Sport organizations develop and implement policies, procedures, and programs to differentiate themselves from other sport organizations operating in the same environment. Thus, the development and implementation of these policies, procedures, and programs have an impact on the ability of sport organizations to attract high profile athletes. The recruiting and attracting of high profile athletes can then be perceived as an indication of the success of the program, and increase the visibility of the sport organization and the league (Langelett, 2003). Thus, sport organizations develop and implement policies, procedures, and programs in an effort to gain recognition, legitimacy, and prestige (Rudolph 1962; Edwards et al., 2009; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). This is the case for Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). In the sport of hockey these organizations attract Canada’s elite level hockey players. The CIS, CHL, and NCAA are umbrella organizations that establish, enforce, and develop rules, regulations, and policies for member universities, colleges, and CHL franchises. Furthermore, the CIS, CHL, and NCAA are three options for Canadian elite level hockey player to play prior to playing in the National Hockey League (NHL). Therefore, the research question posed for this study is: What are the policies, procedures, and programs developed and implemented by the CIS, CHL, and NCAA that legitimize these organizations within their environment and attract Canada’s elite level hockey players?

The research takes an organizational perspective and uses the concept of attraction through the theoretical construct of legitimacy to answer the research question. The concept of attraction is understood to be the development and implementation of operational mechanisms, which shapes an organization’s image (Gatewood et al., 1993). As a result of organizational image, perceptions of the organization are developed, which is a determinant of whether an individual applies or seeks membership with the organization (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Gatewood et al., 1993; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Toma & Cross, 1998).

There has been an extensive amount of literature that has discussed the concept of organizational legitimacy (e.g., Deephouse, 2000; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995; Williamson, 2000). Organizational legitimacy is an outcome often found within the institutional theory literature (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001), and can be defined by Suchman (1995) as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity [i.e., organization] are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (p. 574). These perceptions are developed through an organization’s policies, procedures, and programs through the social construction of systems, norms, values, beliefs, and definitions found within the organizational field.

Through the application of case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003), we examine the research question to gain the knowledge of individual groups in organizational, social, political, and related phenomena through the exploration of the characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003). Within the context of this research, real-life events are explored through face-to-face and phone interviews, which are the primary source of data. Interviews for this study will be conducted with individuals employed by the CIS, CHL, and NCAA as full-time upper management or executive board members. Between 10 and 15 individuals will be interviewed, four to five per organization. Upper management consists of individuals who have the authority to direct employees of lesser status, make significant decisions that impact the organization, have a direct knowledge of all of the operations and programs, and be a liaison between the board and the organization (Pride et al., 1999). Interviewees for this study will include presidents, operations directors, directors of recruitment and educational services, hockey committee chairmen, managers of events and programs, an amateurism certification manager, a Division I vice president, and committee chairpersons of the Frozen Four, Telus Cup, and MasterCard Memorial Cup. The reason for selecting these interviewees is their expected knowledge of the umbrella organizations and knowledge of the development and implementation of policies, procedures, and programs.

Secondary data sources for this study emanate from newspaper articles and organizational documents. The Globe and Mail and The New York Times have been selected because each is a nationally distributed newspaper, one in the United States and one in Canada. The two are thus comparable in terms of national exposure. To gain access to The Globe and Mail and The New York Times articles, the Canadian Newsstand and the ProQuest database will be used, which are electronic database for newspaper and scholarly articles. Another type of secondary data focuses on the rules and regulations of the CIS, CHL, and NCAA. We will specifically examine the CIS, CHL, and NCAA responses to changes in rules and regulations; for example, if there is an NHL rule change, we examine if that change has an impact on CIS, CHL, and NCAA rules in hockey. Furthermore, other secondary data sources will emanate from documentation that pertains to recruitment policies, amateur status, policies and procedures of...
the organization. This information will be gathered from the CIS, CHL, and NCAA’s websites.

Interviews, articles, and documents will be reviewed and themes will be identified that have emerged from the data. Construct indicators will help interpret themes identified in the data. These indicators originate from DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identification of three institutional mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative. DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) institutional mechanisms are organizational responses that differentiate or create homogeneity among the organizations. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983) a by-product of conforming to these institutional mechanisms is legitimacy. Furthermore, the presence of these institutional mechanisms can influence an organization’s objective of gaining legitimacy or being perceived as legitimate by a higher authority. Legitimacy can also be an indication to Canada’s elite level hockey players as to the stability and opportunities that the CIS, CHL, and NCAA can provide to the player, which results in the attraction of Canada’s elite level hockey players to join either the CIS, CHL, or NCAA.

The contribution that this research makes to the literature on attraction is that it discusses attraction from an organization’s perspective, it extends the literature on hockey, and the study further extends the concept of attraction grounded by the theoretical construct of legitimacy. Future studies within the area of elite level hockey can further use the findings from this study to determine how Canada’s elite level hockey players make decisions on which organization to join (i.e., CIS, CHL, and NCAA), from the participant’s perspective of Canada’s elite level hockey development system.