors tapped by balanced subscales nor high levels of difficulties/risk factors tapped by unbalanced scales
Flexibly Unbalanced	High scores on all subscales except cohesion; low to moderate scores are characteristic.	The high scores on the unbalanced subscales combined with the low to moderate scores on cohesion would seem to indicate problematic functioning, however, the high scores on the flexibility subscale may indicate these families are able to alter problematic levels when necessary.
Chaotically Disengaged	Low scores on balanced subscales; low scores on enmeshed and rigid subscales; high scores on chaotic and disengaged subscales.	High problematic families: the two indicators of lesser problems, low enmeshed and low rigid scores are the least effective in differentiating between problem and non-problem groups.
Unbalanced	High on all unbalanced scales; low scores on balanced scales.	Most problematic in overall functioning; lack strengths and protective factors tapped by balanced scales.

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The six family type clusters are also depicted graphically on the Family Types Profile (see Figure 2).

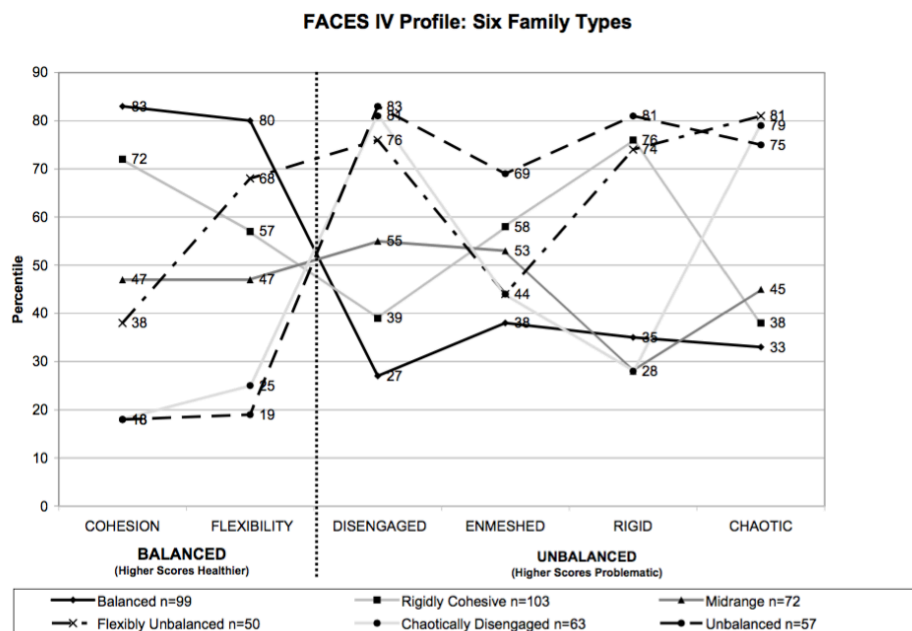


Figure 2. Summary of FACES IV family profile types

### Key to understanding the circumplex model of marital and family systems.

Difficulties in understanding the Circumplex model may arise because it emphasizes a dynamic system approach, yet researchers and practitioners describe it using individual dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, communication). Therefore, to understand the Circumplex model, it is important to recognize that the individual dimensions work together, simultaneously, across time to produce a “balanced” or “unbalanced” system. In this case, we can conceptualize these individual dimensions as operating on a bandwidth, which may rise and fall toward balanced and/or unbalanced levels of functioning depending on the situation presented. Accordingly, families are more likely to achieve equilibrium when the dimensions fall within balanced ranges of functioning (i.e., cohesion – somewhat connected, connected, very connected; flexible – somewhat flexible, flexible, very flexible). In contrast, families are more likely to experience

disequilibrium when the dimensions fall within unbalanced ranges of functioning (i.e., cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility – rigid, chaotic). The hypotheses presented below provide further insight toward understanding family functioning according to the Circumplex model.

### **Circumplex Model Hypotheses**

There are three major hypotheses derived from the Circumplex model. The studies testing these hypotheses have mainly utilized the FACES self-report measure. More than 1,200 studies have been conducted on the Circumplex model using the FACES self-report measure, making it one of the most researched family systems models (Kouneski, 2000; Olson et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 1 suggests that families need to balance their separateness vs. togetherness on cohesion and their level of stability versus change on flexibility. Even though a balanced family system is placed at the four central levels of the model, these families do not always operate in a “moderate” manner. Being balanced means that a family system can experience extremes on the dimension when appropriate, as in times of trauma or stress, but they do not typically function at these extremes for long periods.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that positive communication is viewed as helping family systems to facilitate and maintain a more balanced relationship on the two dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. In contrast, poor communication impedes movement in unbalanced systems and increases the likelihood that these systems will remain extreme.

Hypothesis 3 deals with the capacity of the family system to change to deal with stress or to accommodate changes in family members’ development and expectations. The Circumplex model is dynamic in that it assumes that families will change levels of cohesion and flexibility, and thus family system type, to effectively manage situational stress and developmental changes



across the family life cycle. As such, it is further suggested that change is beneficial to the maintenance and improvement of family functioning.

### **Study Purposes**

Currently, there is limited understanding of the family as a collective system, specifically related to their functioning in travel ice hockey. Moreover, given current U.S. trends regarding the youth sport climate and its evolving “professionalized” culture (i.e., increasingly privatized, specialized, expensive, performance-oriented), examining how characteristics of travel ice hockey are facilitative and/or debilitative for family functioning is warranted. It is well documented that sport can have meaningful effects on children and their families; thus, understanding the relationship between family functioning and sport may help researchers and practitioners to identify dimensions of functional versus dysfunctional families, and outcomes associated with each (e.g., psychological stress, enjoyment, satisfaction).

Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey. To accomplish this purpose, this study will employ a mixed methods design executed within a multiple case study approach. In Phase 1, families will be identified, and one parent (mother or father) will complete the FACES IV self-report measure, which assesses perceptions of family functioning. Then, the family types derived from the FACES IV self-report measure will be plotted onto the Circumplex model and FACES IV Profile according to their levels of functioning. Next, in Phase 2, four families from Phase 1 will be selected and qualitative interviews will be conducted. Using this methodology will make it possible to examine two sub-purposes:

- (1) Use the Circumplex model FACES IV self-report measure to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey families

- a. Do distinct family types exist?
  - b. If so, can all six family types be identified?
- (2) Conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model in helping us understand family functioning in the travel ice hockey experience. Specifically, by addressing the following questions:
  - a. Using key dimensions of the Circumplex model, how can the functioning of the family types identified from the Phase 1 results be described?
  - b. Can the three primary hypotheses of the Circumplex model add to our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of Literature**

This review of the literature will provide a comprehensive summary of the research on youth sport families. First, a brief history of the sport parent literature will be discussed followed by an overview of three primary lines of sport parent inquiry: (1) parent influence in youth sport; (2) factors influencing parent involvement in youth sport; and (3) strategies to optimize parental involvement in youth sport. Next, an overview of the research conducted on sport families (parents, youth athletes, and siblings) will be discussed, including studies that have incorporated a family systems approach. Finally, a review of family systems theory and examples of its use in previous studies from non-sport domains (e.g., family therapy) will be provided. Key studies that have shaped our current understanding of sport families are thoroughly reviewed. This chapter will conclude with a summary of relevant gaps in the literature and the purposes of the present study.

#### **Brief History of Sport Parent Research**

Interest in parental involvement in youth sport began to emerge in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when studies of youth sport motives and attrition captured the attention of researchers from the United States (e.g., Gould et al., 1982; Gould et al., 1985). While the initial purposes of these studies were not aimed at understanding parental involvement in sport, descriptive findings suggested that parents emerged as significant social influences that contributed to their child's continued involvement and/or drop out from sport. For example, Gould and colleagues (1982) explored reasons for attrition in competitive youth swimming and found that children indicated an overemphasis on winning and perceptions of parental pressure contributed to sport drop out. Similarly, research also found support and encouragement from

parents were cited as reasons why children participated in sport (Gould et al., 1985). The initial findings described above illuminated the significance of parental involvement in youth sport, which led to a growing interest among researchers to understand factors that positively and negatively influence children's affective outcomes in youth sport throughout the mid-late 1980s and 1990s.

During the mid-late 1980s and 1990s, a plethora of work was conducted on parental support and pressure; comparing psychosocial consequences associated with parents' behaviors that were deemed "supportive" or "pressuring." Parental support was defined as "an athlete's perception of his or her parents' behavior aimed at facilitating his or her involvement and participation." In contrast, parental pressure was defined as "behavior exhibited by parents that is perceived by their children as indicating high, unlikely, or possibly even unattainable expectations" (Leff & Hoyle, 1995; p. 190). Parental support was generally associated with positive outcomes (e.g., enjoyment, self-esteem, positive affect) (Brustad, 1988; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986) whereas parental pressure resulted in less consistent findings but was often associated with negative outcomes for youth athletes (e.g., anxiety) (Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Lewthwaite & Scanlan, 1989; Passer, 1983). Accordingly, research exploring parental supportive and pressuring behaviors provided an initial understanding of the impact of parental involvement on children's outcomes in youth sport.

While the early work conducted on parental support and pressure led us to a greater understanding of parental involvement in youth sport, it did not come without limitations. The major limitations during this time involved the atheoretical, correlational nature of these early studies (Knight, 2019). Because of these limitations, a surge of research utilizing motivation-related theories (e.g., achievement goal theory – Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984; competence

motivation theory – Harter, 1999; Eccles expectancy value framework – Eccles et al., 1998) emerged during the mid-late 1990s. For example, using competence motivation theory to guide their work, Babkes and Weiss (1999) found parents role modeling behavior, positive feedback after their child's performances, and positive beliefs regarding their child's competence resulted in increased levels of competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation of the child.

Though originally developed to examine parental influence on gender socialization, Eccles expectancy value model was also a prominent theory used during this time to understand parental involvement. Eccles model explained children's achievement behavior based on their expectancies for success (competence) and subjective task values (value placed on a particular domain) (Eccles et al., 1998). Within this model, Eccles argues parental attitudes and behaviors influence a child's own attitudes and behaviors, further impacting their motivation and achievement behaviors. In the youth sport context, Brustad (1993) found that parents who expressed higher perceptions of their child's expectancy for success (competence) provided more opportunities and equipment for their child to participate. Taken together, theories such as those described above allowed for a clearer understanding of how or why specific parental behaviors might affect children's motivation and outcomes in youth sport.

Subsequently, research of the earlier decades (1970s-1990s) highlighted the visibility of parents in youth sport, specifically by considering the way in which their involvement behaviors may shape a child's outcomes and development. Research examining parental support and pressure has since permeated the sport parent literature throughout the last two decades (Knight, 2019). The recent attention given to parental involvement in youth sport has also resulted in novel research avenues that extend beyond parental support and pressure to provide a more holistic understanding of the complexities (e.g., contextual, relational, individual) of this

phenomenon in youth sport. Accordingly, the following section will discuss three primary lines of inquiry that exist today in relation to sport parents including: (1) parent influence in youth sport; (2) factors influencing parent involvement in youth sport; and (3) strategies to optimize parental involvement in youth sport. Finally, while a plethora of research has emphasized how parents impact their children in sport, relatively less research has taken on a more parent-centric perspective to explore the impact of youth sports on parents. The impact of youth sports on parents is important to consider given the focus of the current project and will therefore be reviewed below.

### **Three Primary Lines of Sport Parent Inquiry**

**Parent influence in youth sport.** The literature suggests benefits of youth sport participation are likely to occur when children have positive, supportive relationships with their parents (Blom et al., 2013). Given that parents are highly visible in sport, a plethora of work has been dedicated to understanding their involvement in relation to children's sport experiences and outcomes (e.g., enjoyment, long-term involvement) (Keegan et al., 2010; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006).

With this in mind, researchers have identified three primary roles of parents in youth sport including: interpreters, role models, and providers of their child's sport experience (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). As interpreters, parents communicate beliefs and attitudes surrounding the value of sport, helping their child interpret the competitive experience (e.g., performance, development, success). Often, parents are the lens through which their children interpret success and failure in sport.

Parents serve as role models by setting standards or providing examples for imitation or comparison. For example, parents may influence their child's attitudes and behaviors by

modeling appropriate (e.g., positive encouragement) and inappropriate behavior (e.g., yelling at a referee) in sport environments. Last, parents provide opportunities for their child to participate in sport by transporting their child to practices and games, purchasing equipment, paying league fees, and in some cases, coaching or refereeing teams (Côté, 1999; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005).

When fulfilling these roles, it is critical that parents engage in supportive behaviors (e.g., offering praise, feedback and reinforcement for mastery attempts, unconditional love) versus pressuring behaviors (e.g., overemphasis on outcome goals, harsh criticism, excessive expectations) (Holt & Knight, 2014). Parent supportive behaviors have been associated with adaptive outcomes for children (i.e., enjoyment, autonomy, self-perception of sport skill, long-term involvement) (Holt et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2015) whereas parent pressuring behaviors have been associated with maladaptive outcomes for children (i.e., decreased enjoyment, perceptions of a threatening sport environment, performance anxiety) (Bean et al., 2016; Bois et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2015). The findings above illuminate the positive and negative impact of parent involvement on children's sport experiences.

Research examining parental involvement in youth sport has primarily focused on supportive and pressuring behaviors. Researchers and practitioners have done an exceptional job identifying *what* constitutes parent supportive and pressuring behaviors in youth sport. However, as Knight and colleagues (2017) explain, parental involvement in sport is extremely complex; the consequences of involvement are wide-ranging, the reasons for different types of involvement are diverse, and parent strategies to promote a positive youth sport experience for children are multifaceted. Because of these complexities, research has begun to move from identifying the types of involvement to promote or discourage among parents, towards consideration of *why* parents engage in the behaviors they do (Holt & Knight, 2014).

**Factors influencing parent involvement in youth sport.** More recent work in the youth sport domain has begun to consider what may influence parental involvement in youth sport (Knight, Dorsch, et al., 2016). In particular, great emphasis has been placed on explaining parental “inappropriate” or pressuring behavior in youth sport. Common perceptions held by key stakeholders (e.g., athletic directors, coaches) and the popular media regarding what influences “pressuring” parental involvement typically involve arguments such as parents living vicariously through their children due to their own unsuccessful past sport experiences, parents holding unrealistic expectations for their child’s sport endeavors (e.g., obtainment of athletic scholarships or elite status), and parents being overinvested in their child’s sport participation.

While some of the reasons described above have been supported in previous literature (Brummelman et al., 2013; Knight, Little, et al., 2016), more recently, a noticeable shift occurred wherein researchers moved from an emphasis on *what* constitutes parent involvement toward emphases on *why* certain parent involvement behaviors occur and *how* they affect children’s psychosocial outcomes and performance. With this in mind, Knight and colleagues (2017) suggested it was critical to consider a broader range of personal (e.g., goals and expectations, parenting style, family income) and environmental factors (e.g., stressors, sport culture) on parental involvement in youth sport.

For example, Dunn and colleagues (2016) examined the relationship between parents’ financial investment towards their child’s sport participation and the child’s perceptions of pressure, enjoyment, and commitment to sport. Findings suggested financial investment was an important factor related to a child’s perceptions of parent support and pressure in youth sport, as parents who invested a greater proportion of their annual income to their child’s sport participation were found to be associated with higher youth athlete perceptions of pressure as



well as lower levels of enjoyment and commitment. Previous research has highlighted other personal factors relevant to parent involvement, including parents own past sport experiences and level of sport knowledge, which have been found to shape the way in which they approach their child's sport participation with varying goals and expectations (Dorsch et al., 2015). Researchers have also considered parenting styles, producing findings that suggest authoritative parenting styles are most conducive to optimal parent involvement and children's adaptive outcomes (e.g., task-oriented behavior, satisfaction; Juntumaa et al., 2005). Building from this perspective, autonomy-supportive parenting styles were associated with parents' improved ability to read their children's moods, engage in bidirectional open communication, and make training and competition-related decisions together (Holt et al., 2009).

The parent-child relationship has also been viewed as salient for understanding parental involvement in youth sport (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). A study exploring parent experiences in junior tennis found that parents regularly empathize with their child during participation, especially when they see their child upset or losing the match (Knight & Holt, 2013b). The empathy parents feel for their child may result in sharing their child's disappointment, leading parents to experience elevated stress levels, resulting in a range of potential responses that the child may perceive as facilitative and/or debilitating to his or her participation (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). Parent behaviors may also result from other emotions, like anger, that result from specific sport situations such as seeing their child become injured or disagreeing with a referee's call (Omli & LaVoi, 2009). Taken together, these findings point to the visible role of emotions in shaping parental involvement in youth sport.

Beyond individual factors, environmental influences on parent involvement such as characteristics of a demanding sport culture (e.g., selection policies, time and financial demands,

competition formats) have emerged as a primary contributor to parents' experience of challenges and stressors (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). For example, Dorsch and colleagues (2015) examined the alignment of parent goals for their children and verbal sideline behavior in youth sport. Results indicated as the season progressed and parents became increasingly embedded in the sport culture, their goals changed from initially wanting their child to have fun to placing greater emphasis on identity goals (e.g., how they and their child were viewed by others). Another study conducted by McMahon and Penney (2015) explored the relationship between Australian swim culture and parent identity and found that parents' identities were shaped by a culture of perfectionism and performance. In particular, parents engaged in a number of negative behaviors (i.e., not allowing child to participate in activities outside of swimming, coaching from the sidelines, restricting eating habits) that reinforced the attitudes and expectations of the culture in which they were embedded. Accordingly, these findings suggest environmental factors may be related to parental involvement in the youth sport context.

In line with the findings above, studies have also focused on understanding stressors and challenges related to being a sport parent. For example, parents identified a range of challenges related to the provision of adequate support and perceived pressures and demands placed on their child, which were a function of the characteristics of the sport environment (i.e., quality of officials, league quality, child's performance, processes of competition) that in turn influenced parent involvement behavior (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Research that followed identified a range of stressors related to a number of personal (e.g., family-role conflict, family income, siblings) and organization-related (e.g., time and financial investments, developmental concerns, inefficiencies of organization) stressors (Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Knight, Dorsch, et al., 2016; Lienhart et al., 2019). These findings

suggest that parent stressors and challenges may be important considerations relative to understanding why parents behave the way they do.

Moreover, research has indicated children's perceptions of and preferences for parental behaviors may depend on environmental factors such as time and location. For instance, focus groups with youth tennis players found that they wanted their parents to be supportive without being pressuring at competitions and provided ways which parents can do this (i.e., encouraging both teams, respecting sport etiquette, assisting with physical preparation) (Knight et al., 2010). Children have also suggested the types of parental involvement behaviors that are supportive will vary depending on the context (e.g., at home, training/practice, competition) and timing (e.g., before, during, after) (Knight, Little, et al., 2016), as well as the outcome of the game (Knight et al., 2010), the athletes' goals for sport (Knight & Holt, 2014), and parent expertise (Knight, Dorsch, et al., 2016).

Given that previous research has recognized the positive and negative influences of different types of parental involvement on children's sport experiences, the current research has begun to illuminate the complexity of sport parenting by determining how or why different parental behaviors lead to youth athlete outcomes (Knight, 2019).

**Strategies to optimize parental involvement in youth sport.** Researchers and practitioners have provided valuable insight into *what* constitutes parental involvement and *why* such behaviors may occur in youth sport. However, relatively less emphasis has been placed on disseminating this knowledge to key stakeholders (e.g., athletic directors, coaches, program directors) and parents themselves through evidence-based tools and strategies (Knight, 2019). Moreover, a large majority of the practical application of sport parent research that existed was characterized by a "one size fits all" approach to developing initiatives to support parents, failing

to recognize sport parenting is an intricate social experience, influenced by a host of factors and variables (Knight, Dorsch, et al., 2016).

Thus, within the last five years, interest has shifted to the development of evidence-based programs to promote higher quality parental involvement in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2019). These initiatives have been delivered both in person (through seminars) and online workshops, guided by evidence-based findings in the sport parent literature (e.g., developmental models of participation, child development, parent support and pressure, roles of parents; Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017; 2019).

For example, Dorsch and colleagues (2017) aimed to design, implement, and assess an evidence-based education program for parents in organized youth sport. Participants included thirty-nine fathers and 42 mothers from 7 youth soccer teams were assigned to full, partial, or non-implementation conditions. The full condition group (n = 18 parents) received a 33-page *Sport Parent Guide* and a 45-minute Sport Parent Seminar, both of which were designed to offer tips and strategies for evidence-based parenting in organized sport. Parents (n = 36) assigned to the partial-implementation group were only given the guide and parents (n = 27) assigned to the non-implementation group did not take part in the seminar and were not given the guide. Parents and their children (41 boys, 40 girls) were administered self-report surveys pre- and post-season. Findings revealed a positive impact of the implementation on aspects of parental involvement, the parent-child relationship, and salient child outcomes. Specifically, parents who received the full intervention demonstrated more support and less pressure and more warmth and less conflict than parents in the partial and non-implementation groups. Moreover, parents in the full intervention group had children who reported more enjoyment, higher perceptions of competence, and lower levels of stress at postseason than their counterparts.

Overall, results of these parent interventions have been positive, indicating the value of developing evidence-based, individualized strategies to support and not just educate parents in overcoming the widely used parenting strategies following “trial and error” in sport (Knight et al., 2017; Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight, 2019).

### **Overview of Sport Family Research**

Family involvement is an integral part of children’s sport participation. The research described above illuminated the significant role of parents in a child’s youth sport experience. While this line of work has shaped our understanding of parental involvement in youth sport, it is important to review the literature of sport families, which has been an understudied area in this domain. The following section will provide a detailed review of the sport family literature according to the lines of inquiry that have been studied: (1) exploration of collective families versus individual members, (2) research utilizing a family systems perspective, and (3) the impact of youth sport on families and their functioning.

**Exploration of collective families versus individual members.** Côté (1999) was one of the first researchers to explore youth sport families – including parents, youth athlete(s), and sibling(s). Côté noted a lack of research focused on family dynamics of talented athletes; thus, he aimed to assess the role of the family in the development of talented athletes. Specifically, Côté was interested in answering the following questions: (1) what roles do family members play in the initiation and development of a child’s pursuit of excellence in sport, and (2) are there identifiable patterns of family dynamics that characterize successful athletes?

Côté (1999) conducted in depth, semi-structured interviews with four different nuclear families (four athletes, four siblings, four mothers, and three fathers). The four families were purposefully selected based upon the performers’ sport experiences as Canadian junior national

level athletes participating in rowing (two females; one male) and tennis (one male). Each family member was interviewed individually, face-to-face, which allowed for a triangulation of data sources comparing the perspectives of individuals from different viewpoints (Patton, 1990). Based on these interviews, three stages of sport participation emerged including the sampling years (6-12 years), specializing years (13-15 years) and investment years (16+ years). Within these stages, specific family dynamics occurred related to family member roles, sibling relationships, and resources (i.e., finances, time).

For example, the role of the parents changed from a leadership role in the sampling years to a follower/supporter role in the investment years. Parents assumed a leadership role by encouraging their child to participate in various sports. However, as the child became more serious about his or her participation, parents' role as follower/support became more evident when they had to make sacrifices in their personal lives and their family's life to allow their child to engage in optimal training. Changes also occurred at the family level, as the youth athlete and his or her sibling(s) received the same level of support during the sampling years. However, during the investment years, parental resources and attention shifted towards the youth athlete, which resulted in feelings of jealousy from younger siblings.

These findings illuminated the way in which family dynamics may change across a child's development, suggesting an understanding of families in sport may be a more complex phenomenon than originally thought. Based on this work, Côté (1999) called for attention to be placed on the complete family environment to understand the development of talent in sport.

Another study by Schinke and colleagues (2010) explored the role of families in youth sport programming in a Canadian aboriginal reserve. Importantly, this study did not focus exclusively on family members, and instead took a broader, culturally driven, participatory

action approach by interviewing those within the community (i.e., youth, family members, teachers, coaches, sport and recreation staff). Results indicated family was considered important for youth involvement in Aboriginal community sport programs. Specifically, family support included parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and cousins. Importantly, the role of family in promoting a child's youth sport experience was diverse, as different family members (e.g., grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles) embraced varying roles dependent on one's time demands and resources (e.g., financial). Importantly, these findings suggested that breadth of family involvement affirmed the collective nature of Aboriginal people.

Knoetze-Raper and colleagues (2016) explored the experiences of families of high-achieving adolescent athletes aspiring to compete in the Olympics. Participants consisted of three purposively selected South African families (mothers, fathers, siblings, youth athletes) participating in track and field. Inclusion criteria for this study included one of the following: possible future Olympians; ranked among the top-50 in the world; was an African champion; was a South African champion; or ranked among the top three in South Africa.

In-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Four themes emerged including (1) a child who is an achiever in sport affects the whole family; (2) acceptance of the trying circumstances of being a high achiever in sport made it easier for the achiever to cope; (3) as siblings grow older, they try to find their own niche in the family; and (4) coaches become as important to children as their own parents.

One theme relevant to the current proposal indicated a high achiever in sport affects the whole family. For example, one sibling of a high achieving athlete in Family 1 suggested that if she had a competition, not only her, but her whole family had to go to bed early:

“When it comes to big athletic meetings, we all have to go to bed early, must be very quiet, so that Ousus (high achieving athlete) can rest. When it is cold, nobody can go out, because Ousus might catch a cold. Everybody eats what Ousus eats, because she has to perform.” – Sibling, Family 1

Another example of the way in which sport affected the family was explained by a mother who expressed that she and her husband had no time to spend together, which was challenging for their marriage:

“There is no time for us...the last few years our marriage was not good.” – Mother, Family 3

Taken together, this study shed light on the family dynamics that occur throughout a child’s sport experience. Moreover, high achieving athletes tend to determine the family’s sport experiences.

**Research utilizing a family systems approach.** To date, there have been a total of four studies in the youth sport domain explicitly guided by a family systems approach (Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015; Osai & Whiteman, 2017; Raimundi et al., 2019; Wright, Gould et al., 2019).

Wright and colleagues (2019) examined the billet family experience in junior ice hockey to understand how former players’, their parents’, and their billet family functioned as a triad in this context. “Billeting” is a unique sport experience, whereby young talented players leave their primary homes and families to pursue athletic endeavors in a new, and unfamiliar location. Billet family’s welcome young players by providing them with a home away from home; essentially adopting them into their own family for an extended period of time. Using a family systems lens, authors of this study argued members of the billet family experience (i.e., billet parents, players, parents) should not be examined in isolation from one another and instead should be examined as



one functioning unit, or system (Bowen, 1978). Accordingly, 21 participants composed of 7 triads (former player, billet parent, parent of player) were interviewed.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data within and across triads, which offered a unique systems-level perspective of the themes and subthemes that shaped the results. Importantly, findings revealed how participants functioned as one unit, or system and the relational attitudes and behaviors (i.e., complementary interpersonal attitudes and behaviors, development of a good ‘fit’ is key, absence of tenant mentality) that occurred to promote a positive billet family experience. By utilizing this approach, researchers gained insight into how these triadic relationships impacted patterns of interactions and behaviors, which in turn influenced member experiences and outcomes.

Another study by Osai and colleagues (2017) utilized a family systems perspective to investigate how older siblings’ and parents’ (mothers and fathers) self-reported interests, skills, and sport participation predicted younger siblings’ attitudes and behaviors in those same domains. This study also incorporated social learning principles by further examining whether family members’ impact was stronger when they shared warmer relationships and siblings shared the same gender. Participants included mothers, fathers, and first and second-born siblings from 197 intact, nuclear families.

Guided by a family systems perspective, researchers focused not only on each family relationship and their interdependence within the family system, but also considered the permeability of boundaries between those relationships (Cox & Paley, 1997). Moreover, hierarchy was assumed, suggesting those who rank higher in power generally have more influence. In this case, hierarchy pertained to both parent-child and sibling relationships. This was an important study that extended the literature not only because of its family systems

approach but also because research on siblings is limited in the sport psychology domain (Blazo & Smith, 2014).

Two data collection procedures were used including in-person semi-structured interviews with separate members of the family (mothers, fathers, first and second born children), followed by individually completed questionnaires. Second, a series of phone interviews were also conducted during the two to four-week period following the home interviews, which focused on family members' involvement in daily activities (e.g., chores and leisure). Results revealed that parents' and, with one exception, older siblings' qualities were predictive of younger siblings' interests, skills, and participation in sport, supporting the use of a family systems perspective to guide such work. However, contrary to the original hypothesis regarding social learning variables, family members' influence was not moderated by relational warmth. These findings illuminated the value of studying multiple relationships (i.e., parent-sibling, older sibling-younger sibling) within the family and how such relationships may shape various sibling outcomes (i.e., interests, skills, participation) in youth sport.

Raimundi and colleagues (2019) explored athlete perceptions of family functioning in terms of cohesion, flexibility, communication, and promotion of challenges to understand how these variables were related to character strengths in elite versus recreational youth athletes. Participants included athletes between the ages of 11 and 19 years old. Elite athletes ( $n = 238$ ) were recruited from national teams of different sports in Argentina and the recreational athletes ( $n = 238$ ) were from secondary schools in Buenos Aires. This study was guided by the Circumplex Model of Family Functioning and Marital Systems, which arose from the family systems approach (Olson, 2000). The circumplex model has established the importance of considering three dimensions of family functioning including cohesion, flexibility, and

communication. Accordingly, researchers were interested in exploring the family “as a whole” rather than only considering individual or dyadic aspects.

Interestingly, given the research team’s purpose (to explore how the family context affects indicators of positive development in elite athletes versus recreational athletes) and family systems approach, this study only collected self-report data from the adolescent athletes. Despite this methodological concern, a cluster analysis indicated three distinct family functioning profile groups: (1) positive family functioning, (2) moderate family functioning, and (3) negative family functioning. Results revealed elite athletes differed from recreational athletes in their family functioning perceptions. Specifically, most elite athletes perceived a positive or moderate family functioning. In the recreational athletic group, most adolescents also perceived this type of functioning; however, the proportion of recreational athletes who perceived negative family functioning was higher than among the elite athletes. A multi-variate analysis of variance showed that positive family functioning was related to the development of character strengths regardless of recreational or elite participation.

**Impact of youth sport on family functioning.** Two other studies (Kay, 2000; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015) have also been guided by a family systems perspective in the sport domain. However, these studies were not discussed in the previous section because they highlight an area of research that has received significantly less attention – the impact of sport on families.

Similar to Côté (1999), Kay (2000) suggested the family as a key agent in the process of nurturing sport talent. However, instead of focusing on how family influences talent development, Kay was instead interested in the reverse relationship – the way in which family is

affected by providing practical and emotional support to talented youth athletes. Importantly, Kay was interested in better understanding how sport affects family functioning.

Participants included a total of 20 families, recruited from three sports: swimming (eight families), tennis (six families), and rowing (six families). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the youth athlete, at least one parent, and one sibling. Comparable to previous research findings, the main forms of family support for children's sport included instrumental (e.g., finance, time, transport and travel) and emotional support. Novel findings emerged regarding the way in which family life became shaped by the demands of providing support. The two major ways in which the family was affected involved the burden of financial cost and the impact on family lifestyle – particularly on family members' use of time.

The financial cost of participation was a familiar factor documented in previous studies; however, the latter finding regarding family members' use of time illuminated consequences on individual and collective family activity patterns. Striking examples included: a father sleeping in his van at 5 a.m. to catch an extra hour's sleep before work; an older sibling regularly left to spend weekends with friends; and the timing, postponement, disruption or cancellation of holidays. These results highlight the impact of sport on family's daily living. As one swimmer's mother explained:

“Starting at 5:00 am her Dad has to take her up to Nottingham for training. He sleeps in the van for an hour or so for a bit of extra sleep before going to work. Then we have to take her to school too as by the time she has gotten home from training she has not got time to catch the school bus. I pick her up for training after school and take her to training then come home and cook dinner so it's ready for when she gets home, and her dad picks her up. Everything has to be arranged around her swimming.” – Swimmer's Mother

Participants also noted the impact of sport on relationships and emotional the emotional life of the family. For example, there were equivocal findings regarding how younger siblings were affected by their brother or sister's sport participation. Some siblings didn't seem to mind and actually capitalized on their brother or sister's participation:

"Sometimes if Jenny is in a competition, we have to take Friday off school and my school understands because they know how good Jenny is. This is good, it's great to be able to have a day off school." – Swimmer's Brother

In contrast, others expressed frustration regarding the emotional ups and downs of living with a talented athlete:

"I don't like it when he comes home from a tournament and he's lost, and he's in a really bad mood and so is Dad, and Robert will take it out on me. Then Dad being in a bad mood will reflect on Mum as well, it can cause some conflict within the family." – Tennis Player's Sister

Taken together, these findings suggest the development of youth athlete's talent is dependent on the support offered by families. However, at the same time, while families aim to provide that support to their talented children, they too are affected by sport in complex, diverse ways that can lead to both positive or negative experiences.

More recently, Newhouse-Bailey and colleagues (2015) applied a family system approach to explore the relationship between elite youth sport participation in a variety of sports (i.e., baseball, soccer, football, volleyball, hockey, swimming) and family units, and how these two spheres, individually and in combination, impact family functioning. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine how elite sport characteristics facilitate or impede family functioning. The elite youth sport context involving the sports identified above was chosen based

on previous research (Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000) indicating it may have a strong and lasting influence on family members and family systems. Moreover, given the professionalized nature of youth sport today, researchers deemed it important to understand what impact (both positive and negative) this particular context has on families.

Accordingly, a multiple case study approach was utilized to examine multiple families in regard to elite sport participation. The cases were used in constant comparison within and between families to gain insight into how elite sport impacted family functioning. Constructs based on family systems theory were identified a priori to provide more empirical support for the emerging theory and inductive and deductive reasons was used to guide coding and analysis within and across families. The assumption was put forth that the participation in elite sport would introduce higher amounts of stressors to the family system. Accordingly, in-person, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven families (total of 31 participants) with children participating in a variety of elite sports including: baseball, soccer, football, volleyball, hockey, and swimming. All parents were married at least 10 years and had children ranging in age from 8-18 years old.

Findings revealed a number of commonalities across the families in terms of the challenges and supports that positively or negatively impact their family functioning. The main challenge that families experienced as a result of their child's participation was a depletion of resources; specifically, the demand on time and finances. In relation to the marital dyad, children's participation in elite sport caused stress and a lack of quality communication on the dyad due to the depletion of resources (e.g., money, time, emotional and physical energy). For example, one mother explained issues with her husband regarding communication:

“Sometimes we don’t even talk. He’s at the field picking them up at 10:00 p.m. There are some weeks it feels they have practice after school five days a week and he is either in the car or at the field.” – Mother, Family 6

Elite sport participation also impacted the family unit, causing a strain again due to the depletion of resources. When other children were involved (e.g., siblings), and conflicting activities arose, families would divide themselves to accomplish their tasks for the day. Researchers suggested this resulted in negative family functioning, with a particular impact on cohesion and reduction of time spent together.

Results also indicated certain league characteristics or supports that impacted family functioning. Specifically, coaching input, scheduling, league expectations, and instrumental support were key themes that shaped family functioning. Positive family functioning occurred when parents had input on coaching decisions, particularly related to determining potential candidates to serve as their child’s head coach. Families also felt supported when leagues reduced the amount of instrumental support provided by the parents. For example, Family 5 indicated that their hockey academy handled almost all of the transportation to and from practice throughout the week and even some games. In comparison, league characteristics that seemed to lead to more negative family functioning included inconsistent scheduling, and higher expectations built upon the professionalized nature of youth sport. The findings from this study provided valuable information for families about how to successfully navigate the elite youth sport experience.

With this in mind, it is also important to note the way in which the youth sport context impacts family social experiences, particularly among parents, as this was not assessed in the studies described above. For example, research has highlighted the value of parents being friends

with or supportive of other parents (Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b) as well as benefitting from opportunities to socialize with other parents through their child's sport experience (Dorsch et al., 2009; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Other parents have also served as important sources of information and potential distractors from the stress experienced within the sport environment (Knight & Holt, 2013b). Taken together, research suggests that it is important for parents to recognize the value of creating a social network where they can feel a sense of belonging in the sport community. Through such a community, parents' own social needs may be partly met at their child's practices and competitions (Knight & Holt, 2013b).

**Negative physical and psychological effects of youth sport on families.** In line with the studies described above, Bean and colleagues (2014) conducted a comprehensive review of literature on the negative physical and psychological effects of organized sport on youth and their families. Specifically, this review included all empirical studies, meta-analyses, literature reviews, book chapters, and doctoral dissertations that considered the negative physical and psychological effects of organized youth sport on individual actors of the family unit (i.e., youth athlete, parents, siblings). Importantly, the studies reviewed were focused on individual members experiences (such as the youth athlete themselves, parents, and/or siblings). While this review provided valuable insight into the experiences of individual family members, it is important to note these studies did not systematically explore the experiences of the collective family unit.

The review identified negative physiological and psychological health outcomes associated with characteristics of organized youth sport including the practice of early specialization specifically, whereby research has suggested athletes may be at a higher risk for injury (Jayanthi et al., 2019), increased psychological stress and drop out at a young age (Wall & Côté, 2007). Other studies indicated that youth sport participation may be associated with



increased fast-food consumption (Chircop et al., 2015) and issues related to weight control for certain sports (Turocy et al., 2011). In regard to psychological health, a considerable amount of research has linked youth sport participation to well-being (see Eime et al., 2013 for a review). For example, Holder and colleagues (2009) found that active leisure, such as sport, was related to well-being, while passive leisure, such as watching TV, were not.

The primary way in which organized youth sport seems to impact parents is through the instrumental support (e.g., financial investment, time commitment) they provide to meet the needs of their child's participation (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Previous research has suggested there are substantial financial demands for parents with children involved in sports, which affect their personal, social and family life choices (Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003). For example, it has been documented in Canada, that parents place priority on their children's sport participation instead of saving for their college education and have even gone as far as using portions of retirement savings to fund their children's sport participation. Importantly, it has been argued that there are many families situated within the United States that are in similar financial situations (Helliker, 2014). Expenses for participation have also risen in recent years. For example, parents of competitive recreational ice hockey players may spend on average between \$8000-\$15000 per year, as equipment alone can cost upwards of \$1200 [CBC News, nd]. These findings highlight the significance of family financial resources, which relate not only to family's ability to provide opportunities for their child to participate but also the ability to sustain that participation across time. As children grow older, their competition level typically rises, which in turn may result in an increase in demands. Importantly, research has suggested that such demands often lead to greater financial responsibility for parents, more work hours required, and

less time to spend with family, which can increase parent stress (Coakley, 2006; Dorsch et al., 2009; Trussell, 2007).

Participation in organized youth sport can also require a significant time investment, such as traveling to and from competitions, watching the events, or volunteering and coaching (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008) – all of which have been documented as causing stress to one or both parents within a family. Research has indicated some parents may devote up to 20 hours per week to their child's sport participation (Trussell, 2007). This required time investment may foster a sport-work role conflict and a sport-family role conflict for parents (Harwood & Knight, 2015). For example, sport participation has been found to affect typical family life patterns (Dorsch et al., 2009) and may dictate the schedule of the entire household. Studies have also documented that some parents chose employment based on hours that are suitable to work around in order to meet their child's sport schedule needs (Kay, 2000; Trussell, 2009). When considering impacts on the family unit, interestingly, Trussell (2007) found that eating dinner together as a family was often neglected due to the time demands or scheduling conflicts of children's sport participation.

In addition to financial and time related challenges, research has also noted challenges and stressors of sport participation associated with multiple-athlete families (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013). Specifically, research suggests that having more than one child in sport can prompt parents to split their focus and send parents in different directions with their children, which in turn reduces the amount of time couples and families spend together as a unit (Kay, 2000). In line with this point, parents may also tension with respect to the resources allocated to children within the family unit, whether athletes or non-athletes (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; Harwood & Knight, 2009b).

Research that has examined the influence of siblings on their athlete-brother/sister is sparse (Partridge et al., 2008). Research that does exist has found that siblings, whether younger or older, tend to have a large influence on physical activity and sport participation by acting as role models or rivals (Côté, 1999; Hohepa et al., 2007; Partridge et al., 2008; Raudsepp & Viira, 2000). Earlier research examining birth order and gender found younger siblings tend to be the risk-takers that participate in sports considered to be more dangerous whereas older siblings tend to avoid these types of environments (Casher, 1977). Older siblings also tend to play more of a socializing role to their younger siblings in sport than vice-versa (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990).

Taken together, Bean and colleagues (2014) review provided a well-organized summary of the literature regarding the way in which organized youth sport negatively impacts *individual* athletes and members of the family unit.

**Use of family systems theory in non-sport domains.** Though originally developed in the family therapy domain (Bowen, 1978), family systems theory has emerged as a major paradigm for family analysis among other, non-clinical disciplines such as social work, psychology, sociology, and human communications (Broderick, 1993; Olson, 2000). Family systems theory is a theoretical approach for understanding family dynamics, boundaries (within and between members), subsystems (e.g., spousal, parent-child, sibling), roles, and patterns of communication.

This theory views the family as one unit, or system to describe the complex interactions that occur in the family unit. Accordingly, family systems theory argues for non-summativity, which is the idea that the sum of family behavior is greater than the sum of its parts and highlights the importance of connectedness and reactivity (e.g., the way in which family members respond to one another's behaviors), which make the functioning of family members

interdependent. Thus, an individual's behavior is viewed as being strongly influenced and determined by the structure, organization, and transactional patterns of the family system (Miller et al., 2000). Though few studies have been conducted in sport using family systems theory, it is important to consider how this theory has been applied in other non-sport domains.

Family systems theory has been used in both quantitative and qualitative research studies. The family systems literature has relied heavily on case studies of individual families to generate theory (e.g., Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). For example, Fingerman and Bermann (2000) conducted case studies to explore the impact of family as a system in adulthood and showed how between-family and within-family differences emerged. For example, some families stress obedience and loyalty over all other values, whereas other families encourage the independence and creativity of each member over family togetherness. These differences in families are found at the level of the family as a whole, rather than merely being a property of each individual involved and thus considered between-family differences. In contrast, in any given family system, certain individuals may be viewed as more important than others, certain individuals as more obligated to provide assistance to the family, and certain individuals as more competent than other individuals, which refer to within-family differences.

Another line of work that has received ample attention in the literature is the application of family systems theory to understand the association between family functioning and disorders (e.g., major depression and anxiety). Family functioning in this domain has been primarily guided by a quantitative approach, as research has suggested families with major depression and anxiety disorders tend to report greater family dysfunction than families of individuals with no disordered members, particularly in areas of communication and affective involvement (Miller et al., 1986).

Another quantitative study exploring the relationship between family functioning and anxiety found that prolonged duration of high doses of family dysfunction was associated with the most extreme developmental trajectories of anxious behavior during middle childhood for both girls and boys. This relationship prevailed above and beyond the influence of other correlates of family dysfunction such as marital transition, socioeconomic status, family size, and depressive symptoms experienced by the informant (mostly mothers) (Pagani et al., 2008).

Other relevant lines of research utilizing family systems theory have involved the psychological impact of life changing diagnoses on families (e.g., Edwards & Clarke, 2004), marital relationships (e.g., Yu & Gamble, 2008), stepfamily relationships (e.g., Schrodtt et al., 2008), family conflict resolution (e.g., Van Doorn et al., 2007), and family communication (e.g., Akhlaq et al., 2013). While the studies described above are not a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to family systems theory's application in non-sport domains, they provide insight into the diverse ways in which family systems theory has been applied to understand dimensions of family functioning as well as outcomes associated with family functioning.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

The study of family functioning in youth sport is a complex phenomenon that deserves ample empirical attention. Unfortunately, the literature in this area is relatively sparse. Only three studies have specifically examined the impact of youth sport on family functioning in this population (Kay, 2000; Knoetze-Raper et al., 2016; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015). In line with this point, five studies have attempted to study the whole family system (parents, youth athletes, siblings) (Côté , 1999; Kay, 2000; Knoetze-Raper et al., 2016; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015; Osai & Whiteman, 2017) and four studies have been explicitly guided by a family systems

perspective in youth sport (Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015; Osai & Whiteman, 2017; Raimundi et al., 2019; Wright, Gould et al., 2019).

While it seems that sport families have received ample attention in the literature, when considering the studies reviewed above, the majority of research conducted has focused on parents and their influence on children's youth sport outcomes. From a methodological perspective, the research conducted in this domain has typically only considered the perceptions of one parent (mother or father). Moreover, research on sport families have been typically grounded in theory borrowed from other domains and focused on specific psychological processes or outcomes (e.g., motivation-related), rather than theory conceptualized specifically for the study of families (Knight, 2019). Accordingly, primary emphasis has been placed on the way in which parents, impact children in youth sport. Given this large focus on sport parents, little is known about family functioning in youth sport. By studying family functioning in youth sport, we may extend our understanding of sport families as a whole while also highlighting the family as a "system" in which individual member behaviors are shaped through shared family beliefs and values (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

### **Study Purposes**

Currently, there is limited understanding of the family as a collective system, specifically related to their functioning in travel ice hockey. Moreover, given current U.S. trends regarding the youth sport climate and its evolving "professionalized" culture (i.e., increasingly privatized, specialized, expensive, performance-oriented), examining how characteristics of travel ice hockey are facilitative and/or debilitating for family functioning is warranted. It is well documented that sport can have meaningful effects on children and their families; thus, understanding the relationship between family functioning and sport may help researchers and

practitioners to identify dimensions of functional versus dysfunctional families, and outcomes associated with each (e.g., psychological stress, enjoyment, satisfaction).

Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey. To accomplish this purpose, this study will employ a mixed methods design executed within a multiple case study approach. In Phase 1, families will be identified, and one parent (mother or father) will complete the FACES IV self-report measure, which assesses perceptions of family functioning. Then, the family types derived from the FACES IV self-report measure will be plotted onto the Circumplex model and FACES IV Profile according to their levels of functioning. Next, in Phase 2, four families from Phase 1 will be selected and qualitative interviews will be conducted. Using this methodology will make it possible to examine two sub-purposes:

- (1) Use the Circumplex model FACES IV self-report measure to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey families
  - a. Do distinct family types exist?
  - b. If so, can all six family types be identified?
- (2) Conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model in helping us understand family functioning in the travel ice hockey experience. Specifically, by addressing the following questions:
  - a. Using key dimensions of the Circumplex model, how can the functioning of the family types identified from the Phase 1 results be described?
  - b. Can the three primary hypotheses of the Circumplex model add to our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey?

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### Research Design

A retrospective, cross-sectional mixed methods design that involves both quantitative and qualitative data collection was used to understand family functioning in youth sport. Specifically, a variant of the explanatory design, known as the participant selection model, was used (see Figure 3). A participant selection model is used when a researcher needs quantitative information to identify and purposefully select participants for a follow-up, in-depth, qualitative study. In this model, the emphasis of the study is on the second, qualitative phase. Given the purpose of the current study, the quantitative data collected was used to determine levels of family functioning to guide purposeful sampling for the qualitative phase. Importantly, the first phase (quantitative data collection and analysis) was followed by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The second phase (qualitative data collection and analysis) of the study was designed so that it followed from (or connected to) the results of the first phase (quantitative data collection and analysis) (Creswell & Clarke, 2017).

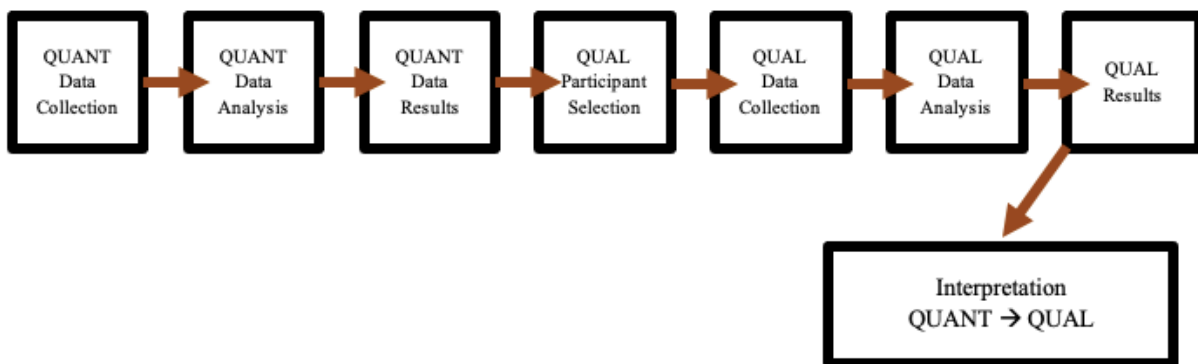


Figure 3. Explanatory design: Participant selection model



The participant selection model was executed within a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009). The multiple case study explores real-life, multiple bounded systems (cases) in regard to a specific social phenomenon. The multiple case study is comprised of two main elements, the subjects and the object (Thomas, 2011). The subjects for this multiple case study were families of travel youth ice hockey players. Critically speaking, the subjects were bounded with exclusive membership, a delineated location, and a delineated time frame (Yin, 2009). The object for this multiple case study was the phenomenon of family functioning in youth sport. While the cases and subjects of the travel youth ice hockey families were of particular interest, they served a supportive role to facilitate the understanding and insight related family functioning in sport (Stake, 2005).

### **Research Approach**

The mixed methods design was deemed suitable for answering the purpose of this research because the use of multiple, integrative techniques (i.e., self-report survey, semi-structured interviews) will provide the researcher with the opportunity to thoroughly explore and inform our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). Specifically, in this study, the quantitative approach will provide the researcher with the ability to understand the absolute functioning levels of each family; however, it will not provide the nuance needed to understand *how* the family functions as one unit, or system in travel ice hockey, which will be addressed through use of the qualitative approach.

The mixed methods approach is rigorous and practical because the researcher can combine the strengths of quantitative (which can yield established links) and qualitative (which can yield in-depth information about variation and context) data to support breadth and depth of understanding (Johnson et al., 2007). In line with this point, the mixed methods may inform

triangulation (i.e., aim for a convergence of the data collected from the self-report FACES IV survey and semi-structured interviews to increase the credibility of the research findings), complementarity (i.e., the enhancement or clarification of findings from one method by use of another), development (i.e., use of the results from the quantitative FACES IV survey to develop and/or inform the qualitative semi-structured interview questions), initiation (i.e., the capacity to access new insights into a particular phenomenon – in this case, family functioning in travel ice hockey), and utility purposes (i.e., combining the two approaches is more useful to answer the research question(s); Bryman, 2006). Taken together, the mixed methods approach will allow for a more complete exploration of family functioning in travel ice hockey than one single data source could provide.

Consistent with the use of mixed methods, these procedures were underpinned by the researcher's adoption of a pragmatic approach, suggesting the nature of reality is what is useful, practical, and "works" (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Thus, knowledge is constructed and made meaningful in relation to an individual's social experiences (Dewey, 1922). The pragmatist approach argues a continuum exists between objective and subjective viewpoints and the choice of which depends on the nature of the research question asked and the point of the research process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Selection and Profile of Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants because they provided diverse and detailed perceptions of family functioning in travel ice hockey, while researchers maintained a manageable sample size for in-depth qualitative analysis (Bruce, 2007). Specifically, travel ice hockey families were recruited because of the researcher's access to this population and the

emphasis placed on characteristics of travel sport that were relevant to the current study such as tryout/selection processes, time and financial commitment, and state-wide travel.

A participant selection model was implemented to collect quantitative information regarding family's level of functioning to identify and purposefully select participants for the follow-up, in-depth, retrospective qualitative interviews. To determine which families were selected to complete Phase 1 of this study (quantitative component), the following criteria was used: (1) a selection process for the travel/club team must have occurred (2) family must engage in regional or state-wide travel for the travel/club sport; and (3) financial investment (i.e., \$1000 or more annually) towards the travel/club sport (e.g., equipment, registration fees, travel and lodging) was made.

Families who met the criteria requirements were then administered the FACES IV. A total of 85 families were purposefully sampled to complete Phase 1 of this study (quantitative component). One mother or father was asked to complete the FACES IV for their respective families. The researcher aimed to select cases based on one family member's (mother or father) perception of family functioning because this phase required breadth of coverage. Upon review of the quantitative data, a total of 35 families were included in the final sample because the mother and/or father (17 males, 18 females;  $M$  age = 42.50,  $SD$  = 5.06) had indicated that they had at least one child between the ages of 8-18 years old currently participating in travel ice hockey, which was the sport of focus for the current study. Over 59% of the sample ( $n$  = 22) identified that travel ice hockey participation was very important in the family and 38% ( $n$  = 14) suggested that the most important reason why their child participates in travel ice hockey was to improve their skills followed by 27% ( $n$  = 10) suggesting being a part of a team. Other relevant details regarding the sample's travel ice hockey experience are provided below (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of total sample travel ice hockey demographics (N = 35)

<b>Hours/week commuting to and from practices and games</b>	<b>Total (N = 35)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-2 hours	4	11.4%
3-4 hours	4	11.4%
5-6 hours	7	20.0%
6+ hours	20	57.1%
<b>Hours/week participating in in practices and competitions</b>		
0-2 hours	0	0%
3-5 hours	12	34.3%
6-8 hours	7	20.0%
9-10 hours	3	8.6%
11+ hours	13	37.1%
<b>Estimated annual financial investment toward travel ice hockey</b>		
\$1000-\$2499	3	8.6%
\$2500-\$4999	10	28.6%
\$5,000-\$9,999	14	40.0%
\$10,000 or more	8	22.9%

Other relevant sample background demographic information is included in Table 3.

Table 3. Total sample background demographic information (N = 35)

<b>Education</b>	<b>Total (N = 35)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Completed high school	2	5.7%
Some college	5	14.3%
Completed college	21	60.0%
Advanced college degree	7	20.0%
<b>Pre-Tax Annual Income (2019)</b>		
\$50,000-\$100,000	13	37.1%
\$100,001-\$249,999	19	54.3%
\$250,000-\$500,000	2	5.7%
More than \$500,000	1	2.9%
<b>Race</b>		
White	28	80.0%
African American	3	8.6%
Hispanic/Latinx	4	11.4
<b>Current Relationship Status</b>		
Married, first marriage	30	85.7%
Married, not first marriage	5	14.3%
<b>Current Living Arrangement</b>		
With children	2	5.7%

Table 3 (cont'd).

With partner and children	33	94.3%
<b>Family Structure</b>		
Two parents (biological)	33	94.3%
Two or more parents (stepfamily)	2	5.7%

The FACES IV quantitative responses were then used to purposefully sample four families from travel ice hockey. Originally, the researcher aimed to select four families with maximally different levels of family functioning to represent diverse cases and fully describe multiple perspectives about the cases (Creswell, 2013). This was done with the exception that extreme scores on the unbalanced scales (Cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; Flexibility – rigid, chaotic) of the FACES IV were not identified in the current sample. Therefore, the researcher was looking within a generally balanced range of family functioning, which must be considered in regard to the study findings.

To select families, the researcher engaged in a systematic process. First, 35 travel ice hockey families were described relative to family functioning (based on their quantitative FACES-IV scores). Next, the researcher plotted each family's cohesion and flexibility dimension score onto the Circumplex model. The dimension score creates a single score for each of the cohesion and flexibility dimensions. Dimension scores are only used for plotting the one location of the family onto the graphic representation of the Circumplex model. Dimension scores provide a visual overview of the number in each cell and a useful picture of the diversity of scores in the sample. Accordingly, using a participant's dimension score on cohesion and flexibility, the researcher located which of the 25 cells the participant fell onto on the Circumplex model. This sample included the following types of families: very connected,

flexible (N = 15), connected, flexible (N = 17), very connected, very flexible (N = 1), connected, somewhat flexible (N = 1), and connected, very flexible (N = 1) (see Figure 4).

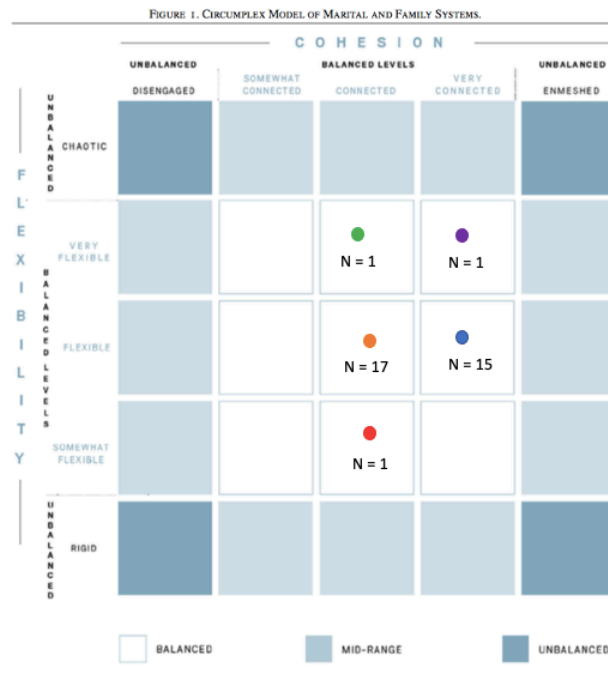


Figure 4. Total family sample dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

The researcher then plotted each individual family's percentile scores onto the FACES IV Profile. Percentile scores were obtained for the 6 scales, two balanced (cohesion and flexibility) and four unbalanced (disengaged, enmeshed, rigid, chaotic), based on raw scores. This was useful for comparing how each mother or father described their family system and for comparing balanced and unbalanced scores (see Figure 5).

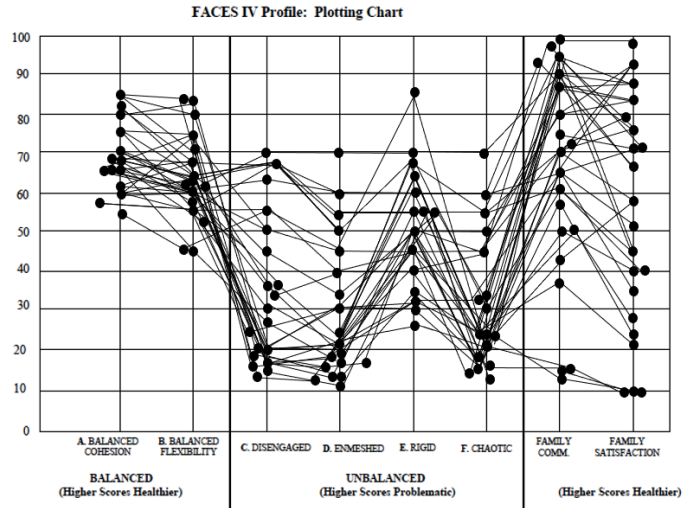


Figure 5. Total family sample percentile scores plotted on FACES IV profile

The full sample ( $n = 35$ ) was characterized by a healthy, balanced level of family functioning. Specifically, extreme scores on the unbalanced scales (Cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; Flexibility – rigid, chaotic) of the FACES IV were not identified. Therefore, the researcher was looking within a generally balanced range of family functioning for selection of the four families, which must be considered in regard to the study findings.

The researcher then used this data (dimension scores and percentile scores) to purposefully select four families to complete Phase 2 of the study, which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews regarding their perceptions of family functioning in travel ice hockey. The following four families were selected, and their dimension scores were plotted on the Circumplex model below (see Figure 6).

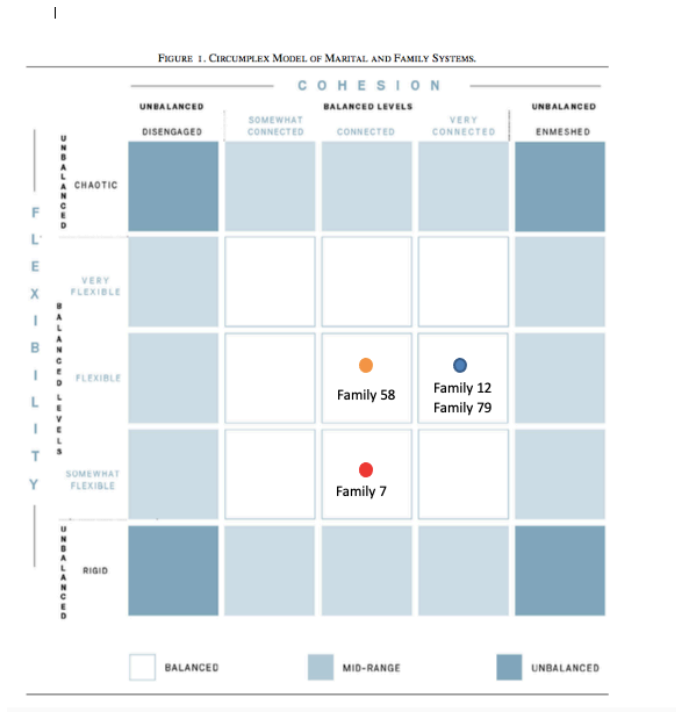


Figure 6. Four selected family dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

Looking at the dimension scores, Family 58 was characterized as connected and flexible, Family 7 was characterized as connected and somewhat flexible, and Family's 12 and 79 were characterized as very connected and flexible. The four selected family's percentile scores are also plotted on the FACES IV profile below (see Figure 7).



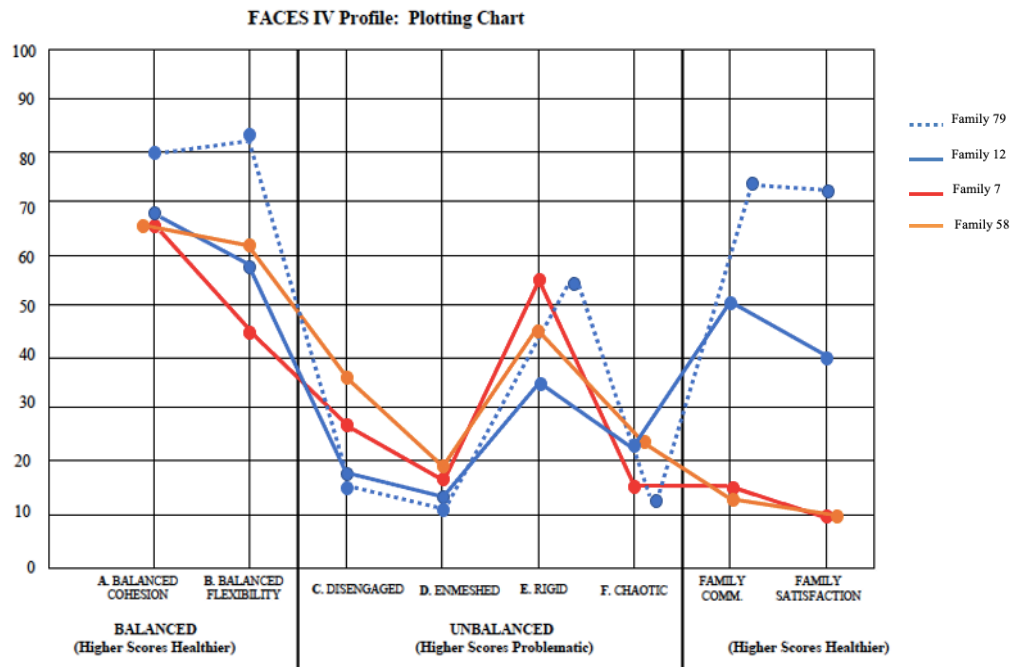


Figure 7. Four selected family percentile scores plotted on FACES IV profile

Accordingly, participants included 4 nuclear families (mother, father, youth athlete(s), sibling(s)) participating in travel ice hockey in the United States. Youth athletes of families were between the ages of 8 and 18 years old (see Table 4).

Table 4. Four selected family's demographic information (N = 4)

Family 7					
Type of Family	Nuclear				
Participants*	Mo	Fa	THA	S	T
Number of participants	1	1	2	1	5
Gender*	F	M	M, F	F	
Age of children	14, 11, 8 years old				
Race	White				
Pre-tax annual income	\$100,001-\$249,999				
Highest level of education	Completed College				
Year began travel ice hockey participation	2018				
Family 12					
Type of Family	Nuclear				
Participants*	Mo	Fa	THA	T	
Number of participants	1	1	2	4	
Gender	F	M	M, F		

Table 4 (cont'd)

Age of children	14, 8 years old				
Race	White				
Pre-tax annual income	\$100,001-\$249,999				
Highest level of education	Completed college				
Year began travel ice hockey participation	2018				
Family 58					
Type of family	Stepfamily				
Participants*	Mo	Fa	THA	S	T
Number of participants	1	1	2	3	7
Gender	F	M	M	F, F, M	
Age of children	18, 12, 8, 3 years old, 3-month-old				
Race	White				
Pre-tax annual income	\$100,001-\$249,999				
Highest level of education	Completed college				
Year began travel ice hockey participation	2010				
Family 79					
Type of family	Nuclear				
Participants*	Mo	Fa	THA	S	T
Number of participants	1	1	1	1	4
Gender*	F	M	M	M	
Age of children	18, 15 years old				
Race	White				
Pre-tax annual income	\$50,000-\$100,000				
Highest level of education	Completed high school				
Year began travel ice hockey participation	2006				

\*Mo = mother; Fa = father; THA = Travel ice hockey athlete; S = Sibling; T = Total

\*M = male; F = female

## Procedures

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Michigan State University prior to participant recruitment. The researcher contacted directors and/or coaches of travel ice hockey teams to identify and select families. First, contact was made with the directors and/or coaches of the travel ice hockey teams of interest via email and/or phone call to provide an explanation of the research process and receive organizational support for participation in the study. Following this email and/or phone call, the director and/or coaches sent a participant recruitment email to families of their travel ice hockey organization. After receiving the

participant recruitment email, families contacted the researcher to indicate their interest in participating in the study. Supplemental purposeful sampling of participants also occurred through direct contact with the families through the Twitter application, whereby the researcher shared a participant recruitment flyer on her personal Twitter account, which provided details regarding the study purpose and expectations. Each participant was assured confidentiality and provided written consent to participate in the study.

Following the consent process, the participant selection model was implemented. To do this, the researcher distributed the FACES IV survey online through Qualtrics to collect quantitative data regarding perceptions of family functioning among participants (mother and/or father). Following the data collection, the researcher analyzed the quantitative data to purposefully select families for the follow-up qualitative interviews. Once family cases were selected, one-time, retrospective virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with each family member based on convenience for the participants. Upon completion of the data collection, the study purpose and methodology were again discussed with participants.

### **Quantitative Instrumentation**

**Family functioning.** The survey battery included demographic items as well as assessments of the dimensions of the Circumplex model including cohesion (e.g., family emotional bonding), flexibility (e.g., family balance of stability versus change), and communication (e.g., family listening skills, speaking skills, respect and regard) (Olson, 2000). As previously mentioned, the FACES IV was administered to collect quantitative information to identify and purposefully select four families for the follow-up, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C).

The FACES IV is designed to measure family cohesion and flexibility in a curvilinear manner, capturing both the overly high – enmeshed and chaotic – and the overly low – disengaged and rigid – dimensions of family functioning. Importantly, communication is also considered; however, it is not graphically depicted in the model because it is critical for facilitating movement on the other two dimensions (cohesion and flexibility).

Cohesion is defined as moving from low, unbalanced (disengaged) to three levels of balanced cohesion (somewhat connected, connected, very connected) to high, unbalanced (enmeshed). Flexibility is defined as moving from low, unbalanced (rigid) to three levels of balanced flexibility (somewhat flexible, flexible, very flexible) to high, unbalanced (chaotic). The FACES IV also contain measures for family communication and satisfaction.

The FACES IV contain 62 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which measure the dimensions of family cohesion and flexibility using 6 self-report scales: balanced cohesion, balanced flexibility, unbalanced cohesion (disengaged), unbalanced cohesion (enmeshed), unbalanced flexibility (rigid), and unbalanced flexibility (chaotic) (see Appendix A). The two balanced scales assess balanced family cohesion (e.g., “family members are involved in each other’s lives”) and balanced family flexibility (e.g., “our family tries new ways of dealing with problems”). The four unbalanced scales assess high and low extremes of cohesion and flexibility that range from disengaged (e.g., “we get along better with people outside our family than inside”) to enmeshed (e.g., “we spend too much time together”), to rigid (e.g., “there are strict consequences for breaking the rules in our family”), to chaotic (e.g., “our family feels hectic and disorganized”).

The FACES IV also contain the family communication and family satisfaction scales which are comprised of 10 items each. The family communication scale (e.g., “family members

are good listeners”) ranges on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In contrast, the family satisfaction scale (e.g., “family members are satisfied with how they communicate with each other”) asks family members how satisfied they are with their families and participants must respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (extremely satisfied).

Materials for scoring the FACES IV were provided with the purchase of the FACES IV Package. Specifically, an Excel Spreadsheet for storing and scoring subjects’ answers automatically scored the data. The Excel program took each item response and summed them for each of the six FACES IV scales, which resulted in a total raw score for the following six scales: *Balanced Cohesion*, *Balanced Flexibility*, *Unbalanced Cohesion - Disengaged*, *Enmeshed and Unbalanced Flexibility - Rigid and Chaotic*. Then, the Excel program summed the 10 items in the *Family Communication* and *Family Satisfaction* scales, which provided a total raw score ranging from 10-50, with higher scores representing higher levels of communication and satisfaction within the family.

The internal consistency of the six FACES IV scales is as follows: Enmeshed = .77, Disengaged = .87, Balanced Cohesion = .89, Chaotic = .86, Balanced Flexibility = .84, and Rigid = .82. In general, the alpha reliability was very good for all six scales (Olson, 2011).

In terms of validity, scores on the FACES IV were correlated with a series of validation scales (i.e., Self-Report Family Inventory – Beavers et al., 1985; Family Satisfaction Scale – Olson, 1995; Family Assessment Device – Epstein et al., 1983) that conceptually they should be correlated with. The general pattern of results revealed significant correlations in the predicted direction between the FACES IV scales and the validation scales. Specifically, the FACES IV scales designed to measure the balanced (healthy regions) of cohesion and flexibility had large

positive correlations with the validation scales (range = .89 to .99), while the FACES scales designed to measure the low extreme of cohesion (disengaged) and the high extreme of flexibility (chaotic) had large negative correlations with the validation scales (range = -.67 to -.93). The exceptions were the rigid and enmeshed scales, which had the lowest negative correlations with the validity scales. In summary, the validity of the balanced cohesion and flexibility scales were highly supported as was the validity of the unbalanced disengaged and chaotic scales, but the two scales that were the weakest were the rigid and enmeshed scales. The discriminant validity of the FACES IV scales was also demonstrated (Olson, 2011).

The FACES IV provide researchers and practitioners the tools to assess multiple domains of family functioning, to gain a more complete understanding of the complexity of family systems. Moreover, it shows excellent promise for future research on health behaviors and outcomes.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

**FACES IV percentile scores.** To analyze and plot the FACES IV data onto the FACES IV profile, percentile scores were derived from the raw scores for each of the six FACES IV scales (balanced – cohesion, flexibility; unbalanced cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; unbalanced flexibility - rigid, chaotic) using the percentile conversion chart (see Appendix D). Family members' scores on the 6 scales were then plotted onto the FACES IV profile. The family's scores were then analyzed and compared to the six family profile types identified by Olson and Gorall (2006): *Balanced, Rigidly Cohesive, Midrange, Flexibly Unbalanced, Chaotically Disengaged and Unbalanced*. This method was useful in comparing how each family member described their family system and for comparing balanced and unbalanced scores.

**FACES IV dimension scores.** To analyze and plot the FACES IV data onto the graphic representation Circumplex model, a single dimension score for cohesion and flexibility was created. Each dimension score for cohesion and flexibility was created by using the balanced score and adjusting it up or down the scale based on whether the difference in the two unbalanced scale was at the high or low of the dimension. If the enmeshed score was higher than disengaged, then the balanced cohesion score was adjusted upward. If the disengaged score was higher than the enmeshed, the balanced cohesion score was adjusted downward.

### **Qualitative Instrumentation**

**Semi-structured interviews.** A semi-structured interview guide was developed and tailored to each family member and included questions based on basic demographic characteristics, general perceptions of the travel ice hockey experience, and perceptions of family functioning in the context of travel ice hockey based on the Circumplex model dimensions and guiding principles. The interview guide also anchored the voices of the families regarding the way in which they believed the travel ice hockey experience impacted outcomes of satisfaction with family functioning, enjoyment, and psychological stress (see Appendix E). Engaging in conversation with participants assisted the researcher to triangulate the quantitative data via interview. To gain rich and detailed responses, the researcher used probing questioning and clarification throughout the interview (Patton, 2002). Individual interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were transcribed immediately after each interview verbatim for data analysis.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized both inductive and deductive reasoning to guide coding and analysis. Constructs based on the Circumplex model were initially identified a priori in an attempt to provide more empirical grounding for the emerging theory. The researcher began by

immersing herself in the transcripts prior to establishing initial codes. Both deductive and inductive processes were utilized, with an eye toward the Circumplex model and openness to the emergence of alternative codes was kept throughout this process. The data were then continuously compared and analyzed until themes began to emerge.

Specifically, this process began with a within-case analysis, whereby the researcher familiarized herself with the data by independently reading each interview transcript multiple times and “marking” the slices or segments that reflected the Circumplex model dimensions and guiding principles of family systems theory. Next, meaning units of each family member were loosely categorized into themes, which were generated based on exploration of the families from a systems analysis, focused on the inter-relations within the family rather than individual members. Focusing on each family system, the researcher told the story of each family’s functioning in the context of travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model.

Once this level of coding was achieved by the researcher, she met with another member of the research team to share and challenge preliminary within-case family analyses both at the level of meaning units and their categorization into themes. This process of individual coding of the transcripts and then meeting as a group to review and revise the codes was repeated several times to ensure the construction of themes accurately represented the family responses (i.e., family member perceptions of their functioning in travel ice hockey). Following this iterative process, the researcher examined the categories of themes developed within each family unit to understand the integration or lack thereof across all four family units (cross-case analysis). This allowed for the generation of themes both within and across the four families, respectively.

**Role and impact of the researcher.** Prior to data collection, a bracketing interview was conducted, which involved challenging assumptions of the researcher to help her consider her



position in the construction of knowledge related to family functioning in travel ice hockey (see Appendix B). To do this, the researcher considered her background and positionality, which led to a discussion regarding her assumptions regarding this study: The researcher is a white, 28-year-old female graduate student pursuing her doctoral degree in the psychosocial aspects of sport and physical activity with a concentration on parent influence in youth sport. The researcher has ample experience in qualitative methods, as she has been trained in graduate-level courses and published in peer-reviewed journals using qualitative methodology.

The researcher's approach to this study centers on her own personal involvement in sport and the parental involvement (support and pressure) that shaped her youth sport experiences. Through her personal sport involvement, the researcher came to understand that sport does not only affect the individual youth athlete participating, but also other family members (e.g., mothers, fathers, siblings) in diverse, complex ways. Given this information, it is important to consider the researcher's potential biases and assumptions: (a) the family is a "system", which reflects the manner in which participants are all connected across roles; (b) participants are a family and the dynamics can be analyzed as such, (c) sport can impact family functioning at both the individual and familial level, and (d) families with children participating in travel/club sport are highly invested in their child's sport participation.

**Study rigor.** The researcher considered rigor through the following strategies, which were not rigid or predetermined prior to conducting the study (Smith & McGannon, 2018). First, the researcher ensured that her assumptions would not unduly influence the way in which she conducted interviews and/or data analysis. To do this, the researcher was cognizant of the way in which she asked interview questions, making sure she did not allow her assumptions to guide the conversation with participants. In addition to this self-reflective process, the researcher employed

“peer debriefing” by coding the initial data and meeting with a second research team member acting as a “critical friend” throughout the subsequent stages of analysis to ensure coherence and defensibility regarding the interpretation of the data and the resulting themes. Moreover, while this study design did not allow for a direct test of the Circumplex model hypotheses, the researcher was able to explore if the family data that emerged were consistent and/or inconsistent to what these hypotheses suggested.

During the interviews, the researcher established rapport and trust with participants, which enabled the collection of high-quality data from multiple perspectives (i.e., mothers, fathers, youth athletes, siblings). The researcher engaged in an iterative process which involved collecting and transcribing initial data, immediately analyzing the data, and then continuing to collect and analyze the data until nothing new was generated (O’Reilly & Parker, 2013). Following each interview, reflexive field notes were taken to document important details related to the research questions (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Then, emphasis was placed on providing evidence for the research teams due diligence, effort, time and care towards sampling and data collection and analyses (Tracy, 2010). An adequate sample size was achieved ( $n = 4$  nuclear families; 18 participants total), which led to the production of over 400 double-spaced pages of transcripts. The careful examination of the four families allowed for the generation of meaningful, rich patterns of data.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

#### Sub-Purpose 1

**Sub-purpose 1a.** The purpose of this study was to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey. Relative to sub-purpose 1a, which addressed the question: “Do distinct family types exist?”, based on the Phase 1 quantitative results, large differences were not evident in family functioning types when 35 travel ice hockey families were examined. All families fell within a normal, balanced range of functioning. Thus, more extreme scores found in the original unbalanced FACES IV scales research (Cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; Flexibility – rigid, chaotic) were not identified in the current sample ( $n = 35$ ). Therefore, in this study, in an absolute sense, all four families were classified within a generally balanced range of family functioning. Specifically, Family 58 was characterized as connected and flexible, Family 7 was characterized as connected and somewhat flexible, and Family’s 12 and 79 were characterized as very connected and flexible. The failure to find extremes in family types must be considered in regard to interpreting the study findings (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive data for the FACES IV ( $N = 35$ )

Dimensions	<i>M</i> Raw Score	<i>SD</i>	Percentile Conversion	Interpretation
Balanced Cohesion	29.09	2.63	68%	Very connected
Balanced Flexibility	27.49	2.72	62%	Flexible
Unbalanced Cohesion: Disengaged	18.11	6.39	32%	Low unbalanced
Unbalanced Cohesion: Enmeshed	16.97	5.51	26%	Very low unbalanced
Unbalanced Flexibility: Rigid	23.09	3.22	50%	Moderate unbalanced
Unbalanced Flexibility: Chaotic	16.77	5.20	26%	Very low unbalanced
Communication	40.40	5.90	70%	High Communication
Satisfaction	39.20	6.44	58%	Moderate Satisfaction

While the four families were considered more similar than different based on their absolute levels of functioning according to the quantitative FACES IV scores, they did not function exactly the same relative to key Circumplex model dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, communication) explored within Phase 2 of the study, involving the qualitative interviews. In this case, the Circumplex model dimensions were useful even within this more homogenous population, helping us to understand each family as a system and highlighting the nuances that emerged to understand each family's functioning in the context of travel ice hockey.

**Sub-purpose 1b.** Relative to sub-purpose 1b, which addressed the question: "Can all six family types be identified?", the researcher compared the six family types derived through a cluster analyses procedure upon validation of the Circumplex model to the four family types that emerged in the current study. The six family types derived from the Circumplex model ranged from the most healthy and happy to the least healthy and most problematic. They were: *Balanced, Rigidly Cohesive, Midrange, Flexibly Unbalanced, Chaotically Disengaged and Unbalanced* (see Table 1, see Figure 2).

Results revealed that the researcher did not find the six types of families within our sample. In order to be classified into one of the six family types, the four families in the current study needed to achieve scores that placed them within a certain threshold of one of the six family types (see Figure 8). Instead, the researcher found varying classifications of family types within the sample. The four families most closely aligned with the *rigidly cohesive* family type (high closeness and high rigid scores; moderate flexibility and enmeshed scores; low disengaged scores and low chaotic scores) of the Circumplex model, though could not be identified as such given their scores falling below the specified thresholds on the balanced flexibility and unbalanced cohesion – rigid and enmeshed scales. The model hypothesizes that *rigidly cohesive*

family type function well at times given high degree of closeness but may have difficulty making changes required by situational or developmental changes due to high rigidity.

Specifically, the four families represented high balanced cohesion and high balanced flexibility scores, with the exception of family 7 who represented a more moderate balanced flexibility score, characterizing them as “somewhat flexible.” The four families represented very low to low-moderate rigid scores, which did not align with the high rigid scores needed to be classified as a rigidly cohesive family type. Finally, the four families represented very low to low scores on the unbalanced cohesion – enmeshed scale, which did not align with the moderate enmeshed scores needed to be classified as a rigidly cohesive family type. Accordingly, in an absolute sense, the study findings did not reflect the Circumplex model as the six family types were not identified in the current sample of travel ice hockey families.

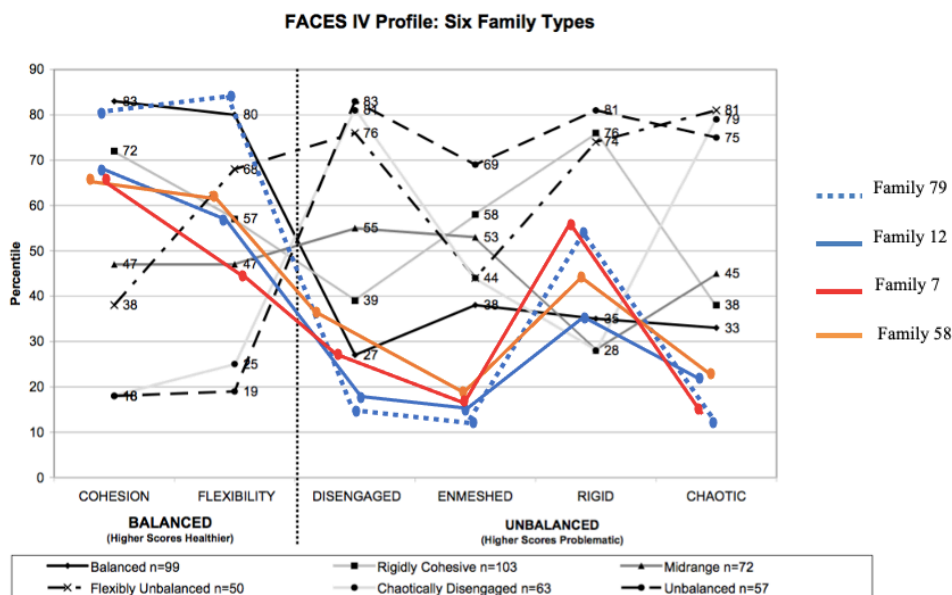


Figure 8. Four families compared to six family types of Circumplex model

## **Sub-Purpose 2**

While the study findings did not identify distinct family types (i.e., functional and dysfunctional families) nor reflect the Circumplex model in terms of classifying families as one of the six family types, the qualitative findings offered the nuance needed to help us understand each family case and explain these quantitative findings. The Circumplex model was helpful in guiding the qualitative analysis and is presented according to sub-purpose 2a and sub-purpose 2b below.

**Sub-purpose 2a.** Relative to sub-purpose 2a, which addressed the question: “Using key dimensions of the Circumplex model, how can the functioning of the family types identified from the Phase 1 results be described?”, a case report of each family is provided. Specifically, a descriptive profile of each family is offered followed by an interpretation of their quantitative FACES IV findings detailing each family’s level of functioning. Then, themes from the within-case analysis are provided, according to the Circumplex model and its guiding principles, offering an in-depth understanding of each family case related to its perceptions of family functioning in travel ice hockey. In essence, the qualitative findings help to tell the story of each family’s functioning in the context of travel ice hockey. Following a presentation of each family’s individual case report, themes from the cross-case analysis are presented to determine if any general patterns are evident across the four family cases.

### **Family 7 Profile**

Family 7 is a White nuclear family consisting of two biological parents (mother and father) and three children ages 14 years old (male), 11 years old (female) and 8 years old (female). The mother completed some college and works as a special education paraprofessional while the father completed college and works as a mechanical engineer. Together, they make an

average annual income between \$100,001-\$249,999 a year. The family moved from Colorado to Michigan in 2018 for the father's job as a mechanical engineer. The family does not live near extended family and therefore operates mainly together as just the five of them. The mother has no sport experience and the father participated in ice hockey throughout his youth, which was a major reason why his two children got involved with the sport. Specifically, the father was described as the "backbone of hockey" in the family. The mother and father suggested that ice hockey seemed like a "natural" thing to do in Michigan, which was unlike Colorado, described by both parents as a place where not many kids participated in ice hockey.

The family has been involved in travel ice hockey since 2018 and two of their children, Nathan (14-year-old male) and Claire (11-year-old female), currently participate on travel ice hockey teams in the Michigan area. The oldest, Nathan, and middle sibling, Claire, both began ice hockey around 4-5 years old. Nathan played ice hockey on and off for a few years and picked the sport back up more consistently around 12 years old. The oldest, Nathan (14-years old) began his travel ice hockey participation when the coach of a team sent his father an email because he saw him practicing and invited him to try out. Claire, the middle child (11-years-old), is participating in her first year of travel ice hockey for an all-girls team in the Michigan area. Claire was originally playing on an all-boys squirt team when a parent of the local all-girls travel ice hockey team saw her play and asked her to join the team. This travel ice hockey opportunity did not require tryouts as there were not enough girls to field a team.

The family's youngest daughter, Chloe, (8 years old) does not participate in ice hockey because she does not like it nor have any interest in playing despite attempts from her parents to get involved. Chloe suggested that she would rather do other things than play hockey such as arts and crafts and video games. While Chloe didn't necessarily enjoy hockey, her lack of enjoyment

didn't disrupt the family's functioning. Aside from Chloe, the whole family enjoyed their travel ice hockey experience.

“Travel ice hockey made us experience things in a different way and we really enjoyed it and it was great to see them you know, in their element doing their thing, hanging out with kids their age and just, it was, it has really made a difference in our lives.” - Mother

The family described travel ice hockey as a significant time commitment, comparing it to a full-time job, which often resulted in sacrificing other activities or areas of life (e.g., birthday celebrations, vacations, family get togethers) to participate in travel ice hockey (see Table 4). With this in mind, the family suggested travel ice hockey could be stressful because they were gone sometimes every night for practice and wouldn't get home until 9:00 or 10:00 P.M. and then went to bed and woke up to do it all over again. For Nathan and Claire, travel ice hockey could be stressful in combination with school, especially if they had a late practice and homework they needed to get done before going to bed. Accordingly, the family suggested that while the experience could be stressful, it didn't deter them from the experience.

Given the time commitment required for travel ice hockey, the mother and father viewed their children's participation as something they would be 100% dedicated to and therefore placed great emphasis on ensuring their children did not miss practices and/or games unless absolutely necessary. In this case, the family's mindset revolved around the idea that once you sign up for something, you will meet its expectations regardless of other things that might be going on (see Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of family 7 travel ice hockey demographics

Participants	*Importance of Travel Ice Hockey in the Family	Hours/week commuting to and from practices and competitions	Hours/week participating in practices and competitions	Estimated annual financial investment toward travel ice hockey
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Table 6  
(cont'd).

Family 7	6.5	1-2 hours/week	6-8 hours/week	\$5,000-\$9,999
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\*(1 = not important; 10 = very important)

The mother and father noted the most important reason as to why their children participated in travel ice hockey was to be a part of a team. As parents, the goals they had for their children were to learn that participation matters, and experience wins and losses and upsets and joys. The parents described that being on a team provided a foundation for the years to come. When Nathan and Claire were asked about their goals, they both suggested they wanted to improve and get better. With this in mind, it was evident that the focus of the family's travel ice hockey experience was on task-oriented goals, such as ensuring the children had fun and developed life skills, rather than outcome-oriented goals, such as winning and meeting other external outcomes (i.e., college scholarship). Moreover, the parents both had a realistic view of their children's travel ice hockey participation, noting that their children were not going to be National Hockey League (NHL) players.

"I mean my kids aren't NHL players I mean they're not going you know, pro. They're playing on a team, they're you know, having a good time which is the most important thing for them. And they're learning that whole team, you know that teamwork." -

Mother

In this case, Family 7 was goal directed toward achieving task-oriented goals in their travel ice hockey experience. In addition to describing their goals, family members also provided their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the travel ice hockey experience. Please refer to Table 7 below.

Table 7. Family 7 travel ice hockey goals, advantages, and disadvantages

Participants*	M	F	THA1	THA2	S	T
Number of participants	1	1	1	1	1	5
Age of children			14	11	8	
Collective Family Themes						
Goals for Travel Ice Hockey Participation	<b>Task Oriented Goals (M, F, THA1, THA2)</b>					
	Enjoyment/have fun					
	Learn how to play on a team					
	Improvement					
	Non-outcome focused					
Advantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Opportunity to Learn Life Skills (F)</b>					
	Commitment					
	Independence					
	<b>Structure/Routine of Travel Ice Hockey (F, M)</b>					
	Keeps family organized					
	<b>Logistical Considerations (F, M)</b>					
	Convenience of Rink Location					
	Effective communication from organization					
	<b>Social Development (M, THA2)</b>					
	Make friends					
	<b>Context to promote PA (F)</b>					
	<b>Provides opportunity for family time (THA1)</b>					
	<b>Fun/Enjoyable (THA2)</b>					
	<b>Better Competition (THA1, THA2)</b>					
	<b>No Advantages (S)</b>					
Disadvantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Time Commitment (M, F, THA1, S)</b>					
	<b>Travel Expectations (THA1)</b>					
	<b>Financial Expectations (M, F)</b>					
	<b>No Disadvantages (THA2)</b>					

\*M = mother; F = father; THA1 = Travel ice hockey athlete, Male, 14 years old; THA2 = Travel ice hockey athlete, Female, 11 years old; S = Sibling, Female, 8 years old; T = total

## **Quantitative FACES IV Results**

According to the FACES IV results completed by the mother, Family 7 was characterized as connected and somewhat flexible, embodying an overall balanced (i.e., balanced on both dimensions of cohesion and flexibility) and therefore healthy level of family functioning (see Figure 9). Specifically, related to cohesion, Family 7 is connected and thus able to strike equilibrium between both separateness and togetherness. This means that family members are able to be both independent from and connected to their families and balance being separate and together in a more functional way. In this family, there is a balance of shared and individual interests along with a balance of emotional closeness and loyalty to the relationships that exist.

As for flexibility, Family 7 is characterized as somewhat flexible. The somewhat flexible family type falls within the balanced range of family functioning, suggesting, overall, the family is able to balance their system's stability versus change and importantly, adapt or change when necessary. The Circumplex model would suggest Family 7 is somewhat flexible when it comes to sharing leadership in the family, involving children in negotiations/decisions, and sharing and adapting roles and rules when necessary. Given the balanced level of functioning related to Family 7's flexibility, the family likely adopts more democratic leadership and negotiation styles. Moreover, roles and rules that exist in the family may not be strictly enforced. Instead, the family may share roles and/or change rules if necessary.

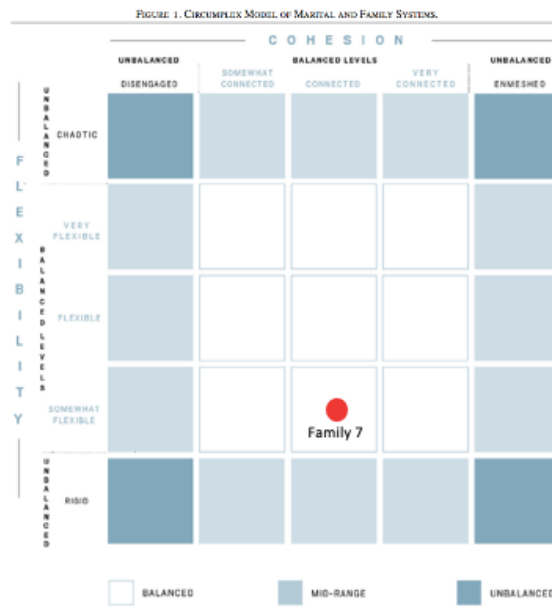


Figure 9. Family 7 dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

To understand the breakdown of Family 7's family functioning, one can refer to the family's percentile scores from the 6 scales (balanced – cohesion, flexibility; unbalanced cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; unbalanced flexibility - rigid, chaotic) plotted on the FACES IV profile below (see Figure 10). Specifically, Family 7 was characterized by a connected cohesion and somewhat flexible score on the two balanced scales (i.e., balanced cohesion, balanced, flexibility). Family 7 was also characterized by a moderate rigid score on the unbalanced scale of flexibility and very low scores on all other unbalanced extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic). The family's balanced cohesion and flexibility scores, moderate rigid score, and very low scores on all other extremes (cohesion: disengaged,

enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic) helps one to interpret the family as having a connected, somewhat flexible functioning level.

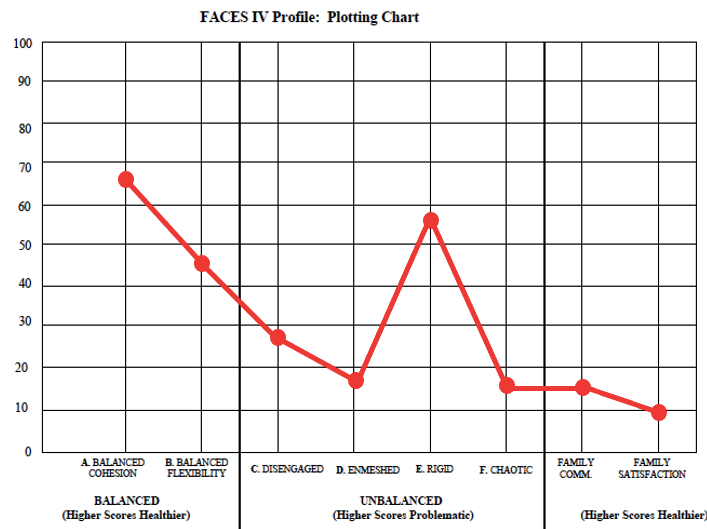


Figure 10. Family 7 percentile scores plotted on FACES IV profile

Family 7 was characterized by very low communication scores. Low communication scores suggest that Family 7 has unhealthy listening skills (empathy and attention), speaking skills (speaking for oneself instead of others), tracking (staying on topic), and respect and regard (the affective aspects of communication). Additionally, the family has negative feelings about their family communication. The family's low communication scores do not act as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility. Interestingly, Family 7's balanced functioning levels and low communication scores do not align with the Circumplex model's suggestion that balanced systems tend to have more positive, healthy communication whereas unbalanced systems tend to have poorer, unhealthy communication. Finally, Family 7 had very low and thus negative perceptions of satisfaction regarding their level of functioning related to cohesion, flexibility and communication.

## **Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Results**

This section provides Family 7's perception of their family functioning in travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model with accompanying quotes, followed by a description of the family's satisfaction with their functioning.

### **Family 7 Goal Direction**

**Goal-directed toward task-oriented outcomes supports family functioning.** As described in their profile, collectively, Family 7 focused on task-oriented goals (e.g., have fun, develop life skills) for their children's travel ice hockey participation. In line with these goals, both parents were realistic about their children's travel ice hockey participation, recognizing that neither would make it to an elite level – such as college ice hockey or the NHL. Considering this information, one can infer that Family 7 was goal directed toward achieving task-oriented outcomes in travel ice hockey. Family members collectively subscribed to this shared goal direction, which may be a factor that contributed to their generally healthy, balanced levels of functioning.

### **Cohesion**

#### **Optimal Balance of Separateness and Togetherness**

When asked about how tight knit and close the family was to one another, thinking about time spent together and separately, Family 7 described themselves as close, which the father suggested was a function of living away from extended family and therefore operating as their own group of five. In particular, Family 7 suggested that while they were a close family, they recognized and appreciated individual and/or alone time, which was triangulated across all family members.

Table 8. Family 7 optimal balance of separateness and togetherness

Theme	Father	Mother	Nathan	Claire	Chloe
Optimal balance of separateness and togetherness	<p>“I think uh, I think it, honestly, it brings us to about the right amount. Um, everybody does like having a little bit of distance in this family but at the same time, everybody does like coming together too.”</p>	<p>“We appreciate our alone time, and we have no problem saying you know we’re gonna go hang out in our rooms or go do our own thing um but then we also appreciate the time we spend together. We are a family that loves road trips and hockey weekends, we love vacation, I think we love our together time but we appreciate our separate time.”</p>	<p>“Yeah definitely, it’s a good balance. Like we um we’ll make sure we have time to go do things that we want like we’ll make sure I have time to go hang out with my friends or my mom has time to go have dinner with her friends. Like just away from all, everybody because I think everybody needs that.”</p>	<p>“Um I mean we’re pretty close you could say. And you know sometimes we go off and do our own things too.</p>	<p>“I think we have a good amount of time we are together and apart. I like to go with my family to do other things with them at hockey like swim at the hotel. But then there is also time to play and do art by myself.”</p>

Notably, the family suggested that an optimal balance of time spent together, and time spent apart was essential for their functioning, otherwise, it may lead to chaos within the family.

For example, the mother described a situation in which the entire family had all decided to travel and stay together in a hotel for Nathan's travel ice hockey tournament. The same night they arrived, the mother and daughters drove home because the family needed their space from one another:

"It was terrible! There were points where it got to, where we were like OK, we need to just not all be together. Like, you take him to the game this weekend and I'm gonna stay home because there, you know, it was, we love to support them, we wanna be at all their games. But when we get to the point where it's not enjoyable because you know, we can't do it." – Mother

Accordingly, in this instance, the family adapted to the challenge they were confronted with (i.e., too much time spent together) in order to restore the family's balance.

### **Hockey as a Family Affair Impacts Cohesion**

**Incorporating other activities as a family during hockey weekends enhance cohesion.** The family's participation in travel ice hockey was a family affair, which had a positive impact on the family's cohesion bringing them emotionally and physically closer by providing social bonding experiences through road trips, hotel stays, and sharing in wins/losses as a family. Not only did hockey provide a social bonding experience for the family itself, but it also provided a social bonding experience for the mother and father as they were able to connect with other hockey parents through their children's participation. For Family 7, incorporating other activities during hockey weekends like skiing or visiting the Great Lakes was emphasized and described as another opportunity to bring the family closer outside of the time spent together through travel ice hockey. This was an important aspect of the family's functioning, as they mentioned incorporating other family activities during hockey weekends helped to ensure



hockey wasn't all consuming and that the entire family was able to bond together, especially the youngest daughter, Chloe, who didn't participate in travel ice hockey or like it.

### **Hockey as a Shared Interest Among All but One**

**Balance of hockey and other activities supports family functioning when all members don't share the same interest.** Regarding travel ice hockey as a shared versus individual interest, the family suggested it was an enjoyed, *shared interest* for everyone except the youngest daughter, Chloe, who did not participate in nor enjoy ice hockey, which was described as more of a forced interest for her and triangulated among all family members.

Table 9. Family 7 hockey as a shared interest among all but one

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Nathan</b>	<b>Claire</b>	<b>Chloe</b>
Hockey as a Shared Interest Among All but One	"Yeah, I suppose that should be, I said the four of us do. I know Chloe doesn't."	"My youngest, she doesn't want to do it, she doesn't want to be there, but she does because there's no, you know, she can't do anything else, she's 9. But, because she knows it's important to everyone else she kind of has to come along with it. Kind of sounds mean now that I'm saying that [laughs]."	I think everybody is interested in it except my, except for my youngest sibling because she doesn't play hockey so she just kind of gets dragged along with us when we have to go places."	"Yeah, we all like hockey, except for Chloe, she's just not interested."	"I don't really like going to the games, but I have to. It's like I guess I could go but I don't really want to."

The family acknowledged that while travel ice hockey wasn't a shared interest for Chloe, they didn't believe it negatively impacted their overall functioning because they tried to balance the experience by engaging in other activities (e.g., ski trips, visits to the Great Lakes) that could be shared with all family members. In this case, while travel ice hockey was all-consuming during the season, the family strived to participate in other activities, both shared (e.g., skiing, swimming at the hotel) and individual (e.g., hang out with friends, ride bikes) to ensure all family members were content with their functioning. Overall, the family believed that travel ice hockey brought them closer together as it was an integral part of their everyday lives.

“Playing hockey definitely does uh bring us all together, because I mean it's, I think we got a little bit of the hockey family identity there.” – Father

### **Family Operates as a Team to Function Adaptively**

**Team effort for decision making.** In the travel ice hockey context, the family described themselves as operating mainly together, like a team, in order to function adaptively. In this context, decisions regarding travel ice hockey (e.g., scheduling, ensuring finances are in line) were primarily shared between the mother and father. The parents suggested they typically involved their children in decisions when it related to activities outside of travel ice hockey, such as where they'd like to eat for dinner after games. Importantly, the parents suggested that communication was important for supporting the family's decision-making process and ensuring they were on the same page to function adaptively in this context.

“As long as we're talking about it and we explain it, and you know we're working through like hey, it's gonna fall on this day and you know, and this month and you know who's gonna be around? So, it's definitely, we have to talk about it together otherwise it doesn't work.” – Mother

**Family supportiveness enhances cohesion.** Family 7 described travel ice hockey as “demanding” and “like a full-time job”; thus, family members depended on each other in this context; especially the children who depended on their parents to provide instrumental (e.g., purchasing equipment, transportation) and emotional support (e.g., unconditional positive regard, encouragement) throughout this experience. When discussing family member involvement in travel ice hockey, all participants identified the father as the most involved member of the family and the youngest child, Chloe, as the least involved. Nathan and Claire were both considered highly involved given their participation in the sport. The mother was also described as someone who helped out with ice hockey when available. However, given Chloe’s low involvement in travel ice hockey paired with her lack of interest and preference to stay home, the family dynamic typically played out such that the mother too, had to stay home and take care of Chloe while the rest of the family went to travel ice hockey. Thus, the father was described as the “go to man” for travel ice hockey and his primary involvement was related to taking the kids to and from practices throughout the week and long car rides to weekend games and/or tournaments. While family members had varying levels of involvement, all believed that as a whole, with the exception of the youngest daughter, the family was supportive of the travel ice hockey experience, which was helpful for bringing the family closer together. While the youngest daughter was described as the least supportive, her lack of support was not malicious, rather, it was indifferent due to her lack of interest in travel ice hockey.

The family provided unconditional support for their children in any and all of their endeavors, not just travel ice hockey. With this in mind, the mother and father suggested that if their children chose a different activity pursue, they would support it wholeheartedly, as long as their children put in effort.

“We’ll always make it work if it’s what they wanna do. But we ask that if they do it, they put all of their effort into it because then you know, we kinda see it as not appreciating, you know, the opportunity that they get. We support them, 100%.” – Mother

The family also provided instrumental support related to financial investment toward ice hockey, transportation to and from practices and games, and helped Nathan and Claire improve their skills. Emotional support related to disappointments and losses as well as wins and achievements (e.g., scoring a hattrick) was also provided. Accordingly, all forms of support contributed to the family’s positive perceptions of their closeness.

When asked specifically about a difficult experience related to their family’s travel ice hockey experience (e.g., tryouts, not making a team, big win, tough loss) in which the family was supportive or unsupportive, all family members had a hard time providing a concrete example. The father suggested that aside from minor things like being disappointed about missing games every now and then due to a conflict with the schedule, the family hadn’t had any major disappointments. Family 7’s goal direction, focused on task-oriented outcomes may help to explain their inability to provide examples of difficult experiences faced in this context.

### **Family structure matters**

**It takes two to make travel ice hockey work.** In regard to this dependence described above, the mother and father suggested that it takes two to make travel ice hockey work. This led to the emergence of *family structure* as an important factor characterizing Family 7’s ability to function in the context of travel ice hockey, further supporting their cohesion. Specifically, the family’s nuclear structure, including both parents, made it easier for the family to coordinate their schedule and work together to get things done. While Family 7 did not have extended

family help to support them in this experience, the father highlighted the importance of having both he and his wife working together below:

“I mean we don’t have like extended family around. But, just the two of us being able to work together to get all that done whereas if we were single parents or had any other complications, it definitely, I think it would be more difficult.” – Father

Consequently, the father described how the shared organization and sense of accomplishment from working together with his wife to make the travel ice hockey experience work for the family enhanced their degree of closeness toward one another.

### **Contextual Considerations Impact Cohesion**

**Practices during the week decrease cohesion and games/tournaments during the weekend enhance cohesion.** *Contextual considerations* also emerged to describe how participation in travel ice hockey impacted the family’s cohesion. Specifically, practices throughout the week led to more separateness in the family, whereas games and/or tournament weekends led to more time spent together as a family. In Family 7, the father took the kids to practice throughout the week while the mother stayed home with the youngest daughter, Chloe. In this case, the family modified their cohesion (togetherness versus separateness) based on the situation presented (i.e., practice versus game) to keep their system balanced. Importantly, because the father was typically involved in carpooling his children to and from practice throughout the week, this provided an opportunity for enhanced cohesion among the father-daughter and father-son subsystem relationships within the family.

### **Level of Family Involvement Impacts Perceptions of Separateness and Togetherness**

Interestingly, when asked about how family members felt regarding this time spent together versus apart, they expressed different views. Specifically, the father, Nathan, and Claire

perceived spending less time together throughout the week due to practices and more time together during the weekends for games was helpful for maintaining the family's balance of separateness and togetherness. In contrast, the mother and youngest daughter, Chloe, had conflicting views. Chloe described being mad and upset when she did not want to go to her siblings' hockey participation, even if this meant spending time together with her family. In comparison, the mother had conflicting views regarding the subsystem relationships formed as a result of the father being highly involved in travel ice hockey and her staying home:

“I think sometimes it's really good for them to have that like father-daughter time or that father-son time, absolutely. But I also want to be there you know? I want the family all together.” – Mother

Taken together, the most involved family members (father, Nathan, Claire) had more positive perceptions regarding their family's separateness and togetherness whereas the lesser involved family members (mother, Chloe) had more conflicting views regarding the family's separateness and togetherness.

### **Travel Ice Hockey Impacts Subsystem Relationships**

**Father-son and father-daughter subsystem relationships enhanced.** Accordingly, travel ice hockey also impacted cohesion among particular subsystem relationships within the family as various coalitions were formed. Within the travel ice hockey context, family members agreed that subsystem relationships were enhanced between the father and Nathan and the father and Claire. Both parents described this as a special bond formed between the father and his children.

“That special bond that they would have with their dad with something that they both enjoy so much you know? I think that it’s absolutely important and I have no problem taking a backseat to it.” – Mother

**Marital dyad enhanced through travel ice hockey.** Other subsystem relationships within the family included the father and mother, as the father described how the shared organization and a sense of accomplishment from working together with his wife to make the travel ice hockey experience work for the family enhanced their relationship. Through travel ice hockey, the sibling relationship shared between Nathan and Claire was also enhanced as it provided them with a shared experience to bond over while at the same time created a sense of spirited competition between them.

“There is some competition between Nathan and Claire on you know, they both want to do good and they both sort of brag to each other every now and then about how they do on their teams or coach each other every now and then.” – Father

**Mother-daughter and sister subsystem relationships enhanced outside of travel ice hockey experience.** Coalitions were also formed outside of the travel ice hockey context, such as Claire and Chloe because they both shared common interests (e.g., arts and crafts) outside of travel ice hockey, bringing them closer together. The mother and youngest daughter’s relationship also embodied a stronger bond due to Chloe’s lack of interest in ice hockey. As Chloe stated, “I just don’t really like hockey so like, me and my mom kind of fit together.” Though the mother enjoyed travel ice hockey and supported her children in this context, in order for the family to function adequately, she had to stay home and take care of her youngest daughter. This particular family dynamic supported the idea that *family structure* was important for understanding their functioning, as Family 7 had multiple children and therefore had to

diversify their attention to ensure all of the children's needs were met, especially when the youngest daughter didn't share the same family interest of travel ice hockey. In this case, diversifying one's attention impacted subsystem relationships within the family.

### **Flexibility**

Collectively, Family 7 viewed themselves as flexible with the ability to change when necessary in the context of travel ice hockey. These interviews helped to explain the family's quantitative results from the FACES IV, suggesting they were a somewhat flexible family type. Specifically, the interviews with family members helped to shed light on the nuance of this dimension, by providing insight into how travel ice hockey both contributed to the family's flexibility and rigidity in this context. With this in mind, the interviews provided support for a major idea of the family systems approach, suggesting families require both stability and change. In this case, stability and change were both necessary in order to function adaptively in the travel ice hockey context.

### **Balance of Stability and Change Supports Family Functioning**

**Adapt to make travel ice hockey work.** Family 7 recognized the ability to be flexible in the context of travel ice hockey as an important aspect of their family's functioning. Specifically, the family suggested that the ability to be flexible in travel ice hockey was something families should be aware of prior to starting the experience in order to make it work. As the father explained:

“Um, just being able to accommodate for it [travel ice hockey] and not get stuck on the things that we can't get around or have to miss or anything like that. I think that's uh you know, for the travel hockey stuff, it's yeah, part of signing up for it is realizing that we



will have to change our schedules or change schedules on the fly, or you know have to miss something else in order to be able to participate in it.” – Father

The family also believed that if you sign up for something you would be dedicated to it, which resulted in the family centering travel ice hockey as an activity that they would regularly adapt and/or change for in order to make work:

“It’s usually just like stuff we have planned already and then hockey comes along and then most of the time we’ll try to change whatever we had planned first so we can go play hockey. Like a doctors appointment or something, we’ll reschedule that, we’ll reschedule something just to go play hockey.” – Nathan

Examples of how the family was flexible in this context ranged from adapting to accommodate both children’s hockey participation (e.g., attending games on the same day at different times), the mother and father splitting up to make tournament weekends work and canceling and rescheduling other commitments. To highlight this flexibility, Nathan described a situation which involved his mother changing her entire work schedule to ensure he would be able to get to ice hockey practice last year. This was an example of a situation which may have led to an imbalance in the family system; however, the mother was flexible and adapted her work schedule to ensure balance in their system. In line with this point, the family suggested communication was important in this context to manage these changes.

“We’ve always stayed pretty flexible with that too. We do realize plans come up, plans change um, the communication is key for that.” – Father

**Stable leadership and roles support rigidity.** Other aspects of the family’s dynamics, such as their stable roles and leadership helped to make sense of the family’s rigidity in this context. The family’s beliefs regarding the commitment aspect of travel ice hockey (e.g., if you

sign up for it, you will be dedicated to it) resulted in more rigid behaviors related to travel ice hockey. For example, if the children had to get up at 7:00 AM on a Saturday for travel ice hockey and they didn't want to, the mother and father would not give them a pass to skip because they made a commitment to the sport and their team. Though this was not an explicitly stated rule in the family, it was an expectation that all members were aware of.

“Um we're pretty, when it comes to that we're pretty strict about it. You know if we have something that they have to be doing and you know at a place and at a time they're going to be there. They're going to do it. Um because it goes back to that whole, hey, you signed up for this and this is the responsibility that you take.” – Mother

In Family 7, generally stable leadership and roles were identified, which contributed to the family's adaptive functioning. In regard to leadership, the family identified the father as “in charge” and thus the “hockey leader” because ice hockey was a context in which he was comfortable and could relate to when considering his own personal experience with the sport. While the father was identified as the leader related to travel ice hockey, the family did not perceive him as highly controlling. Instead, they viewed his leadership as a natural aspect of their family's functioning, suggesting that someone needed to take initiative in this context. In line with this point, the father took on the majority of hockey-related roles such as transporting the children to and from practices and games and handling finances related to paying dues and purchasing equipment. In comparison, the mother's main role centered on taking care of the home and ensuring the schedule was organized. The children's main role involved taking care of their hockey equipment and gear. The family suggested these roles were generally stable, though would change if needed. For example, if the father had a scheduling conflict due to work, the mother would step in to help out and get the children to their practices and/or games. Taken

together, these characteristics of flexibility (leadership, rules, and roles) contributed to the family's sense of organization and routine, supporting their functioning in travel ice hockey.

### **Family Structure Impacts Flexibility**

**Two-parent household enhance flexibility.** With the examples above in mind, considerations regarding *family structure* emerged, suggesting that a two-parent household was helpful for allowing the family to be flexible and adapt to different situations in this context:

“And luckily, thankfully there’s two of us in the family. That makes all the difference honestly because we can be two places at once then or you know, we can have that separation. So, we’re blessed with the flexibility of things so that’s it.” – Mother

### **Travel Ice Hockey Structure Impacts Flexibility**

**Travel ice hockey provides “blueprint” to support flexibility.** The family suggested that travel ice hockey made it easier for the family to be flexible because they got used to changing and accommodating to meet the expectations. In this case, the family identified the overall expectations (i.e., multiple practices throughout the week, traveling out of town for competitions, being at the rink at specified times) that travel ice hockey placed on them as characteristics that enhanced the family's flexibility. With this in mind, the family suggested the travel ice hockey schedule itself provided them with a blueprint to know when and where they had to be and made changes accordingly.

“Um, but yeah, we’re regularly scheduling and changing schedules and what not to accommodate it. So, I would say, overall, it does make it easier for us because we’re used to doing that.” – Father

**Travel ice hockey provides “blueprint” to support rigidity.** At the same time, while the travel ice hockey schedule and expectations supported the family's ability to be flexible, it

was also a characteristic that contributed to the family's overall rigidity. Specifically, the structure and expectations associated with travel ice hockey, like the predetermined schedule (set time and location), kept the family structured and organized, too. For example, the family suggested that knowing that they had to be at travel ice hockey at a specified time and place required them to proactively plan ahead, which was deemed helpful for the family's functioning. With this in mind, the family described the structure of travel ice hockey as "helping the family to stay organized and maintain a sense of normalcy", "helping them to thrive" and "getting into a good routine and flow."

Table 10. Family 7 structure of travel ice hockey contributes to family organization

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Nathan</b>	<b>Claire</b>
Structure of Travel Ice Hockey Contributes to Family Organization	"Um, I definitely think the structure thing is something that you know, both me and Suzy, and the kids, the whole family really, helps us maintain uh you know a sense of normalcy with that."	"So, um having structure with hockey is great. Um because we knew what we were expecting. We knew where we had to be. Knowing all of those things helped keep us organized."	"I think it helps us be organized because um, it gives us a schedule. Like, over the summer there's no hockey so it's kinda like we're just doing whatever, there's not really a schedule. But then in the season it's like we're into the flow of things and we've gotta go to practice on these days and times and so yeah."	"It definitely helps that we know our hockey schedules early on. Especially for my parents so that they can plan for the week."

Taken together, based on these findings, characteristics of the family and travel ice hockey both contributed to the family's ability to be flexible as well as the family's rigidity in this context. Moreover, family dynamics related to rules, roles, and leadership were generally

stable, with the exception of some changes to these characteristics when necessary, which was deemed helpful for the family's functioning in the context of travel ice hockey. Considering these results, the family's moderate rigid score didn't suggest that they had an inability to change in this context; in fact, the family's ability to change in this context was quite flexible. Instead, the family's moderate rigid score helped to explain the importance of both stability and change in the context of travel ice hockey, specifically related to the family's functioning (e.g., rules, roles, leadership) and travel ice hockey characteristics (e.g., structured schedule), which were identified as important for the family's ability to function successfully in this context.

## **Communication**

### **Communication Facilitates Family Functioning**

Family 7 identified communication as a key aspect of their functioning in the context of travel ice hockey. Overall, with the exception of some areas of concern from the mother, family members believed they had productive communication skills, which improved as a result of their participation in travel ice hockey. The family suggested their communication skills improved in this context because hockey provided an avenue for the family to engage in regular communication and keep channels of communication open. As Nathan explained:

“Um well spending more time with each other in hockey just has us communicating more with each other so it's kinda, just like, practicing, like just the more time you spend on it the better you get at it.” – Nathan

Communication was important in this context to support the family's balance of cohesion and flexibility. Not only did travel ice hockey provide an avenue for communication among the family, but it also highlighted the need for the family to communicate in order to function adaptively when it came to decision-making and ensuring the family was on the same page to

make the experience work. In this context, communication also supported the family's ability to change or adapt, illuminating the idea that communication was key for managing change together.

“I would say we do communicate pretty effectively at what you know, what needs to happen and what we need to do to both, you know, go through life pretty much, including hockey, which definitely helps us when we have to adapt or change whether that be for a schedule change or tournament or whatever it is.” – Father

The family engaged in open communication regarding a variety of topics related to hockey such as discussions surrounding the children's performances (good and bad), areas to focus on for improvement, and coaches and teammates. The children typically communicated with their father about ice hockey related topics (e.g., performance, skill) and social aspects of participation (e.g., who they liked and disliked on the team) with their mother. The family did not mention negative aspects of their communication, until probed to consider aspects of hockey that have not been helpful for their family's communication. Accordingly, participants mentioned that toward the end of the season they experienced breakdowns in communication due to family member's being worn out from the demanding schedule as well as bad performances resulting in a lack of productive communication among family members.

### **Mother Views Communication as a “Work in Progress”**

**Concerns with engaging in open communication and sharing true feelings.** While the mother of Family 7 believed her family communicated well for the most part in travel ice hockey, she described it as a “work in progress” suggesting her children had trouble sometimes engaging in open communication and sharing their true feelings.

“I know that my kids though, if they didn’t like something, they would absolutely say something about it. Um especially when it comes to hockey um or sports or in general. They have no problem telling me how they feel about not liking something. But I also feel like you know, they, maybe hold in things and I think that that affects the way we communicate because there are some things that they don’t wanna discuss.” – Mother

Moreover, the mother suggested communication had always been difficult because she felt like her children didn’t want to share things because they were afraid of hurting mom or dad’s feelings.

“I think it has maybe to do, sometimes it could do with hockey, you know? Sometimes they don’t wanna do it. Um but they see that you know, it’s something that their parents really think is beneficial and that slowly comes out later on toward the end of the season, because you notice that things are not working the way they are supposed to or they’re not really forthcoming with things so I think seeing that with the kids is what the communication problems stem from.” – Mother

**Parents own family communication styles growing up may impact communication styles now.** Interestingly, when explaining this lack of open communication, the mother mentioned her and her husband’s own familial communication styles growing up, suggesting that communication, especially open communication, did not exist within their own families. With this in mind, the mother stated that she did not want to embrace those communication patterns adopted in her family growing up with her own family.

Accordingly, the mother’s concerns regarding her family’s communication skills may lead to an imbalance in the family system, resulting in less adaptive functioning, though further investigation would be needed to confirm this. As such, the mother’s perceptions of her family’s

communication, particularly related to her children, helped to explain the lower communication scores on the FACES IV results. With this in mind, the interviews provided insight into how the FACES IV communication scores were not representative of the entire family systems view of their communication in this context.

### **Satisfaction**

Overall, Family 7 was generally satisfied with dimensions of their family functioning involving cohesion, flexibility, and communication. Areas noted for improvement stemmed primarily from the mother regarding her family's communication and cohesion. Specifically, she suggested that while she was generally satisfied with her family's communication, she believed it could improve, specifically related to her children's openness to share their true feelings and concerns.

"I think maybe a little more open with me, but I think that's also the mom in me because I think my husband would probably have a different opinion. Um, but I think being more open with me. I think that they do come to me with concerns and I do think they share their concerns but to what extent? I don't know." - Mother

In regard to the family's cohesion, the mother thought more about this from a collective family perspective rather than individual perspective, suggesting that she worried that not everyone was happy in the family, particularly her youngest daughter, Chloe. The mother acknowledged that her youngest daughter didn't enjoy going to hockey, which she was concerned would cause a rift in the family's cohesion.

"I think I see it as more of if everyone is happy with what we do with our time together and apart in the family. Um, so you know, like with my youngest who has to be kind of



brought to these things [hockey] or made her go to a practice because no one else is home, so those things are not satisfying.” – Mother

Accordingly, these perceptions helped to explain the lower satisfaction rating provided by the mother on the FACES IV survey, though like the communication scores, the satisfaction scores were not representative of the entire family systems view of satisfaction in this context.

### **Family 12 profile**

Family 12 was a White nuclear family consisting of two biological parents (mother and father) and two children, ages 14 years old (male) and 8 years old (female). The mother completed college and works as a settlement coordinator for a civil engineering firm. The father completed college at an Ivy League university and currently works as a Deputy Executive Director for a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Division I men’s college hockey to prospective players and fans through extensive marketing and informational efforts. Prior to this position, the father served as the Vice President of Communications for eight seasons with a National Hockey League (NHL) team. Together, they make an average annual income between \$100,001-\$249,999 a year. The father’s personal sport experience and work in ice hockey served as the “main motivator” for his children’s own ice hockey participation. The other family members echoed this sentiment, suggesting that they got involved in ice hockey because it was what their husband and father grew up doing and what he does for a living now.

Brooks and Charlotte both began ice hockey around 4-5 years old. The son, Brooks, was always around the game - whether it was with the father at work or going with him to watch games. Therefore, Brooks began to play as soon as he could skate. Charlotte’s participation stemmed more from wanting to be like her older brother Brooks as he was someone she looked up to. With this in mind, both the mother and father described their children’s participation in

hockey as “the natural thing for their kids to pick up.” Both parents took a lot of pride in their children’s ice hockey participation and suggested ice hockey had a positive impact on their family that not only provided social opportunities for the children but for themselves as well. Taken together, the family enjoyed their travel ice hockey experience and described it as a fun activity for all of them to share.

The family has been involved in travel ice hockey since 2018 and both of their children, Brooks (14-year-old male) and Charlotte (8-year-old female) currently participate on different travel ice hockey teams within the same organization in the Connecticut area. Currently, the father serves as the head coach and assistant coach for his son and daughter’s teams, respectively. Both Brooks and Charlotte participate on travel teams in the same ice hockey organization, which was considered convenient for the parents, especially the father who coaches them, because they can’t have practices at the same time and also follow similar Saturday and Sunday game schedules on the weekends. In addition to travel ice hockey, Brooks and Charlotte participate in other sports, including lacrosse and soccer.

The family suggested travel ice hockey was an important part of their lives, as Brooks and Charlotte children highlighted their father’s career and role as their coach as a major reason why. The family also described travel ice hockey as a significant time commitment (but not all-consuming), identifying the travel expectations as a major downside, suggesting it limited other activities. For example, the father mentioned he would love to teach his children how to ski but cannot because it coincides with the winter hockey season. With the in mind, the travel expectations were characterized as “absurd” considering the family’s home rink has 8 sheets of ice, yet they travel various distances around their home state and surrounding states to compete. (see Table 11).

Table 11. Summary of Family 12 travel ice hockey demographics

Participants	*Importance of Travel Ice Hockey in the Family	Hours/week commuting to and from practices and competitions	Hours/week participating in practices and competitions	Estimated annual financial investment toward travel ice hockey
Family 12	8	1-2 hours/week	6-8 hours/week	\$1,000-\$2,499

\*(1 = not important; 10 = very important)

The mother and father suggested the most important reason as to why their children participated in travel ice hockey was to be a part of a team. As parents, the goals they had for their children were to compete and be with friends while playing at an appropriate level. With this in mind, the parents emphasized task-oriented goals for their children such as developing life skills, having fun, and making friends. Because the family was not results-oriented, they felt that overall, their children's participation did not create long-lasting stress for them outside of what was described as "normal" experiences of stress related to the beginning and end of the season (e.g., team selection, playoffs) and travel throughout the week and weekend. Moreover, because the father had worked in professional hockey, it was evident that he was well versed with, and supportive of, the American Developmental Model (ADM) developed by USA Hockey (n.d.), which emphasizes holistic and age-appropriate conditions for children's participation. Both parents acknowledged that they did not have hopes and/or expectations for their children to reach an elite level in ice hockey. In this case, both the mother and father had developed a self-awareness regarding their children's ice hockey participation, acknowledging that they would likely not make it to collegiate play or the NHL. Primarily with Brooks, both parents suggested that he didn't put forth much effort, which showed in his play and sometimes resulted in family conflict trying to navigate the situation. Interestingly, the father noted that Brooks had a goal of

making his high school hockey team, which the father questioned if it was realistic or not given his current work ethic.

While the parents adopted more task-oriented goals, their children identified goals to play college ice hockey at the Ivy League university their dad attended. Though the children mentioned these outcome-oriented goals, based on the interview, these goals seemed to focus more on wanting to be like their dad, rather than the goal of playing college ice hockey itself. In addition to describing their goals, family members provided their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the travel ice hockey experience. Please refer to Table 12 below.

Table 12. Family 12 travel ice hockey goals, advantages, and disadvantages

Participants*	M	F	THA1	THA2	T
Number of participants	1	1	1	1	4
Age of children			14	8	
Collective Family Themes					
Goals for Travel Ice Hockey Participation	<b>Task Oriented Goals (M, F)</b>				
	Have fun				
	Develop friendships				
	Develop sense of community outside of school				
	Long-term participation				
	<b>Outcome Oriented Goals (THA1, THA2)</b>				
	Play college ice hockey				
	Play professional ice hockey				
Advantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Life Skill Development (F)</b>				
	Resiliency				
	Motivation				
	<b>Social Development (M, THA2)</b>				
	Friendships				
	<b>Logistical Considerations (F)</b>				
	Children in same organization				
	<b>Enjoyable/Fun (M, THA1)</b>				

Table 12 (cont'd).	Characteristics of hockey – skating, seeing how other teams play, playing defense
Disadvantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Travel Expectations (F, THA1)</b> Keeping up with the Jones' mentality  <b>Financial Expectations (M)</b>  <b>Physicality of Ice Hockey (THA2)</b> Getting checked on the ice  <b>Ugly Side of Sport Parents (M)</b>

\*M = mother; F = father; THA1 = Travel ice hockey athlete, Male, 14 years old; THA2 = Travel ice hockey athlete, Female, 8; T = Total

### Quantitative FACES IV results

According to the FACES IV results completed by the father, Family 12 was characterized as very connected and flexible, embodying an overall balanced (i.e., balanced on both dimensions of cohesion and flexibility) and therefore healthy level of family functioning (see Figure 11). Specifically, related to cohesion, Family 12 is very connected, which suggests the family embodies high emotional closeness and loyalty regarding relationships. A very connected family relationship suggests time together is more important than time apart and emphasis is placed on togetherness. With this in mind, shared interests are common with some individual activities.

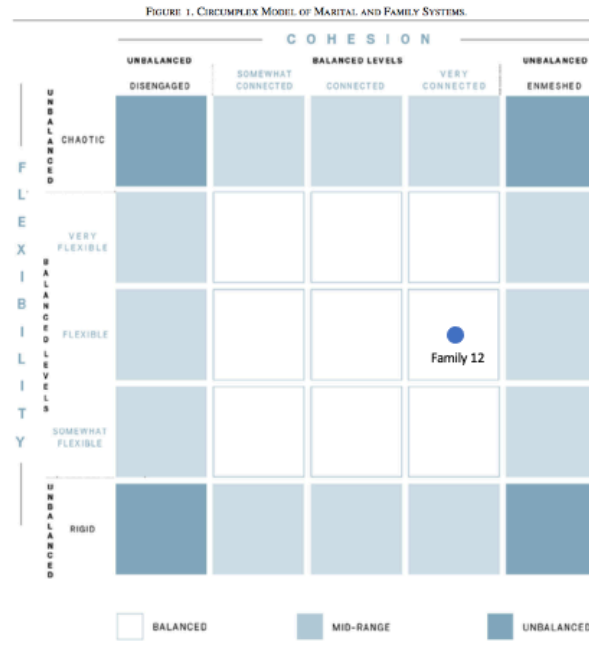


Figure 11. Family 12 dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

As for flexibility, Family 12 was characterized as flexible. The flexible family type falls within the balanced range of family functioning, suggesting, overall, the family is able to balance their system's stability versus change and importantly, adapt or change when necessary. The Circumplex model would suggest Family 12 is flexible when it comes to sharing leadership in the family, involving children in negotiations/decisions, and sharing and adapting roles and rules when necessary. Given the balanced level of functioning related to Family 7's flexibility, the family uses less authoritarian, controlling leadership and more democratic, shared leadership that involves the children in negotiations/decisions. Moreover, roles and rules that exist in the family are not strictly enforced. Instead, roles and rules that exist in the family can change as the members of the family and situational demands require.

To understand the breakdown of Family 12's family functioning, one can refer to the family's percentile scores from the 6 scales (balanced – cohesion, flexibility; unbalanced cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; unbalanced flexibility - rigid, chaotic) plotted on the FACES IV profile below (see Figure 12).

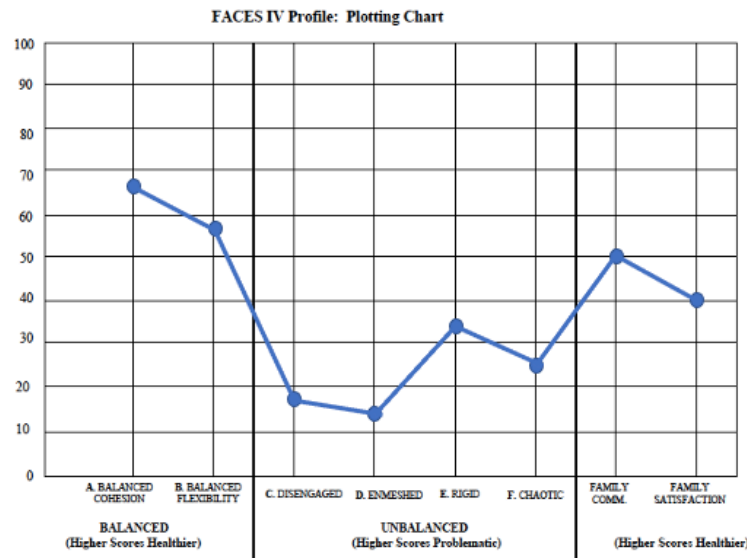


Figure 12. Family 12 percentile scores plotted on FACES IV profile

Specifically, Family 12 was characterized by a low rigid score on the unbalanced scale of flexibility and very low scores on all other unbalanced extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic). The family's balanced cohesion and flexibility scores, low rigid score and very low scores on all other extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic) helps one to interpret the family as having a very connected, flexible functioning level. Family 12 was also characterized by moderate communication and satisfaction scores. Moderate communication scores suggest that Family 12 has moderately healthy listening skills (empathy and attention), speaking skills (speaking for oneself instead of others), tracking (staying on topic), and respect and regard (the affective aspects of communication). Additionally, the family has moderately positive feelings about their family communication. The family's moderate

communication scores act as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility. Family 12's balanced functioning levels and moderate communication scores align with the Circumplex model's suggestion that balanced systems tend to have more positive, healthy communication whereas unbalanced systems tend to have poorer, unhealthy communication. Finally, Family 12 had moderately positive perceptions of satisfaction regarding their level of functioning related to cohesion, flexibility and communication.

### **Qualitative Semi-structured Interview Results**

This section provides Family 12's perception of their family functioning in travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model with accompanying quotes, followed by a description of the family's satisfaction with their functioning.

#### **Family 12 Goal Direction**

**Goal-directed toward task-oriented outcomes supports family functioning.** As described in their profile, parents of Family 12 focused on task-oriented goals (i.e., compete and be with friends, play at an appropriate level, have fun, learn life skills) for their children's travel ice hockey participation. Accordingly, the parents did not have high hopes or expectations for their children to participate at the next level, either in college and/or professionally. With this in mind, both children described outcome-oriented goals to play college ice hockey at the ivy league university their dad attended. The children's outcome-oriented goals manifested more from wanting to be like their dad rather than the goal to play college hockey itself. Thus, while the parents and their children's goal directions did not directly align, the parents' active efforts to promote a developmentally appropriate ice hockey experience for their children seemed to guide the family's goal direction. In this case, the family was able to function efficiently because there



was a general acceptance that the two types of goals (task and outcome) could co-exist, with greater emphasis placed on the task-oriented goals throughout the experience.

## Cohesion

### Optimal Balance of Separateness and Togetherness

When asked about how tight knit and close the family is to one another, thinking about time spent together and separately, Family 12 described themselves as having an optimal balance of *separateness and togetherness*. The family felt they were pretty close to one another, without being overbearing.

Table 13. Family 12 optimal balance of separateness and togetherness

Theme	Father	Mother	Brooks	Charlotte
Optimal balance of separateness and togetherness	“I would say relatively close knit, I mean I don’t think, I notice when I look at other families, I don’t, I think we would be somewhere in the middle range, middle of the spectrum.”	“We spend a lot of time together, but we also, I mean I’m definitely a person who likes my space, I don’t want to be around everyone all the time and I think that the rest of my family is like that too, you know? overbearing, we are pretty close.”	“I’d say we’re maybe in the middle, like, we do some stuff together like hockey but other times me and Charlotte are off playing like video games with our friends and playing outside with our friends, so, I think it’s a good balance.”	“I feel like we are pretty close. We tend to spend time together when we all want to or when we can. We do our own stuff too.”

With this in mind, the family explained that time spent together was balanced by time spent apart. The family enjoyed time spent together but also appreciated and valued their

individual time, which was important for their functioning. In this regard, the family recognized that while travel ice hockey provided opportunities to be together through things like car rides to and from practices or time spent at the rink, it was important to find balance, which involved time spent apart from one another and away from the rink. For example, after long hockey weekends together, the family explained that they needed to spend some time apart, whether that be mom and dad watching television alone or the kids playing with their friends.

**Family approach toward travel ice hockey contributes to balance of time together and time apart.** For Family 12, one specific way that they strived to meet this balance between their separateness and togetherness was through their approach toward travel ice hockey. While the family acknowledged travel ice hockey was a large time commitment, they proactively made sure that it was not all consuming. As the mother explained:

“We’re not that family that has our kids on four different teams, um, so because we limit them, um, I just, I don’t want to ever, I don’t ever want to be that family that has hockey every night at five different rinks; that’s just not who we want to be, um, and because of that I think we do have a really good balance.” – Mother

Accordingly, striving for balance between their togetherness and separateness was important for the family’s ability to function in this context.

### **Hockey as a Family Affair Impacts Cohesion**

**Hockey as a family affair enhances closeness.** The family’s participation in travel ice hockey was a family affair, which had a positive impact on the family’s physical and emotional bonds. In this case, travel ice hockey brought the family closer by providing another connection point for interaction. In this context, travel ice hockey provided opportunities for the family to be together at games and tournaments, which the family very much enjoyed.

The family also felt they became emotionally closer as a result of talking more to one another about hockey during car rides to and from practices and games. In particular, the mother suggested that time in the car was one of the best opportunities for the family to talk and spend time together as there was a “captive audience that the kids could not get away from.”

Communication shared between family members supported their cohesion in this context.

Moreover, the father highlighted that his role as a coach of his children’s teams was also an aspect of the experience that helped him personally connect more with Brooks and Charlotte.

In addition to the family’s emotional closeness, they agreed that travel ice hockey increased the overall degree of physical time that they spent together as a family. For Family 12, hockey forced family time together, which was perceived as a good thing as they were able to spend more time together because of it than they would have otherwise. Considering this, the mother made mention of the fact that this increased physical togetherness was more constant for the father due to his role as the coach.

“Like Nate’s also the coach, in situations where I’m not involved, but he still is, he always is. So, for him it’s a constant, um, togetherness with them and just with everything having to do with it, for me it’s maybe not quite so much.” – Mother

### **Hockey as a Shared Interest for All Family Members**

**Hockey as a shared interest enhances cohesion.** Collectively, hockey was viewed as a shared interest for Family 12, which provided a common ground for family members to share and relate – whether that be through attending games and/or supporting each other through the experience, which in turn enhanced family members closeness toward one another.

Table 14. Family 12 hockey as a shared interest enhances cohesion

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Brooks</b>	<b>Charlotte</b>
Hockey as a shared interest enhances cohesion	<p>“I also think that it gives us sort of a common ground, a common um, interest that we can talk about, we can share, um, you know, Brooks and Charlotte can relate to each other a little bit because of that, whereas you know they’re obviously much different levels in school and there’s five years between them, so there’s a lot, plenty of differences with their interests, but it’s something that they have in common, so I think that helps.”</p>	<p>“I definitely think it is something that we all enjoy and share, and we bond over and so it’s something that we all do together too, so, um, yeah it’s a shared interest for sure.”</p>	<p>“We all really like hockey. It’s just something that my whole family likes doing together.”</p>	<p>“Hockey is something my whole family likes to do together. It’s fun to do it with my brother and dad and even my mom, even though she’s not very good.”</p>

**Hockey as a shared interest provides avenue for communication.** In line with this point, hockey as a shared interest provided an avenue for the family to pursue communication, which supported the family's cohesion. For example, the father suggested that he did not share his children's primary interests outside of hockey, which involve playing video games. Thus, when Brooks came to him to talk about a video game, he did not care much for it until he realized the video game was hockey related.

“Just the other day Brooks said, ‘Hey Dad, can I tell you this thing that Xbox is doing?’ and I’m like, ‘Buddy, you know I don’t care much. I don’t want to make you feel bad, but I don’t really care about what XBOX is doing.’ Brooks responded, ‘No! It’s about hockey, it’s about, they brought back NHL Live 4,’ and I was like ‘Oh, that’s kind of cool!’” – Father

**Hockey as a shared interest enhances family members social circles.** Hockey as a shared interest also increased the mother's own personal involvement with the sport as she joined a pick-up team with other hockey moms that she met through the experience, which she suggested happened as a result of Brooks' hockey participation. Consequently, the mother's social circle grew.

“I think it's a shared interest for sure, I mean I think initially Nate is the driving factor, um, Brooks enjoys it as much as he enjoys anything, um, I actually started playing a couple of years ago having never skated in my life and joining some other moms, so for me it's created a whole, because of Brooks' hockey, it created a whole nother activity for me and hobby and a whole separate group of friends.” – Mother

“Um, my mom she like [pauses] she and all of her friends sometimes do some like mom-hockey thing where they all just grab their stuff and quick play little games.” – Brooks

Accordingly, the father also experienced enhanced social opportunities as many of his friends were made through the travel ice hockey experience whether they be parents or other coaches in the organization. Taken together, not only did hockey provide a social bonding experience for the family itself, but it also provided social opportunities for the parents, as they had both made a lot of life-long friends from this experience.

### **Family Operates as a Team to Function Adaptively**

**Team effort for decision making.** In the travel ice hockey context, Family 12 operated mainly dependently, handling decisions and difficult hockey situations together. Specifically, the family approached decisions through a “team effort” whereby everyone had the opportunity to contribute and have their thoughts and feelings taken into account. Then, the final decision was made by the mother and father. For example, the family had to make a decision regarding if Brooks should continue playing for his recreational house ice hockey team or move to travel ice hockey and included him in the decision. Importantly, open communication was key for helping the family come to a final decision.

“So we were like, ‘Do you want to keep being a Crusader?’ which was what he was at the time (recreational house team), or ‘Do you want to try out for the Outlaws and see what that’s like?’ um, and that was definitely a group decision, um, you know he yeah, we wouldn’t have gone if he didn’t want to, um, and if we didn’t feel comfortable with it, then we probably wouldn’t have done it either so, um, it sort of had to be right for all of us.”- Father

Another good example that highlighted decision-making in Family 12 was when the father was asked to coach a higher-level premier team. While the parents thought it would be nice to coach a good team, developmentally speaking, they did not feel it would be in the best interest of their

son, Brooks. Specifically, the father felt from a skill perspective that Brooks would not have success at that level. Therefore, the family decided that the father would not coach the premier team and kept Brooks down at his current level of play. Other hockey-related decisions that were made in the family included leaving the organization due to a bad coach, purchasing gear and equipment, and leaving organizations due to problematic parents. Accordingly, this approach to decisions was appreciated by family members:

“It feels nice because I know that they’re not just gonna do something without my say in the matter.” - Charlotte

**Family support enhances cohesion.** In line with this team approach, the family, primarily the children, depended on their parents in this context to provide both instrumental (e.g., transportation, purchase equipment) and emotional (e.g., encouragement, unconditional positive regard). In this context, the family prescribed to not talking hockey outside of the rink, which helped to reinforce their focus on ensuring a fun experience.

“Um, thinking emotional support like kind of reinforcing, you know, we’re very, we subscribe a lot to the idea of when you get in the car you say, “I love watching you play””  
- Father

As a coach, the father also provided specific forms of support such as guidance on the ice related to skill improvement as well as being the “go to” person for helping the children with their hockey gear. Other specific examples of how the family supported one another in this context related to Brooks supporting Charlotte when she joined his hockey organization, family support when a child makes a team, and supportiveness toward helping Charlotte and Brooks learn new, more difficult skill. Overall, Family 12 felt that they were all very supportive of one another in this context, which helped enhance the family’s closeness.

“It definitely helps because [pauses] I think we all know that we’re always cheering for each other no matter what’s happening with our life.” – Brooks

### **Travel Ice Hockey Impacts Subsystem Relationships**

**Father-son and Father-daughter subsystem relationships enhanced through travel ice hockey.** Travel ice hockey impacted subsystem relationships within the family as various coalitions were formed. In particular, Family 12 believed that travel ice hockey contributed to strong subsystem relationships shared between the father and his children due to the extensive amount of time they spent together at the rink and the father’s role as their coach in this context. As Brooks and Charlotte noted:

“Hockey affected it for the better, I think because I we now have a common interest so if I need somebody to talk to like I know I can always rely on him.” – Brooks

“I think we have gotten pretty close to my dad through hockey.” – Charlotte

**Enhanced father-children subsystem relationship creates conflict with mother at times.** With this in mind, the mother suggested that hockey had definitely brought the children closer to their father, because of his role as their coach and how much they relied on him in this context. The father was thus viewed as the “hockey expert” in the family and the mother more of a bystander in this context, which created conflict within the family at times. For example, the mother described a situation in which Charlotte refused to let her tie her skates, which led to a disagreement between the two.

“You know Charlotte yesterday told me that I wasn’t capable of helping her with her skates. She was adamant that Nate was the only one that could help her, so sometimes it can create a little bit of conflict and just where they seem to think that because I’m not



the expert, I, therefore, have no knowledge. I wonder if Nate wasn't such an expert if they would view me the same?" – Mother

**Father as coach creates conflict at times within father-son subsystem.** Overall, while the father-son subsystem relationship the father-son subsystem relationship sometimes experienced conflict, due to the father's role as a coach and Brooks' lack of effort put forth on the ice.

"He's just, you know sometimes, especially as a coach, if he doesn't put forth the effort, things like that, that can create some friction too, um so it's not I guess it's not entirely positive in that regard, but it, I think for the most part it ends up being, creating a stronger bond." - Father

**Sibling subsystem relationship enhanced through travel ice hockey.** The family also felt that Brooks and Charlotte's relationship with one another was enhanced, again, because hockey provided them with a common interaction point to talk about each other's games, support one another, and even engage in a little friendly competition or sibling rivalry.

"She's more competitive with him than he is with her, like she likes to talk about how if they raced, she would beat him, um, you know and she'll skate with his team, um, because she likes the extra practice. He won't skate with her team and his excuse was that he doesn't want to embarrass himself in front of a bunch of eight-year olds." – Mother

"Um, there's a little bit of rivalry there, like how Charlotte wants to be able to do what he can do." – Father

## Flexibility

### Adapt to Make Travel Ice Hockey Work

Collectively, Family 12 described themselves as flexible and open to change when necessary in the context of travel ice hockey. While the family described themselves as people who appreciated structure and routine, they were also able to adapt according to the demands (e.g., scheduling changes, travel logistics) placed on them in the travel ice hockey context (see Table 15). The family recognized change as a part of the experience and the importance of adapting and/or “going with the flow” in order to thrive. Accordingly, these interviews helped to explain the family’s quantitative results from the FACES IV, suggesting they are a flexible family type.

Table 15. Family 12 adapt to make travel ice hockey work

Theme	Father	Mother	Brooks	Charlotte
Adapt to make travel ice hockey work	“I think um, certainly on a day-to-day basis we appreciate rigidity, um, you know things are pretty planned out and we kind of know what to expect, we plan our meals, we know the schedule. But I don’t think we’re	“Um, I would say on the whole probably pretty flexible, um, I think you know, Nate and I as adults understand the need for that. At the same time, so, I think that everyone sort of likes a schedule and to know what is going to happen, but I think that when things	“They’re definitely more open to change. We’re able to adapt quickly, I feel like.”	“Most of the time, we do pretty well at it. Both of my parents are pretty flexible”

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Table 15 (cont'd).

too caught off guard, you know, we can adjust if we have to.”	change, people tend to not lose their minds.”
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The interviews also helped to shed light on the nuance of this dimension, by providing insight into how travel ice hockey contributed to the family’s flexibility and rigidity in this context. This supported a family systems approach suggesting families require both stability and change. In this case, a balance of stability and change were necessary in order to function adaptively in the travel ice hockey context.

### **Balance of Stability and Change Supports Family Functioning**

**Family approach toward travel ice hockey enhances flexibility.** Similar to the way in which cohesion was enhanced, Family 12 suggested that their approach to the travel ice hockey experience supported their ability to be flexible in this context. Because the family approached travel hockey with the mindset that they wanted their children to have fun and develop both as athletes and people, they were able to adapt and be relatively flexible in this context without much trouble.

“I think it’s partly, we don’t really take this, it’s fun and it’s a good thing, but I don’t think we take it quite so seriously that it um, rules our life, right? Like you take from it the enjoyment and fun and the skills and all of those things but, um, I don’t think we put so much stake in it that it drives the rest of our lives.” – Father

Examples of how the family was flexible in this context primarily centered on splitting up to ensure the children could make it to their games and practices and adapting to their children’s changing teams. For Family 12, communication was critical for helping them adapt to change in

this context as it gave them the opportunity to work together to get on the same page and coordinate plans to make the travel ice hockey experience work. For example, Brooks explained that his family had to adapt when his sisters ice hockey team didn't have enough girls to field a team. The father suggested that when making the decision regarding what team Charlotte would join next, the family was accommodating and flexible toward Charlotte's needs and wants. Importantly, this was an aspect of Family 12's functioning that they felt was adaptive for their functioning.

“Um, but we didn't want to, we wanted to make sure she wasn't, didn't feel pushed in one direction or another because of logistics, like if she wanted to go play at a different rink, we were going to be fine with that, we would have figured it out.” – Father

**Family member personality impacts flexibility.** With this in mind, the mother suggested that there were varying levels of flexibility within the household, particularly related to the children whose personalities were vastly different. Brooks was described as more introverted and non-competitive whereas Charlotte was described as more extroverted and competitive. Accordingly, when it came to flexibility, Brooks was more “go with the flow” whereas Charlotte was more set in her ways. As the mother and father explained:

“Brooks is really flexible, he'll just do whatever, whenever, however, with whoever, doesn't matter, it's fine.” – Father

“Charlotte is less so, um, she gets an idea in her head, she will not deviate um, I think she prefers the more rigid expectation of, you know, this then that and the other thing, whereas Brooks, if we're running late and we say “Okay, buddy we have to get dressed in the car” he's like ‘Okay’” – Mother

Accordingly, the mother also felt that as a whole, she and her husband understood the need to be flexible, but her husband definitely more so than her because of his higher involvement in their children's participation.

**Stable leadership and roles support rigidity.** Other family dynamics that contributed to the family's balance of stability and change were the family's stable leadership, inexplicitly stated rules, and stable roles. In Family 12, generally stable leadership and roles were identified, which contributed to the family's adaptive functioning. When asked about rules adopted in the family, the family preferred to refer to these as "routines" that were in place to help them function. Some of these "routines" related to limits on screen time, having dinner as a family, and completing homework before doing other activities. With these in mind, the family did not feel as though travel ice hockey impacted these "routines" that existed within the family.

In regard to leadership, the family identified the father as the "hockey leader", given his knowledge of the game and role as the children's coach. As the leader for his family in travel ice hockey, the father took on a more democratic style, suggesting all voices were valued and considered in the family. As such, the family believed that they were able to successfully balance their leadership as the father took on more leadership in the travel ice hockey context and the mother at home.

"I think it's generally pretty stable, but I think it also provides for our family kind of a nice balance, um, because I think, um, [pauses] I just think it's good that it's not always me who has the reins and it's not always him who has the reins." – Mother

Similar to the family's leadership in the context of travel ice hockey, the father took on the majority of hockey-related roles (e.g., transportation, finances, coaching) whereas the mother took on the majority of roles within the family's home (e.g., meals, laundry). The family

suggested these roles were generally stable, though they felt they could adapt if needed. In this case, the family suggested that their generally stable leadership and roles supported the family's organization and functioning in this context.

### **Family Structure Matters**

**Two-parent households enhance flexibility.** With this in mind, the mother and father took a “divide and conquer” approach toward their children's travel ice hockey participation. This “divide and conquer” approach led to the emergence of *family structure* as an important characteristic that allowed them to be flexible and adapt to different situations in travel ice hockey. In particular, the parents suggested that their two-parent household makes a world of difference when it comes to their flexibility and ability to make this experience work for the family.

“It's a lot right? I mean if you work um if you are mostly a one-parent family, I think that's gotta be incredibly difficult, like you would, I think you would definitely additional support outside your family unit, you know?” – Father

**Number of children participating in travel ice hockey supports flexibility.** In addition, the family suggested that it would be difficult to adapt to change in this context if they were outnumbered by their children participating in travel ice hockey.

“I mean if you work um and I mean we have friends um, they both work, they have three kids, all play hockey, I mean I don't know how they do it, they're outnumbered!” – Mother

### **Travel Ice Hockey Structure Impacts Flexibility**

**Characteristics of travel ice hockey force flexibility.** Moreover, the family suggested that characteristics of travel ice hockey (e.g., scheduling changes, travel expectations for away

games, lack of advanced notice regarding changing games/practices) force you to be flexible. As the mother explained:

“Um, because things change, right? You know, just with schedules changing and everything, I mean I think, I think yeah, you just have to be flexible in order for it to work in order for it not to drive you crazy, like you’ve gotta be flexible when you do your homework, flexible in when you have dinner and flexible when you go get your Christmas tree, you know all of those things sort of have to move around.” – Mother

For Family 12, these characteristics were something they’ve grown accustomed to, which in turn led them to suggest travel ice hockey makes it easier for the family to be flexible.

**Characteristics of travel ice hockey enhance rigidity.** In the same vein, while the structure of travel ice hockey supported the family’s ability to be flexible, it also contributed to the family’s rigidity, which was deemed helpful for their family’s functioning. Specifically, the structured travel ice hockey scheduling and expectations were characteristics that supported the family’s appreciation for routine and structure, in turn, allowing the family to organize themselves to maintain their day-to-day schedules, while adapting and being flexible when needed.

“You have to work around the schedule and um, [pauses] it does dictate a lot, it dictates meal planning for example, um, you know because of when they’re practices were last night we had, we were going to have leftovers, and sort of that type of thing.” – Father

**Travel ice hockey organization accommodates family.** In line with the point above, because the father was a coach of his son and daughter’s team, the family felt their hockey organization supported the family’s structure and organization, as practices and games were often scheduled according to what accommodated the father’s schedule. Thus, while the family was

able to adapt to change in this context, they did not have to do so often because of the accommodating schedule provided by the organization.

“Um, and typically the organization’s been good with scheduling them with back-to-back practices or maybe an hour in between, um which makes our lives a lot easier.” - Father

Taken together, the travel ice hockey context seemed to contribute to the family’s rigidity and flexibility. Family 12’s ability to balance this stability and change was thus helpful for their functioning in travel ice hockey.

Considering the findings above, the family was able to find balance related to their stability and flexibility in the context of travel ice hockey, which supported their adaptive functioning in this context. Specifically, characteristics of travel ice hockey contributed to the family’s flexibility as well as their rigidity in this context. Moreover, the family found balance in their leadership, rules, and roles adopted. These findings align with the family’s FACES IV quantitative results suggesting the family is a flexible functioning type.

## **Communication**

### **Communication Facilitates Family Functioning**

Family 12 perceived they had average communication skills, which were characterized by various strengths and weaknesses. Importantly, the family believed that while their communication wasn’t perfect, it would not be possible to participate in travel ice hockey without it. Considering this, the family felt that hockey provided a concrete avenue for their family to engage in communication, which was perceived as facilitative for the family’s functioning as they were not as naturally outgoing in terms of sharing their thoughts and feelings with one another.



## **Weaker Communication Among Mother and Father Versus Children**

The mother and father both agreed that their ability to communicate openly was weaker than that of their children, suggesting they were more guarded in their emotions and responded to open communication in different ways. As the mother explained:

“Um, you know I think the kids are better about it, it’s just kinda our, Nate and I are both pretty guarded in our emotions, but in regard to the kids, we both try and be better, um, even my, Nate’s default is to, Nate defaults to quiet, I default to anger.” - Mother

**Parents own family communication styles growing up may impact communication styles now.** With this in mind, the father referenced his own personal family experiences growing up as a factor impacting his own ability to communicate with his family now.

“Certainly me, I was just kinda grown, brought up in a family where you don’t talk about that stuff. I would like to more, but I don’t [laughs].” – Father

## **Children’s Communication Skills Vary by Personality**

Accordingly, when describing their children, the mother and father suggested communication skills varied for each child based on their different personalities. Specifically, the mother and father described Brooks as shy and reserved, and Charlotte as more in touch with her emotions and outgoing, which resulted in more open communication from Charlotte versus Brooks.

“It’s volatile and kind of crazy but, but you know exactly how she’s feeling at any given moment, which I think is actually great.” – Mother

“Like she’ll [Charlotte] talk, she talks on the way to the rink about how good she wants to be, um, and he just doesn’t, he’s just not as open with stuff like that.” – Father

## Travel Ice Hockey Doesn't Dominate Communication in the Household

Aligning with their task-oriented approach to travel ice hockey, the family noted that while hockey played a role in their conversations, it did not dominate them. For example, typical dinner conversations among family members centered on a range of topics from school, to friendships, to hockey logistics (e.g., game schedule, planning meals). Performance-related discussions regarding hockey did not come up often, as the family, especially the father being the children's coach, preferred to keep those conversations at the rink. The father suggested that when he provided his children with constructive feedback regarding their play, Charlotte was typically more receptive than Brooks.

“Sometimes that, um, and especially Charlotte will seek out, like last night at practice she took a shot and then skated up to me and goes, “How can I shoot better?” and so I gave her a tip, and she tried it next time at the line and it sort of worked [laughs]. She appreciated it, you know, Brooks’, and probably because of his age he’s a little less inclined to do that but, he seems to think he knows more things.”- Father

## Parents Struggle Navigating Communication with Brooks regarding Performance

With this in mind, both parents struggled with how to navigate communication with Brooks in the context of travel ice hockey, particularly related to addressing his lack of effort toward his hockey participation. When asked about this, Brooks acknowledged and agreed that he needed to get better at receiving feedback.

Table 16. Family 12 struggle navigating communication regarding Brooks' performance

Theme	Father	Mother	Brooks
Struggle Navigating Communication regarding Brooks' performance	“You know he’s not the type, he won’t shoot pucks in the driveway,	“Our son has gotten, I don’t want to say worse with time but you can tell his heart	“Sometimes I would like to get feedback, um, I think I need to, I need to start getting better at being more

Table 16 (cont'd).

he doesn't put the extra time in, and I try not to, I don't want to boss him around from a coaching perspective, but I do think from a parenting perspective, like, and Audrey and I had debated this like, he still says playing on the high school team is a goal of his, I don't think it's a realistic goal of his, um, and so we debate a little bit of, how do we communicate that to him? Um, you know, do we say you need to do this, you need to do x, y, and z?"	isn't into it. He enjoys that he likes it [hockey], but he doesn't put forth any extra effort and I think sometimes there is conflict around that because he has the capability to be better, he just doesn't have the drive and watching that is frustrating, um, but he's very "I'm trying, I'm doing my best." Um, which is frustrating because you know that's not true. Um, so he's either blows us off or gets defensive."	open to feedback 'cause I know my dad has a lot of, knows a lot, so I know if I lose, I'm going to ask him for some."
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Overall, the family felt that while communication did not come naturally to the family, they made an active effort to keep open lines of communication the best that they could, which contributed to their adaptive functioning in this context. Accordingly, the family's perceptions of their communication aligned and better explained the moderate FACES IV communication scores completed by the father.

### Satisfaction

Overall, Family 12 was generally satisfied with dimensions of their family functioning including cohesion, flexibility, and communication. In regard to cohesion, the father suggested

that his family had a good balance of separateness and togetherness and understood that they were a collective family unit whose actions impacted other members in the family.

“I would say I’m very satisfied. I think that we have a good mix of togetherness and apartness, I think we’re definitely a good family unit, but I think everybody understands that they’re an individual within the family and that each individual affects the family as a whole and that, you know, we all have a role to play, I think that yeah, I think it’s a good, I think it’s good!” - Father

Areas noted for improvement stemmed primarily from Brooks and Charlotte related to cohesion and communication. In particular, Charlotte suggested she’d like to spend more time with her family as their busy schedule sometimes didn’t allow for as much time together. In relation to communication, Brooks and his father were moderately satisfied, suggesting their communication wasn’t negative, but it could be better.

“I don’t know, I feel like we just need to be more open-minded, like see everything around us; not just a couple of directions. Like put yourself in their shoes and see what they’re seeing, feel what they’re feeling.” – Brooks

Accordingly, these perceptions helped to explain the low to moderate satisfaction rating provided by the father on the FACES IV survey, which is generally representative of the entire family systems view of satisfaction in travel ice hockey.

### **Family 58 Profile**

Family 58 is a White nuclear family consisting of two parents and five children, ages 18 years old (male), 12 years old (female), 8 years old (male), 3 years old (female) and a newborn (male). The current family structure is nuclear; however, the family identified as a stepfamily because the father remarried after having his first son, Gavin (18-year-old, male) at 21 years old

with his first wife whom he is now divorced from. Gavin's biological mother was not interviewed in the current study. Accordingly, the father met his current wife two years later and they share four children together (12-year-old, female; 8-year-old, male; 3-year-old, female; and newborn, male). The father's wife met his oldest son, Gavin, when he 3-years-old and has thus been a part of his life ever since as his stepmother. The father completed some college and works as a firefighter while the mother completed college and works as a nurse. Together, they make an average annual income between \$100,001-\$249,999 a year.

The father got involved recreationally with ice hockey later in life, around 21 years old, when he was hired at the fire department and joined a men's league. The father's ice hockey involvement was a major reason as to why his two sons got involved with ice hockey themselves. The father remembers taking his oldest son, Gavin to the rink with him every day and his participation took off from there and has been a major part of their family's life ever since. The mother did not follow hockey nor know much about it until meeting her husband, who introduced her to the sport. Thus, the family agreed that the father was highly influential in getting them involved with the hockey experience.

The family has been involved in travel ice hockey since 2010 and two of their children (18-year-old male; 8-year-old male), Gavin and Cooper, participated and currently participate as goalies. The boys do not participate in any other sports outside of ice hockey. Gavin's family dynamics were different from his younger step siblings as he had both his biological mother and stepmother involved in his life. Accordingly, this dynamic played an important role in Gavin's ice hockey experience, as his biological mother and father had very different views regarding his participation. According to Gavin's father, Gavin's biological mother did not want him to participate in travel ice hockey because she felt it was too expensive and did not want to travel.

Therefore, she took him out of the sport around 9 years old after he had played for a competitive Triple A team in the Michigan area.

Growing up, the different views regarding Gavin's travel ice hockey participation was a major point of contention between his biological mother and father, which was a constant struggle and argument. The family suggested they experienced very few stressors in travel ice hockey aside from the stress caused by Gavin's biological mother's lack of support and interest toward travel ice hockey. With this in mind, Gavin's biological mother and father disagreed so much so that it led to a court hearing regarding the matter in which the father lost and was therefore required to accept that Gavin would not be participating in ice hockey while he was under his biological mother's care. This led to Gavin taking a few years off from ice hockey (between the ages of 9 and 12 years old), which was difficult because Gavin felt he was a skilled player, and a lot of teams were interested in having him play for them. Following a few years off, Gavin returned to ice hockey around 12 years old after an old coach asked his father if Gavin wanted to play goalie for his travel team. The father explained that they didn't have any gear and he couldn't afford it on his own, so the team offered to pay for Gavin's participation, and he played with them through high school. According to Gavin's father, Gavin's biological mother allowed him to play in this instance because she did not have to contribute toward expenses and/or travel to and from practices and competitions. Gavin was too young to understand the impact of his biological mother's decision on his development as a goalie; however, reflecting on this today, Gavin felt that had he not taken time off, he may have made it to play Division I college hockey. Gavin currently plays for a Division III club ice hockey program. Accordingly, these dynamics will be discussed in further detail related to the family's functioning within the presentation of qualitative findings below.

With Gavin's hockey participation in mind, his younger stepbrother, Cooper (8-years-old), got involved with hockey as a goalie in part because of their father and because he looked up to Gavin and wanted to be a goalie just like him. Cooper currently plays up on a U10 travel ice hockey team in Michigan. Along with his travel ice hockey participation, Cooper meets with a private goalie coach at least one day a week to train. The other children in the family do not participate in travel ice hockey. However, the daughter, Mya (12 years old) has been participating in competitive dance since she was 3 years old and attends practices every day with competitions on the weekends. Mya was never interested in playing ice hockey because she can't skate and really enjoys dance.

The family described travel ice hockey as an important aspect of their life, suggesting that it is something that the whole family enjoys – the children love it, and it makes the parents happy to know they are supporting their children in something they enjoy. Their son's travel ice hockey participation has provided the parents with a sense of pride and also taught them that you put your kids first.

With this in mind, the family suggested travel ice hockey was a significant time and financial commitment, which sometimes resulted in making sacrifices in other areas of their life (e.g., vacations, not seeing friends). Accordingly, while individual interests existed among the mother and father, they suggested they did not have time to pursue them during hockey season. However, they never viewed characteristics such as time and money in a negative light, or, as a depletion of their resources. While the family suggested that the time and financial expectations (e.g., hotel costs, equipment costs) could put a strain on them at times, they firmly believed that it was worth it for their children. The father suggested that the time commitment was necessary if you wanted your child to get recognized:

“If they’re gonna go anywhere in hockey there’s a lot of pressure to play hockey year-round, if that makes sense? So, you always gotta be on the ice if you’re gonna be good or get looked at. You’ve always gotta be in front of somebody doing something so.” - Father

Moreover, the mother felt that the time commitment for her children’s exclusive participation in travel ice hockey was no different than a child who participated in multiple sports, suggesting you would be putting in the same amount of time no matter if your child was specializing or diversifying his or her sport participation. Please refer below for the family’s travel ice hockey demographics (see Table 17).

Table 17. Summary of family 58 travel ice hockey demographics

Participants	Importance of Travel Ice Hockey in the Family	Hours/week commuting to and from practices and competitions	Hours/week participating in practices and competitions	Estimated annual financial investment toward travel ice hockey
Family 7	8	3-5 hours/week	5-6 hours/week	\$2,500-\$4,999

\*(1 = not important; 10 = very important)

The father suggested the most important reason as to why his children participated in travel ice hockey was to improve their skills. As parents, the mother and father had different goals for their son’s hockey participation. The fathers’ goals for his two sons centered on getting a scholarship and playing college ice hockey, highlighting a more outcome-oriented focus. In contrast, the mother identified more task-oriented goals for her son, Cooper, such as building confidence, learning commitment and social skills, and keeping active and healthy. Though the mother emphasized more task-oriented goals for Cooper, she was also supportive of her husband’s outcome-oriented goals, explaining that she just wanted him to experience the task-oriented outcomes too. The mother did not have specified goals for her stepson, Gavin, though



she supported him in all of his endeavors. With this in mind, Gavin suggested that his goals for ice hockey growing up aligned with his father's goals, aimed at reaching a collegiate level of play and then moving up to the professional ranks. Reflecting on his goals today, Gavin suggested that he was able to reach part of those goals by playing Division III college hockey. Cooper's goals also centered on playing college ice hockey someday.

Gavin's father and biological mother had different goals for Gavin as his biological mother did not want him to play ice hockey at all nor attend college because she wanted him to go straight into the work force. In contrast, Gavin's father wanted him to play ice hockey in order to receive a college hockey scholarship and attend college. These differing goals regarding Gavin's hockey participation caused considerable tension among this particular family system (biological mother, father, Gavin), subsequently impacting their functioning, which will be further described in the qualitative findings below.

In addition to describing their goals, family members also provided their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the travel ice hockey experience. Please refer to Table 18 below.

Table 18. Family 58 travel ice hockey goals, advantages, and disadvantages

Participants*	M	F	FTHA1	THA2	S	*T
Number of participants	1	1	1	1	1	7
Age of children			18	8	12	
Collective Family Themes						
Goals for Travel Ice Hockey Participation	<b>Outcome Oriented Goals (F, FTHA1, THA2)</b> Get a scholarship and play college ice hockey  <b>Task Oriented Goals (M)</b> Social Development Life Skill Development (learn commitment, build confidence) Keep Active, Stay Healthy					
Advantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Quality of Travel Ice Hockey (F)</b>					

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Table 18 (cont'd).

Promotes Strong Work Ethic  
More Structured with a “Want to Win”  
Attitude  
Higher Level of Competition  
Only good athletes will play

**Logistical Considerations (F)**  
Proximity of rink to family home

**Teaches Life Skills (M)**  
Organization and Time Management

**Opportunity to Travel/Experience New  
Places (FTHAI1)**

**Social Development (M, FTHAI1, S)**

**Opportunity to do what you love (THAI2)**  
Play goalie

**Enjoys Supporting Brothers (S)**

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Disadvantages of Travel Ice Hockey

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**Time Commitment (F, THAI1)**

**Financial Commitment (F, M)**

**Schedule Conflicts (M)**

**No Disadvantages (THAI2, S)**

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\*M = mother; F = father; FTHAI1 = Former travel ice hockey athlete, Male, 18 years old; THAI2 = Travel ice hockey athlete, male, 8 years old; S = Sibling, Female, 8 years old; T = total

\*T = total; there are 7 family members but only five were interviewed for this study due to developmental appropriateness to engage in an interview.

### **Quantitative FACES IV results**

According to the FACES IV results completed by the father, Family 58 was characterized as connected and flexible, embodying an overall balanced (i.e., balanced on both dimensions of cohesion and flexibility) and therefore healthy level of family functioning (see Figure 13). Specifically, related to cohesion, Family 58 is connected and thus able to strike equilibrium

between both separateness and togetherness. This means that family members are able to be both independent from and connected to their families and balance being separate and together in a more functional way. In this family, there is a balance of shared and individual interests along with a balance of emotional closeness and loyalty to the relationships that exist.

As for flexibility, Family 58 was characterized as flexible. The flexible family type falls within the balanced range of family functioning, suggesting, overall, the family is able to balance their system's stability versus change and importantly, adapt or change when necessary. The Circumplex model would suggest Family 58 is flexible when it comes to sharing leadership in the family, involving children in negotiations/decisions, and sharing and adapting roles and rules when necessary. Given the balanced level of functioning related to Family 58's flexibility, the family uses less authoritarian, controlling leadership and more democratic, shared leadership that involves the children in negotiations/decisions. Moreover, roles and rules that exist in the family are not strictly enforced. Instead, roles and rules that exist in the family can change as the members of the family and situational demands require.

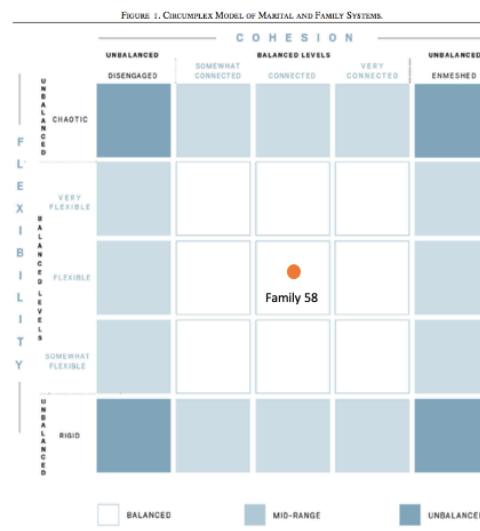


Figure 13. Family 58 dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

To understand the breakdown of Family 58's family functioning, one can refer to the family's percentile scores from the 6 scales (balanced – cohesion, flexibility; unbalanced cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; unbalanced flexibility - rigid, chaotic) plotted on the FACES IV profile below (see Figure 12).

Specifically, Family 58 was characterized by a connected, flexible score on the two balanced scales (i.e., balanced cohesion, balanced flexibility). Family 58 was characterized by a low to moderate rigid score on the unbalanced scale of flexibility and low scores on all other unbalanced extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic) (see Figure 14).

The family's balanced cohesion and flexibility scores, low to moderate rigid score, and low scores on all other extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic) helps one to interpret the family as having a connected, somewhat flexible functioning level.

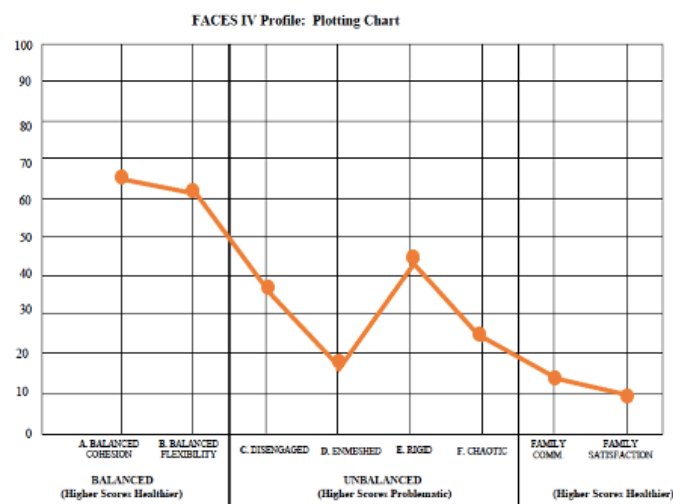


Figure 14. Family 58 percentile scores plotted on Circumplex model

Family 58 was also characterized by very low communication scores. Low communication scores suggest that Family 58 has unhealthy listening skills (empathy and attention), speaking skills (speaking for oneself instead of others), tracking (staying on topic),

and respect and regard (the affective aspects of communication). Additionally, the family has negative feelings about their family communication. The family's low communication scores do not act as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility. With this in mind, Family 58's balanced functioning levels and low communication scores do not align with the Circumplex model's suggestion that balanced systems tend to have more positive, healthy communication whereas unbalanced systems tend to have poorer, unhealthy communication. Finally, Family 58 had very low and thus negative perceptions of satisfaction regarding their level of functioning related to cohesion, flexibility and communication.

### **Qualitative Semi-structured Interview Results**

This section provides Family 58's perception of their family functioning in travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model with accompanying quotes, followed by a description of the family's satisfaction with their functioning.

#### **Family 58 Goal Direction**

**Goal-directed toward outcome-oriented goals for Cooper supports family functioning.** As described in their profile, the mother and father had different goals for their son Cooper in travel ice hockey. The father's goals were outcome-oriented (receive a college scholarship to play ice hockey) and the mother's goals were task-oriented (e.g., build confidence, learn commitment, keep healthy and active). Despite these different goals, the mother suggested that like her husband, she too was competitive and wanted her son to play college hockey; however, she was also focused on task-oriented outcomes. Accordingly, the mother and father's goal misalignment did not negatively impact the family dynamics and/or functioning as the mother was on board with her husband's approach to their son's travel ice hockey experience and supported his actions taken to reach these identified goals.

**Misalignment of goal direction for Gavin does not support family functioning.** In contrast, there was an apparent misalignment of goals between Gavin, his father, and his biological mother in relation to Gavin’s ice hockey participation. Considering this misalignment of goals, one may infer that these particular members of the family system were not in equilibrium and therefore did not find balance in their functioning due to the biological mother not subscribing to the family’s goal direction (i.e., play college ice hockey). Within this case, it was suggested that the biological mother did not want Gavin to play hockey or attend college because she wanted him to go straight into the workforce. Given that there was low consensus about what the family’s goal was (among Gavin, his father, and his biological mother), this appeared to have led to decreased efficiencies in their functioning together.

## **Cohesion**

### **Optimal Balance of Separateness and Togetherness**

When asked about how tight knit and close the family was to one another, collectively, Family 58 viewed themselves as very close to one another. The family enjoyed their time spent together as well as their individual time spent apart. With this in mind, the family suggested that they embodied an *optimal balance of separateness and togetherness*.

Table 19. Family 58 optimal balance of separateness and togetherness

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Gavin</b>	<b>Cooper</b>	<b>Mya</b>
Optimal balance of separateness and togetherness	“Yeah, for sure so we do the hockey stuff together a lot but then even when we’re home like, Cooper has his friends like	“I think it’s a pretty good balance. Um, it just took me longer to get on that because I don’t know, I’m, you know I like	“I think it’s perfect, honestly. For me it’s a little different because I’m away now. But looking at how my	“Um I mean we spend, I guess we spend a lot of time together a little bit, but I also get to be	“Yeah I think, yeah. Because usually if we spend too much time together usually we start

Table 19  
(cont'd).

around the neighborhood and Mya does her own thing, like she's 12. So, she, there's a horse rescue place right by our house and she does that on weekends."	to be around my husband, and I like to be around my kids. So, um that was a little harder for me I think just cause like I said, when you're working all day and then you wanna see everybody"	dad is and my stepmom is with the kids now, when I'm not there, they're, I mean, I can't picture it being any more balanced."	with my friends and do stuff I like away from my family too."	arguing and then it, they start yelling and it gets annoying."
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While all family members perceived an optimal balance of separateness and togetherness, it took the mother longer to come to terms with the family's time spent apart. In this case, the mother described learning how to accept that the family couldn't always be together in order to function efficiently, especially in the context of travel ice hockey.

"I think you just have to come to that understanding you know and try to remember OK this is, the focus is you know we want them to build these skills so we can't always all be there together at once but we're still you know, really close so." – Mother

The family suggested that they were able to balance their separateness and togetherness in the travel ice hockey experience. For example, travel ice hockey tournament weekends were deemed a valuable opportunity for the family to spend time together at the rink and outside of the rink such as going out to dinner afterwards or staying at hotels together. With this in mind, family members also explained that time apart was important outside of travel ice hockey as the family often engaged in their own individual activities whether that involved volunteering at the horse

rescue center, hanging out with friends, or participating in a golf league. The ability to balance the family's separateness and togetherness was important for supporting the family's functioning.

### **Hockey as a Family Affair Impacts Cohesion**

**Hockey as a family affair not always possible.** In this case, the family strived to make travel ice hockey a *family affair*, as they all felt that it brought them closer through the bonding experiences that they shared. While the family strived to make the travel ice hockey experience a family affair, it was not always possible given the parents occupations and family member's involvement in other activities. For example, the father suggested while travel ice hockey was overall adaptive for their family's cohesion, drawbacks existed due to his occupation as a firefighter and the time commitment of travel ice hockey. Specifically, the father worked 12 days out of the month for 24-hour straight shifts in addition to attending hockey practices and games, which impacted his time spent at home with the family.

“So then if I’m gone for 24 hours and then come home the next day and then there’s a hockey practice then I’m gone for those hours [laughs] you know what I mean? It’s a little different so like our time, my time off, we try to spend as much time together because I’m not home a lot if that makes sense?” - Father

With this in mind, the time spent apart from the family weighed heavily especially on the mother.

“Um sometimes it’s hard because I’ll be at work all day right? And then I get home and he has hockey practice you know, which is for the travel team. But um so then I’m coming home and they’re leaving. So, its multiple days like that um so sometimes I’ll be like Gosh I feel like I don’t see them. You know?”



## Hockey as a Shared Interest Among Family

**Hockey as a shared interest enhances cohesion.** Regarding travel ice hockey as a shared versus individual interest, the family suggested it was a *shared interest* across family members, which was helpful for bringing the family closer and supporting their functioning. The family suggested it would be difficult to function together in this context if travel ice hockey wasn't a shared interest. A specific example was provided by the mother of Family 58 (i.e., biological mother of the four children; stepmother of Gavin) explaining how Gavin's biological mother's lack of interest in hockey led to dysfunction and conflict between Gavin, his biological mother, and his father's family system.

“Like she didn't care about it [travel ice hockey] so she just didn't concern herself with it. So, it was like trying to [laughs] just you know, if you don't have somebody interested in it then they're probably going to be mad when they have to go and get mad when they you know, it's a constant battle because you know you don't share that same interest.” –

Mother

Navigating his parents being on two different extremes regarding their interests in travel ice hockey was difficult for Gavin because he didn't want to upset his father but at the same time had to consider his biological mother's feelings regarding the matter. In this case, there was evident tension between Gavin's biological mother and father, which created an unhealthy boundary between members of their system. Specifically, the boundary between the two parents and Gavin was not kept intact, resulting in Gavin being placed at the center of the tension experiencing conflicting duties and emotions. Gavin was indirectly “triangulated” as a third person in his parent's disagreement regarding his travel ice hockey participation.

“Like I said, me and my dad are best friends so it’s kinda hard for me to go against anything he says because I don’t wanna ruin the relationship we have together. And when it comes to hockey you know, I don’t want to upset her, but I explained to my mom you know like I know this isn’t your thing and that’s OK, but this is what I wanna do [emphasized] so like she just needs to support my decisions you know because this is what I’m going to be doing no matter what.” – Gavin

Accordingly, because Gavin’s biological mother didn’t share the same interests as he and his father, their relationship suffered, and they were not as close to one another.

**Hockey as shared interest between father and son has its ups and downs.** Most family members believed that hockey as a shared interest brought them family closer. However, Gavin, the oldest son, suggested hockey as a shared interest with his father had its ups and downs. Gavin alluded to the idea that his father cared a lot about hockey and wanted he and Cooper to be the best that they could be in this context; however, sometimes his father was overinvested in their participation, which created tension at times within their subsystem relationship.

“It has its ups and downs. He doesn’t understand what we’re going through so if we have a bad practice or something like that you know he can get mad or whatever. And I mean I see it with Cooper now, he’s so young so it’s kinda tough to say anything or teach him really but he’ll understand it eventually. And I think dad understands it more, it’s just hard. He wants to push us to be the best that we can be and we’re, we try but he doesn’t see it how we do.” – Gavin

## **Family Operates Dependently and Independently**

**Team effort for decision making.** In the travel ice hockey context, the family described themselves as operating both independently and dependently. In regard to decisions (e.g., playing up in 10U hockey, private lessons, scheduling), the family operated as a team, involving all family members. Typically, the mother and father would discuss and then include their children before coming to a final decision, which seemed to work well for the family. For example, when deciding whether Cooper should move up to play 10U travel ice hockey, the family considered if this would be a developmentally appropriate situation (psychologically and physically). The mother and father asked Cooper what he wanted to do, and he said he wanted to move up. After coming together, the family decided to allow Cooper to move up to play 10U travel ice hockey.

**Family support enhances cohesion.** The family's independent functioning was a result of their constant "on the go" schedules. Often, the family had to function independently in order to ensure their children made it to ice hockey and dance. With this in mind, the father took on the majority of travel ice hockey obligations and was considered the most involved member of the family. When discussing family member involvement in travel ice hockey, all participants identified the father as the most involved member of the family. While the father was the most involved, all family members were highly supportive of travel ice hockey. For example, both parents provided unconditional support toward their sons' hockey participation, Gavin helped Cooper with his goalie game when he is home from college, and Mya liked to attend her brothers' games and cheer for them. In turn, the boys supported Mya's dance participation, though it was described as an "obligation" by the mother. The father's in-laws were also highly involved in their grandchildren's travel ice hockey experience and often attended tournaments

and games when they could. Family member supportiveness was helpful for the family's cohesion.

Table 20. Family 58 family supportiveness enhances cohesion

Theme	Father	Mother	Gavin	Cooper	Mya
Family supportiveness enhances cohesion	<p>“you know, with his [Cooper] mom, you know, she just, all she, I mean she likes hockey, and she supports it but she just wants to make sure that he’s having a good time. So like, that he’s having fun, you know? Travel hockey or not travel hockey, she wants to make sure that he’s having fun.”</p>	<p>“As far as um you know Cooper of course looked up to Gavin a lot. Um, and now that Gavin is older you know when he can, he, he’ll help out Cooper or you know, which is really nice because that makes Coop feel great and you know they’re pretty tight like that so that’s nice even though there’s a huge age difference.”</p>	<p>“She [mother] does support me and she’s said that multiple times. Um but compared to like how it brings me and my dad together? It’s not close to the same. They’re two totally different relationships when it comes to that aspect of it.</p>	<p>“My brother and my dad help me get better in the net. We’re really close and it’s fun!”</p>	<p>“Yeah, everybody supports each other I think yeah usually. Like we all go to eachothers things and stuff.”</p>

**Lack of support from Gavin's biological mother decreases cohesion.** While there was strong family support for travel ice hockey among the stepfamily, there was an evident lack of support from the biological mother within the family system shared with Gavin and his father. As suggested by the father and his current wife, Gavin's biological mother was only supportive when it was a big event (e.g., Championship game).

"Um my mom on the other hand, you know, she's very wishy washy on whether she wants to support me or not." - Gavin

As previously mentioned, Gavin's biological mother did not share the same goals or interests as Gavin and his father when it came to his travel ice hockey participation and therefore did not allow him to play for a few years during his youth (ages 9-12 years).

"The biggest battle for Gavin was his mom. My ex-wife. A team called me and wanted me to bring Gavin to come try out, so we took him over there and they were like, yep, we want him to play. They were gonna cover all of our ice fees because we had to drive so far. So, it wasn't gonna cost his mom anything, so like she, I was gonna take him to practice and if I couldn't take him, my dad was gonna take him. So, she didn't have to do anything and she still said no." – Father

The lack of support for travel ice hockey from Gavin's biological mother ultimately hurt their relationship in the long run. As Gavin explained,

"When my mom told me to stop playing, I actually had a big try out for a team and they told me I had the spot. It was all mine, and my dad went to talk to my mom, and she wanted me to quit and that was kind of, that was it for us. You know, it kind of tore, it hurt the relationship between me and my mom." – Gavin

## Family Structure Matters

**Multiple children in the home impact time spent together versus separate.** A major contributing factor to the family's time spent apart was related to their *family structure*. Because there were 7 members in the family, it was more challenging for them to do things together, as one unit. For example, the father suggested that hockey was a "family event" until Mya's dance competitions began occurring on the same weekends as travel ice hockey, which then resulted in more time spent apart because the family had to split up to ensure their children could attend their activities.

With this in mind, the family made a helpful comparison when noting the differences between Gavin and Cooper's ice hockey participation. For Gavin, the family structure only consisted of himself, his father and his stepmother, which resulted in the family being able to focus all of their attention toward Gavin's participation. In contrast, today, with four more children in the mix, the mother and father were no longer able focus exclusively on one child; instead, they had to diversify their attention to accommodate all of their children's needs.

"Usually when we were going on trips for hockey you know it was all of us going together. Now, it's tougher because you know my dad has a 3-year-old and one on the way so it's harder to travel with all of the kids but back when I was doing it, I mean we all traveled together." – Gavin

Moreover, the family structure also altered the amount of time spent with individual children in the family. For example, the father highlighted an instance that resulted in conflict between he and his wife surrounding the amount of time spent with Gavin on the ice growing up in comparison to Cooper today.

“If you wanna talk about the split family thing, like when Gavin was little, Gavin was, you know I took Gavin to the ice rink all the time. You know all the time, all the time we’re at the ice rink. Well then Cooper starts to play hockey and she’s like “well you never take Cooper to the ice rink like you took Gavin to the ice rink.” And I’m like, well no, because he [Gavin] was my only kid. At the time, I didn’t have anything else to do. You know what I mean?” – Father

### **Contextual Considerations Impact Cohesion**

**Practice decreases cohesion and games/tournaments enhance cohesion.** Another factor that impacted the family’s cohesion were contextual considerations related to practice and games. Specifically, practices throughout the week led to more separateness in the family, whereas games and/or tournament weekends led to more time spent together as a family. In Family 58, because of their family structure and children’s involvement in various activities, the family modified their cohesion (togetherness versus separateness) based on the situation presented (e.g., practice and/or game; scheduling conflicts with children’s activities). Accordingly, the family felt that such contextual factors contributed to their balance of separateness and togetherness, as travel ice hockey led to more separateness throughout the week but was balanced by weekends spent together as a family at tournaments and games.

### **Travel Ice Hockey Impacts Subsystem Relationships**

**Father-son and sibling subsystem relationships enhanced through travel ice hockey.** Travel ice hockey impacted subsystem relationships within the family as various coalitions were formed. Within the travel ice hockey context, family members agreed that enhanced subsystem relationships emerged primarily between the father and his sons and Gavin and Cooper. As the mother and Gavin described:

“Oh I think it definitely brings like father-son close, closer together. Um, because you know like I said, he takes him there, he gets him dressed, he helps him, you know? He’s always been involved with coaching for Gavin and Cooper.” - Mother

“I think it’s brought me and Cooper super, like really close together. Like I said, he’s always looked up to me and wanted to be like his brother, which is cool for me. I’ve never really had anybody look up to me like that. So that’s cool.” – Gavin

**Travel ice hockey creates ups and downs for father-son subsystem.** In regard to the father-son relationship, Gavin and his father each described one another as their “best friend.” Accordingly, while travel ice hockey was viewed as overall helpful for their relationship, both noted negative impacts on their relationship because of the father’s involvement as a coach in this context.

“The downside is, I help coach, and so there’s a lot of yelling involved [laughs] there’s a lot of yelling involved, so sometimes that doesn’t go over so well.” – Father

Gavin echoed this sentiment, suggesting that having his father as a coach was difficult at times. In this context, Gavin described that his father struggled balancing his “dad” and “coach” role.

“He didn’t understand what we were going through, or what we go through when we play so I mean it was hard because he wanted to push me to be the best that I could be but he didn’t understand that I was you know, trying already. So, he pushed me really hard.”

**Travel ice hockey impacts biological mother-son (Gavin) relationship.** Gavin’s biological mother’s lack of interest and support for his travel ice hockey participation resulted in a detached subsystem relationship. In this case, the lack of interest and support for Gavin’s travel ice hockey participation resulted in decreased closeness and lower communication among the biological mother and Gavin, negatively impacting their relationship shared with one another.



**Travel ice hockey impacts marital dyad.** Interestingly, travel ice hockey also impacted the marital dyad shared between the mother and father. In this context, the parents had different views on their balance of separateness and togetherness within their marital dyad. While the two agreed that travel ice hockey resulted in spending less time together, this was perceived more negatively by the mother. Specifically, because of travel ice hockey and the father's occupation, she felt that he was never home to spend time with her and the family. The father suggested that his wife wanted the best of both worlds, which was not realistic for the family given their goals for Cooper in travel ice hockey.

“So now he's [Cooper] playing travel hockey and she's like “well it's a lot” and I'm like, well you wanted him to be like Gavin or better so this is the road we have to go down [laughs] you know what I mean?” – Father

In line with this point, the father suggested that while he would like to spend more time with his wife, it's the sacrifice they make for their kids, which is just a part of marriage. With this in mind, the mother did not lack self-awareness regarding her unrealistic expectations for she and her husband's togetherness given their involvement in travel ice hockey, suggesting that she must look at things from a different perspective and realize that what you might want to happen is very different from the reality of what is happening given the decision they made to pursue travel ice hockey.

## **Flexibility**

### **Family as “Go with the Flow”**

Collectively, Family 58 viewed themselves as flexible with the ability to change or adapt when necessary, describing themselves as “going with the flow.” These interviews helped to explain the family's quantitative results from the FACES IV, suggesting they were a flexible

family type. While the family was definitely flexible, their interviews suggested that they were almost too flexible at times and would benefit from a little more structure in their lives.

“Almost too flexible sometimes. You know, I mean almost flexible to a fault. Like, we’re, to the point where we’re like, just tell them no! You know, like, no we’re not gonna do that today.” – Father

### **Balance of Stability and Change Supports Family Functioning**

**Flexibility is required to make the travel ice hockey experience work.** With this in mind, the family insisted that you have to be flexible in the context of travel ice hockey in order to make it work. In Family 58, travel ice hockey was described as unpredictable and ever-changing, so it was important that the family was able to accommodate these changes when necessary. Some examples mentioned regarding characteristics of travel ice hockey that required flexibility were changes in the league schedule, not knowing the game/tournament schedule until last minute, and changes related to the private goalie sessions.

Table 21. Family 58 flexibility is required to make the travel ice hockey experience work

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Gavin</b>	<b>Cooper</b>	<b>Mya</b>
Flexibility is required to make the travel ice hockey experience work	“ Yeah cause it’s just so, I mean, uh it’s just so, like there could be a change tomorrow, you know uh we got practice, practice, then a game and then	“There’s like things, yeah like the schedule changes sometimes or oh we gotta come up a day before now [laughs] or you know and sometimes that’s a little sketchy if I’m working	“ They’re very flexible. Really they just go with the flow more than anything because I mean, they don’t ever know, you know 10x out of 10 Coopers got, I mean	“I do lots of hockey stuff so my mom and dad are always trying to make sure that they can take me or find somebody to get me there, so I don’t miss. I never really miss	“Yeah, you have to be flexible. Sometimes like uh I have like dance competitions and stuff and then they have, and Cooper has a hockey tournament or something and so we

Table 21  
(cont'd).

you know that night the team manager will schedule another game you know or whatever so it's always changing. So, we gotta be kinda flexible for that"	then you know, but you do, you just have to go with the flow I guess really."	right now he's at a hockey thing so like he's always busy. Mya's always busy and you know it's crazy. So, I would say they have to be a very very very flexible family."	hockey, so I think my parents are good at that."	have to figure out like whose going with who."
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Other examples of how the family was flexible in this context involved adapting the mother and father's work schedules to accommodate Cooper's travel ice hockey games and practices. Sometimes, when the family was unable to change their work schedules, which happened often, they would send Cooper with another hockey family until they could get off work and join him. When travel ice hockey and dance fell on the same weekends, the family would split up, typically with the mother going with Mya to dance and the father going with Cooper to ice hockey. Additionally, the father was very flexible when it came to Coopers private goalie lessons as ice often opened up on short notice and he wanted to ensure that Cooper was able to meet for these sessions so he did what he could to make them work.

#### **Family's Previous Travel Ice Hockey Experience Enhances Flexibility**

With this in mind, the family suggested that their previous experience with Gavin's travel ice hockey participation helped to prepare the family to accommodate this experience and be

flexible. In this case, Gavin's travel ice hockey participation provided a blueprint for what the parents should expect.

“Like now for Cooper they all, they obviously know what to expect because they have changed, um they know what to expect so if that does happen you know they know OK well this has to happen and what not, so they don't really get all flustered about it. I feel like me being in hockey back then, before they had all the kids has helped them now.” – Gavin

**Stability in leadership and roles support family functioning.** Other aspects of the family's dynamics that contributed to their balance of stability and change were the family's stable leadership, inexplicitly stated rules, and stable roles. In this case, the family maintained stability primarily in their leadership and roles, which in turn supported the family's functioning in travel ice hockey. Rules in the family were not explicitly stated, though the family had expectations such as picking up after themselves and trying to sit down together for dinner when possible. The family suggested that hockey impacted their ability to sit down and eat dinner together as a family because they were constantly on the go. Therefore, the family would modify their behavior in order to spend some time together by eating at the rink as a family instead.

“This is so sad [laughs], sometimes we would just honestly like eat there. Like eat the um eat there, so at least we were together uh and hang out. So, it's just different. We still do it it's just different.” -Mother

In regard to leadership, the family identified the father as the “hockey leader”, because of his knowledge and interest surrounding the sport. In this context, the father was largely in control, which was supported by the family and viewed as adaptive for their functioning in this context. With this in mind, the father took on more hockey related roles (e.g., coach, transporter,

finances – purchases equipment) whereas the mother’s role centered on taking care of the home and helping out with the travel ice hockey experience when needed. The family suggested these roles were generally stable, though they felt they could adapt if needed.

### **Family Structure Matters**

**Family operates in “organized chaos” due to large family structure.** Family members tended to take things day by day, operating with little to no planning and organization due to their family structure (5 children in the family) and the many activities (e.g., work schedules, travel ice hockey, dance) they were trying to balance within their system. With this in mind, the family had more flexibility when their focus was just on Gavin’s ice hockey participation in comparison to now, where their attention has to be diversified to consider the activities of their four other children.

When asked about how Family 58 functioned in relation to their flexibility, family members described it as “organized chaos” as a result of their large family and busy lives.

“We’re definitely chaotic but it’s just the way that our system is you know with everything going on so. With my schedule and her schedule and hockey and dance, it’s just the way our life goes.” – Father

“I mean it’s organized but it’s chaotic. I don’t know because we’re all doing so many things. But yet we somehow are organized. And we make it work, yeah.” – Mother

With this in mind, because the family was so busy throughout the week it was suggested that communication was lost in translation at times between the mother and father, which contributed to their “organized chaos” functioning. Accordingly, it was agreed that struggles with communication stemmed primarily from the father, which created obstacles at times for the family, especially when it came to organizing themselves to adapt to their family’s travel ice

hockey expectations and the other activities, they were involved in. Though there were breakdowns in communication at times, the family worked through them to accommodate the travel ice hockey experience. As such, Family 58 did so by functioning in as “organized chaos.”

**Father’s occupation leads to difficulties with flexibility.** The father suggested adjusting to change could be especially difficult for him at times given his work schedule (work 24 hour shifts as a firefighter), which often required the mother to take on a lot of the responsibilities with three children at home. Thus, the family’s ability to handle change typically depended on the situation. If it was something small, like having to leave earlier for a game, that’s usually wasn’t a major issue. However, if it was something larger, it could cause chaos in the family. Despite these difficulties, the family was adamant that they figured out a way to make things work. In line with this point, the family’s structure also impacted flexibility.

**Extended family supports family’s flexibility.** With this in mind, a factor that helped the family maintain their balance of stability and change in the context of travel ice hockey was their strong extended support system (i.e., grandparents). The family’s extended support from the children’s grandparents seemed to be a vital aspect of the family’s ability to function in the context of travel ice hockey. For example, when travel ice hockey and dance fell on the same day, Mya suggested her grandparents helped out by having her stay the night with them and then took her to her dance competition while her parents went with Cooper to his travel ice hockey tournament. The mother and father agreed:

“We just have our support system you know is really really good. I mean as much as they complain about doing everything, um, I think my mother-in-law would do it in a heartbeat. You know what I mean? And so, she might be disgusted by it, but she would be like Oh I’ll do it! You know?” – Father

“And then sometimes like even my mom would take Mya to dance or something you know? It just um, we just have great support so it’s, it just works, it ends up working out with us no matter what so yeah.” – Mother

Related to the extra help the family received from the children’s grandparents, the father reflected on his concerns regarding what would happen if they didn’t have this extra support in the travel ice hockey context. The father noted that he had missed a lot of hockey tournaments in the past due to his work schedule and his in-laws had really stepped up to help them in these situations. As such, the father suggested it would be very difficult to function without his in-laws but also explained that they “won’t want to be doing this [helping with travel ice hockey] shit forever.” Accordingly, extended family support was a critical factor for supporting Family 58’s ability to function adaptively in the travel ice hockey context.

### **Travel Ice Hockey Structure Impacts Flexibility**

**Travel ice hockey schedule/expectations enhance and limit flexibility.** Accordingly, travel ice hockey made it both easier and more difficult to be flexible in this context. For example, the mother suggested that when the hockey structure was set in stone and the schedule didn’t change, it was easier for the family to accommodate its expectations. With this in mind, there were also characteristics of travel ice hockey which limited the family’s flexibility due to their larger family structure, such as the cost associated with it.

“Like sometimes like everybody wants to go and then like it gets to be a lot of money and stuff. And then like, I feel like it’s just harder sometimes.” – Mya

## **Communication**

### **Communication Facilitates Family Functioning**

Overall, Family 58 suggested it would not be possible to participate in travel ice hockey without communication because there were so many people that need to be included in their family (e.g., two parents, five children, in-laws) to make the travel ice hockey experience work. Travel ice hockey provided an avenue for communication to occur within the family. In some instances, travel ice hockey “forced” the family to communicate, which was perceived as helpful for the family’s overall communication in this context.

### **Communication Challenging at Times Due to Family’s Constant “On the Go” Functioning**

There were mixed reviews regarding the family’s perceptions of their communication as the parents suggested communication was challenging at times while the children felt the communication was exceptional. For the parents, communication was challenging in part due to their busy lives. The mother and father sometimes failed to keep up with everything going on with their day-to-day functioning as a result of a lack of communication.

**Father’s communication skills are a barrier.** With this in mind, both parents suggested that the father’s communication skills were particularly lacking.

“Like I, I just, I feel like, it’s probably because I don’t, I feel like I tell Rachel everything, but I probably don’t and so then when it comes time to uh do like hockey or a training, I’m like ‘oh I’m pretty sure I told you even though if I didn’t tell her. You know? So, um, so I’m probably, that’s probably my, yeah I’m probably the worst at that.” – Father

“Yeah, just a little more you know, I can’t remember everything so you just, I’m like can you write it down? You know? And he might do it for a week and then he doesn’t do it



anymore. Or like he'll send me, he sent me like the schedule you know? And I'm like well print it!" - Mother

The father suggested that his issue with communication was not the fact that he didn't communicate, rather, it was *when* he communicated that was the problem as he usually did so last minute. As mentioned above, concerns surrounding the father's communication sometimes created difficulties related to the family's ability to adapt in the travel ice hockey context. Importantly, the family always figured out a way to adapt when they needed to; however, it was often done in a chaotically organized manner.

### **Children's Communication Skills Vary by Personality**

The children's personalities also impacted their ability to communicate. The mother described Mya as more introverted and therefore less likely to share and engage in open communication. In contrast, Cooper was described as an open book suggesting he would tell you exactly how he feels.

"He [Cooper] is an open book, the kind of kid where um he doesn't lie and he talks to us about everything, which we tried to get um our kids to do anyway." – Father

"Mya might think about something for a week or two and then come back and say hey you know, finally talk about it. She's not a big uh touchy feely person. Um but you know that she's sweet and you know that she's thinking about stuff and you know things affect her so you just, like with her you're just a little more careful because I think she's a little more introverted." – Mother

### **Poor Communication Skills Among Oldest Son**

**Gavin's poor communication skills are a result of dysfunctional family system.** With this in mind, both the mother and father suggested that Gavin had very poor communication

skills, which may have stemmed from the family dynamics surrounding his biological mother and father's contentious relationship growing up. Gavin suggested that communication between he and his biological mother was lacking, because he grew up not having that relationship with her like he did with his father in hockey and life. Accordingly, the father explained Gavin was open when things were going great but not when they were going bad.

"He is the kind of kid where um he [Cooper] doesn't lie and he talks to us about everything, which we tried to get um our kids to do anyway, which was hard for Gavin because he you know, he went back and forth so um, our kids are usually pretty open about everything that's going on that they have." – Father

When asked about his own communication skills, Gavin provided no indication that he had poor communication skills and suggested that he regularly engaged in open communication with his family.

**Gavin's poor communication skills a result of pressure from father as both dad and coach.** Another reason that was put forth by the father to explain Gavin's poor communication was the idea that Gavin felt pressure from his dad to play ice hockey. Interestingly, this was corroborated by Gavin, as he agreed that he felt pressure from his dad to play hockey, suggesting that his dad got upset when Gavin tried to explain to him that there was more to life than hockey.

"I'm up north visiting my girlfriend and I know my goalie coach has practices this week that my dad wants me to go to but I'm gonna be gone all week so you know, and you can tell by how he is he gets upset about it and stuff. But, like, I try to explain to him too you know, like it's my life you know? I gotta do my own thing as well. I can't let hockey control my life like, yeah it is what I like to do. I love to play hockey and stuff and I wanna be the best that I can be, but I can't just rely on hockey either." – Gavin

In regard to the father, there was also a fine line between balancing communication with his sons as both dad and coach. The father explained that on the ice, he yelled at his son, just like the other coaches, and his sons responded well.

“Unless he has a terrible practice and I really gotta get into him, uh he usually takes it really really well. Because like I said, nothing usually bothers him, like even when, if he, even when he’s getting beat 21-0 like he comes off the ice just smiling and whatever so.”

– Father

Off the ice, specifically during the car ride home, the father suggested he put on his dad “hat” and used the sandwich approach to provide constructive feedback regarding his son’s performance and how he could improve.

Overall, the family felt that while communication was difficult at times, they recognized its importance and tried their best to keep open lines of communication in this context.

Accordingly, the family’s perceptions of their communication better explain the FACES IV communication scores completed by the father. In this case, the father’s communication skills were lacking, which was collectively agreed upon by other members in the family system.

### **Satisfaction**

Family 58 was satisfied with dimensions of their family functioning, with the exception of the mother and father who were not satisfied with the father’s communication skills. When describing this, the father suggested that he was the biggest downfall for his family’s communication. The wife echoed this sentiment, suggesting that while she was satisfied for the most part and thought her family tried to communicate regularly, it wasn’t always at 100% and could improve, especially related to her husband. Outside of this suggested area of improvement, the family, including the parents and children, were satisfied with their cohesion and flexibility.

Accordingly, these perceptions helped to explain the lower satisfaction rating provided by the father on the FACES IV. With this in mind, the family satisfaction scores were more representative of the father's views of his poor communication, rather than the collective family's functioning related to cohesion and flexibility.

### **Family 79 Profile**

Family 79 is a White nuclear family consisting of two biological parents and two children, ages 18 years old (male) and 15 years old (male). Both parents completed high school and then entered the work force. The father works as a small business owner while the mother works as a phone center manager for a local eye care provider. Together, they described themselves as a "blue collar hardworking" family. Together, they make an average annual income between \$50,000-\$100,000 a year. The father got involved with ice hockey as a teenager when a man affiliated with the minor league professional team in the area mentored him and provided him with a job opportunity to clean up the locker room and travel with the team. The father suggested he did not get an early start in ice hockey like most successful junior, Division I, and professional players because he did not have a father figure in his life growing up. Instead, the father picked up playing ice hockey recreationally around 14-15 years old when he started working for the semi-professional team and some of the goalies passed down their equipment to him. Through this experience, the father developed a love and passion for ice hockey, which ultimately led him to introduce the sport to his two sons. Family members echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the father played an influential role introducing the family to ice hockey. Skyler and Kurtis began ice hockey around 6 years old and 3 years old, respectively. With this in mind, Kurtis always wanted to be a goalie, so he started first with roller hockey because his parents wanted to ensure that it was something he really wanted to do before investing a lot of money

toward goalie equipment and the overall experience. Accordingly, both boys began with the “learn to skate” and then “learn to play” development programs and then transitioned to 8U ice hockey before starting the travel ice hockey experience.

The family has been involved in travel ice hockey since 2006 and two of their children, Skyler (18-year-old male) and Kurtis (15-year-old male), participate(d) in travel ice hockey. The family suggested that Kurtis participated for more competitive reasons whereas Skyler’s participation was more focused on the social opportunities it provided. The oldest son, Skyler, played travel ice hockey in the Michigan area until high school when his parents took him out of the sport as a result of poor grades in the classroom. This was very disappointing to Skyler, as he described ice hockey as an important part of his life, which helped him to make friends. Now, Skyler works full time as a sales manager at a mechanic shop. The younger son, Kurtis currently participates on a travel ice hockey team in the Michigan area and the family’s functioning revolves around his participation.

“Hockey comes first. We do hockey first and then we plan our, we basically, I joke, I have no life during hockey season. Don’t really plan on us being able to do anything because more than likely, we’re not going to be able to.” – Mother

The family’s focus on Kurtis’s ice hockey participation was made apparent through the interviews, as the family seemed to only reference their system in relation to the mother, father, and Kurtis, often disregarding the oldest son, Skyler (unless probed by the researcher). Accordingly, the three family members (mother, father, Kurtis) suggested they were all on the same page regarding their functioning, even Skyler, as the mother explained that he understood the family’s commitment toward Kurtis’s ice hockey participation because he had lived the same experience growing up. Interestingly, Skyler had a different perspective than his family

regarding their functioning in travel ice hockey, which resulted in decreased perceptions of cohesion and communication.

The family described travel ice hockey as a very important aspect of their lives, suggesting their day-to-day functioning is based around it (see Table 22). Interestingly, though it was made clear that the family's lives revolved around hockey, they suggested it didn't dominate their lives and there was time for other activities such as riding dirt bikes and being with friends. With this in mind, travel ice hockey was deemed a significant time and financial commitment though the parents did not view this as a depletion of their resources. While the parents acknowledged that they've struggled in the past with the cost and expectations tied to ice hockey, they chose to adopt a "whatever it takes" mentality to make this experience work.

"I mean yeah obviously it is very expensive um I probably wouldn't have as much debt as I do now um, but I don't, I mean I don't regret it." – Mother

The father suggested that some families may look at what they are missing out on when they invest in their child, whereas he focuses on his son's joy from playing, which is the reward for all the time and money invested. Moreover, for the father, Kurtis's ice hockey participation meant the world to him as he felt he was able to give Kurtis something he never had, a father figure to guide him through this experience. The father growing up without a father figure seemed to be a driving force for the way he approached his son's travel ice hockey experience.

"My viewpoint is a little bit different um, I don't know, I think it's just from the way my life path and my journey of not having an opportunity or a father. So, I guess the way I view it is, is I'm gonna do it - it's a whatever it takes mentality for me." – Father

Accordingly, this positive approach adopted by the father was also said to have built unity within the family.

“It goes back to that vacation thing. It’s like, a lot of family’s mindsets I think are thinking about beaches and vacations where I guess I’m the total opposite. I don’t look at it like “oh I’m, I spent \$10,000 in hockey this year when I could be going to you know Italy or something.” – Father

Taken together, Family 79 was a rigidly positive family when it came to their son’s travel ice hockey experience; meaning no matter how difficult things would get, the family approached things with an “all in” mentality because they believed they were doing what was best for their son and helping him reach success in travel ice hockey.

Table 22. Summary of family 79 travel ice hockey demographics

Participants	*Importance of Travel Ice Hockey in the Family	Hours/week commuting to and from practices and competitions	Hours/week participating in practices and competitions	Estimated annual financial investment toward travel ice hockey
Family 7	9	6+ hours/week	11+ hours/week	\$5,000-\$9,999

\*(1 = not important; 10 = very important)

The mother and father noted the most important reason as to why their son participates in travel ice hockey is to earn a college scholarship. The father explained that his son’s passion is to play at a high level. As parents, the goals they have for Kurtis are to be a good person, work hard and succeed in whatever he pursues in life, and ultimately play Division I hockey and eventually make it to the NHL. In addition to these hockey related goals, the father suggested Kurtis also has goals to attend college and become a veterinarian. Kurtis’ goals aligned with his parents as he stated he wanted to make it to juniors and then “keep moving up.” With this in mind, the father was adamant that Kurtis sets these goals for himself and has taken the reigns in terms of his hockey participation. Considering these goals, it was evident that the focus of the family’s travel ice hockey participation was directed toward outcome-oriented goals.

“We all know, you know obviously what the ultimate goal is or goals you know either the NHL or you know, making it you know on a college scholarship or you know, I think we all have the same goals in mind.” – Mother

In addition to describing their goals, family members also provided their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the travel ice hockey experience. Please refer to Table 23 below.

Table 23. Family 79 travel ice hockey goals, advantages, and disadvantages

Participants*	M	F	THA1	S	T
Number of participants	1	1	1	1	4
Age of children			15	18	
Collective Family Themes					
Goals for Travel Ice Hockey Participation	<b>Outcome Oriented Goals (F, M, K)</b>				
	Play Division I Hockey				
	Make it to the NHL				
	<b>Task Oriented Goals (F)</b>				
	Work hard and succeed				
Advantages of Travel Ice Hockey	<b>Quality of Travel Ice Hockey (F)</b>				
	Provides better opportunity to be recognized by scouts (vs. recreational)				
	More competitive				
	Separates the “good” from the “great”				
	<b>Friendship and Social Development (F, M)</b>				
	Hockey Community				
	<b>Opportunity to Travel (K, S)</b>				
	<b>Promotes Family Organization (K, M)</b>				
	Structured hockey schedule				
	<b>Promotes Unity within Family (F, M, K)</b>				
	<b>Teaches life lessons (F)</b>				
	Life knocks you down, keep swinging				



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Table 23 (cont'd).

Disadvantages of Travel Ice Hockey

**No Disadvantages (F, K)**  
“Whatever it takes mentality”

**Miss out on Social Relationships (S)**

**Cost (M)**

**Breakdowns in Communication (M)**

**Creates Stress for Family (K)**

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\*M = mother; F = father; THA1 = Travel ice hockey athlete, Male, 15 years old; S = sibling; T = Total

### **Quantitative FACES IV results**

According to the FACES IV results completed by the father, Family 79 was characterized as very connected and flexible, embodying an overall balanced (i.e., balanced on both dimensions of cohesion and flexibility) and therefore healthy level of family functioning (see Figure 15). Specifically, related to cohesion, Family 79 is very connected, which suggests the family embodies high emotional closeness and loyalty regarding relationships. A very connected family relationship suggests time together is more important than time apart and emphasis is placed on togetherness. With this in mind, shared interests are common with some individual activities.

As for flexibility, Family 79 was characterized as flexible. The flexible family type falls within the balanced range of family functioning, suggesting, overall, the family is able to balance their system's stability versus change and importantly, adapt or change when necessary. The Circumplex model would suggest Family 79 is flexible when it comes to sharing leadership in the family, involving children in negotiations/decisions, and sharing and adapting roles and rules when necessary. Given the balanced level of functioning related to Family 79's flexibility, the

family uses less authoritarian, controlling leadership and more democratic, shared leadership that involves the children in negotiations/decisions. Moreover, roles and rules that exist in the family are not strictly enforced. Instead, roles and rules that exist in the family can change as the members of the family and situational demands require.

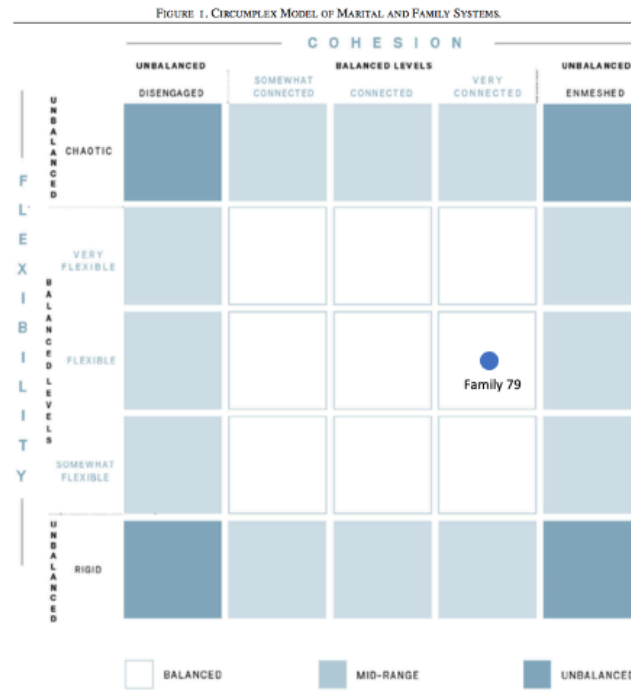


Figure 15. Family 79 dimension scores plotted on Circumplex model

To understand the breakdown of Family 79's family functioning, one can refer to the family's percentile scores from the 6 scales (balanced – cohesion, flexibility; unbalanced cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; unbalanced flexibility - rigid, chaotic) plotted on the FACES IV profile below (see Figure 16).

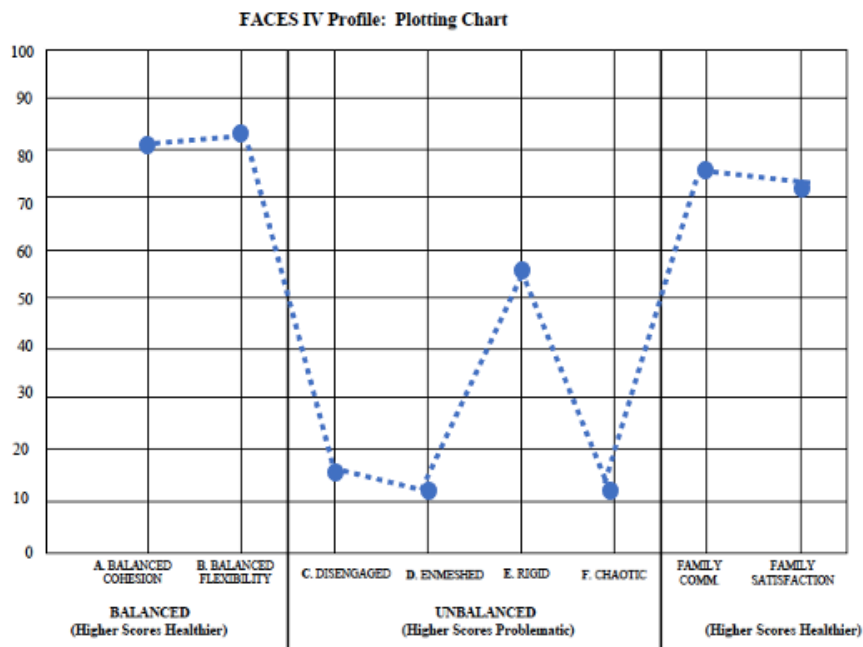


Figure 16. Family 79 percentile scores plotted on FACES IV profile

Specifically, Family 79 was characterized by a moderate rigid score on the unbalanced scale of flexibility and very low scores on all other unbalanced extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic). The family's balanced cohesion and flexibility scores, moderate rigid scores, and very low scores on all other extremes (cohesion: disengaged, enmeshed; flexibility: chaotic) helps one to interpret the family as having a very connected, flexible functioning level. Family 79 was also characterized by high communication and satisfaction scores. High communication scores suggest that the family has healthy listening skills (empathy and attention), speaking skills (speaking for oneself instead of others), tracking (staying on topic), and respect and regard (the affective aspects of communication). Additionally, the family has positive feelings about their family communication. The family's high communication scores may act as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility. Family 79's balanced functioning levels and high communication scores align with the Circumplex model's suggestion that

balanced systems tend to have more positive, healthy communication whereas unbalanced systems tend to have poorer, unhealthy communication. Finally, Family 79 had positive perceptions of satisfaction regarding their level of functioning related to cohesion, flexibility and communication.

### **Qualitative Semi-structured Interview Results**

This section provides Family 79's perception of their family functioning in travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model with accompanying quotes, followed by a description of the family's satisfaction with their functioning.

#### **Family 79 Goal Direction**

**Three of four family members directed toward outcome-oriented goals for one child while the oldest sibling was not resulting in less efficient functioning of the entire family system.** As described in their profile, collectively, Family 79 focused on outcome-oriented goals (i.e., obtain a college scholarship, make it to the NHL) for their youngest son's travel ice hockey participation. In line with these goals, both parents embodied a "whatever it takes" mentality toward their son's travel ice hockey participation, suggesting that the money and time was worth the investment for their son. Accordingly, they were both set on providing him with the best opportunity possible to be successful. The parents believed travel ice hockey was important for helping their son reach these goals. Given that the parents and Kurtis collectively subscribed to this shared goal direction, they perceived themselves to function efficiently in this context. While Skyler did not oppose these goals, he was not actively involved in supporting and/or working towards them with the family. Because of this, he perceived less adaptive functioning related to his family's cohesion and communication.

## **Cohesion**

### **Optimal Balance of Separateness and Togetherness for All Family Members Except Oldest Son**

**Travel ice hockey enhances cohesion.** Family 79, with the exception of the oldest son, Skyler, viewed themselves as a very close, tight-knit family who embodied an optimal balance of separateness and togetherness. Family members suggested that while travel ice hockey took away from family time and made it difficult to plan things outside of travel ice hockey, involvement in this activity also had a positive impact on the family's cohesion, enhancing their closeness by providing opportunities for the mother, father, and Kurtis to bond together (e.g., traveling in the car, hotel stays, attending games/tournaments).

**Important to strive for balance in separateness and togetherness.** The father was adamant in suggesting that while hockey took up a lot of their family's time, it didn't devour their lives and they all had ample time to themselves. The mother and son, Kurtis echoed this statement, though followed it up by suggesting the individual time that family members had outside of travel ice hockey was probably not as much time as they would like. Nonetheless, the family's individual interests outside of travel ice hockey contributed to their balance of separateness and togetherness.

"We all kind of have our own things we try to plan to do or whether it's me just going to get my hair done or my nails done, my husband in his church group, or Kurtis does a lot of you know, he um, likes to go play like, he's got some um older kids that have graduated but they get together and they play ultimate frisbee or they go on camping trips um things like that." – Mother

Importantly, without travel ice hockey, the family suggested they would all be on their own separate paths. For Family 79, it was important that they strived for balance in their separateness and togetherness in order to function adaptively.

“I mean it can take away obviously for many months of the year, it can take away a lot of your time. But, I think if you strive for balance which is a part of success for anybody you know, for a family or a team, if you strive for balance you can still find it even in the midst of chaos. You know what I mean?” – Father

**Lack of involvement in travel ice hockey decreases cohesion.** While the mother, father, and travel ice hockey player, Kurtis were all on the same page regarding their family’s cohesion and balance of separateness and togetherness, the oldest son, Skyler perceived less of a balance because he was not involved with his family’s travel ice hockey experience, which resulted in Skyler not spending much time with his family and therefore not feeling as close to them.

Table 24. Family 79 lack of involvement in travel ice hockey decreases cohesion

Theme	Father	Mother	Kurtis	Skyler
Lack of involvement in travel ice hockey decreases cohesion	“I think it’s about as close as you can get honestly. I mean yeah, as far as like, yeah, I mean we’re all on the same mission. You got two parents usually for the games and then you got tournament	“I have to say I think we’re pretty close. Instead of being in a home where everybody’s kind of doing their own thing and nobody pays attention, you know there’s not an activity that kind of bonds	“I’d say it brings us closer together. Just everything we do for hockey is together. Between traveling, eating um being there for the games”	“Um I’m personally I’m not with my family much so I don’t know about closeness. I guess, hm. [pause] Like I said usually I’m not with them so we’re not as close.”

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Table 24 (cont'd)

weekends, sometimes you'll go away out of town from Thursday through Sunday night just yeah, I mean it's just a lot of extra bonding time."	everybody. Um, whereas hockey kind of bonds everybody because I enjoy it, you know my husband enjoys it, and its something you know we share with you know our son"
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Accordingly, Skyler felt like he wasn't able to spend as much time with his family as he would've liked because they were gone every night, which was difficult for him at times. Specifically, Skyler explained that he felt he had grown distant from his family, especially his father and brother.

"I definitely feel like I've kind of gotten distant from them. Especially, I wish I was closer with my dad um and a little bit more with my brother." – Skyler

Considering this information, the travel ice hockey experience created a coalition between the mother, father, and Kurtis, which enhanced their closeness. However, Skyler was not a member of this coalition.

### **Hockey as a Shared Interest Among All but One**

**Hockey as a shared interest enhances cohesion.** Travel ice hockey was identified as a shared interest among the father, mother, and Kurtis though it was not a shared interest for Skyler. While the family identified travel ice hockey as a shared interest, the father insisted that Kurtis had grasped ahold of his participation on his own. The three family members who viewed

travel ice hockey as a shared interest discussed how it had bonded them and brought them closer to one another.

“Instead of being in a home where everybody’s kind of doing their own thing and nobody pays attention, you know there’s not an activity that kind of bonds everybody. Um, whereas hockey kind of bonds everybody because I enjoy it, you know my husband enjoys it, and it’s something you know we share with you know our son.” – Mother

**Disinterest in hockey decreases cohesion.** Interestingly, these family members spoke of travel ice hockey bonding *everybody* in the family, yet did not acknowledge the oldest son, Skyler until probed by the researcher. When asked about Skyler’s interest in travel ice hockey, the parents described Skyler and Kurtis as complete opposites, suggesting Skyler pursued hockey for social reasons and Kurtis for more competitive reasons. The family members agreed that Skyler was not included in their view of the family’s travel ice hockey participation as a shared interest. Accordingly, the family acknowledged Skyler wasn’t as close to the family due to his disinterest in hockey.

“I would say he is probably not as close to us um but he’s also 18 and he’s got a job and he’s kind of, um, he’s kind of at that age where he really doesn’t wanna hang out with his family.” – Mother

### **Contextual Considerations Impact Cohesion**

**Tournament weekends enhance cohesion.** The mother, father, and Kurtis agreed that participation in travel ice hockey increased their time spent together as a family. During the season, the family suggested that their lives revolved around travel ice hockey. Tournament weekends were identified as a characteristic that increased the family’s time spent together as they often ran from Thursday through Sunday, which provided the family the opportunity to



spend time together in the car, at the hotel, and during the games. Tournament weekends were typically a family bonding event for the mother, father, and Kurtis. Accordingly, the three family members involved in travel ice hockey really enjoyed their time spent together and felt that it was a shared experience that brought them closer to one another.

Table 25. Family 79 hockey as a shared interest within system of three enhances cohesion

Theme	Father	Mother	Kurtis	Skyler
Hockey as a shared interest within system of three enhances cohesion	“I mean like I said it’s tied to the passion that I have so I mean for me, I mean, it’s kinda like, I’d rather do it [hockey] with my family than a vacation honestly. I mean yeah, I’d rather do that with my wife and son than probably sit on a beach [laughs].”	“I mean I enjoy it. as you know, my older son doesn’t play anymore or we’ve seen like our friends’ son, he’s now playing for the NAHL and he’s not, you know at home, he’s with a billet family out of state so now I think I enjoy, I’m enjoying it more now because I know um this isn’t gonna last. You know what I mean?”	“It’s just nice to spend time together and hockey is something that just brings you closer. ”	“Um I don’t watch any hockey games on TV and I barely go to the games anymore for Kurtis, mainly the reason for that I’m busy but I just don’t have a lot of interest in it anymore so I don’t do that [hockey] with my family much.

### Father, Mother, and Kurtis Operate as a Team to Function Adaptively

**Team effort for decision making.** Within the context of travel of ice hockey, the family operated mainly dependently. In regard to decision making, the family suggested that they came to decisions together, as a team. Typically, the father would take the lead and then work together with his family to decide what was best for Kurtis.

“Because of my experience and love, you know, wanting to see him you know excel and go even higher, I’ll throw out options like hey let’s go to this team! And then, you know, so I’ll throw options out there but yeah obviously we work together to come to a you know, reasonable solution or what we think is best for him so.” – Father

Decisions in this context ranged from deciding what team Kurtis should try out for (e.g., consider distance, team status) to whether the parents should pull Kurtis from teams due to lackluster coaching. A specific example of a difficult decision the family had to make related to Kurtis’s travel ice hockey experience involved handling a situation in which Kurtis was benched during a game and replaced with the coach’s son. The parents felt the coach was wrong, so they made the decision to approach the coach and then pulled Kurtis from the team.

“Kurtis started the game, and they might’ve scored 2 or 3 goals, not a crazy amount. Next thing you know, Kurtis gets pulled out of the game and the head coach puts his son in who was the other goalie on the team. So, we chose to, I did approach that coach and asked him for a one on one midway through the season and kind of asked him a few questions and called him out on a few things you know, just a calm conversation, just kind of left it at that. We made the decision then that we were not going to return to that situation.” - Father

Interestingly, the mother told a different story, suggesting that she and the father did not handle their discussion with the coach regarding Kurtis getting benched very well.

“Kurtis played on this Triple A team with this coach whose son was the other goalie, and he played my son in all the hard games throughout the season and we made it to States and he sat my kid for every single game. And it was bad. Um, we probably didn’t handle

it pretty well because we had some very strong choice words for the coach at the end of it and we pulled Kurtis and we never went back.” – Mother

Skyler noted that he was not involved in decisions with the family, though recognized that they often didn’t have anything to do with him. Nonetheless, he wished he was included more in family decisions as he often felt left out.

**High involvement enhances cohesion.** Accordingly, the father, mother, and Kurtis were all highly involved in the travel ice hockey experience while Skyler was not involved much at all. The family described the father as the most involved, taking the lead on getting Kurtis to and from practices and games and communication with the organization.

“My dad’s been taking me to practices and everything. We’ve been playing in Plymouth, uh I played triple A a few years ago for Plymouth and he took me on hour and half road trips and three-hour road trips just for hockey.” – Kurtis

**Low involvement decreases cohesion.** Skyler was not involved in his family’s travel ice hockey experience as his parents suggested that he never went to his brother’s games unless forced to go, and even then, he was angry about attending. This lack of involvement from Skyler resulted in decreased time spent together and lower cohesion.

“As of right now, I see them very minimum because, actually, a lot because some days my brother and my dad aren’t even home when I get home from work. So, they’re usually gone for you know, 3, 4, 5 hours when you know, they don’t get home till 10:00PM and I’m usually in bed by then.” – Skyler

While Skyler did not spend a lot of time with his family due to their high involvement in travel ice hockey, he explained that he would like to spend more time with them, suggesting that some of the fault was on him for not making more of an effort to do so.

“I’d definitely like to spend a little bit more time with them. I definitely need to make more time to go to my brother’s games and stuff like that because I do miss always being there for hockey, it’s always a good time when you’re with your family. You know, at the rink or wherever.” – Skyler

**Family support enhances cohesion.** In line with the family’s high involvement in travel ice hockey, they were all very supportive of the experience by providing various forms of instrumental (e.g., purchase equipment, transportation) and emotional support (e.g., encouragement, unconditional positive regard), which was agreed upon by the family as enhancing their family’s bond toward one another. Other specific examples described by the parents involved providing support after tough losses and when Kurtis was cut from teams that they felt he deserved to make.

“Like you don’t have to be on this team like you know, we try to give him different examples of different players that have made it and you know they came out of high school hockey and they made it to the NHL you know? And they played high school or you know?” – Mother

**Lack of support leads to tension among brothers.** Regarding family support, there was definite tension between Skyler and Kurtis, resulting in an imbalance in the family system, due to Skyler’s lack of support for his brother’s travel ice hockey experience. In this case, sibling support was described as “non-existent”, which was a result of Skyler seeing Kurtis have success on the ice and jealousy regarding how much time and resources the parents invest in Kurtis’ hockey experience.

“So, he’d see him have some success and he’d congratulate him I mean he’d say nice job Kurtis or something, but it was just like uh, it felt like a blanket congratulations and then

moved on. So, there's not like a, you know, not no really extra encouragement or support you know from that route." – Father

"Because travel hockey is so time intensive and um that the older one does um make comments even still that Kurtis is spoiled, or he gets more attention. You know it's just, you know so I would say there's probably a little jealousy there because of how much time and money is spent on Kurtis." – Mother

The mother went on to explain that her son Skyler should understand their investment toward Kurtis because Skyler is technically an adult (18 years old) and she and her husband felt they no longer needed to support him the same way that they currently support Kurtis. With this in mind, though Skyler suggested that there was nothing he wouldn't do for his brother, he agreed that sometimes he felt as though Kurtis was the favorite child, but it didn't bother him.

"I do feel like my brother is sometimes the favorite child. But, [pause] I do sometimes feel like he's the favorite child but it doesn't really bother me that much. Um mainly cause I really, like I said, I'm never home so I'm always doing my own thing. So them kind of favoring him doesn't really bother me because I'm never home to do anything with my family." – Skyler

Kurtis suggested the two were "not as close because we're just not involved in each other's personal lives." The parents echoed this statement explaining that the two boys "live their own separate lives." Taken together, this lack of sibling support negatively impacted the sibling's subsystem relationship.

### **Travel Ice Hockey Impacts Subsystem Relationships**

**Father-Mother-Kurtis subsystem enhanced through travel ice hockey.** While subsystem relationships in mind, a family coalition was formed between the mother, father, and

Kurtis as a result of their travel ice hockey experience. These family members suggested that their relationships were enhanced, though a stronger bond was formed between Kurtis and his father (see Table 26).

Table 26. Family 79 father-mother-Kurtis subsystem enhanced through travel ice hockey

Theme	Father	Mother	Kurtis
Father-mother-Kurtis subsystem enhanced through travel ice hockey	“Anytime you could share a passion with somebody, especially your child, you know, I mean I just, yeah I enjoy shopping for like matching goalie equipment and just, it just gives me extra fun things to do and just things that I never had an opportunity to have or do before. So yeah, it’s awesome.	“You know I would say me and my younger son are, we’re close too. You know, it’s just of course dad and son is just a different bond or whatever because you know, they go look for hockey sticks and stuff together. Me? I’m like I have no idea what the hell I’m looking for!”	“Um honestly mainly between me and my dad it’s traveling a lot together and just, being together a lot through hockey.”

#### **Father-Skyler subsystem relationship diminished due to lack of shared interests.**

Skyler suggested that travel ice hockey didn’t have an impact on he and his mother’s relationship as he described “I still have a pretty good relationship with my mom.” However, in regard to his father, Skyler explained that the two didn’t have a great relationship and a main reason for this was that the two didn’t have any shared interests with one another.

“Um yeah uh mainly in high school I never was really close with him. I didn’t really talk to him a lot. And that was mainly on me and him not having any you know, shared interests so.” – Skyler

Taken together, through the travel ice hockey experience, a family coalition was formed between the mother, father, and Kurtis, which brought them closer together and led to positive perceptions of their family's functioning related to cohesion in this context. In contrast, Skyler was not included in this coalition given his lack of interest in travel ice hockey, which in turn resulted in a lack of emotional and physical closeness shared among himself and his family members. In this case, there was an unhealthy boundary formed (we: mother, father, Kurtis versus them: Skyler), whereby Skyler was an outsider looking in, resulting in lower perceptions of his family's functioning related to cohesion and a negative subsystem relationship shared with his father.

## **Flexibility**

### **Balance of Stability and Change Supports Family Functioning**

**Adapt to make the travel ice hockey experience work.** Family 79 perceived they were flexible and able to change when necessary in the context of travel ice hockey. With this in mind, the family had a balance of flexibility and rigidity, which was critical for their functioning in travel ice hockey.

“We’re very structured and organized, but we’re also aware that anything can go wrong at any moment so we’re also on the fly, spur of the moment flexible type thing.” – Father

Accordingly, the family suggested communication was key for supporting their ability to function and adapt to change in travel ice hockey.

“Whether it’s hockey or life we have to constantly be communicating about who’s going where, whose doing what um you know whatever role the person has to play that day um so I think between the three of us we’re always communicating.” – Mother

The parents suggested that it was important to be flexible in the context of travel ice hockey because there were a lot of moving parts and things you had to be ready for that required change on the fly.

Table 27. Family 79 adapt to make the travel ice hockey experience work

Subtheme	Father	Mother	Kurtis	Skyler
Adapt to make the travel ice hockey experience work.	“ I mean I think you almost gotta be flexible. I mean you definitely gotta be flexible with so many moving parts and just so much going on.	“We are, we’re pretty flexible. I think you kind of, I mean you kind of have to if you you know, you don’t really wanna be like that parent thats always like the difficult one. [laughs]”	“We usually have a solid game plan ready and just keep it together. We’re flexible. Definitely open to change when we have to and make it work.”	“Um my family has always been pretty flexible with change so it doesn’t you know, whatever obstacles we have we’re usually able to overcome so we can you know, keep going. So, you know, usually it’s not too big of a deal.”

Examples of how the family adapted to changes related to travel ice hockey included rearranging schedules to accommodate hockey games and private goalie lessons that came up on short notice and managing the hockey schedule by splitting up when necessary. Related to scheduling, the family’s rigidity came into play as they used a calendar to keep their hockey-related activities in line, which supported their organization and structure and ability to function adaptively. The family was also flexible when it came to finding Kurtis new teams as they were willing to travel and support him in tryouts for a number of different teams because they wanted to ensure that he found a good fit. The family suggested that while these were difficult situations,



they stayed calm and adapted to support their functioning. In addition, operating in a flexible manner set a good example for the children.

“The people you’re raising are gonna see how you react to uh you know stress and different situations too so it’s important to set the example by how you operate in chaos and how you do these different things.” – Father

Not only did the family suggest that it was important to be flexible to be able to adapt successfully and set a good example for their children, but the mother also noted that they were very flexible given their time and financial commitment toward Kurtis’ participation.

“Maybe for some kids who aren’t as dedicated you know we’ve seen where kids will miss games for you know something that we wouldn’t view important or we wouldn’t miss a game for it. You know we, you know we have kind of invested all this time and money into him that like we’re gonna make it work.” – Mother

### **Travel Ice Hockey Structure Impacts Flexibility**

**Travel ice hockey structure supports flexibility.** Accordingly, Family 79 suggested that travel ice hockey made it easier to be flexible because of the moving parts they had to adapt to in order to function adaptively.

Table 28. Family 79 travel ice hockey structure supports flexibility

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Kurtis</b>	<b>Skyler</b>
Travel ice hockey structure supports flexibility	“A lot of moving parts, it’s kind of just like training, training for more flexibility you know what I mean?”	“I think it makes it easier too. I mean while we know what to expect usually with scheduling that can	“Definitely easier because we’re just used to it and it happens a lot so.”	“Um hockey since it’s thrown you know, multiple challenges our way with you know, with how

Table 28 (cont'd).

It's like adapt or die kind of. If you don't then it's just always gonna be a struggle or	definitely change sometimes and there are other pieces of travel hockey that require us to figure it out and make it work. So yeah, we've kind of had to get used to it."	adaptive you have to be whether it be changing teams or things like that, I'd say it's definitely helped us you know to change and grow."
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**Travel ice hockey structure supports rigidity.** The structure of travel ice hockey related to practice/game scheduling and league expectations (e.g., be an hour early for games) was typically organized at least a month ahead of time, which was helpful for the family's ability to operate successfully in the context.

"I think it's very structured, it gives parents a chance to plan and be successful. You know past that is your choice whether you are able to operate you know and those things." – Father

As such, the structure of travel ice hockey contributed to the family's functioning as it supported their own organization in this context. In this case, to keep up with the busy hockey schedule (daily practices, weekend games, travel out of state to tournaments), the family had to have consistent structure in their day-to-day functioning.

#### **Stable Leadership and Roles Enhance Rigidity**

For Family 79, stable roles and leadership were identified, which supported the family's rigidity in this context. For example, the father took on most of the travel ice hockey-related

roles, such as transportation and finances while the mother took care of the family home. While the hockey roles were generally stable, the parents noted they could adapt these roles when needed by taking a divide and conquer, tag team approach.

“It’s also like a, it’s a tag team effort and if one’s not around the other one’s you know helping out and managing the household or the hockey stuff, so.” – Father

Moreover, like the family roles, leadership was generally stable as the father was deemed the “leader” for his family’s travel ice hockey participation. For Family 79, while the father took on most of the leadership, it was suggested that he embraced a more democratic approach whereby the mother and Kurtis were able to take on a participatory role in this context, sharing in decisions and support toward the travel ice hockey experience. For Family 79, it was necessary to have someone take charge in this context such as the father who was most familiar with travel ice hockey and its expectations so that the family didn’t miss a beat in terms of functioning adaptively in this context.

### **Family Structure Matters**

**Number of children participating in travel ice hockey supports flexibility.** In addition, the family suggested that it was difficult to be flexible and adapt to change in this context when both of their sons were participating in travel ice hockey.

“It was hard for us to function especially when both of them were playing so if somebody has two that are playing that was pretty rough because we were constantly being pulled in different directions and we were in different cities and you know, different states at the same time.” – Father

After Skyler stopped participating in travel ice hockey, the family suggested that it was much easier for them to be flexible and make the travel ice hockey experience work with just one child involved.

“We know a family that has four that play and I’m like there’s no freaking way I could do that! Yeah, I’d be selling a few kids [laughs].” – Mother

Accordingly, Family 79’s balance of rigidity and flexibility align with the family systems approach suggesting both stability and change are needed for adaptive functioning.

## Communication

### Communication Facilitates Family Functioning

Family 79 perceived themselves to communicate very well, engaging in constant, open communication, with the exception of Skyler, who suggested the family’s communication was “alright” and could definitely improve.

Table 29. Family 79 communication facilitates family functioning

Theme	Father	Mother	Kurtis	Skyler
Communication facilitates family functioning	“Um, I mean I think, that’s one thing about a close-knit family. I think you try to be open, open and communicate things. Um I guess that’s whether it’s personal or tied to the sport. You know you wanna create an open line of communication	“I mean I think we communicate pretty well cause you know, whether it’s hockey or life we have to constantly be communicating about whose going where, whose doing what um you know whatever role the person has to play that day um so I think between	“Pretty good. If we need something we text each other and let each other know or if we’re all home together.”	“Um I would describe it as alright. Um, there’s definitely aspects we could improve on.”

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Table 29 (cont'd).

so you feel like you can be heard or if you're struggling with something or stuff like that."	the three of us we're always communicating."
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The mother, father, and Kurtis described their communication as key in the context of travel ice hockey, suggesting they needed to constantly communicate to ensure they could function adaptively in this context. For example, without good communication, Kurtis would constantly show up late or miss practices, which was described as unacceptable for Family 79. For the father, good parent communication was emphasized as he suggested without it that teaches children bad habits.

"I see a lot of examples around me where parents just don't, they don't communicate well or maybe it's just not a priority for them, but I constantly tell them, like you're uh, you're teaching your kid your bad habits and at no fault of his own he's gonna grow up to be the same way. And it's like, and it comes back to the parent, how you operate is very important." – Father

### **Travel Ice Hockey Provides Avenue for Communication**

Travel ice hockey was helpful for the mother, father, and Kurtis' communication as it provided an avenue for them to regularly engage in communication, allowing them to share in good and bad experiences related to their participation. In regard to poor performances, the father emphasized that he did not engage in "car ride home" conversations about Kurtis' poor performances as he learned through experience that being positive was more helpful for their relationship.

“I still see it around me a lot where kids will be afraid to even hop in the car because they go in there and it’s just like, they get that angry scream tirade so um I think, like I said every family’s different, I’m just saying I’ve learned a different route to be positive and not grill them about a bad performance and that’s one reason why Kurtis and I have such a great relationship. None of that negativity going on. We just share our hockey passion together and love every minute of it.” – Father

With this in mind, the mother suggested that participation in travel ice hockey was particularly helpful for Kurtis’ communication with his family and coaches.

“You know Kurtis has had to learn a lot with communication um you know not just with us but with his coaches. He’s at that age where we’ve kind of put it in his court that he has to learn how to communicate with his coach if he can’t make a practice or you know communicate with his goalie coach. So that’s kind of helped too.” – Mother

### **Contrasting Views on Typical Conversations in the Household**

Interestingly, these family members had contrasting views on typical conversations in the household. The father suggested that family conversations did not focus exclusively on travel ice hockey, which was important for their family’s functioning. Specifically, the father explained “you can love something and be passionate about something but not let it devour your every moment.” In comparison, the mother and Kurtis both agreed that hockey conversations “rule the house”, though they didn’t suggest this was a maladaptive aspect of their family’s functioning.

### **Oldest Son Perceives Maladaptive Communication Patterns Within the Family**

**Poor communication due to lack of openness.** As mentioned previously, Skyler did not perceive adaptive communication among himself and his family. For Skyler, his family’s communication fell short due to a lack of openness with one another. In this case, Skyler

suggested that he and his family were not open with to sharing with one another. Specifically, he perceived that his family lacked communication skills related to asking questions, telling each other their true feelings, and engaging in conversation in general.

“Me and my parents aren’t very open to one another. So, yeah um like sharing what we’re doing, things like that and communicating for hockey and things like that, we’re not very open.” – Skyler

### **Lack of shared interests impact poor communication between father and Skyler.**

Skyler explained that he wanted his family’s communication to improve so that he could have a better relationship with them all, especially his father. One explanation for he and his father’s poor relationship stemmed from the idea that they didn’t have any shared interests, which resulted in a lack of communication between them.

“I guess the main issue would be mainly not having any common interests. I don’t really talk to him a lot anymore or get very close with him or get into in depth conversations. So, I don’t really you know have any shared interests with him so” – Skyler

### **Family System of “Three” On the Same Page with Communication**

The mother and father made no indication that poor communication existed amongst their family, including Skyler. The mother felt she and Skyler communicated all the time and engaged in constant, open communication like the rest of the family. The father agreed stating that there were no issues in he and Skyler’s nor the family and Skyler’s communication.

“Yeah, everybody, including Skyler, we all have good communication. Now you know we [Skyler and father] might not talk all that much but there’s nothing wrong with that. He just likes to do his own thing, so we let him do that.” - Father

Similar to the cohesion dimension of family functioning, the family system including the mother, father, and Kurtis were all on the same page regarding their communication, whereas the oldest son, Skyler was not, suggesting a potential imbalance of the whole family system. This imbalance resulted in varying views of communication (e.g., adaptive – mother, father, Kurtis; maladaptive – Skyler), which in turn impacted perceptions of family functioning and relationships within the family. In this case, the FACES IV communication scores completed by the father were representative of the father, mother, and Kurtis but not the oldest son, Skyler.

### **Satisfaction**

Family 79 was satisfied with dimensions of their family functioning, with the exception of the oldest son, Skyler who was not satisfied with he and his family's communication skills and cohesion. When describing this, Skyler suggested that he would like his family's communication to improve so that he could have a better relationship with them. In line with this point, Skyler felt that he and his family could be closer, as he often felt distant from them due to his lack of interest and involvement in travel ice hockey. Outside of these areas, the family, including Skyler, were satisfied with their flexibility. Accordingly, these perceptions helped to explain the higher satisfaction rating provided by the father on the FACES IV survey, which were collectively accepted by all members of the family except for Skyler. Thus, the satisfaction scores were not representative of the entire family systems view of satisfaction in this context.

### **Family Cross-Case Analysis**

Following the presentation of each family systems case regarding their functioning in travel ice hockey according to the Circumplex model, a cross-case analysis was conducted to understand the integration or lack thereof across all four families.



**Finding 1: Family goal direction impacts functioning.** In the travel ice hockey context, all four families were goal-directed either toward task or outcome-oriented goals, which impacted the family's efficiencies related to their functioning. Regardless of the *type* of goal the family strived for, those families who were on the same page and supported their family's goal direction tended to be more efficient in their functioning in comparison to families with varying goal directions within their unit (see Table 30).

Table 30. Family alignment of goal direction impacts functioning

Family System	Goal Direction	Alignment	Functioning
Family 7	Task-Oriented Goals	Aligned	Adaptive functioning
Family 12	Task-Oriented Goals	Aligned	Adaptive functioning
Family 58	*F, M, THA1, THAI2: Outcome-Oriented Goals	Aligned	Adaptive for F, M, THA1, THAI2 functioning
	THA1 Biological Mother: Enter work force and do not participate in hockey	Misalignment	Instances of maladaptive functioning between F, THA1, and THA1 Biological Mother
Family 79	**F, M, THA1: Outcome-Oriented Goals	Alignment	Adaptive functioning for F, M, THA1
	S = No goals; did not support family's travel ice hockey goals	Misalignment	Instances of maladaptive functioning between F, M, THA1 and S

\*F = Father, M = Mother, THA1 = Son (18 years old); THAI2 = Son (8 years old)

\*\*F = Father, M = Mother, THA1 = Son (15 years old); S = Sibling (oldest brother, 18 years old)

**Finding 2: Travel ice hockey as a shared interest supports cohesion.** Travel ice hockey as a shared interest was important for supporting the family's functioning in this context. Specifically, across all four families, travel ice hockey as a shared interest enhanced cohesion by bonding and bringing the family members closer to one another. With this in mind, among three of the four families, there was one member who did not share the same interest as the rest of the family in travel ice hockey, which led to more maladaptive functioning within the system, with the exception of family 7, specifically related to cohesion and communication. Though family 7 had one family member, the youngest daughter, that was not interested in travel ice hockey, the family buffered this disinterest to keep balance within their system by intentionally incorporating other activities (e.g., ski trips) into travel ice hockey weekends. In this case, while travel ice hockey wasn't a shared interest for the youngest daughter, it did not negatively impact the family's functioning because they were able to support their cohesion through other activities outside of travel ice hockey.

In contrast, Family 58 and Family 79 had more maladaptive functioning within their systems related to cohesion and communication due to one family member's lack of interest in travel ice hockey. For Family 58, their stepfamily shared the same interest in travel ice hockey, which led to adaptive functioning within this system. However, among the father, his first wife, and their son, Gavin, maladaptive functioning within this system was evident as a result of the Gavin's biological mother's disinterest in travel ice hockey. For Family 79, the mother, father, and Kurtis all shared a strong interest in travel ice hockey and perceived no negative aspects of their functioning as a result. While these family members recognized the oldest son, Skyler did not share the same interests as them, they didn't indicate that this had any impact on their family system's functioning. However, Skyler felt that because he didn't share an interest in hockey

with his family members their system embodied lower cohesion and poorer communication (see Table 31).

Table 31. Travel ice hockey as a shared interest supports cohesion

Family System	Shared Interest	Functioning
Family 7	Shared Interest for all family members except youngest daughter	Adaptive functioning  Disinterest of youngest daughter buffered by engaging in other activities during travel ice hockey weekends
Family 12	Shared interest for all family members	Adaptive functioning
Family 58	*Shared interest for blended family (F, M, THA1, THA2, S1, S2)  THA1 mother did not share interest	Adaptive functioning  Maladaptive functioning for F, M, THA1
Family 79	**Shared Interest for F, M, THA1  S did not share interest	Adaptive functioning for F, M, THA1  Maladaptive functioning between F, M, THA1 and S

\*F = Father, M = Mother, THA1 = Gavin (18 years old), THA2 = Cooper (8 years old), S1 = Mya (12 years old), S2 = Josie (3 years old)

\*\*F = Father, M = mother, THA1 = Kurtis (15 years old), S = Skyler (18 years old)

**Finding 3: Need for balance of separateness and togetherness.** A common theme that emerged across all four families was the importance of balancing their separateness and togetherness in the context of travel ice hockey. All of the families suggested that balancing time spent together, and time spent apart was critical for their family's functioning. While all of the

families identified travel ice hockey as a significant time commitment, they also highlighted the importance of it not being all consuming in their family. Thus, to support their functioning, families suggested that it was important to balance travel ice hockey, an activity that brought the family's closer together (both physically and emotionally), with individual time/interests away from the rink. With this in mind, families noted that the structure of travel ice hockey itself contributed to this balance, as they were often separated through the week during practices and then brought back together when possible during the weekend for tournaments.

**Finding 4: Development of strong subsystem relationships between father and children.** Among all four families, subsystem relationships shared between the father and his child(ren) were enhanced through participation in travel ice hockey. While mother's in each family believed that travel ice hockey brought their entire family system closer, all suggested that the father's bond with his child(ren) was stronger. The children also echoed this statement and believed hockey had brought them especially close with their fathers. Within these family cases, all fathers were highly influential in getting their children involved in ice hockey and played important roles in supporting them in this experience whether that be related to taking on the majority of hockey-related duties (e.g., transportation, finances, scheduling) and in three of the four cases taking on a coaching role for their children.

Table 32. Development of strong subsystem relationships between father and children

<b>Mother 7</b>	<b>Mother 12</b>	<b>Mother 58</b>	<b>Mother 79</b>
“That special bond that they have with their dad with something that they both enjoy so much you know? I think that	“Yeah, so it's definitely increased Nate's [father] relationship with the kids. It's definitely created	“Oh, I think it definitely brings us all closer but like father-son close, closer together even more. Um, because you know like I said, he takes him there,	“But, um, you know I would say me and my younger son are, we're close too. You know, it's just of course dad and son is just a different bond or whatever because you

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Table 32 (cont'd).

it's absolutely important and I have no problem taking a backseat to it."	strong bonds between them."	he gets him dressed, he helps him, you know? He's always been involved with coaching for Gavin and Cooper."	know, they go look for hockey sticks and stuff together."
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**Finding 5: Need for balance of stability and change.** All families highlighted the importance of being able to balance stability and change in the context of travel ice hockey. In this context, all families suggested that in order to make the travel ice hockey experience work, one had to have the ability to adapt when necessary. Within these family systems, generally stable leadership and roles were identified, which contributed to the family's organization and structure in this context, supporting their functioning. Importantly, fathers took on most of the leadership and hockey-related roles, though family members suggested that the leadership and roles in the household could change if needed.

Moreover, travel ice hockey also emerged as a characteristic that contributed to family's flexibility and rigidity, which supported healthy, balanced family functioning types such as those in the current sample. Characteristics of travel ice hockey that supported the family's flexibility related to the changing game and practice schedules, expectations related to tournament weekends (travel, hotel accommodations), needing to find and try out for new teams, accommodating private ice hockey sessions when they came up on the fly, etc. In the same vein, families also suggested that travel ice hockey contributed to their rigidity in this context. Specifically, the structure and expectations associated with travel ice hockey, like the predetermined schedule (set time and location), kept the family's structured and organized to the best of their ability, which supported their functioning.

**Finding 6: Family structure matters.** Family structure emerged as an important family characteristic that impacted cohesion and flexibility. In regard to cohesion, the nuclear family structure including a two-parent household was described as beneficial for supporting family 7 in making the travel ice hockey experience successful. With this in mind, the sense of teamwork shared between the mother and father brought them closer together, supporting their cohesion. Family structure related to the number of children in the family home was also noted as a characteristic that impacted Family 58's time spent together. Specifically, because Family 58 had seven members in the family it was difficult for them to do things together, as one unit. Moreover, with more children in the family, the parents had to diversify their attention, which resulted in less time spent with each child individually.

With this in mind, family structure was also an important characteristic related to family's ability to adapt and change. Again, the nuclear family including a two-parent household was beneficial in this context, as it was easier to be flexible when needed given that there were two parents supporting the experience. In line with this point, flexibility was also supported when extended family members were involved. To make sense of this, we can compare family 7 and 58. While both families were nuclear family types, family 7 didn't have extended family help whereas Family 58 did have extended family help from their in-laws. In this case, Family 58 suggested that having extended family was helpful for their functioning as they often relied on their in-laws to assist with the children's activities. Family 7 did not have this same extended support system in place and therefore had to function primarily on their own, which was still considered better than if a family system was operating in a single-parent household.

In addition, the number of children in the household impacted flexibility among three of the four families. For Family 12, it was suggested that it would be difficult to be flexible in travel

ice hockey if they were outnumbered by their children. Thus, their two-parent, two-children nuclear-family structure supported the family's functioning. For Family 58, their larger nuclear family structure (two-parent, five-children) made it difficult to be flexible sometimes. In line with this point, the family noted that it was easier for them to be flexible and adapt when they only had one child (Gavin, the oldest) versus five children (Gavin, Cooper, Mya, Josie, newborn). Finally, Family 79 described difficulties with flexibility when they had both of their sons participating in travel ice hockey, as they suggested this constantly caused them to be pulled in different directions. Taken together, family structure was important for understanding family functioning and impacted dimensions of family functioning in different ways.

**Finding 7: Communication facilitates family functioning.** Communication served as a critical dimension for facilitating family functioning in the context of travel ice hockey. While communication patterns varied across the four families and included various strengths and weaknesses, all agreed that it wouldn't be possible to participate in travel ice hockey without it.

Table 33. Communication facilitates family functioning

Mother 12	Father 79	Mother 58	Father 7
<p>"You can't, you can't coordinate anything without decent communication um, you know it's not always perfect of course but I think right, without a good communication you know, and good sort of, um, just not monitoring but knowing what</p>	<p>"Oh, I mean yeah, communication is almost like life or death. Because if you don't, I mean your athlete isn't going to be successful either."</p>	<p>"You have to communicate, or you just don't know anything that's going on. You're almost forced, I mean you have to communicate or you're just in trouble is what you are."</p>	<p>"I don't think it would be possible, I don't think we would get the benefits out of it. Um yeah, I don't think it would be nearly, it wouldn't be fun at all if we weren't you know, yeah if we didn't communicate regularly yeah,</p>

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Table 33 (cont'd).

you need to do  
and when you  
need to do it, the  
logistics of all of  
it and being able  
to convey that to  
someone else,  
yeah there's no  
way you could do  
it."

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we wouldn't do  
this."

**Sub-purpose 2b.** Recall that sub-purpose 2 aimed to conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model and sub-purpose 2b of this study addressed the question: "Can the three primary hypotheses of the Circumplex model add to our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey?" In this section of the results, the individual family cases were examined in light of these theoretically based hypotheses. However, it is important to note that because this was an initial exploratory mixed methods study, the design did not allow for a direct test of family systems theory. While the design of this study did not allow for a direct test of these hypotheses, the researcher was able to use these hypotheses as propositions to examine if the results were consistent to what the hypotheses suggested.

### **Examination of the Circumplex Model Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1: Balanced family systems tend to be more functional (happy and successful) than unbalanced family systems.** Hypothesis 1 suggests that families need to balance their separateness versus togetherness on cohesion and their level of stability versus change on flexibility. Even though a balanced family system is placed at the four central levels of the model, these families do not always operate in a "moderate" manner. Being balanced



means that a family system can experience extremes on the dimension when appropriate, as in times of trauma or stress, but they do not typically function at these extremes for long periods.

Given that the current sample only consisted of balanced family types, we were unable to directly test this hypothesis. However, within our sample, examples emerged to illuminate how all families balanced their separateness and togetherness and stability and change to function adaptively in the context of travel ice hockey. For example, Family 79 described the importance of striving for balance in their separateness and togetherness, even in the midst of chaos, in order to function adaptively. Within this context, the family was able to balance their separateness and togetherness in travel ice hockey by incorporating individual time (e.g., church group, dirt bike riding) into their day-to-day dynamics. In terms of stability and change, families found balance by recognizing the importance of adapting to make travel ice hockey work while also welcoming stability in their leadership and roles to support their functioning. For example, in Family 12, adapting to their children's changing teams and balancing the father's leadership in hockey and the mother's leadership at home supported their functioning.

With this in mind, in some instances, families experienced extremes on the dimension(s) but were able to move themselves out of this extreme dimension because of their balanced family type. For example, in Family 7, an experience was described by the mother depicting how their family may have moved from a more balanced functioning type to a more extreme functioning type when the entire family attended a travel ice hockey tournament together, which in turn created a stressful situation resulting in a modification of their functioning to meet the needs of their family in that particular moment. While the family experienced a stressful situation due to spending too much time together, they didn't function in this extreme range for long, and the family decided the best plan of attack would be to separate themselves, which

involved the mother and daughters going home and leaving the father and son to spend the travel ice hockey weekend together. In family 58, they described themselves as operating in “organized chaos”, which seemed to embody more extreme functioning (i.e., chaotic flexibility, disengaged cohesion) at times due to their large family structure and constant “on the go” dynamics due to the number of activities they were involved in daily. However, because the family identified as a balanced family type, they were able to manage these more extreme levels of functioning to make the travel ice hockey experience work.

Further examining Hypothesis 1, the researcher noted that only one family member (mother or father) completed the FACES IV self-report questionnaire regarding their perceptions of family functioning. Therefore, intriguing findings emerged from the qualitative interviews with each family member, highlighting some instances of unbalanced functioning, particularly within Family 58 and Family 79. Family 58 was a stepfamily who functioned adaptively together in travel ice hockey. However, unbalanced functioning was evident among the father, his oldest son, Gavin, and Gavin’s biological mother due to a misalignment in goal directions and lack of a shared interest in travel ice hockey. Importantly, the researcher was unable to interview Gavin’s biological mother, therefore, only the father and Gavin’s perspective was provided. Nonetheless, both the father and Gavin suggested their family system didn’t function adaptively in areas related to cohesion and communication. In particular, Gavin and his biological mother’s relationship was negatively impacted, resulting in lower cohesion and communication shared between the two.

Family 79 was a nuclear family of four, whereby three of the four family members functioned adaptively in travel ice hockey. Interestingly, these three family members including the father, mother, and travel ice hockey player, Kurtis seemed to view themselves as a healthy

functioning system and failed to recognize the oldest son, Skyler within their system unless probed by the interviewer. With this in mind, the oldest son, Skyler, perceived less adaptive functioning within the family system related to cohesion and communication. The other family members did not seem to be aware of Skyler's views regarding their family's functioning. In particular, Skyler suggested he was distant from his family, especially his father, whom he didn't share a very good relationship and felt open communication was lacking between himself and his family as a result of his lack of involvement and interest in travel ice hockey.

Taken together, the interviews from this study provided initial insight how the four balanced family types in the current sample functioned adaptively, which seem to be consistent with Hypothesis 1, though this cannot be confirmed without a direct test and comparison of functional versus dysfunctional family types. Moreover, the findings also provided insight into examples of unbalanced functioning among families, particularly when one family member had different views and experiences within the system. With this in mind, it would be interesting to further explore these systems in which instances of unbalanced functioning emerged. Future research will benefit from directly testing this hypothesis and comparing functional versus dysfunctional family types.

**Hypothesis 2: Positive communication skills will enable balanced types of families to alter levels of cohesion and flexibility when necessary.** Hypothesis 2 suggests that positive communication is viewed as helpful for family systems to facilitate and maintain a more balanced relationship on the two dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. In contrast, poor communication impedes movement in unbalanced systems and increases the likelihood that these systems will remain extreme.

Though communication patterns varied across the four families, they all suggested that it was a critical aspect of their family's functioning in travel ice hockey. In many cases, communication served as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility. Communication was valuable for family decision-making, working together, and providing an avenue for families to pursue conversations with one another, all of which supported their balance of cohesion. For example, in Family 12, communication was key for helping the family come to a group decision regarding the son, Brooks, continued ice hockey participation in a recreational versus travel league organization. Positive communication also helped the families organize themselves and their roles when presented with situations and/or challenges that required them to adapt. For example, in Family 7, the mother changed her work schedule to ensure her son would be able to make his travel ice hockey practices. Importantly, the father suggested this level of flexibility was supported by good communication, which allowed them to manage this change.

Within these cases, interestingly, there were also examples of negative, unproductive communication within the families, most notably within Family 58 and Family 79. The negative, unproductive communication helped the researcher to consider how balanced family types within the current sample functioned adaptively for the most part, despite breakdowns in communication. In Family 58, the father's poor communication resulted in some difficulties related to flexibility, as the family sometimes lacked organization in order to adapt to change in this context. Though poor communication was present, the family seemed to embrace their "organized chaotic" functioning and suggested that despite these instances of unproductive communication, they were still able to adapt when needed. With this in mind, the family's characterization of a balanced family type may have helped them to manage their negative, unproductive communication patterns to keep balance in their system.

Family 58 also had concerns with communication within the family system including the father, Gavin, and Gavin's mother. These family members seemed to characterize a more unbalanced system, though this would need further testing to confirm. With this in mind, negative, unproductive communication was present between the father and his ex-wife and Gavin and his biological mother. In this case, poor communication was not facilitative for these family members functioning related to their imbalanced cohesion, which negatively impacted the father and Gavin's relationship with Gavin's biological mother.

In Family 79, the oldest son, Skyler, described unproductive communication among his family, though his other family members did not share those same views. With this in mind, Skyler perceived less adaptive functioning related to cohesion, suggesting there was not an optimal balance of separateness and togetherness within the family unit. In this case, from Skyler's perspective, poor communication didn't facilitate his family's functioning and instead contributed to an imbalance in cohesion, specifically.

The interviews from this study provided initial insight into the way in which positive communication skills supported families balance of cohesion and flexibility in the context of travel ice hockey. In line with this point, where instances of unbalanced family functioning emerged, unproductive communication did not serve as a facilitating dimension for cohesion and flexibility, though again, this cannot be confirmed without a direct test of the hypothesis. Taken together, the data collected regarding the four balanced family types communication skills is consistent with Hypothesis 2.

**Hypothesis 3: Families will modify their levels of cohesion and/or flexibility to effectively deal with situational stress and developmental changes across the family life cycle.** Hypothesis 3 deals with the capacity of the family system to change to deal with stress or

to accommodate changes in family members' development and expectations. The Circumplex model is dynamic in that it assumes that families will change levels of cohesion and flexibility, and thus family system type, to effectively manage situational stress and developmental changes across the family life cycle. As such, it is further suggested that change is beneficial to the maintenance and improvement of family functioning.

To directly assess this hypothesis, a longitudinal design assessing family functioning across time would be necessary. Moreover, families in the current sample provided few specific examples of situational stress that negatively impacted their functioning. Though the researcher was unable to directly assess this hypothesis, the qualitative interviews provided preliminary insight into how families modified their levels of cohesion and flexibility to function efficiently in the context of travel ice hockey. Most commonly, families modified their cohesion (togetherness versus separateness) based on the situation presented to keep balance within their system. For example, family 7 traveled to a tournament that involved a hotel stay and upon arriving realized that having the entire family there wasn't going to support their functioning that weekend; therefore, the mother took herself and the girls home and let the father and her son spend the hockey weekend together.

Families modified their cohesion in order to balance their separateness and togetherness by recognizing the importance of incorporating time apart after long travel ice hockey weekends spent together as a family. For example, Family's 12 and 79 suggested they had individual interests that they enjoyed, such as dirt bike riding, going out to dinner with friends, or church group. Within this context, families also modified their cohesion according to contextual considerations related to practices and games. Specifically, families spent more time apart during the week to ensure their children could attend practices and more time together during weekends

for games and tournaments. Families suggested this was helpful for supporting their balance of cohesion in this context.

Families in the current sample also modified their flexibility to adapt to situations and/or challenges presented in the context of travel ice hockey. Within these cases, families seemed to operate on a continuum ranging from flexible to more rigid, which supported their functioning. Importantly, the way in which the family modified their flexibility depended on the situation and/or challenge presented. For example, families changed their work schedules in order to ensure their children could make it to travel ice hockey, adapting by moving from rigid in their schedules to more flexible. In family 58, the father often adapted his flexibility to accommodate private goalie lessons that came up on more short notice for his son, Cooper. Families also modified their generally stable leadership and roles when necessary to adapt to changes in travel ice hockey. For example, if fathers were unable to take the lead getting their children to practice and/or games mothers would step in and pick up the slack to support their family's functioning.

Considering that all families were balanced family types, these findings provide preliminary insight regarding the way in which balanced family types were able to modify their cohesion and flexibility when necessary. While the findings seem to be consistent with Hypothesis 3, a longitudinal design directly testing the hypothesis would be required to make a final conclusion.

## **Summary of Results**

In summary, the current study was designed to explore family functioning in travel ice hockey. Relative to sub-purpose 1, which aimed to use the Circumplex model FACES IV self-report measure to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey families, sub-purpose 1a addressed the question: "Do distinct family types exist?". Based on the Phase 1 FACES IV

quantitative results, we did not find distinct family types within our sample of 35 travel ice hockey families. Instead, all of the families were classified within a normal, balanced range of family functioning. As such, extreme scores on the unbalanced FACES IV scales (Cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; Flexibility – rigid, chaotic) were not identified.

Following this, sub-purpose 1b addressed the question: “Can all six family types be identified?”. To address sub-purpose 1b, the researcher compared the six family types (i.e., balanced, rigidly cohesive, midrange, flexibly unbalanced, chaotically disengaged and unbalanced) that were originally derived through a cluster analyses procedure upon validation of the Circumplex model to the four family types identified in the current sample. As previously stated regarding sub-purpose 1a, no distinct family types were identified from the quantitative data much less six distinct family types. Thus, in an absolute sense, no support was found for the six family types identified in the Circumplex model.

Sub-purpose 2 of this study aimed to conduct an exploratory assessment of the utility of the Circumplex model, guided by sub-purpose 2a and sub-purpose 2b. Sub-purpose 2a asked the question: “Using key dimensions of the Circumplex model, how can the functioning of the family types identified from the Phase 1 results be described?” While the six distinct family types were not found in this study, four families were selected to participate in Phase 2. These four families most closely resembled the Rigidly Cohesive family type (high closeness and high rigid scores; moderate flexibility and enmeshed scores; low disengaged scores and low chaotic scores), though could not be identified as such given their scores on the balanced flexibility and unbalanced cohesion – rigid and enmeshed scales did not reach the levels needed to be classified as such.



However, looking at similarities and differences between these four families provided insight into how the Circumplex model's key dimensions and principles could help scholars understand and describe the quantitative FACES IV findings and potentially provide an important advancement relative to how families as a system could be studied in sport psychology. Specifically, findings highlighted the nuances of family functioning by highlighting how the four families were characterized as generally normal, balanced family types, yet functioned differently in the context of travel ice hockey. While differences in family functioning within each family case emerged, core themes across the family cases were identified, which supported dimensions of the Circumplex model, while also showcasing other key considerations outside of the Circumplex model that may be important for understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey.

Finally, sub-purpose 2b addressed the question: "Can the three primary hypotheses of the Circumplex model add to our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey?" Based on the data collected, the results seem to be consistent with the three guiding hypotheses, though conclusions cannot be made without a direct test of family systems theory. Specifically, a comparison of functional versus dysfunctional families is necessary as well as implementation of a longitudinal design in order to understand how (and if) families modify their levels of functioning across time.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore family functioning in travel ice hockey and, in doing so, conduct one of the first studies in sport psychology to examine sport families as an integrated system with different members of that system influencing each other in complex ways. This was done by using the Circumplex model to describe and inform our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey. It was hoped that by using the FACES IV self-report measure in Phase 1 of the study that it would be possible to identify distinct family types (i.e., functional and dysfunctional families). However, despite the fact that 35 families were assessed, this did not happen and distinct family types that informed the Circumplex model were not evident. However, following completion of Phase 2 of the study, which involved qualitative interviews with four families, the Circumplex model dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, communication) and guiding principles provided a valuable frame for describing how family's functioned in travel ice hockey through use of a family systems approach. Specifically, using the family systems approach, consideration of the *collective* family was emphasized, allowing us to understand how families functioned as one unit, or system in this context.

Findings revealed nuances of family functioning as all four families used in Phase 2 of the study were characterized as normal, balanced family types, yet functioned differently in the context of travel ice hockey. In line with this point, mothers and fathers FACES IV results were not always congruent with other family members perceptions of family functioning, which supported use of a family systems approach versus an individualized family member approach. Moreover, while differences in family functioning within each family case emerged, core themes across the family cases were identified. These included:

- family goal direction impacts functioning
- travel ice hockey as a shared interest supports cohesion
- the need for balance of separateness and togetherness
- development of strong subsystem relationships between father and children
- the need for balance of stability and change
- family structure matters; and
- communication facilitates family functioning.

These core themes supported dimensions of the Circumplex model and also showcased other key considerations outside of the Circumplex model that may have important implications for understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey in particular and youth sports in general.

### **Critical Analysis of Mixed Methods Design**

It was disappointing that distinct family types (i.e., functional and dysfunctional families) were not derived from the Circumplex model using the FACES IV self-report measure. However, using the mixed methods approach, which included collecting Phase 1 quantitative data to select families to complete Phase 2 interviews regarding their functioning in the context of travel ice hockey allowed for a more complete and comprehensive picture of family functioning in travel ice hockey to emerge (Doyle et al., 2009). Because all four families were identified as normal, balanced family types prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher was able to consider these specific family types throughout the duration of the research process (e.g., family selection, qualitative data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results), making for a systematic and theoretically-based analysis of each family. This would not have been possible if only the quantitative assessment was administered.

In the current study, the initial quantitative FACES IV data collected from mothers and/or fathers enhanced purposeful sampling and case selection of the four families taking part in Phase 2 of the study. Specifically, based on the FACES IV data, the researcher was able to identify the total sample ( $n = 35$ ) as balanced, healthy family types prior to conducting the Phase 2 qualitative interviews. In relation to Phase 1, the quantitative FACES IV data collected from mothers and/or fathers provided a frame of reference (i.e., objective scores on balanced and unbalanced family functioning scales) in which the researcher was able to explore and discuss intra-system variability. In line with this point, the Phase 2 qualitative data subjectively informed the quantitative data, while providing greater depth in describing and understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey. Previous studies that have used a family system approach to guide their work have typically only incorporated a qualitative component and have therefore been unable to address family functioning with larger samples or provide a general frame of reference for understanding the family's objective level of functioning (Kay, 2000; Newhouse-Bailey et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to expand and strengthen the study findings in several ways. First, there was triangulation – convergence was identified; for example, all families highlighted the importance of balancing separateness and togetherness, which reflected their balanced cohesion and flexibility scores. Second, a lack of convergence was found relative to cohesion and communication among some families. The Family 79 father had balanced family functioning scores on the FACES IV, which was triangulated among all family members except the oldest son, Skyler who perceived less adaptive function related to cohesion and communication). Third, complementarity was uncovered; for example, the Family 7 mother had low communication and satisfaction scores on the FACES IV,

which was explained primarily as a worry regarding her children's ability to be open and share their true feelings (Bryman, 2006). Taken together, the combining the two approaches (quantitative and qualitative) was helpful for addressing the specific research questions posed in the current study (Creswell, 2003).

### **Phase 1: Quantitative FACES IV Self-Report Measure**

Phase 1 of this study did not identify distinct family types (all families were normal, balanced family types) nor one of the six family types (Balanced, Rigidly Cohesive, Midrange, Flexibly Unbalanced, Chaotically Disengaged and Unbalanced) derived from the Circumplex model using the FACES IV self-report measure. Given that this was one of the first studies to assess family functioning in travel ice hockey, it is important to critically analyze how the model assessed family types. It is unclear whether the inability to identify distinct family types and any of the six family types was related to contextual issues related to travel ice hockey or an empirical issue related to the Circumplex model.

When considering the study sample, it is possible that travel ice hockey participation was biased toward functional family types. Families did not perceive their participation in travel ice hockey as a depletion of resources, which does not align with Newhouse-Bailey and colleagues (2015) study that aimed to understand family functioning among elite athletes. Newhouse-Bailey and colleagues (2015) findings suggested the main challenge that families experienced as a result of their child's participation was a depletion of resources; specifically, the demand on time and finances. Previous research has also identified financial burden as a large stressor on families involved in elite sport (Dixon et al., 2008; Kay, 2000). In this study, while families noted cost as a concern, it was not a concern that seemed to impact the families on a daily basis. The four families also dismissed any issues associated with stress outside of typical challenges

experienced in travel ice hockey (e.g., scheduling, league expectations, team tryouts). One potential explanation for this is that the four families in the current study had sufficient resources (e.g., finances, sport knowledge and experience, family structure), which seemed to support their functioning. Accordingly, the travel ice hockey context and its demands may make it very difficult for dysfunctional families to be involved.

Demographic information related to family structure may also help to explain the normal, balanced family types identified in the current study. The majority of the total sample (94.3% two-parent biological), including the four families who completed the Phase 2 interviews, consisted of nuclear (two-parent household) family types. While little to no evidence exists in the sport domain linking family structure and family functioning, previous research in the family therapy literature that investigated family structure differences in family functioning found lower family functioning levels within stable cohabitating two-biological-parent households and stable single-biological households relative to stable married two-biological parent households, even after sociodemographic controls (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012). With this in mind, functioning of the family may not only be created by the family members themselves but also dependent on the demands of the travel ice hockey context and the resources (e.g., finances, family structure) afforded to families in their environment. Thus, it may be unlikely that extreme, dysfunctional family types exist in travel ice hockey; therefore, the Circumplex model may not apply well in this context because if families are unable to function efficiently, they may simply not involve themselves in travel ice hockey.

Based on a thorough review of the previous topics studied and validation of the Circumplex model itself, the inability to identify distinct family types may reflect more of an empirical issue than a conceptual issue. Specifically, weaknesses associated with the validation

of the model were identified. The validation of the Circumplex model was based on a modified convenience and snowball sample, which asked individual students from a junior-level family systems and diversity course to complete the FACES IV self-report measure and encouraged them to reach out to their family members, friends, fellow students, and co-workers to complete the FACES IV as well. This resulted in a sample including 469 participants with around 15% being other family members included. The final sample had an average age of 28 and a range of 18-59 years. About two thirds of the sample was single and female, and one third of the sample was married (Olson & Gorall, 2006; Olson, 2011).

Considering the information above, it is interesting that the Circumplex model is based in a family systems approach, which suggests researchers should study the family as one unit, or system to understand the complex interactions that occur within the family; yet, in the validation study, an individualized approach was taken by only sampling students from a junior-level family systems and diversity course to complete the FACES IV self-report measure. It is possible that the individualized approach did not allow the researcher to capture a holistic snapshot of family functioning. With this in mind, while the current study included a purposefully selected, consistent sample of only mothers and/or fathers it may have been helpful to explore perceptions of family functioning using the FACES IV from *all* family members (i.e., both parents, youth athlete, siblings) to potentially help us identify distinct family types. For example, in Family 79, collecting quantitative FACES IV data from the oldest son, Skyler, may have resulted in the identification of a distinct family type outside of the normal, balanced functioning types in the current sample as he seemed to qualitatively perceive less adaptive functioning among himself and his family. Accordingly, it is possible that the empirical concerns described above may have

contributed to our inability to identify distinct family types within a sample of travel ice hockey families.

## **Phase 2: Qualitative Interviews Guided by Circumplex Model**

Empirically, using the quantitative FACES IV self-report measure, it was difficult to classify families on extreme levels of family functioning (i.e., Cohesion – disengaged, enmeshed; Flexible – rigid, chaotic). While distinct family types were not found, conceptually, the Circumplex model and its dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, communication) and guiding principles made sense to use as a lens for navigating and understanding the experiences of four travel ice hockey families. By doing so, the researcher was able to better understand the parents' ratings on the FACES IV and explore the utility of using the Circumplex model to understand family functioning, something that has not been done in the sport psychology research. The rich, detailed qualitative findings resulting from doing so offered nuance in helping us to understand each family case and explain the quantitative findings.

**Family systems approach.** Within the youth sport domain, much has been written about the involvement of parents and the important implications this has for children's sport outcomes and development (Holt & Knight, 2014; Knight, 2019). These valuable contributions describe how parents are involved in children's sport, but not the functioning of the family system as a whole. Accordingly, little empirical evidence exists linking a family system approach to the sport context, as this approach has been mainly applied in the family therapy and family development literature (Crocker & Walker, 2017). In the current study, exploring the concept of *holism*, or the family "as a whole" (i.e., from a systematic perspective) highlighted the importance of viewing the family as one integrated unit rather than individual parts (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974).



This approach aligns with a recent call put forth by Dorsch and colleagues (2020) suggesting that the persons and contexts surrounding an athlete in youth sport should be examined collectively.

As such, studying the family from a systems approach displayed characteristics of family functioning that could not be tapped into by considering only individual or dyadic aspects (Minuchin, 1974; Schilling et al., 2006). For example, without a family systems approach, outliers within family cases would've been more difficult to identify. In Family 79, interviews with all family members (i.e., father, mother, Kurtis, Skyler) shed light on how a coalition formed between the father, mother, and Kurtis given their goals, interests, and involvement in travel ice hockey, resulting in positive perceptions of their family's functioning. Yet, Skyler, the oldest son, had vastly different views of his family's functioning given his lack of interest and involvement in travel ice hockey resulting in less adaptive perceptions of cohesion and communication among his family. Accordingly, these results pointed to an imbalance within the family system, a finding that likely would not have come to light without consideration of *all* family member's collective perspectives.

Using a family system approach also illuminated how one family member's perspective may not accurately inform the whole family's functioning. For example, in Family 7, the quantitative FACES IV results completed by the mother indicated poor perceptions of the family's communication and satisfaction, which would suggest communication did not act as a facilitating dimension for the family's balance of cohesion and flexibility in travel ice hockey (Olson et al., 2019). However, interviews with the mother provided a clearer understanding of this rating, suggesting that while she viewed her family's communication as a "work in progress" she still felt that their communication contributed to her family's balance of cohesion and flexibility. Moreover, interviews with the other family members revealed more positive

perceptions of communication and satisfaction, suggesting that examination of family members experiences from a systems perspective provided valuable insight into instances of divergence between the quantitative FACES IV scores completed by one mother and/or father and the qualitative interviews with all family members, which in turn extended knowledge in this area beyond an individualized approach. In addition, utilizing both the quantitative and qualitative data was helpful as the researcher was able to recognize and identify divergence in family perceptions of functioning.

In line with the point above, the current study's systems approach showed that the absolute level of family functioning (i.e., FACES IV scores) was not the determining factor for adaptive family functioning. Rather, the determining factor seemed to be the degree to which balance existed across the family system regarding how they functioned in travel ice hockey. For example, in Family 58, the father identified low perceptions of communication on the FACES IV. In the interviews, the father suggested that his personal communication skills were a barrier for his family's functioning, which was echoed by the other members of the family. While the family mutually agreed that the father's communication skills were poor and not necessarily facilitative, this type of functioning worked for the family because they were all on the same page in terms of how they operated in "organized chaos" in this context. Accordingly, this aligns with the family systems approach, which suggests that what may objectively be considered "good" and/or "bad" functioning within a system may be less important for understanding family functioning than the degree to which the family accepts and supports the way in which they function (Olson et al., 2019).

Taken together, the family systems approach captured nuance in family functioning that otherwise may have been lost by simply using a quantitative individualized approach. Future

research will benefit from applying a family system approach to understand family functioning as it will allow researchers to address questions that cannot be addressed using an individualized family member approach. For example, in relation to communication, a researcher using an individualized family member approach might ask: “How does a youth athlete’s level of communication with their family impact his or her perceptions of family functioning?” In contrast, using a family system approach, a researcher could ask: “How do variable levels of family communication skills together shape functioning in youth sport?” The family systems approach provides a different perspective than trying to understand the experience of the youth athlete who has parents and/or siblings.

Consistent with the family systems approach, the dimensions of the Circumplex model were important for understanding family functioning in the context of travel ice hockey. For example, hockey as a shared interest enhanced family cohesion, which aligns with previous research suggesting that high levels of athlete involvement in athletics make sport a shared activity or a core activity in family life (Horn & Horn, 2007; Sacks et al., 2005).

As such, while the researcher was unable to directly test the hypotheses associated with the Circumplex model, the researcher was able to subjectively explore the theoretical relationships among the dimensions based on these hypotheses. Based on the study findings, the family’s ability to balance their separateness and togetherness (cohesion) and stability and change (flexibility) were both key for understanding functioning in travel ice hockey. Such a balance is one of the underlying concepts of a family systems approach, which suggests that families seek a dynamic state of homeostasis (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

Hypothesis 1 suggested balanced family systems tend to be more functional (and happy and successful) than unbalanced family systems (Olson et al., 2019). Following a review of over

525 studies using the Circumplex model, Kouneski (2000) found that the majority of these studies have supported this hypothesis. Importantly, these previous studies typically compared couples and families experiencing a variety of emotional problems and symptoms to non-clinical families, which the current study was unable to do because only normal, balanced, family types were found. Therefore, future research in the sport context will benefit from including both functional and dysfunctional families to compare to one another to better assess and understanding family functioning, although finding dysfunctional families may be difficult.

Hypothesis 2 suggested normal, balanced systems tend to have more positive, healthy communication. Results from the current study seem to be consistent with this hypothesis and previous studies found strong support that balanced couples and families had more positive communication than those who were unbalanced (Kouneski, 2000). In the current study, communication served as a facilitating dimension for four balanced family types studied and their functioning. Specifically, communication paved the way for family organization and helped members to feel connected and supported (Perosa & Perosa, 2001). With this in mind, because there were also examples of negative, unproductive communication identified within the normal, balanced family types, it would be valuable to directly test Hypothesis 2 with functional and dysfunctional family types to better understand how this impacted their balance and/or imbalance of cohesion and flexibility.

Hypothesis 3 suggested families will modify their levels of cohesion and/or flexibility to effectively deal with situational stress and developmental changes across the family life cycle. While retrospective examples of the way in which families modified their levels of cohesion and flexibility were identified in the current study, the researcher was unable to assess the family's modification of cohesion and flexibility due to the cross-sectional design employed. With this in

mind, most of the previous studies assessing change over time have been done with couples and families in therapy. Specifically, pre-test and post-tests revealed that couples changed to become more balanced at post-test (Kouneski, 2000; Olson, 2011). Accordingly, a longitudinal design would be needed to test Hypothesis 3 to better understand how families modified their levels of cohesion and/or flexibility in travel ice hockey across time.

This study also considered the way in which other guiding principles of the family systems approach informed family functioning in travel ice hockey. Previous research in the family functioning literature (Klein & White, 1996) and sport parent literature (Harwood & Knight, 2015) has suggested that families are goal directed. The current study provided evidence to support this principle while also highlighting the importance of shared goals between parents and athletes (Knight & Holt, 2014) for adaptive family functioning. The principle of triangulation also emerged, specifically related to Family 58's functioning between the father, Gavin, and his mother. Family systems researchers suggest triangulation is most likely to develop when a dyad is experiencing stress that is not addressed in any constructive way. The dilemma for the child in such circumstances is that to please one parent is to displease the other. This experience is not uncommon for children going through their parents' divorce when hostility arises (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). In Family 58, tension existed between the father and Gavin's biological mother regarding their disagreement toward Gavin's travel ice hockey participation, which resulted in the indirect triangulation of Gavin in this situation, ultimately leading to an imbalance within this particular family system. In this case, the process of triangulation led to less stable and shifting alliances. Previous research has suggested that triangulation can have immediate and longer term adverse social and psychological consequences for some children (Blow & Daniel, 2002).

Another key consideration that emerged outside of the Circumplex model that may be important for understanding family functioning in travel ice hockey was the theme that family structure matters. When critically analyzing why this study had difficulty identifying distinct family types, it was suggested that this might be due to empirical issues related to the Circumplex model. Specifically, concerns were raised regarding use of the Circumplex model to understand only normal, balanced family types as this model has been primarily used for clinical populations and intervention purposes (Olson, 2000). Given this information, use of the Circumplex model in the travel ice hockey context might lead one to believe the researcher is aiming to “fix” or intervene on the family to enhance and/or improve functioning. However, when considering the finding that emerged across the four families highlighting family structure and more specifically, nuclear family types, as an important factor to consider related to family functioning in ice hockey, it may be that the point of intervention should not be the family system itself but rather the broader sport system in which the family is immersed.

For example, in the current study, findings suggested that the nuclear family type, involving a two-parent household, was important for supporting adaptive functioning in travel ice hockey. Taking a closer look at the total sample’s demographic information, 80% of families completed college and/or had an advanced college degree, 62.9% had an average annual income of \$100,001 and more, and 90% identified as White. These demographic and family structure data suggest a relatively homogenous sample relative to family structure, socioeconomic status, race, and education in the context of travel ice hockey. Accordingly, previous research has suggested disparities in organized sport participation by family-related factors such as family structure (Bramlett & Blumberg, 2007). Considering this information in relation to the sport system, as researchers and practitioners, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

Are we putting up barriers for non-nuclear families to participate in certain sports? Or, are we making it more difficult for families with different dynamics to participate in certain sports?

When we critically analyze the questions above, rather than attempting to intervene at the family level, it may be helpful to look at the broader sport system to identify ways in which we can support a range of families with different dynamics. For example, in the current study, Family 12 suggested that it was helpful that their travel ice hockey organization structured practices throughout the week within the same general time frame for both of their children involved. Thus, to support other family structures (e.g., single-parent, stepfamily), organizations might provide same time practice and/or game options for families with children in different age groups or teams. Another example currently being implemented by USA Hockey that may be helpful for diversifying family participation is the “Try Hockey for Free Day” program, which offers families from all backgrounds with the opportunity to let their child(ren) try out ice hockey for free, while providing them with the necessary equipment to participate (USA Hockey, n.d.). Accordingly, future research should continue to examine the way in which elements of particular sport systems impact families with different family structures outside of the nuclear family type. In this case, studying the interconnected nature of family types and the sport context that may reciprocally influence one another would be valuable (Dorsch et al., 2020).

Reflecting on the findings in this study, the researcher had the most confidence in the application of a family systems approach to understand functioning in travel ice hockey and therefore suggests that examining all elements of the family system is essential.

## **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While the results provide an initial understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey, they must be considered within the context of the study's limitations. First, the study sample only consisted of normal, balanced family types; thus, the researcher was exploring family functioning in travel ice hockey within a relatively homogeneous sample. Given this information, the researcher was unable to compare functional versus dysfunctional family types in travel ice hockey, an approach that is typically applied when using the Circumplex model (Kouneski, 2000). Future research should aim to explore family functioning in unbalanced, extreme family types as this may help researchers and practitioners to identify dimensions of functional versus dysfunctional families in sport.

As discussed above, demographic data suggested that the majority of the total sample included nuclear family types (two-parent biological: 94.3%). The study findings suggested family structure was an important characteristic that impacted family functioning in travel ice hockey. Previous studies in the family therapy literature have found associations between family structure and functioning (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2013) and other health related outcomes (wellbeing – e.g., McFarlane & Bellissimo, 1995; substance use – e.g., Wagner et al., 2010). Given this information, future research should consider targeting and exploring other types of family structures (e.g., single-parent household; stepfamily) to understand how they function similarly or differently in the context of travel ice hockey.

Similar to previous studies in the sport parent literature (Elliott & Drummond, 2017, Neely et al., 2017; Tamminen et al., 2016), the researcher adopted an individualized family member approach for Phase 1 of the current study, which involved collecting quantitative data through the FACES IV self-report measure from one mother and/or father in travel ice hockey.



While the Phase 1 data collected from one mother and/or father provided an objective frame of reference for understanding the family's level of functioning in travel ice hockey, future research may benefit from collecting FACES IV data from all family members to compare and contrast their functioning on the FACES IV profile. This may provide initial quantitative insight into the collective family's alignment and/or misalignment on dimensions of family functioning, which may serve to better inform family functioning in the youth sport context.

Because this study adopted an exploratory, cross-sectional design, the researcher was unable to assess family functioning across time. While the current study identified retrospective examples that identified ways in which family's modified their cohesion and/or flexibility, the researcher was unable to make concrete conclusions regarding these findings given the exploratory nature of this study. For a complete test of the Circumplex model, implementation of a longitudinal design is necessary as it would allow us to establish the direction of relationships found in the study. Specifically, longitudinal assessment of family functioning would allow researchers to directly test the Circumplex model's guiding hypotheses and examine potential changes in dimensions of functioning across time. In line with this point, using a longitudinal design, one might consider conducting an observational study assessing families in real-time (e.g., observe meal-time observations) relative to their functioning in sport.

For example, considering the current study findings, Family 79, who differed the most demographically from the other three families in terms of socioeconomic status did not perceive their son's specialization in travel ice hockey as a depletion of resources. Upon a critical analysis of this family, the researcher interpreted Family 79 as rigidly positive toward their travel ice hockey experience, which may help to explain their adamant views that travel ice hockey did not contribute to a depletion of their resources no matter how much they put toward the experience

(e.g., finances, time). Because the researcher has a suitable grasp of the specific context of Family 79's travel ice hockey participation, this led her to interpret some self-protection occurring within the family related to their functioning in travel ice hockey.

Specifically, considering their current travel ice hockey organization and the reality of the number of college scholarships distributed annually per team for NCAA Division I collegiate ice hockey (i.e., 18 scholarships per team that last 4 years), objectively, it is unlikely that their son will make it to a collegiate and/or professional level of play. Accordingly, while on the surface, Family 79's functioning seemed generally positive, this family may experience issues over time because of how *rigidly* positive they are toward travel ice hockey and how it will lead to a college scholarship for their child. The researcher was unable to assess changes in functioning over time in the current study due to its cross-sectional nature. Thus, it would be interesting to assess Family 79 across time to examine how their functioning changed (or not) if their expectations did not pan out in this context. For example, if the son, Kurtis, did not receive a college scholarship to play ice hockey, one might ask the question of whether or not the family had the capacity to adapt to this situation given their rigidly positive mentality. In this case, it may be that the more the family puts into the experience, the more they rationalize and justify their rigidly positive behaviors and attitudes.

In line with the point above, future research should also aim to increase the study sample size to enhance generalizability by conducting longitudinal work to quantitatively explore how family functioning in sport contributes to other broader health-related family outcomes (e.g., enjoyment, stress, burnout).

## Conclusion

While research on parents in youth sport has gained scholarly interest in recent years, the exploration of the collective family, including all members (parents, youth athletes, siblings) remains an area that requires greater attention. The current study emphasized the importance of exploring families as one unit, or system to understand family functioning in travel ice hockey. In line with this point, it allowed the researcher to move from an individualized, top-down approach toward a more integrated approach that considered the family as a coordinated system. Moreover, the family systems approach highlighted the way in which key principles informed family functioning, which allowed the researcher to consider characteristics that are generally not explored in relation to the study of sport families in the sport and exercise psychology literature (e.g., triangulation, subsystem relationships, family structure considerations). As such, the complex nature of family functioning was highlighted by describing how normal, balanced family types did not always function the same way in travel ice hockey. While differences in family functioning within each of the four family cases emerged, core themes across the family cases were identified. This supported dimensions of the Circumplex model, while also showcasing other key considerations outside of the Circumplex model that may be important for understanding family functioning.

Taken together, a family systems approach is valuable for the study sport families, as it provides a more realistic and holistic view of how families function in sport contexts. The current study enriched our understanding of family functioning in travel ice hockey through use of a systems approach and highlighted the importance of continued research on this topic.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

### **MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Initial Study APPROVAL Revised Common Rule**

June 25, 2020

To: Daniel Roy Gould

Re: **MSU Study ID: STUDY00004676**  
**IRB: Biomedical and Health Institutional Review Board**  
**Principal Investigator: Daniel Roy Gould**  
**Category: Expedited 6, 7**  
**Submission: Initial Study STUDY00004676**  
**Submission Approval Date: 6/24/2020**  
**Effective Date: 6/24/2020**  
**Study Expiration Date: None; however modification and closure**  
**submissions are required (see below).**

Title: ALL IN THE FAMILY: AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN YOUTH SPORT



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This submission has been approved by the Michigan State University (MSU) BIRB. The submission was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the Non-Committee Review procedure. The IRB has found that this study protects the rights and welfare of human subjects and meets the requirements of MSU's Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00004556) and the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects in research (e.g., 2018 45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 50, 56, other applicable regulations).

Temporary institutional restrictions are in place until further notice for human subject research conducted by MSU employees or agents. All MSU human research activities conducted by MSU employees or agents that take place in Michigan and cannot be done at home or place of residence with no inter-personal interaction with participants and others like research staff must stop unless the project is a clinical trial activity, that if discontinued, would negatively impact the patient's care, or is urgently related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing clinical trial activity, which if discontinued, would negatively impact the patient's care may continue with already enrolled participants. New enrollment in clinical trials conducted in Michigan is not permitted without additional institutional approval.

For MSU human research activities that take place outside of Michigan, unless there is the potential for direct therapeutic benefit to the participant (drug or device), any in-person participant interaction must immediately pause. This applies to both exempt and non-exempt research studies.

For all human research studies, research procedures involving no direct in-person interactions with participants may continue (e.g. data analysis, online surveys, telephone interviews) in otherwise permissible venues, so long as State and local requirements are met.

MSU is an affirmative action,  
equal opportunity employer.

## **Appendix B: Bracketing Interview Guide**

### **Bracketing Interview Guide**

1. Provide your gender, age, ethnicity or national identity, education
  - a. How might these characteristics of the self influence the way in which you approach this research study?
1. Please share your own personal youth sport experiences
  - a. Related to your participation
  - b. Related to family influence
  - c. Related to how your personal youth sport experience might impact this study
2. What are your personal experiences related to travel ice hockey?
  - a. How might these experiences shape the way you view/approach this research study?
3. Reflect on your personal assumptions/biases related to:
  - a. Sport families
  - b. Travel ice hockey
  - c. Family functioning
4. How will you ensure that your personal assumptions/biases will not unduly influence the research process?

## Appendix C: Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale Fourth Edition (FACES IV)

### FACES IV: Questionnaire

#### Directions to Family Members:

1. All family members over the age 12 can complete FACES IV.
2. Family members should complete the instrument independently, not consulting or discussing their responses until they have been completed.
3. Fill in the corresponding **number** in the space on the provided answer sheet.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Generally Disagree	Undecided	Generally Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Family members are involved in each others lives.
2. Our family tries new ways of dealing with problems.
3. We get along better with people outside our family than inside.
4. We spend too much time together.
5. There are strict consequences for breaking the rules in our family.
6. We never seem to get organized in our family.
7. Family members feel very close to each other.
8. Parents equally share leadership in our family.
9. Family members seem to avoid contact with each other when at home.
10. Family members feel pressured to spend most free time together.
11. There are clear consequences when a family member does something wrong.
12. It is hard to know who the leader is in our family.
13. Family members are supportive of each other during difficult times.
14. Discipline is fair in our family.
15. Family members know very little about the friends of other family members.
16. Family members are too dependent on each other.
17. Our family has a rule for almost every possible situation.
18. Things do not get done in our family.
19. Family members consult other family members on important decisions.
20. My family is able to adjust to change when necessary.
21. Family members are on their own when there is a problem to be solved.
22. Family members have little need for friends outside the family.
23. Our family is highly organized.
24. It is unclear who is responsible for things (chores, activities) in our family.
25. Family members like to spend some of their free time with each other.
26. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.
27. Our family seldom does things together.
28. We feel too connected to each other.
29. Our family becomes frustrated when there is a change in our plans or routines.
30. There is no leadership in our family.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Generally Disagree	Undecided	Generally Agree	Strongly Agree

31. Although family members have individual interests, they still participant in family activities.
32. We have clear rules and roles in our family.
33. Family members seldom depend on each other.
34. We resent family members doing things outside the family.
35. It is important to follow the rules in our family.
36. Our family has a hard time keeping track of who does various household tasks.
  
37. Our family has a good balance of separateness and closeness.
38. When problems arise, we compromise.
39. Family members mainly operate independently.
40. Family members feel guilty if they want to spend time away from the family.
41. Once a decision is made, it is very difficult to modify that decision.
42. Our family feels hectic and disorganized.

- 
43. Family members are satisfied with how they communicate with each other.
  44. Family members are very good listeners.
  45. Family members express affection to each other.
  46. Family members are able to ask each other for what they want.
  47. Family members can calmly discuss problems with each other.
  48. Family members discuss their ideas and beliefs with each other.
  49. When family members ask questions of each other, they get honest answers.
  50. Family members try to understand each other's feelings
  51. When angry, family members seldom say negative things about each other.
  52. Family members express their true feelings to each other.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Generally Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied

**How satisfied are you with:**

53. The degree of closeness between family members.
54. Your family's ability to cope with stress.
55. Your family's ability to be flexible.
56. Your family's ability to share positive experiences.
57. The quality of communication between family members.
58. Your family's ability to resolve conflicts.
59. The amount of time you spend together as a family.
60. The way problems are discussed.
61. The fairness of criticism in your family.
62. Family members concern for each other.

***Thank you for Your Cooperation!***



## Appendix D: FACES IV Percentile Conversion Charts

<b>Percentile Conversion Chart – Balanced Scales</b>					
<b>A. COHESION Raw Score</b>	<b>COHESION Percentile Score</b>	<b>COHESION Level</b>	<b>B. FLEXIBILITY Raw Score</b>	<b>FLEXIBILITY Percentile Score</b>	<b>FLEXIBILITY Level</b>
7	16	Somewhat Connected	7	16	Somewhat Flexible
8	18	Somewhat Connected	8	18	Somewhat Flexible
9	20	Somewhat Connected	9	20	Somewhat Flexible
10	22	Somewhat Connected	10	22	Somewhat Flexible
11	24	Somewhat Connected	11	24	Somewhat Flexible
12	25	Somewhat Connected	12	25	Somewhat Flexible
13	26	Somewhat Connected	13	26	Somewhat Flexible
14	27	Somewhat Connected	14	27	Somewhat Flexible
15	28	Somewhat Connected	15	28	Somewhat Flexible
16	30	Somewhat Connected	16	30	Somewhat Flexible
17	32	Somewhat Connected	17	32	Somewhat Flexible
18	35	Somewhat Connected	18	35	Somewhat Flexible
19	36	Connected	19	36	Flexible
20	38	Connected	20	38	Flexible
21	40	Connected	21	40	Flexible
22	45	Connected	22	45	Flexible
23	50	Connected	23	50	Flexible
24	55	Connected	24	55	Flexible
25	58	Connected	25	58	Flexible
26	60	Connected	26	60	Flexible
27	62	Connected	27	62	Flexible
28	65	Connected	28	65	Flexible
29	68	Very Connected	29	68	Very Flexible
30	70	Very Connected	30	70	Very Flexible
31	75	Very Connected	31	75	Very Flexible
32	80	Very Connected	32	80	Very Flexible
33	82	Very Connected	33	82	Very Flexible
34	84	Very Connected	34	84	Very Flexible
35	85	Very Connected	35	85	Very Flexible

## Percentile Conversion Chart – Unbalanced Scales

Unbalanced Raw Scores	C. DISENGAGED Percentile Score	D. ENMESHED Percentile Score	E. RIGID Percentile Score	F. CHAOTIC Percentile Score	Unbalanced Levels
7	10	10	10	10	Very Low
8	12	12	12	12	Very Low
9	13	13	13	13	Very Low
10	14	14	14	14	Very Low
11	15	15	15	15	Very Low
12	16	16	16	16	Very Low
13	18	18	18	18	Very Low
14	20	20	20	20	Very Low
15	24	24	24	24	Very Low
16	26	26	26	26	Very Low
17	30	30	30	30	Low
18	32	32	32	32	Low
19	34	34	34	34	Low
20	36	36	36	36	Low
21	40	40	40	40	Low
22	45	45	45	45	Moderate
23	50	50	50	50	Moderate
24	55	55	55	55	Moderate
25	60	60	60	60	Moderate
26	64	64	64	64	High
27	68	68	68	68	High
28	70	70	70	70	High
29	75	75	75	75	High
30	80	80	80	80	Very High
31	85	85	85	85	Very High
32	90	90	90	90	Very High
33	95	95	95	95	Very High
34	98	98	98	98	Very High
35	99	99	99	99	Very High

### Family Communication: Interpretation of Scores

Percentage and Levels	Family Communication	Family Communication	
		Raw Score	Percentile
<b>Very High</b>  86-99%	Family members feel very positive about the quality and quantity of their family communication.	50	99
		49	97
		48	96
		47	94
		46	90
		45	88
		44	86
<b>High</b>  61-85%	Family members feel good about their family communication and have few concerns.	43	83
		42	80
		41	74
		40	70
		39	65
		38	62
<b>Moderate</b>  36-60%	Family members feel generally good about their family communication, but have some concerns.	37	58
		36	50
		35	44
		34	40
		33	36
<b>Low</b>  21-35%	Family members have several concerns about the quality of their family communication.	32	32
		31	28
		30	24
		29	21
<b>Very Low</b>  10-20%	Family members have many concerns about the quality of their family communication.	28	18
		27	15
		26	14
		25	13
		24	12
		10-23	10

## Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

### General Sport Background Questions (keep it brief)

Thanks for agreeing to participate in this interview. To start, I just wanted to spend a couple minutes to collect some background information on your family's sport participation.

#### **Mother or Father:**

1. To begin, could you tell me how your child got involved in [insert travel/club] sport?

##### ***Probes:***

- a. Who was influential in making the decision to become involved?
  - b. How (if at all) did your own personal sport participation play a role?
  - c. What are characteristics of the travel/club sport participation that you view as advantageous? Disadvantageous? Why or why not?
    - a. Time
    - b. Money
    - c. Scheduling? Consistent or not?
    - d. Coaching?
    - e. League expectations? (attending events, time/money)
2. Goals for your child's hockey participation?
    - a. Would you say you and your wife have similar goals/expectations for your child in hockey?

### Questions used to understand family functioning in youth sport:

Today we are going to talk about your family dynamics and functioning in travel/club sport. When I use the term "family functioning" I'm just referring primarily to the interactions and relationships within your family. Families function and interact in all different ways, depending on the personalities of the family members and specific situational factors (e.g., both parents working, age of siblings). With this in mind, it's important to remember there's no right or wrong way when it comes to family functioning! It's really about what works for the family. The way one family functions may look different than the way another family functions and that's OK. So, when thinking about your family's functioning, I'd like you to think about the following characteristics:

**Cohesion:** Cohesion is how close your family is to one another. It describes your family's emotional bonding toward one another – both physically and emotionally. Essentially, cohesion describes how tight knit your family is; interested in how your family balances their togetherness versus separateness.

**Flexibility:** Flexibility is interested in characteristics such as leadership styles in your family, roles that may exist (i.e., one takes care of finances; one might be in charge of groceries and cooking meals), and any family rules or negotiations that exist in your home.

When you think about your family's flexibility and the characteristics mentioned above (roles, leadership styles, rules), think about whether these characteristics may be more rigid or fixed (unlikely to change regardless of the context/situation) or more flexible and likely to change.

Really interested in whether these characteristics are generally stable; don't change very often; your family is kind of set in their ways; or your family does change. And when certain situations occur that requires flexibility - does your family have the ability to adapt/be flexible/change when necessary? Taken together, flexibility refers to how your family balances stability versus change.

**Communication:** your family's communication patterns – their listening skills, speaking skills, respect and regard for one another.

### **Opening Questions:**

**Overall, how would you describe the way in which your family functions in your [insert travel/club sport] participation?**

#### ***Probes:***

- a. What are some positive aspects of your family functioning in [insert travel/club sport here]?
- b. What are some negative aspects of your family functioning in [insert travel/club sport here]?
- c. What aspects/characteristics of the sport experience are helpful/adaptive to your family's functioning?
- d. What aspects/characteristics of the sport experience are not helpful/maladaptive to your family's functioning?

### **Specific Questions focused on each dimension of Circumplex Model:**

#### **Cohesion**

Cohesion is how close your family is to one another. It describes your family's emotional bonding toward one another – both physically and emotionally. Essentially, cohesion describes how tight knit your family is; interested in how your family balances their togetherness versus separateness.

With that said, think about or compare your own family to other families you know and interact with....

1. How would you describe how tight knit and close your family is to one another both physically and emotionally? Think about the time you spend together or separately.

#### ***Probes:***

- b. How does your family's participation in travel sport impact this level of closeness?

2. Is travel sport participation an individual parent or child interest or a shared interest in your family? Why or why not?

**Probes:**

- a. If yes, how has it shaped your family's closeness towards one another?
  - b. If no, how has it shaped your family's closeness towards one another?
3. How does travel sport participation impact the amount of time you spend together (or do not spend together) as a family? Please explain.

**Probes:**

- a. If time is spent together, how do you feel about spending time together through travel sport as a family?
    - i. Do you feel forced or like you have to spend this time in sport together? Why or why not?
    - ii. Do you enjoy spending this time in sport together? Why or why not?
    - iii. How do you feel about the time spent together?
      - 1. Would you want to spend more time together as a family?
4. Describe how involved your family members are in \_\_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation?

Does your family take part in \_\_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation? For example, do family members attend practices/games.

**Probes:**

- a. How does this affect closeness of relationships in the family?
    - i. Particular subsystems or groups? (mother-youth athlete; father-youth athlete; youth-athlete-sibling, etc.)
5. Describe your family's supportiveness in \_\_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation?
- i. Sibling support? (rivalry, jealousy?)
  - ii. Parent support?
    - 1. Emotional, instrumental (transportation, finances)

**Probes:**

- b. Can you think of any difficult times or experiences related to the travel sport experience in which your family was supportive or unsupportive towards one another? (e.g., not making a team, not being able to have everyone do what they would like)
  - i. Think about a particular game (win or lose); try out; tournament; practice situation, etc.
- c. Are any family member's more or less supportive than other's when it comes to \_\_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation? Why or why not?
  - i. How would you say this affects your family's closeness?

6. How are important decisions made in your family regarding \_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation? (everyone is consulted in the family regarding the decision versus separately)

For example, if your family has to make a decision about paying for a \_\_\_\_ tournament, how is that decision made?

***Probes:***

- a. If everyone is consulted, why?
  - b. If separately, who primarily makes the decisions? Why?
  - c. What are some of those decisions related to travel sport?
  - d. How do you feel about the way in which these important decisions are made in your family?
7. Can you talk to me about any difficulties, problems or dilemmas in which your family faced in your travel sport participation?

***Probes:***

- a. Describe these problems or dilemmas.
  - b. How does your family handle these difficulties, problems or dilemmas?
    - Together as a "team", or separately (on their own)?
8. Do family members depend on one another when it comes to \_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation?

For example, a youth athlete like yourself might depend on your mom or dad to get you to practice/games throughout the week.

***Probes:***

- a. If yes, how so?
  - b. If no, why do you think that is?
9. Overall, in your travel sport participation, would you describe your family as operating mainly dependently (together) or independently (separately) from one another? Please explain.
10. Overall, do you believe that your family has a good balance of separateness (individualism) and closeness? Why or why not?

***Probes:***

- a. How does travel sport participation impact your family's balance of separateness and closeness?

## Flexibility

Flexibility is interested in characteristics such as leadership styles in your family, roles that may exist (i.e., one takes care of finances; one might be in charge of groceries and cooking meals), and any family rules or negotiations that exist in your home.

When you think about your family's flexibility and the characteristics mentioned above (roles, leadership styles, rules), think about whether these characteristics may be more rigid or fixed (unlikely to change regardless of the context/situation) or more flexible and likely to change.

Really interested in whether these characteristics are generally stable; don't change very often; your family is kind of set in their ways; or your family does change. And when certain situations occur that requires flexibility - does your family have the ability to adapt/be flexible/change when necessary? Taken together, flexibility refers to how your family balances stability versus change.

So, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), next I want to talk a little bit about your family's flexibility. In some of the family studies research, some families are kind of more rigid or very fixed or don't change when it comes to the way they do things and interact with one another. Whereas other families are much more flexible and more likely to change.

With that said, think about or compare your own family to other families you know and interact with....

1. How would you describe your own family?

***Probes:***

- a. Rigid/stable; not likely or willing to change; less openness to change
- b. Open to change when necessary; good balance of stable and flexible

So, you described your family as [rigid/fixed or flexible] compared to other families you know and interact with. Now I'd like you to think about this in the context of your family's travel/club sport participation....

2. How would you describe your family's flexibility in the context of \_\_\_\_\_'s travel sport participation?

***Probes:***

- a. Rigid/stable; not likely or willing to change; less openness to change
- b. Open to change when necessary; good balance of stable and flexible

3. Think specifically about your family's travel sport experience – how would you describe your family's ability to change in this context?

***Probes:***



- a. Think about a situation or “problem” or “challenge” in travel sport that required your family to adjust to change. Can you tell me about this travel sport experience and what your family did or did not do to change?
      - i. Ideas: try outs, tournaments, “big games”, life change (i.e., laid off work), bad performance, finances, getting to and from practices/games, lack of family time.
    - b. How would you describe your family’s emotions when it came to handling these situations/problems/challenges in travel sport?
      - i. Frustrated? Hectic? Disorganized? Calm, able to compromise together? Come up with new ways to deal?
  4. Would you say the travel sport experience makes it easier or more difficult for your family to be flexible and adapt to change?

***Probes:***

- a. Why or why not?
5. How would you describe your family’s leadership style(s) in the context of \_\_\_\_’s travel sport participation?

***Probes:***

- a. If leadership exists – what are the styles? Controlling, Democratic?
  - b. Shared equally? One specific family member leads? If yes, who and why?
  - c. Generally stable/doesn’t change? Changes? If this is the case, why and how?
6. How would you describe the way in which the travel sport experience impacts your family’s leadership?
  - a. Compare to day to day functioning – does leadership change?

For example, does your travel sport experience change how leadership looks in your family? Or does it not change at all?

7. In your household, does the family have clear rules that are expected to be followed?

***Probes:***

- a. If yes, describe some of these rules. (for example: sit down together as a family for family dinner during weeknights)
  - b. Are there consequences for breaking rules? What are they?
  - c. Is discipline distributed fairly across the family? How?
8. In your household, does travel sport impact the rules that exist in your family?
  - a. How so?

***Probes:***

9. What type of roles (*e.g., in charge of the house – cleaning/making dinner, child – does certain chores; someone is the “transporter” to and from activities; in charge of finances; takes care of school stuff*) (if any) exist in your family?
  - a. Financial?

- b. Emotional?
- 10.
- a. Are members of your family flexible in their roles? Do these roles change or are these roles generally stable across the family?
    - i. If they change, how so?
  - b. In the context of travel sport, what roles exist?
    - i. Specifically think about the travel sport experience – do these roles change or are these roles generally stable across the family? (e.g., someone is the supporter, transporter to and from practice/games, cooks the meals, cleans the house, provides sport advice/feedback, etc.)
11. How does the travel sport experience impact your family's organization when it comes to the rules and roles adopted in your family?
- Probes:**
- a. Lots of organization? No organization? Structure vs. no structure? Chaos? Set schedules/routines?
12. Overall, how would you describe your family's overall ability to adjust to change when necessary in travel sport?
- Probes:**
- a. How do you feel about your family's ability to adjust to change or not?

## Communication

Now, I'd like to talk to you about your family's communication. So, I'd like to hear about your family's listening skills, speaking skills, respect and regard for one another.

With that said, think about or compare your own family to other families you know and interact with....

- 1. Think about your family's travel sport experience... how would you describe your family's communication with one another in this context?
 

**Probes:**

  - a. Listening skills?
  - b. Speaking skills?
    - i. Expression of true feelings; Ability to ask questions and ask for what they want; calmly discuss problems with family members?
    - ii. Typical discussions in the house?
      - 1. Focus on what? (e.g., focus on travel hockey – logistics?)

Gavin- oldest- poorer communication; he feels pressure from dad to play hockey; he didn't want to tell his dad because he wanted him to have hockey. He feels a lot of pressure to play hockey.

- c. Ability to show respect and affection through communication with one another?
2. Describe any situations/aspects of travel sport that were facilitative/helpful or debilitating/harmful for your family's communication with one another.

***Probes:***

- a. Child's sport performance? Coach relationships; teammate relationships? Parent expectations for child; Travel/club expectations for family and youth athlete (traveling, finances, practice/game schedule)
- b. Strengths/weaknesses of communication

***Would it be possible to play sport without your communication?***

**Satisfaction with Family Functioning in Travel Sport:**

1. Describe how satisfied are you with the degree of closeness between your family members?
2. Describe how satisfied you are with your family's ability to be flexible?
3. Describe how satisfied you are with the quality of your family's communication?

**Sport and Family Outcomes**

How has travel hockey impacted you individually, as a parent?

- a. Increased sense of pride for your son's experience
- b. More opportunities for socialization with other families and players

Overall, how has travel hockey impacted your family?

- c. Positive outcomes?
- d. Negative outcomes? E.g., depletion of resources, conflict of family values with sport league.

Overall, how has travel hockey impacted relationships within your family?

- e. Wife
- f. Kids

Would you say your family is on the same page in terms of functioning in travel sport?

- Is it important?

Thoughts on one child in the household – do you think if this were different would it change how your family functions in travel hockey? Why or why not?

## **Family Dynamics**

1. How does travel sport participation impact your overall family dynamics?

Does the time commitment, cost, etc. have an impact on your family dynamics and things you do? (e.g., vacations, visiting friends/family, etc.)

### ***Probes:***

- a. Daily schedule throughout the week and weekend (e.g., family dinner, vacations, game nights, etc.)
- b. Individual interests? Ability to do other activities?

### **Stress:**

1. When thinking about your family's travel sport experience, describe any aspects/characteristics of this experience that may have affected your stress levels?

#### ***Probes:***

- a. What about the stress levels of your family as a whole? Why or why not?

### **Enjoyment:**

2. When thinking about your family's travel sport experience, describe any aspects/characteristics of this experience that may have affected your level of enjoyment?

#### ***Probes:***

- b. What about the level of enjoyment of your family as a whole? Why or why not?

### **Pandemic (COVID-19) Related Question:**

3. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced and/or affected your child/children's sport involvement?

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