Life Histories of Women in Coaching

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

Graduate Studies Exercise Science

University of Toronto

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2010

Abstract

The Canadian sport system is challenged by the lack of representation of female leaders and coaches. This is, in spite of statistics showing that female athletes account for almost half of all participants in sport, a number that is still growing (Sport Canada, 1999). Women have acquired equity in many areas of life and are accepted in leadership roles, however in the area of sport, women have yet to gain the full credibility and professional respect equal to their male counterparts. Previous research indicates that women who pursue a career in coaching face many adversities and struggle to attain a level of leadership where they can achieve their highest potential (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002).

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of elite female coaches, using Erikson’s (1950) theory of psychosocial development. In this study, the qualitative method of life history was used to learn about the experiences of female coaches, specifically the process of becoming and being elite coaches. Five elite Canadian coaches were interviewed. The major themes that developed through the analysis of the interviews were: (a) Support, (b) Overcoming Obstacles, (c) Personal Qualities and (d) The Bigger Picture. The study noted the importance of various support systems through one’s lifespan and some of the challenges a female athlete and coach must overcome to become a successful athlete, coach and mother. The study shares
insight into the five women’s personal qualities that helped them grow into elite coaches. Finally, the participants described the process by which they came to find a leadership style with which they were comfortable, as coaches and as women.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt thank you to my supervisor Dr. Gretchen Kerr for her dedication to my research and her sustained passion for women in sport. Her mentoring, intellectual feedback and encouragement during the last number of years have allowed me to grow as a person, coach and academic. She is a true role model and inspiration for all women.

A sincere thank you to Dr. Diane Gerin-Lajoie for her expertise, time and patience. Dr. Gerin-Lajoie offered me a chance to explore the qualitative method of life history and in doing so provided me the opportunity to interview some of the top female coaches in Canada. Dr. Gerin-Lajoie’s insight and expertise has guided me in a more in-depth understanding of life history and all the wonderful benefits it has to offer the research world.

An additional thank you is given to Dr. Penny Werthner for her dedication and support over the past eight years as a mentor, friend and colleague. Her passion for research and consulting sparked a fire in me for the practical side of sport psychology. Of course, I must thank Dr. Larry Leith who had made me laugh and smile with every encounter. His expertise, personality and way of life continue to inspire me to enjoy each moment.

Special thanks to the coaches of this research project. Without their participation and dedication in coaching, this research would not have been possible.

This pursuit of academia could not have been possible without the entertainment, humor and support of my friends. To my siblings Dave, Jan and Kristi, thank you for your continuous support and tough love to help me pursue my passions. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Ryan for his ongoing support, encouragement and patience.

I proudly dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, Jeanie and Robert McCharless for their unconditional love and support over my never-ending student life and over-the-top passion for sport and helping others. I would not be where I am today if I didn’t have such special parents, role models and friends. I am so grateful to you both.
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You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'

You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

Eleanor Roosevelt
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Past research shows that the increase in the participation rate of female athletes has not led to a corresponding increase of women in leadership positions within sport, in fact there had been a considerable decline since the 1970s (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). Women’s progress in coaching roles has not followed other societal trends, such as the increase in numbers of girls participating in competitive sports (Coakley, 1998). Prior to Title IX, which was a law passed under the United States Congress in 1972 to promote equality on the basis of sex, 90% of women were coached by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). However, following the implementation of Title IX, female coaches’ participation decreased substantially (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). In 1993, women coached only 48% of women’s teams in the United States (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). More recently, Kerr, Marshall and Sharp (2006) found that only 30% of head and assistant coaches in Canada were women. In addition, women tend to spend fewer years in the coaching profession than men (Demers, 2001; Hall, 1996; Marshall, 2001; Mercier & Werthner, 2001).

The Women in Sport Progress Report (2004) emphasized that women’s issues are beginning to be addressed in sport:

Women’s issues are being thoroughly addressed and this has led to major policy actions, regulations and laws which recognize and defend women’s rights at all levels of society being taken or promulgated. Sport is a natural undertaking for all earthly beings. Organized sport is the preserve of all humans without expectation. It belongs to all of humankind. Sport provides opportunities to learn and develop new friendships. It builds teamwork and team spirit that is important in life. It teaches discipline and organization. Sport unites whole nations, providing unparalleled joy. Everybody plays by the same rules. It is therefore a tremendous medium for communication and emancipation that can help build girls’ and women’s physical and psychological well-being and awareness as well as giving them the confidence to play an effective role in society. (p. 3)
Given the potential benefits of sports participation and the paucity of female coaches in sport, it seems appropriate to investigate the lives of female coaches in Canada in order to shed some light on why so few women evolve into coaches.

Previous research highlights the importance of having women in positions where they are coaching female athletes. Women coaches can act as important role models and mentors to serve as living examples that there is a place for young females to succeed and flourish in an andocentric system (Mercier & Werthner, 2001). Women in coaching can also contribute in a positive manner to the sport culture through their leadership styles, which are typically different from those of their male counterparts.

Although there is a need to have women coaches, various obstacles exist for women who wish to transition from athlete to coach; and if they do make that transition, to stay in the coaching profession long term. Demers (2004) addressed mentoring programs that attempt to involve and retain more women in coaching and found that few female athletes transition into coaching in Canada. One reoccurring challenge for women in coaching found by Acosta and Carpenter (2000) was the ‘old boy’s network’ which became a barrier for women and decreased women’s desire to give back to sport and take on leadership roles. Further research indicated that time constraints and self-efficacy were also obstacles for women in coaching (Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003; Demers, 2004; Marshall, 2001).

By understanding “successful” female coaches’ lived experiences, we may better understand the support sources, opportunities, decision making, enjoyment, obstacles and challenges women experience during their process of becoming and being and elite coach (Bloom, 1985; Dixon, Warner & Bruening, 2008). In the current study, success as women in coaching was defined as making a long-term career out of coaching.
After exploring the literature pertaining to leadership, coaching, and women in coaching, I found few studies that focused on the process by which the women who became coaches, did so. Consequently, I was interested in the life histories of women who succeeded in making elite coaching a career, by looking at the processes by which they navigated through participation in sport as youth, as a developing coach, and finally as an elite level coach.

Chelladurai (1993) believed that more research that draws upon “real-life situations” and a wide range of sports is needed. In addition, more research is necessary for analysis, education, and discovery of new trends and styles in coaching. Horn (1992) also stated that “considerably more research will be needed before a clear picture of the impact of particular leadership styles on athletes can be obtained” (p.191). With this study, I strived to close the gaps and begin to understand the lived experiences of elite women coaches using a life history approach.

I begin the dissertation with a personal reflection to describe my background, the process by which my interests in this topic evolved and the way in which I position myself within the research. Then, the following chapters are presented in turn: Chapter II, the Review of Literature addresses the current literature in the areas of sport, leadership and coaching. Chapter III explains the methodology used for the present research. Chapter IV shares the life histories of the five participants. Chapter V through to Chapter VIII explores the results from the analysis of the interviews. Finally, Chapter IX synthesizes results by describing the lessons learned, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Personal Reflection

My experiences as an athlete and a coach have had a significant impact on the selection of the dissertation topic. I have played soccer for twenty-two years and ice hockey for fifteen years, both at the university level. I have also been fortunate to play soccer at the provincial level, and nationally for Canada at two World Universiades Games (FISU).
During my varsity years, I was privileged to have female coaches as I developed as a person, professional, and athlete. In my perspective, each female coach contributed a style of her own. I learned from my first female coach the importance of fitness and discipline; from the second, the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and motivation; and from the third, I learned that sport specific knowledge is important to gain respect and credibility. Most importantly, the three women helped me to believe in myself and to identify that the obstacles in climbing to the top may be difficult, but certainly not impossible. Unfortunately, all three coaches were single young women trying to start their coaching career and develop professionally, and each of them left the profession after two to four years. This pattern is typical of the attrition across the country; young women become involved in coaching but drop out after a short period of time.

I am currently the head coach of the National Military Women’s soccer team. I coached the University of Toronto varsity women’s soccer team from 2004-08 and was an assistant coach for the Canadian National University women’s soccer team in 2005 and 2007 at the World Universiades Games (FISU). During my university coaching years, I was the only female coach for women’s soccer in the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) conference (1 out of 17), and had the only female staff within the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). This experience further sparked my interest to pursue the present research on women in coaching.

My mission is to empower each athlete to achieve her potential in life, as an athlete, student, person, and professional. As a young female coach, I often sit in meetings and conferences feeling somewhat isolated as the only woman. I see this research as an opportunity to strengthen the case that women can meet the challenges of the coaching profession and contribute to the overall advancement of sport and leadership.
At the university or national level, I am often the first female coach most players have. One of the challenges for female coaches is that many female athletes have been coached by men, who tend to have quite different leadership styles than women. Female athletes are not familiar with being empowered, or with being given the time and opportunity to make decisions, which in my opinion, are important factors in developing quality leaders. Bit by bit, piece by piece, I hope my athletes see the benefits of new and different styles of leadership. As a coach, I want my athletes to see the positive aspects of leading with empowerment and increasing one’s confidence; while at the same time when they hear the word “coach,” young girls can visualize a woman.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review the available literature and provide an outline of (a) Women in Sport, (b) The Role of the Coach, (c) Leadership Theories, (d) The Importance of Women Coaches, (e) The Lack of Women in Coaching: Obstacles and Challenges, (f) Theoretical Framework, and offer a (g) Conclusion. I believe this will provide adequate background on the past and present trends and challenges of women in coaching.

Women in Sport

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in sport. Past research shows that the increase in the participation rate of female athletes has not led to a corresponding increase of women in leadership positions within sport, in fact there has been a considerable decline since the 1970s. This section will provide a summary of two areas of women in sport: (a) Trends in participation rates and (b) Trends of women in coaching and leadership.

Trends in Participation Rates

In 1972, the United States Congress enacted a law under Title IX of the Educational Amendments which prohibits sex discrimination in any educational program or activity, within an institution receiving any type of federal financial assistance. Title IX provided women in the US of America with many opportunities in the sporting world; however, it also presented them with more obstacles to surpass to obtain leadership positions.

Prior to Title IX, women participated in sport without scholarships or institutional funding for coaches, uniforms, equipment, facilities, locker rooms, medical assistance and athletic therapy. They had few teams and short seasons to carry out proper leagues or competitions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). However, since the implementation of Title IX, the participation rates for women in sport have increased immensely.
Title IX came at a time when many institutions of higher education were drastically cutting athletic budgets. However, recent court decisions have required US colleges and universities to take affirmative steps to accommodate female athletes even in the face of severe budget cuts. Numerous requirements need to be implemented for equality to be reached (Shaw, 1995). These requirements include: (a) overseeing of athletic scholarships; (b) ensuring that the selection of sports and levels of competition effectively accommodate the interests and abilities of members of both sexes; (c) provision of equipment and supplies; (d) scheduling of games and practice time; (e) travel and per diem allowance; (f) opportunity to receive coaching and academic tutoring; (g) assignments and compensation of coaches and tutors; (h) provision of locker rooms, practice and competitive facilities; (i) provision of medical and training facilities and services; (j) provision of housing and dining facilities and services; and (k) publicity.

These guidelines were set to help recruit women into sport programs as athletes, administrators, and coaches (Shaw, 1995). Given the existence of Title IX, participation in athletics should be proportionate to the number of women currently enrolled in college and university. Women’s enrollment in post secondary education is now equal, if not higher than men (Statistics Canada, 2008); therefore, female and male athletics should see an equal balance in all aspects of participation within the college and university environment.

The underrepresentation of women in governing positions leads to a restriction of different and new perspectives on the issues surrounding sport, leadership and coaching (Fasting, 2004). One woman making her mark as a leader, Marguerite Clifton (2004), chair of Division of Girls’ and Women’s Sports of the American Association of Health and Physical Education Research (AAHPER), acknowledged the need for more women in leadership positions for girls and women’s programs:

Women must assume leadership for these newly developing intercollegiate programs. . . . Men are uniquely different from women, therefore, their answers to
problems fundamental to sports programs will not always be satisfactory ready-made solutions which can be superimposed upon the women’s programs. Failure to observe this premise is undoubtedly the greatest fear that many women leaders have as they move cautiously ahead with this latest development in competition. (p. 46)

Although Title IX was not implemented in Canada, it did have an effect on the number of women in sport leadership positions. After Title IX was implemented, the salary for coaching women increased, thereby enticing more men to want to coach women. This increased salary resulted in fewer women in coaching, more men in coaching and a stronger “old boy’s network.” Acosta and Carpenter (2000) found that the old boy’s network became a drawback for women and decreased women’s desire to give back to sport and take on leadership roles.

LeDrew and Zimmerman (1994) noted a low number of female volunteers and paid coaches at the most senior levels of sport. For many athletic programs and committees, the issue of men coaching women did not appear to be a great concern. However, it becomes problematic when an increasing number of paid positions are available in coaching women’s sport (e.g., soccer), and these positions are given to men who see themselves as the most qualified for the position (Hall, 2004). Hall suggested that the solution to this push by men is to encourage female players who show interest in coaching to take the necessary certification courses and to seek a role model or mentor to help during this process.

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) strives to provide quantity and quality opportunity for girls and women in sport. Their mission statement in 1992 was to “ensure that girls and women in sport and physical activity have access to a complete range of opportunities and choices and have equity as participants and leaders (CAAWS).” A more recent mission statement from CAAWS is “to develop education material for women in sport and deliver their new ‘vision’ as gender equity, leadership, research, communication, partnership and liaison, and community initiatives.” Their
vision includes a holistic and equitable sport and physical activity system, in which Canadian girls and women have the right to all benefits of participating in sport and physical activity.

In a longitudinal study, Acosta and Carpenter (2006) studied both the participation rates of female athletes and the status of women as head coaches. They found that the massive increase of participation may be a function of factors including a generation of females who have grown up in post Title IX era and whose daughters are now second generation beneficiaries of Title IX; a long line of successful Title IX lawsuits dealing with participation; society’s greater acceptance of female athleticism; greater media time focused on female athleticism; and commitment of organizations/individuals to encourage college and secondary schools to provide full access to the benefits of athletics to both men and women (p. 5).

Similarly, in Canada, the participation rate among female athletes continues to increase. The number of female athletes participating in soccer has jumped 43 percent within the past 10 years. In 1996 there were 167,913 Canadian female soccer players; today that number has grown to 356,680, almost half of the total participation population (Canadian Soccer Association, 2007). The number of females participating in Canadian hockey has also increased significantly. In 1990, there were less than 10,000 female participants in ice hockey; in 2005-06 there were over 70,000 female players (Hockey Canada, 2007). The success at the national level for the Canadian Women’s Olympic hockey team, and the media attention given to these athletes, likely impacted overall participation rates of women in hockey.

In Canadian rugby, there were a total of 8,657 participants in 2007. Interestingly, rugby has one of the highest statistics for women in coaching but some of the lowest participation rates. Out of the 8,657 participants, only 1712 were female, which would indicate that it is still a growing sport for females, and may not have the financial input similar to the other more established sports (Rugby Canada, 2007). In comparison, field hockey in Canada is the only
sport that has always had more participation from females than males, and the female participation rates are still increasing (Field Hockey Canada, 2007).

Today we are seeing enormous success with Canadian female athletes at the provincial, university and national levels, and especially at the Olympic Games. For example, for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Italy, Steve Summons (2006) from the *Toronto Sun* noted in presenting the results of the Canadian athletes:

Canada has won a record 19 medals at the Winter Games, a record 14 of them coming from women... Women have won on skates, in the hockey rink, at the oval, on the short track. Women have won on the skis, on snowboards, going downhill on something called a skeleton. Women have got up from crashing into fences and recovered from broken ski poles to win Olympics... So much for the alleged fairer sex... Canada has won five gold medals here: Four of them in women's sports; Canada has won an impressive eight silver medals: Five of them from women; Canada has six bronze medals to date: Five from female athletes.

Shane Pearsall, “Chef de Mission” of the Canadian Olympic team, also commented; “I don't think we ever look at things from a male-female perspective, but it's pretty obvious our women have done some amazing things here.” If we were able to bring opportunity and success to female athletes in Canada, I believe that it is possible to do the same for women in coaching.

**Trends of Women in Coaching and Leadership**

In Canada, there is a disproportionate number of women (11%) coaching at the national level, even when women make up 47% of the participating athletes in Canada (Acosta & Carpenter, 2000). Moreover, women in leadership positions (coaches, administrators, referees and executives), dropped from 17% in 1998 to 11% in 2000. The latest Canadian statistics show that women hold only one-quarter of coaching positions (CAC, 2000). In addition, Kerr, Marshall and Sharp (2006) found that approximately only 30% of head and assistant coaches in Canada are women.

In the coaching profession in Canada, women make up only 41.1% of head coaches for women’s teams, which is down from 45.6% in 2000 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). This is close
to the lowest representation in history of females as head coaches of women’s teams (p. 1).

Female coaches are fewer in numbers and spend fewer years in the coaching profession than men (Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986). There are three times as many men coaching in Canada than women (Marshall, 2001) and only 44.1% of women’s college teams have a female head coach; this is an all time low (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004).

In a longitudinal study, Acosta and Carpenter (2004) presented both the participation rates of female athletes and the status of women as head coaches in the US. The study showed a depressed representation of women as head coaches and head administrators. Presently, women head coaches are at an all time low in numbers, and men have filled more of the new head coach positions for female programs in the National College Athletic Association (NCAA). Acosta and Carpenter partially attribute the decline to market based discrimination and disparate recruitment (females are typically recruited with no perks), or the lack of interest as a career goal for women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004, p. 12).

The most recent findings from the longitudinal study by Acosta and Carpenter (2008) found that there is an all time high number of paid positions for female assistant coaches; of the 10,220 paid positions, 5,811 (56.7%) are occupied by women. Unfortunately, when looking at the higher level of leadership positions, only 27.4% of head athletic trainers are female and only 12% of sport information directors are female. Overall, women are still underrepresented in higher level leadership positions within sport.

A recent study completed by Kerr et al. (2006) presented statistics comparing men and women head coaches of female teams in Canada within five major sporting organizations: National Sport Team, Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA), Canadian Summer Games (CSG), and provincial sport organizations. For the purpose of this study, I will present the statistics only from team sports. Figure 1 shows an
overview of the female and male coaches working with women’s team sports in the national, CIS, CCAA, CSG, and provincial competition categories.

Kerr et al. (2006) found that only the national women’s basketball teams were coached solely by women. The national women’s soccer and college women’s hockey teams had male head and assistant coaches only. Aside from the national women’s basketball teams, only college women’s rugby had a greater than 50% representation of female coaches showing that overall, there was a greater percentage of men than women coaching women’s teams (p. 8).

Figure 2 contains a gender comparison of head coaches for women-only team sports. Of the 809 identified head coaches for the five women’s team sports, 280 (34.61%) were female (p. 9).
Figure 3 shows a gender analysis of head coach positions in women’s basketball. Across all categories examined, 85 out of 235 head coaches of women’s basketball teams were female (36.17%). An overview of the elite level coaching showed a strong representation by having both junior and senior national teams coached by women (p. 12).

Figure 4 shows a comparison of head coach positions in women’s ice hockey. Of the 51 ice hockey head coaches, 10 (19.61%) were women. There was gender variability across categories, with equal or close to equal percentages of male and female head coaches at the national level but a larger gender disparity was seen at the CIS, CCAA, and provincial levels. Also, 6 of the 6 head coaches in women’s hockey in Canadian colleges were male (100%).
addition, there were 25 women’s teams at the university level, of which only 4 (16%) had female head coaches (p. 12).

A gender analysis of head coaches in women’s rugby is presented in Figure 5. At the national, CIS, and CCAA levels, there was close to equal representation of male and female head coaches. However, at the provincial level, there was a greater percentage of male head coaches (67%) for female rugby teams. When considering all competition categories, the overall percentage of female coaches in women’s rugby was 41.18%, which is the highest percentage of female head coaches across all sports analyzed by Kerr et al. (p. 13). We may see a higher percentage of women coaching women’s rugby in Canada; however, internationally, women’s rugby only has three female national coaches (Rugby Canada, 2007). In my perspective, a common trend in sport seems to be that the more popular and well established a team sport, the more likely the higher percentage of men coaching women will be higher.
Figure 6 provides a gender comparison of head coach positions in women’s soccer. Thirty-four percent (42 of 123) of head coaches of women’s soccer teams were female. Only the CSG category showed equal percentages of men and women head coaches, with a larger proportion of male head coaches at all other levels (p. 13). However, within the past year the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) announced a female head coach for the senior national team (Canadian Soccer Association, 2009).

A gender analysis of head coaches in women’s volleyball can be found in Figure 7. Across the categories examined, 34.35% (79 of 230) of head coaches of women’s volleyball were female. There was close to equal percentages of men and women head coaches at the national, CSG and provincial levels, with larger gender disparity at the CIS and CCAA levels. Note that college volleyball had the highest number of teams of all sports in a single category with 13 female coaches out of 70 teams (19%); (p. 14).
For more comparable statistics, I gathered data from a sport in which the majority of coaches are females to show a positive representation of women in coaching. A gender analysis of head coaches in women’s field hockey in Canada is presented in Figure 8. Field hockey has a significantly higher percentage of women coaches than all other sports being reviewed. Field hockey in both Canada and the United States has the highest representation of women coaches (86% and 97% respectively) which provides a positive outlook for organizations in Canada. However, when we look at the statistics from an international standpoint, there are only three female head coaches of women’s teams (Field Hockey Canada, 2007). This may be happening because field hockey is less popular in Canada than in other countries.

Kerr et al.’s (2006) results showed that women occupy 19–41% of the head coach positions in the women’s team sports of rugby (41.2%), basketball (36.2%), soccer (34.7%),
volleyball (34.4%), and ice hockey (19.6%). Clearly there is a need for more female coaches in Canadian sport.

Demers (2004) interviewed athletes who were members of university teams and were potential coaches, as well as four women who coached these athletes. Demers concluded that having more female coaches does not automatically provide more opportunity for young female coaches. Demers stated that action must be taken in such areas as taking graduate students as assistant coaches; recruiting some athletes as coaches at their club’s summer youth camps; presenting a variety of existing family life models to the athletes to show that it is possible to be a coach and a mother at the same time; being attentive to athletes with coaching potential and referring them to clubs and schools looking for coaches; setting up coaching clinics for women only; promoting and educating certification programs; and finally, getting involved with their sport federation in developing female coaches through mentoring programs (p. 5).

A Review of Activities, in the Women and Sport Progress Report (2002-2004) from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) included a policy on issues of gender equality in sport. The IOC explained the need for more women in sport, specifically at the higher level positions. Billing and Alvesson (2000) argued that women and men need to take on more of a primary role in educating others about the needs, benefits and importance of bringing more girls and women into sport. Women are greatly outnumbered by men in high status, high income and high power positions. However, women tend to be implanted into the sport profession developed by men; therefore, they find themselves working within the boundaries of a man’s world instead of creating their own practices.

Lay (1993) expressed concern over a decline of female coaches in the United Kingdom and Canada, reporting a study on the Canadian Interuniversity Sport which found that the number of male head coaches rose 100 per cent over five years (1978-1983) while the number of
female coaches dropped by 10 per cent. It should be noted that this decline happened during a period of increased funding and supposedly greater awareness for equality issues in Canadian sport.

In 1986, Sport Canada created a policy to increase the number of female coaches at the national team level to 25 per cent (Sport Canada, 1999). Around this time, the Coaching Association of Canada implemented an apprenticeship program for women in coaching. In addition, the Canadian College Athletic Association developed a coach mentor program in 2005. These initiatives were intended to foster the development of female leadership in sport administration, coaching, refereeing, athletics and volunteering (Hall, 2004). As professor Sandy Kirby said: “Sport must accommodate the changing needs of all participants, not just open doors to welcome new participants.” (CAAWS, 1995, p. 4). In 1999, Sport Canada attempted to make strides towards equity by having a vision “to attain equality for women in sport” (Sport Canada, 1999). Unfortunately, sport still continues to produce and demonstrate masculinity.

Sport is not the only area that is lacking in female leadership. The issues alluded to women coaches in sport are the same issues that women experience in many leadership positions in male-dominated professions. Thus, looking at the bigger picture of women in leadership positions will help illuminate the issues within coaching specifically.

Review of the leadership literature clearly shows that nearly all of the leadership theories were developed decades ago when the majority of leaders were middle-aged Caucasian men. People still see this as a continuing tradition, and minorities, such as women, are still sitting in mid-level positions (Davies-Netzley, 1998, Rhode, 2003). Women are trying to find their place as leaders in the workforce but continue to face many obstacles and challenges. Chafetz (1990) stated that it is important for women to strive and earn the rights to higher level positions;
however, this is difficult to achieve. It is necessary for women to find acceptance and gain respect for “their” style of leadership that is viewed as “different” from the majority of men.

Dennis and Kunkel (2004) believed that women have their own leadership style. Women manage most effectively in corporate America, using networks, viewing themselves as leaders rather than bosses, using people-oriented skills, heightened sensitivity, creating problem solving, intuitive management and participatory leadership; the same skills that women have been fostering since they were little girls. In addition, Wirth (1998) stated that “social attitudes and cultural biases were identified as major factors discriminating against women and holding them back from attaining higher level jobs” (p. 247). Acosta and Carpenter (2002) stated that a presence of female athletic directors increase the likelihood that women coaches will be hired. This may be due to a better networking system and a greater sensitivity to present female role models, as well as a better understanding of women’s resumes, vitae and experiences.

In the literature exploring the areas of education, business and management, it has been observed that over the past few decades, women have been slowly breaking into the male controlled society in subtle ways; however, women are required to utilize male frameworks and styles of leadership for successful integration. In fact, women who secure administration positions must capitalize on the typical paths of their male predecessors (Funk, 2004). Women represent a majority in the teaching profession and school administration graduate programs, but they are persistently absent from the highest and most prestigious administration positions in public education (Shakeshaft, 1999). Davis-Netzley (1998) reported that women tend to cluster near the bottom of the corporate organizational charts, endure lower earnings and authority, and have less advancement potential in comparison to men. Billing and Alvesson (2000) found that women are greatly outnumbered by men in positions of formal power and authority, high status and high incomes (p.145).
Overall, women are still not achieving the higher and more rewarding ranks within the work area (Ivy & Buckland, 1994). In the mid 1980’s a group of researchers based out of an organization called the Center for Creative Leadership began a 3-year study entitled “The Executive Women Project” (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987). In this study, the term glass ceiling was introduced as a metaphor for working women who operate in “glass houses,” whose behaviours are not only scrutinized by individuals in every level of the organization, but whose success or failure might affect the status of women everywhere (Kanter, 1977). Many women have paid their share, even a premium, for a chance at a top position, only to find a glass ceiling between them and their goal. The glass ceiling is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person’s ability to handle a higher level job; rather it applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987, p. 13).

Ivy and Buckland (1994) listed five contributing barriers for the advancement of females and minority groups: (a) corporate lack of attention; (b) discriminatory placement patterns; (c) inadequate recordkeeping; (d) internal recruitment practices that maintained white male-dominated networks; and (e) lack of EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) in the hiring processes for middle and upper level management positions (p. 347). However, when women do advance within organizations, they face perceptions that their behaviour is “nontraditional” or “not the norm,” which presents yet another challenge. In the field of sport, Kidd (CAAWS, 1995) stated that “equality focuses on creating the same starting line for everyone; equity has the goal of providing everyone with the same finish line” (p. 4). The previous statement must be recognized and taught to people in all domains of life in order to continue the advancement of women in leadership and sport.
In the book *The Velvet Hammer*, Allison (2006) provided female leaders with insight to embrace the differences from their male counterparts and use it as a strength. Allison also investigated the many challenges encountered by women in management, supervisory or leadership roles, and then offered mentoring advice to overcome these challenges and expectations. She stated that women don’t have to work longer and harder, they just have to work smarter. I believe this is an essential quality to be developed by females trying to work their way up the professional ladder. Allison found that women leaders need to be able to communicate with women and men within each individual situation to get the best out of their employees. A woman’s need to nurture creates a balancing act between family and career. Therefore, women need to be able to separate work and family, while being strong and confident about their interpersonal skills.

The leadership literature shows us that women can succeed in leadership positions by being strategic and confident. For women to be educated in doing so, the literature supports the need for further research on the gap between female participations rates and the number of women in coaching. In summary, many sport organizations have attempted to address the gender gap in coaching through the implementation of coaching development programs for women. The programs created a productive initial step; however, the national organizations and mentorship programs need to begin a recruiting process of young female coaches to provide them with hands on experience, which would allow them to understand the many different roles of coaching (e.g., recruiting, fundraising, support, administration). We need to understand leadership statements such as this one by Marg McGregor, the president of the Canadian Interuniversity Sport “The new market - 52 percent of the population [female participation rates in Canada]? A commitment to equity isn’t altruism, it makes good business sense” (CAAWS
Handbook, 1995, p. 5). After presenting the current trends of women in coaching and leadership, we can now explore the different qualities, characteristics, and roles of the coach.

The Role of the Coach

In Canada, coaches can be volunteers, part-time or full-time coaches, and they can coach at all levels starting from the grass roots to the international level. Woodman (1993) described high quality coaching as helping athletes reach their highest potential and preparing them for competition. In addition, Lyle (1993) defined coaching as “the recognized practice in sport whereby individuals intend to improve the performances of an athlete or team and to reduce the unpredictability of performance towards an identified target competition” (p. 15). Edwards (2000) described coaching as “a coach-athlete relationship in which the main intention is to move the athlete beyond any intrinsic and extrinsic limitations that they may have on their level of performance in a competitive or training environment” (p. 44).

The ability to teach strategies and technical skills to athletes is often described as the “main role” of the coach (Cardinal, 1989). Salmela (1994b), who interviewed expert coaches, found that “master teachers are people who have this ability to take complex skills and teach them in a unique and personalized manner to athletes of different skill levels” (p. 44). Moreover, elite coaches are teachers who must be able to deliver a high level of communication skills, appropriate in all areas of the coaching domain (Bloom, Schinke, & Salmela, 1997). Anshel (1990) described a successful coach as a winning coach who gets others to achieve what she/he wants, and an effective coach is described as one who can generate athlete performance, which is largely driven by athlete’s needs and goals. Gross (1990) considered successful coaches to be those who are part of a winning team; therefore, short-term outcome is again viewed as the determinant. In contrast, Howe (1990) used “effectiveness” as a universal term, achieved by accomplishing the smaller goals and working on the process rather than the outcome.
One looks to a coach as a teacher, leader and mentor. A coach must also be able to inspire, realize individuality, be persistent and optimistic, and understand all key factors of coaching (Canadian Soccer Association, 2002). In addition, Bloom (2002) stated that an elite coach should be encouraging, challenging and understanding of the athletes. A coach must teach, model and reinforce outcomes and situations so that athletes will be able to complete tasks themselves (Dils & Ziatz, 2000).

According to Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990), a coach’s ability to show acceptance, provide empathy and express warmth, while at the same time ensuring and developing high standards for the team and its individual athletes, may build self-confidence and drive personal development. Moreover, knowing that the coach is there to assist the athlete may provide an opportunity for the athlete to gain and build more self-confidence. Culver and Trudel (2000) noted that communication is a critical technique in the art and science of coaching, perhaps the most important element. Coaches require good communication skills in order to give technical and tactical instruction, manage their teams, interact with parents and administrators, and provide psychological support for their athletes.

As previously mentioned, today’s society still views leadership as being male-dominant, and female athletes consistently visualize a male as an ideal coach (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Wade & Baker, 1998). One contributing factor may be the greater amount of attention given to male athletics compared to female athletics (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). A second factor may be the role of the media. The type of coverage men receive emphasizes their athletic ability (e.g., mental toughness and physical strength), whereas women are often looked upon as objects of femininity and physical attractiveness (Wade & Baker, 1998).

Weiss and Stevens (1993) examined coaching motivation and attrition from a different perspective than did previous researchers. They asked current and former head high school
coaches to identify the costs and benefits associated with the coaching profession. Benefits were described as the enjoyment of seeing athletes achieve a goal, the enjoyment of working with athletes, the fun of coaching, the enjoyment of seeing athletes learn new skills, and the challenges of encouraging individuals to work as a team. The main costs of coaching were described as less time for family, workload, sacrifice of personal time and inadequate program support. Following Weiss and Stevens, it would be valuable to determine specific costs and benefits that coaches, especially women, may experience at the elite level for education and mentoring purposes.

Carron and Bennett (1977) suggested that in determining coach-athlete compatibility, it is necessary to assess not only the coach’s personality and behaviour, but also the athlete’s desire for such traits and behaviours in their coach. Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) found that coaches could have a considerable effect on a female’s development of self-esteem, self-confidence and healthy body image. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge Harter’s Competence Motivation Theory (1978) which predicts that individuals who report a higher perception of competence in themselves tend to choose more challenging tasks, persist longer when faced with difficulty, and exert a higher amount of effort than individuals with low self-competence.

Competence motivation is based on an athlete’s feeling of personal competence and successful attempts at mastery which promote self-efficacy and feelings of personal competence (Cox, 1998, p. 245). In order for female athletes to increase their self-confidence, coaches need to acquaint themselves with the psychological differences between the male and female athlete and understand how to accommodate the differences (Fasting & Pfister, 2000).

Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) stated that coaches need to understand what motivates their athletes to participate in their sport and provide an environment that addresses the athletes’ needs. They found an essential quality for a coach is to remember that every athlete is different.
and that an athlete-centred model is the best way to satisfy the needs of all athletes. They further discussed many beneficial coaching qualities for the female athlete, including: (a) allowing athletes to make mistakes in their decisions, to encourage independent learning; (b) supporting athletes in their training decisions; (c) helping athletes deal with pressures from parents to perform; (d) showing professionalism at practice: being on time, challenging the players, listening to the players, and giving feedback; and (e) setting goals with each athlete.

Overall, it was found that coaching behaviours influenced the player’s enjoyment of the sport, team solidarity, evaluation of coaches and self-esteem (Smoll & Smith, 1989). Furthermore, coaches who gave less punishment, less general feedback, more technical instruction, and who engaged in fewer controlling behaviours were rated more positively by their athletes (Bloom, 2002).

*Leadership Theories*

Leadership is presented and defined in many different ways throughout sport and coaching, and has always been difficult to define. Some would argue that in order to become a successful leader in the sporting world, one must develop certain qualities to allow themselves to become role models to their athletes, employers, colleagues and community. A coach’s leadership style is an essential factor in establishing the atmosphere for training and competition. For this reason, leadership theories have been researched and developed for decades. This section summarizes a number of different leadership theories that have been developed in sport, business, education and management.

According to Horn (1992), leadership behaviours can have a significant effect on the performance and psychological well being of others. This researcher believes that each leadership model has a direct relationship to women in coaching positions and presents certain strengths and limitations that need to be addressed within the literature. The leadership theories

Evans (1970) and House’s (1971) *Path-Goal Theory* suggested that the performance, satisfaction and motivation of a group can be affected by the leader in a number of ways: (a) offering rewards for the achievement of performance goals, (b) clarifying paths towards these goals, and (c) removing performance obstacles. A leader may take action by adopting a specific leadership style according to each situation.

Evans and House found four major leadership styles: (a) directive leadership, when advice is given and ground rules are established; (b) supportive leadership, which incorporates good relations and sensitivity to employees; (c) participative leadership in which everyone, leaders and followers, are involved with the decision making process; and finally, (d) achievement-oriented leadership, when realistic but challenging goals are set while striving for high performance and confidence in the group’s ability.

*Situational Leadership* (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974), similar to Path Goal Theory, refers to a leader who can adopt different leadership styles depending on the situation. Blanchard and Hersey created the model of Situational Leadership in the late 1960s, which allows one to analyze the needs of the situation and then adopt the most appropriate leadership style. Hersey and Blanchard characterized leadership style in terms of the amount of direction and support that the leader provides to his or her followers. They described three different styles of leadership: (a) directing leaders deliver roles, tasks and supervise followers closely. Their decisions are typically made in an autocratic manner; (b) coaching leaders still define and deliver roles and tasks, but lead in a more democratic manner which provides the opportunity for two-way
communication which allows the followers to provide ideas and suggestions; and (c) Supporting leaders delegate day-to-day decisions to the follower, yet still remain facilitators and take part in the decision making.

Effective leaders are versatile by delivering a particular leadership style based on specific situations. Situational leadership theory combines situational and human factors (environment and attitudes), which influence the decisions and behaviours of the leaders, and therefore may determine the leader’s effectiveness.

Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985) is the most widely accepted theory today in disciplines such as business, sport, management and education. According to this theory, people can choose to become leaders and learn leadership skills. Transformational leaders strive to build their followers’ self-confidence, competence and skills. This leadership model represents a holistic approach and accentuates the development of the person as a whole. In addition, the transformational leadership model emphasizes ethical values where the leader’s attitude and actions make a difference. The leader generates a form of empowerment and provides a sense of “team.”

Moreover, transformational leadership encourages self-discovery and accountability and provides a shared vision and goal, which creates ownership by all. Finally, encouragement and praise are offered to promote risk taking and a positive environment. While transformation theory is used by many researchers and leaders when emphasizing education and development, it may not be possible to generalize it from one context to another. Furthermore, transformational leadership has limited ability to differentiate between effective and ineffective leaders and to look at things from a holistic perspective on leadership, instead of always being concerned with the outcome.
Martens’ (1987) *Leadership Theory for Sport*, which consists of four main components of effective leadership: (a) leader’s qualities, (b) leader’s style, (c) situation factors, and (d) follower’s qualities. Martens explained that a leader’s qualities must consist of integrity, flexibility, loyalty, confidence, accountability, openness, preparedness, resourcefulness, self-discipline and patience.

Martens explained that there are two forms of leadership: democratic and autocratic. Democratic leadership is when a leader implements an athlete-centred model, which represents empowerment in decision making, cooperation and relationships, and enacts a sense of trust and empathy. Autocratic leadership style is usually win-oriented, tightly structured and task-oriented. As previously mentioned, the situational factors may include the type of environment (interactive or coactive atmosphere) and the size of the team or group of employees. The leader and followers must react to the situation. All interactions are crucial in effective leadership. It is how these four components of leadership interact that in fact determines the effectiveness of the leader. Leadership from a holistic view presents a leader who challenges the process, inspires a shared vision, empowers others, models the way, and finally, encourages the heart.

Chelladurai’s (1990) *Multidimensional Model Leadership* incorporates three different concepts: trait, behaviour and situational theories. These three concepts address the interactions among the administrator, coach and athlete in a sporting environment. Furthermore, Chelladurai proposed three types of leadership behaviours. The first is required behaviour, which is the type of sport, size and level of the team, task variability and conditions of play. The second behaviour is actual behaviour, which includes the coach’s personal characteristics such as age, gender, personality, ability and experience. The final behaviour is the preferred behaviour of an athlete: the interaction between the situational characteristics and the individual characteristics of each athlete.
Similar to Martens’ leadership theory for sport, this model suggests that the greater the interaction between trait, behaviour and situation, the greater the enhancement of individual performance and satisfaction by the athlete. Optimal performance is achieved when the coach’s required, preferred and actual behaviors are consistent, and the leader uses the behaviours prescribed for each situation that are consistent with the athletes. Chelladurai’s (1990) Multidimensional Model of Leadership for sport is one of the most established models for sport to date. However, regardless of its popularity, its limitations should be addressed. We must realize that there are external behaviours beyond the control of the coach.

Chelladurai (1993) discussed several limitations of his own study. First of all, he criticized his model because it does not closely correlate with leader’s behaviours and performance outcomes. His emphasis was on a number of external variables, out of the coach’s control, which contaminate the measure of correlations between coaching behaviour and win/loss outcome. For example, an unexpected call from a referee or an outstanding performance from the opposing team become factors beyond the coaches’ control and this can influence the outcome of the competition. One of the ways to measure the leader’s effectiveness is to evaluate how the athlete did in relation to their pre-set goals. The athlete’s success and thus the success of the coach are measured by goal achievement; this prevents uncontrollable external variables from influencing outcomes in a win/loss situation.

Secondly, the subscales are not inclusive of all the behaviours that are characteristic of coaches. In addition, Chelladurai points out that the multidimensional model is based on the transactional models of leadership, which assume that the leader appeals to the athletes by engaging their self-interest. Chelladurai suggests that his ideas from transformational theory need to be studied to ascertain their relevance to sport and then incorporated into the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS), as relevant coach behaviours. Finally, he suggested that the definition of
performance outcome be enhanced and expanded to perhaps include goal-attainment rather than win/loss.

In the *Four Framework Approach*, Bolman and Deal (1991) suggested that leaders display leadership behaviours in one of four types of frameworks: (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, or (d) symbolic. Similar to Evans and House (1970), the style can either be effective or ineffective, depending on the match between the behaviour and the situation.

Structural framework leaders are more aware of order and instruction; they focus on structure, strategy, adaptation, risk taking and implementation. A limitation often faced by structural framework leaders is when they find themselves in situations that do not complement their style of leadership, resulting in their leadership becoming ineffective. Human resource framework leaders are heavily focused on support, advocacy and empowerment. This framework can be successful in increasing participation, support, and shared information and allowing others to provide input in decision making; however, in the wrong situation the leader may become easy to manipulate. Political framework leaders are the networkers of leadership: They build relationships and are great negotiators. Yet when taken to an extreme, this type of leader can be seen as a hustler or as manipulative. Finally, symbolic framework leaders view things from a holistic perspective, which embraces a vision and seeks experience. In the end, symbolic framework leaders are inspirational leaders. A limitation of this style of leadership is that some “followers” may see this style as fanatical or surreal.

The goal of all these approaches is to enable the coach to read and understand a given situation and deliver the proper framework. For example, if an athlete or student is having problems with time management and is becoming stressed and underperforming, an appropriate leadership framework to implement would be the human resource and structural framework, in order to empower the athlete, develop strategies and implement structure into his or her everyday
life. This in turn would decrease stress and increase performance, which in most cases is the primary goal of the leader.

Leith (2003) argues that there are three main types of leadership: (a) directive leadership, which incorporates goals and outcomes which creates a more task-oriented, reward/punishment, and instructed atmosphere; (b) supportive leadership, which has a more relationship-oriented leadership style; supportive leaders create a trusting and encouraging environment; and (c) participative leadership, which is more of a task-relationship that includes decision-making, negotiation, and allows others to have control.

Leith also notes three important leadership qualities, which he presented as the three Cs: change, conflict and communication. Change is necessary in building any program or team. If no change occurs, the leader becomes old fashioned and does not seek the benefits of new and fresh ideas and research. A leader must be able to deal with conflict in a respectable and intellectual manner. Conflict is a part of every team and program; therefore, it is extremely important for leaders to have the proper management tools for every form of conflict they encounter. Finally, communication is an essential component in any coach-athlete relationship. Proper communication comes with knowing individual personalities, being constructive, positive, and being able to listen to what your athletes and staff are communicating.

Given these qualities, we should question why female coaches feel they have to second guess their leadership styles if they are different from their male counterparts? Women should feel confident in their leadership styles, and not feel that being a “bitch” is the only way to be or become a successful coach.

The goal of this section was to present the different leadership theories, to help the reader gain an understanding of the relationships among the different leadership theories, and to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each leadership theory. Research continues to
expand on the new ways of leadership; however, gaps remain in the literature as to why there is a lack of leadership progression for women in management, politics, and sport. Leadership positions such as coaches can provide empowerment and role modeling to younger women. Youth look up to these positions with the belief that one day, they will be able to do the same job, if not better.

I believe in the coaching profession, an autocratic leadership style is still prevalent throughout the sporting world. However, situational leadership is the style most apt for coaching, especially at the elite level. Given the importance of adapting one’s coaching style to the individual characteristics and needs of each athlete, as well as to the various situational demands of training and competition, a situational leadership style may be the most appropriate. Further, if the goal of coaching is to enhance both athletic performance and the holistic development of athletes as individuals, an athlete-centred style of coaching may be the most well-suited approach. Finally, for a female coach to stay in the coaching profession, it must be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for her; it is proposed that this may be enhanced for female coaches by forming and maintaining positive coach-athlete relationships and serving as role models and mentors.

The Importance of Women Coaches

Women coaches are important role models in sport as well as in everyday life (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Researchers found that female athletes who are coached by women are more likely to stay involved in sport and are less intimidated by the profession (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Coaches are important role models for young women, and they positively affect females’ development of self-confidence, self-esteem, and healthy body image (McCharles, 2003; Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998).
Researchers have long demonstrated that same gender coach-athlete relationships were important for the development of the athlete. Heide (1978) stated that female role models in coaching are important to young athletes: “women teach girls about sport; men may be able to teach some skills, but women lead girls and women for reasons of role modeling and empathy” (p. 200). A more recent finding by Avery, Tonidandel, and Phillips (2008) found protégés with sex-dissimilar mentors receive significantly less psychosocial and career mentoring than those with same-sex mentors. In addition, female assistant coaches of male head coaches received less mentoring than their male counterparts did as assistant coaches. This suggests cross-sex mentoring could in fact impede women’s career development (p. 78).

The literature on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) demonstrated the positive effects of role modeling and indicated the apparent strengths of same gender relationships. Notably, a woman-to-woman interaction is richer than woman-to-man. This may be true because women use a greater range of communication levels and many other similar qualities (Davidson & Duberman, 1982). Women were found to be role models for young female athletes. The presence of female role models provides motivation to enter and to continue participation, confidence in leadership, an outlook of success, and a positive support system. Women coaches can motivate other female athletes to stay in sport and continue to participate.

Scott and Brown (2006) found the first evidence that gender bias in leadership emerges very early on in our information processing. They believed that this bias affects how people perceive themselves. In addition, the findings suggest a pervasive and unconscious nature of resistance to following female leaders. Leadership is in the eye of the beholder; people observing the behaviour of their superiors try to match the behaviour against their leader prototype, which presents an ongoing challenge for female leaders to be perceived in the same way as male leaders.
Athletes and coaches need to understand different styles of leadership, and that every situation presents a new experience and challenge. Typically men and women bring different but equally positive leadership qualities. In a study with elite female soccer players, Fasting and Pfister (2000) found that the athletes perceived female coaches as more likely to show empathy, communicative competence and offer more willingness to cooperate. In comparison, their male coaches were more aggressive, authoritative, and keen on demonstrating power with a “macho” attitude. Unfortunately, some of the young female athletes view this type of communication as the only style of leadership that brings success because men coach the majority of female athletes.

In the same study, Fasting and Pfister (2000) argued that women are more difficult to coach because they are generally more sensitive and emotional, more easily crossed, and more thin-skinned than men. In addition, they believed that coaches who want to work with women must show more empathy and a higher degree of social competence. A coach must be conscious that women tend to express many emotions through body language, and women should be given constructive feedback rather than criticism (Weiss, 1993). Weiss also believed it is very important for coaches to have a positive communication style with female athletes. It is dubious to assert that research findings for male athletes can be applied systematically to females (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Martens (1987) stated that females are psychologically different from their male counterparts and should therefore be coached differently than males, as individuals and as a team.

Culver and Trudel (2000) found that the women in their study believed that a positive interpersonal climate was conducive to greater athlete satisfaction and self-esteem. When compared to males, females felt that they communicated more effectively, learned more quickly, and performed better in a positive atmosphere. In addition, Shogan (2001) revealed that a
trust nature is an essential personal characteristic for a coach to possess. Female athletes need to trust that their coaches will improve athletic skill, observe performance and provide feedback (p. 82). Smoll and Smith (1989) concluded that “leader effectiveness resides in both the behaviors of the leader and the eyes of the beholder” (p. 1544).

Women coaches can motivate females to participate in sport and can provide mentoring in life and athletics (Demers, 2004; Werthner, 2005). Werthner (2005) suggested that we continue to encourage women to see coaching as a viable, respectable, challenging and enjoyable profession. In another study done on women in coaching, Gibson, McConnel, Forster, Riewald, and Peterson (2003) found that we should take a better look at how we recruit, support, promote and maintain women in coaching.

Statistically, Acosta and Carpenter (2006) found that there were many more female coaches hired under female athletic directors. Unfortunately, in Canada we have a limited number of women in higher level positions, such as athletic directors. LeDrew and Zimmerman (1994) stated that women tend to be their own worst critics with respect to ability and power, which creates difficulty in gaining the confidence to pursue a coaching career. For example, LeDrew and Zimmerman (1994) examined 410 high school athletes' attitudes regarding female coaches, finding that males were more likely than females to believe that coaching style was dependent on the coach's gender and that coaching opportunities were more restricted for females. Both male and female athletes had stronger preferences for male coaches than for female coaches. Moreover, when the female athletes were asked to picture an ideal coach they first envisioned a male (p. 6).

Female leadership styles are typically characterized differently from male leadership, but this does not lessen their potential to contribute to sport culture in a positive manner. Studies in business that focus on leadership and women have found that women have skill sets that include
strong communication, team building, multitasking and high emotional intelligence (Fenwick & Neal, 2001; Rutherford, 2001; Werthner, 2005). Fenwick and Neal (2001) found that openness for learning and listening is critical in the field of sport, due to time limitations and the management of a large number of people both inside and outside the team setting. In addition, they noted that women used communication rather than power for team building and the creation of strong relationships. Other research in business shows that women create positive group dynamics through conflict resolution, disciplinary fairness, and group collaboration rather than using an autocratic approach (Cole, 2004).

More emphasis is needed on the ethical and moral reasons as to why the sport culture has so few women in coaching positions. This includes prevention of discrimination in hiring and promotion practices, creating a safe, respectful and inclusive environment, and fair treatment of all members (Graf, 2005; Harassment and Abuse in Sport Collective, 1998).

In summary, there are many reasons why there should be more female representation in sport leadership positions. Men and women have different knowledge, expertise and experience in the professional world and their distinct views are of value (Fasting, 2004). As the traditional roles in the family structure change, we begin to see a slightly more democratic family system where roles have changed and many tasks originally held by women are now shared by men. This trend is now expanding beyond family life, to extracurricular activity and sport. Today we see more and more young female athletes participating in many types of activities, such as soccer, that were once dominated by male athletes. It is necessary for researchers to understand and explore current trends, revisit the studies that recommend the involvement of women in leadership positions, review the benefits of coaching and further investigate why there is a lack of women coaches.
The Lack of Women Coaches: Obstacles and Challenges

Women face many adversities while striving to become successful and respected professionals in sport, specifically in coaching. There continue to be many challenges for women in leadership positions in sport and physical education (Byrd-Blake, 2004; Culcross, 2004; Hall, 1996). Past research supported the theory that success for professional women was limited, especially for women with families. Career advancement for the professional woman often means limiting family size, because the ideal time for achieving quality professional status is between the ages of 25 and 35, which coincides with the optimal years for bearing children.

Challenges faced by women as coaches and leaders in sport have been identified by a number of researchers (Anderson, 2001; Demers, 2004; Hall, 1996, Marshall, 2001; Mercier & Werthner, 2001; Sabo, 1998). These challenges include burnout, lack of financial incentives, lack of experience, family conflicts, discrimination, hiring and recruitment practices, lack of interest, organizations’ reluctance to run the risk of hiring a female leader, and the lack of role models. Acosta and Carpenter (2000) also identified the old boy’s network as a deterrent for female athletes wanting to give back to sport and assume leadership positions. Men give more back to sport than women do, with regards to funding, leadership, facilities, sponsorships and overall support. Men tended to have more established connections with other men in sport organizations (Rowe, McKay, & Lawrence, 1997), and thus were more likely to hire men who had demonstrated success in the past.

The literature suggests that many female coaches do not stay in coaching longer than five years (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003); therefore, more research is needed on the past and present programs for women in coaching. Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) found that female coaches were less likely to apply for positions even when they were qualified. This may be due to the lack of self-efficacy when compared to men (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003). Moreover, a female
coach may have to deal with limited support systems, a lack of networks, sexual harassment, family responsibilities, and less credibility with respect to her leadership style, in addition to her everyday coaching stressors (Werthner, 2005).

Taylor’s (1992) *Applied Model of Stress Management for Coaches* addressed stress from an overall perspective and found three main categories of stress in coaching: personal, social and organizational. Personal stressors refer to factors intrinsic to the individual that create stress, for example, lack of experience and inability to meet personal needs, self-doubts, maintaining physical health, and inadequate coaching skills. Social stressors sometimes create difficulties that arise due to interactions with others. Finally, organizational stressors may originate from inside or outside a team or club, and therefore may affect the stress level of the coach. As previously shown, all three stressors are more likely to happen simultaneously with female coaches than with male coaches.

Coaches who spend less time with their families due to heavy travel schedules or experience difficulties with parents and administrators may feel trapped and will find themselves at a higher risk for burnout. This is more problematic for women than men because they continue to have more home and family responsibilities (Davies-Netzley, 1998). Capel (1986) discovered that the most typical role conflict was seen when the coach had too many tasks (hassles), and those tasks were too demanding. It is stressful for a coach to try to maintain the roles of physical trainer, technician, fundraiser, accountant, parent, administrator and recruiter. Dixon and Bruening’s (2007) findings supported this strife that coaching mothers experience conflict in their multiple roles often because of lack of time or energy to appropriately and adequately address their goals and demands of each role.

In the coaching profession, Knoppers, Myer, Ewing, and Forrest (1989) indicated that female coaches have lower professional status and lower salaries than their male counterparts.
Furthermore, coaching education and coaching practice seem to be oriented towards men and their needs, which becomes another obstacle for females, to try to adapt themselves to the male norms and values (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). All of these challenges and obstacles are additional stressors for women as coaches.

Another obstacle for the female coach is coaching self-efficacy. Coaching self-efficacy is “one’s confidence in his or her capacity to perform the coaching tasks effectively” (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998, p. 191). Women may have a lower coaching self-efficacy due to their lack of female role models, the success of the old boy’s networks, the lack of time due to family responsibilities, stereotypes and preconceived ideas about women as coaches, reluctance to run the risk of hiring a female leader, and the lack of careful career planning by female leaders themselves (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003; Demers, 2004; Marshall, 2001). Sabo (1998) suggested that women drop out of sport after their athletic career is over and indicated women have less desire, interest, and intent towards head coaching positions.

Burnout can also occur when coaches show significant empathy towards their athletes, and believe that the athletes’ personal lives are important in developing the athlete as a whole (Bass, 1981). Coaches who show empathy, seek a strong coach-athlete relationship and are more conscious about decision making may be more vulnerable to burnout because of the stress associated with the athletes’ and the team’s needs in the sporting environment (Kelley, Eklund, & Ritter-Taylor, 1999). In addition, a coach with less experience may feel overwhelmed by the multitasking required when coaching student-athletes (Kelley et al., 2000). As previously stated, women tend to have less experience when brought into the coaching world. However, there are various factors that contribute to their involvement, such as skills and abilities, family and peer encouragement and support, interest in leadership positions, previous positive experiences,
personality, and a variety of situational and demographic factors such as being single or not having children (Demers, 2004).

Theberge (1992) found certain social problems encountered by women trying to break into the top of the coaching profession. She stated that women who are in high performance coaching positions are looked upon as “token” coaches and continue to receive less respect than their male counterparts. As women are visibly different from men, pressures to conform to the norm may cause female coaches to downplay gender issues and try to be one of the boys.

The female coaches interviewed by Theberge (1992) identified specific barriers that prevented them from choosing coaching as a career, including: domestic responsibilities, children, long irregular hours, time, and energy. In addition, the women’s performances were evaluated relative to their male counterparts, even though men continue to be viewed as superior in the sporting world. Theberge also found that the husbands’ career often took precedence, which resulted in women having limited opportunity to strive for higher positions. Furthermore, most athletes have the perception that coaches are on-call at all hours of the day, which interferes with the women being primary caregivers in their family lives. These frustrations caused some women to quit the coaching profession. Finally, Theberge found that women continue to feel pressure to prove their competence to their male colleagues.

*Theoretical Framework*

Given the lack of women in coaching and the importance of having women in these leadership positions, it is proposed that we could learn a great deal from those women who have successfully created a career in coaching at the elite level. How did they enter the coaching profession and navigate the obstacles and barriers along the way? Did their own sport experiences as athletes contribute to their coaching experiences? What were the enabling and motivating factors that influenced their career development? In order to address
these questions, a model of lifespan development was used to better understand the development of female coaches through childhood, adulthood and their professional development. More specifically, Erikson’s psychosocial theory of human development was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study.

According to Erikson, development across the lifespan results from the interaction between internal drives and cultural demands and expectations; thus his theory involves psychosocial stages (Erikson, 1950, 1959). To achieve healthy development, an individual must successfully resolve a psychosocial crisis at each stage. Each crisis is defined by opposing possibilities; successful resolution of a crisis results in the development of the characteristic on the positive side of the pole.

Erikson divided human development into eight stages: Psychosocial Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust (0 to 1 year); Psychosocial Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (early childhood - 1 to 2 years); Psychosocial Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt (preschool years - 3 to 5 years); Psychosocial Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority (early school years - age 6 to 11); Psychosocial Stage 5: Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence - 12 to 19 years); Psychosocial Stage 6: Intimacy vs. Isolation (young adulthood - 20’s to 30’s); Psychosocial Stage 7: Generativity vs. Stagnation (middle adulthood - 40’s to 50’s); and Psychosocial Stage 8: Integrity vs. Despair (late adulthood – 60 and over).

Erikson believed that at each stage of development, people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in development (Poole, Warren, Nunez, & 2007). Erikson understood these conflicts are centered on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times, the potential for personal growth is elevated, but so is the potential for failure. If the stage is resolved with success, the person will gain
confidence through a sense of mastery. If the stage is dealt with poorly, the person will experience a sense of inadequacy (failure).

For the present study, I will reflect upon the stages that are relevant to my research; therefore, I will present four of Erikson’s stages. Erikson believed that in the fourth stage of development, the Industry versus Inferiority stage, which occurs between the ages 6 and 11 years, children begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities through social interactions. Children who are encouraged and commended by parents, teachers, and peers develop a feeling of competence and belief in their skills. Those who receive little or no encouragement from parents, teachers, or peers will doubt their ability to be successful.

The fifth stage of human development is *Identity vs. Role Confusion* which relates to ages 12 to 19 years. Within this stage, Erikson believed those who receive proper encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration will emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Those who remain hesitant of their beliefs and desires will feel insecure and confused about themselves and the future.

*Intimacy vs. Isolation* is the sixth stage of human development, between the ages of 20 and 30 years. Erikson believed it was critical that people develop close, committed relationships with other people. Those who are successful at this step will develop relationships that are secure and committed; a strong sense of personal identity is important to developing intimate relationships.

The seventh stage is considered to be middle adulthood that ranges from ages 40 to 50 and is titled *Generativity vs. Stagnation*. Erikson stated that during adulthood, we continue to build our lives, focusing on our career and family. Those who are successful
during this phase will feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community. Those who fail to attain this skill will feel unproductive and uninvolved in the world.

Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory was chosen because of the study’s focus on the developmental experiences, in this case, of women coaches. I am interested in the developmental processes by which women become elite coaches and their experiences as elite coaches. It enabled me, as the researcher, to make sense of the participants’ different stages of life and understand both the influence of maturational and environmental factors in their development as coaches.

**Conclusion**

The participation of females in sport has grown to represent half of the participants in Canada; however, the number of women in coaching is declining. Furthermore, the female leaders in sport positions are not at the top levels (presidents, head coaches, technical directors, and national programmers). I believe we need to continue to look for the underlying reasons why women are under-represented at the highest levels of coaching.

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental processes by which women become elite coaches. I was also interested in their current experiences as elite coaches. To explore these questions, Erikson’s model of psychosocial development was used to frame the study, from the development of the research questions to the analyses and interpretation of the data.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The Research Question

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of women coaches of female sport teams, more specifically, to gather female coaches’ perspectives on their experiences, challenges and enjoyments on the developmental path to a coaching career. Ultimately, my aim is to better understand the lived experiences of women who have made a successful career in coaching at the elite level. To study this question, I will use the qualitative method of life histories, to be addressed below.

The Nature of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as

A field of inquiry in its own right. It crosses disciplines, fields and subject matters; a situation activity that locates that observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self; include an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world; study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

In addition, Atkinson (2004) believes that qualitative researchers must learn to “think out-side the box.” This is similar to Patton’s (1985) thoughts, when he explained that qualitative research is

An effort to understand situations in the uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interaction there. . . . what the participants’ lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)
Qualitative research draws meaning from analyzed data and focuses on the context. Interpretations arise when patterns, themes, and issues are discerned within the data and when findings are seen in relation to one another against larger theoretical perspectives. Qualitative research is a multi-method approach used to study people, race, culture, and gender. I established an interpersonal relationship with each participant, while trying to gather information and find an understanding of the true “essence” and meaning of the participant’s lived experience.

The benefits of qualitative research can be applied to the specific area of women in coaching. By using qualitative research methods, I tried to understand the true essence of the participants’ lived experiences, while answering the research question(s) using the best form of data gathering. A lack of generalization of a specific population used to be perceived to some as a qualitative research limitation; however, it is now believed to be a strength because it allows researchers to find similar and different experiences within a particular culture, race, geographical area, gender, class, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002), and brings more life and analysis to the topic. For this study I use life history, a form of qualitative research, to explore how women in coaching share and differ in specific characteristics, personalities and subjective experiences, and attempt to make sense of, and account for, these experiences.

*The Nature of Life History*

Goodson and Sikes (2001) stated that life history captures the true essence of one’s life. Plummer (1995) defined life history as the study of one’s lived experiences for a particular purpose in trying to study the person’s community, culture, race, gender and identity, impression, image and self (p. 15). Further, Cohler (1993) believed that life history allows us to understand single lives in detail and how the individual plays various roles in society.
The interview is the technique used for life history inquiry, which examines the world of the interviewee to create a way of understanding their relationships, perspectives, and experiences. For this research, life history interviews were used to gather meaningful data from women in coaching. Rubin and Rubin (1995) referred to qualitative interviewing as both academic and practical; it allows the researcher to share information on what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their world (p. 5). The in depth interview process used for life history is a qualitative method for gathering information on the subjective essence of a person’s entire life. This is a method of looking at life as a whole, and as a way of carrying out an in depth study of individual lives (Atkinson, 2001). Interviews with people collect a first hand testimony. By learning about the lived experiences of female coaches, I gathered different perspectives and experiences, and then presented the data within a written text.

There are many benefits to using a life history approach. Life history provides the opportunity for self reflection, where the participants can tell their side of the story and reflect during or after the interviews. Life history exploration helps the researcher, as well as the participant, understand the true essence of the lived experiences of the participant. The life history approach is a valuable research tool and is a way to link theory and practice within one’s research (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Fine (1994) stated that life history faces the inevitable closure of the text that is produced and one should not look for completeness. I intended to produce what Fine called “a snap shot of transgressions in process,” by capturing the true essence of each story and finding commonalities between each participant. I looked for similarities in morals, beliefs, attitudes and personal characteristics while at the same time gathering an understanding of the participants’ sense of community, with respect to their support systems, mentoring programs and interactions between women coaches (Atkinson, 2001).
One must understand that knowledge does not need to be quantified or reduced to numbers or statistics. This research strived to gain an understanding of the essential “truths” and perceptions of the lived experiences of female coaches; therefore, I encouraged the interviewees to discuss the development of all parts of their lives as individuals, as representatives of specific groups and as witnesses to specific events along their paths to becoming and being an elite coach.

Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner (2004) defined oral history as a “basic tool in our efforts to incorporate previously over-looked lives, activities and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and the present” (p. 224). Women’s experiences and realities have been systematically different from men’s in crucial ways and therefore need to be studied in order to fill the gaps in knowledge as well as in the literature. Oral history can tell us about individual experiences of females being coaches. It can also tell us whether the process was exciting, stressful, fun or laborious, and whether it was accompanied by a sense of pride or failure.

I chose the life history approach to further our understanding of the developmental processes by which women successfully established a career in coaching at the elite level. Through a life history approach, further insight will be gained on the lived experiences, perspectives, obstacles and challenges women face within their developmental and professional coaching years. More specifically, by exploring the childhood and adulthood experiences of women who have successfully established a career in coaching, new contributions to the literature are made.
The Study

The Participants

The sampling strategy implemented for the present study was criterion sampling, consisting of volunteer participants who meet specific criteria as elite women coaches (Patton, 2002). Seven elite female coaches were interviewed for the study, with two of these participants being used as part of a pilot study in order for the researcher to become familiarized with the life history interview style. The “elite” criteria was defined as coaches with over ten years of experience; having coached within the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS); being a provincial or college level coach; and with experience at the national level in Canada (athlete, assistant coach or head coach).

The sample was comprised of women coaches who coached women’s team sports. I chose female coaches because that is my area of experience and interest and more importantly because there continues to be a diminishing number of female coaches. Moreover, I focused on women coaching women athletes in order to understand the importance of this relationship, and also because both the general literature as well as the sport literature indicate and support the importance of same gender relationships.

I conducted life history interviews from the perspective of women coaches of team sports to narrow the research and create a more intimate cultural environment in order to obtain richer data. I believe that there are substantial differences in coaching a team sport compared to coaching individual athletes. These differences include; team cohesion, social support, team dynamics, skill level, playing time, and individual versus team motivation.

In order to understand the lived experiences of women in coaching, I believe it was necessary to conduct in depth interviews with women coaches involved in two types of female team sports (a) sports dominated by female coaches (SDFC), such as field hockey, soft ball or
ringette; and (b) sports dominated by male coaches (SDMC), such as soccer and ice hockey. As a result, I interviewed one elite coach from SDFC and four coaches from SDMC. Four of the participants came from SDMC because the majority of female team sports in Canada are coached by men (male-dominated). However, I felt it was important to gather at least one perspective from an elite female coach who developed through a female-dominated system, which I believe is an area of study that could provide opportunities for further research.

Specific sports were selected because they met the following inclusion criteria: (a) the competitions exist at the provincial, university, college, Canada Summer Games, and international level, and (b) the provincial representative teams have a National Sport Organization (NSO) and a sanctioned national competition, with the potential to compete at a world championship or Olympic Games. The next section will give an overview of the interview process and the themes that were uncovered after the interview analysis.

The Procedure

Each coach’s information and status were collected from the public domain, where information was gleaned from team rosters and websites created by National Sport Organizations (NSO), Provincial Sport Organizations (PSO), Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA) and Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). The next step was to contact the appropriate athletic director or sport specific organization to obtain specific contact information for the coaches who met the criteria of the study. The third step was to contact and send an invitation to the top coaches who fit the specific criteria from SDFC and SDMC. During the initial contact, each participant was sent an information sheet stating the purpose of the research (see Appendix A). I had a one hundred percent positive response after the initial contact. Once the coach agreed to participate in the research, a time and date was arranged for the first life history interview.
At the initial meeting, the participant was asked to fill out a demographic information sheet and a consent form (see Appendixes B and C). The consent form provided information in regard to confidentiality and other ethical matters. After this information was discussed and the consent form was signed with no further questions, I began the interview process. The interview process varied among the participant; three of the participants wanted to complete the entire interview during one meeting, whereas the other two were completed over two separate meetings. After transcribing and reviewing each of the interviews, I occasionally e-mailed or spoke to the participants on the phone to obtain further information or clarification.

The Conceptualization of the Research Question

I aimed to understand each participant’s experiences and perspectives during the course of her life. To achieve this, three stages were developed for the present study that were adapted from Erikson’s (1986) Psychosocial Theory and his eight stages of human development. The first, Developmental Professional Stage is rooted in Erikson’s 4th stage - Industry vs. Inferiority and 5th stage - Identity vs. Role Confusion and was relevant because of my interest in the participants’ experiences as children and youth in sport and the ways in which these experiences may have influenced their choice of coaching as a career. The second, Professional Developmental Stage which complements Erikson’s 6th stage - Intimacy vs. Isolation, was important because of the interest in exploring early career choices and establishment. Finally, the third stage, Leadership Stage which incorporates Erikson’s 7th stage of Generativity vs. Stagnation, represents the coaches’ experiences as elite coaches, including the specific leadership styles and coaching philosophies that the participants believed in and implemented as elite coaches.
The Interviews

Each participant was asked to consent to two in-depth interviews which were arranged according to their availability. Two pilot interviews were completed so that I could gain experience in conducting life history interviews. The two pilots were an essential part of the overall interview and data collecting process, and in congruence with Janesick’s (1994) statement with regards to establishing “trust, rapport and authentic communication patterns with participants” (p. 211). In addition, Janesick found that pilot studies help the researcher focus on particular areas that may have been hidden, and also allow the researcher to practice questions.

Each participant went through an interview process that lasted a total of two-and-a-half to four hours. During the interviews, I used open-ended probing questions to create an atmosphere for each participant to share specific experiences that brought her to a coaching career, and present her experiences as an elite coach. Sample questions are provided in Appendix D. The face-to-face interview enables a “special insight” into subjectivity, voice and lived experience (Atkinson & Siverman, 1997). The purpose of the interviews was to reveal the images and symbols that give meaning to the participants’ experiences. The life history interviews consisted of a continuous outpouring of words from the participants, which provided information on the main themes defining female coaches and the individual identity of each of these coaches. At times during the interview process I stopped the interview due to emotional distress of the participant, in hoping to keep the comfort and trust level between myself and the participant. I believe the emotional distress showed the “richness and realness” of the lived experiences by the coach. After regaining comfort and the ability to continue on with her story, the interview was continued.

Consequently, interview questions were framed according to these three life stages:
(1) *Developmental stage:* Questions were asked about this stage in order to gather information about perspectives, experiences, influences and challenges that the participants had during their childhood development as daughters, siblings, friends, and athletes.

(2) *Professional developmental stage:* The questions pertaining to this stage were intended to capture the perspectives, experiences, and challenges the participants felt as women, students, athletes and coaches.

(3) *Leadership stage (present):* The information gathered through the questions asked about this stage presented a picture of the participants’ current personal and professional lives as role models, coaches, mentors, educators, mothers, and partners.

I believe that dividing the participants’ lives into these three stages was essential in order to understand their life histories as they pertained to becoming and being an elite coach.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and reviewed numerous times prior to developing any themes or patterns. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) believed that data analysis is the process of “generating concepts from and with the collected data, using coding as means of achieving specific categories” (p. 26). Coding helps de-contextualize and re-contextualize, to reduce and then expand the data in new forms and with new organizing principles (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As explained by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (2001), coding is a process by which the researcher reads and rereads a portion of data and provides labels, usually in the margins, to identify specific themes and categories.

To begin coding, I started with the specific research questions that inspired this study. After reading and rereading the transcriptions, organizing and labeling recurring topics and ideals, emerging conceptual categories and themes came to the surface, and were analyzed in order to understand the lived experiences of women coaches. In telling the stories of these
women, I attempted to bring pieces together to describe, as precisely as I could, the world as revealed by the participants. I analyzed the interview texts by identifying emerging strategies, behaviours and situations that the female coaches may have shared in describing their past and present experiences within the three stages; developmental stage, professional developmental stage, and leadership stage.

The result of the analysis of these interviews was a description of the five participants’ lives with respect to becoming and being elite coaches. Similarities between the interviews were analyzed and presented in a manner that best represented the true lived experiences of each participant and their perceptions of being women in coaching. Strauss (1987) stated that coding “is about raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data” (p.31). Moreover, coding is about analyzing relevant data in a way to create a foundation for further questions about the data.

Ethical Considerations

The coaches were informed of the content of the study, how they were to be involved as participants, and their rights as participants. Confidentiality is a standard ethical issue in which researchers are obligated to protect their participants’ identities. All participants were informed that the results would stay confidential. To ensure confidentiality the following steps were made: (a) I conducted and transcribed the interviews myself, (b) pseudonyms were used for the participants’ names, locations, and specific sports, and (c) member checking was used with each participant. After the interviews were transcribed, the participants were given an opportunity to read over their life histories, and give their approval or disapproval of the anonymous character and the manner in which their life history was written and presented in this study.
Conclusion

After reflecting on the entire research process, I feel the interview process turned out to be the most rewarding. It allowed me to identify with the participants’ lives and understand the need for more research in the area of women in coaching. The analysis process was an expedition into the complexity of emotions, experiences and perceptions of each participant’s life, while trying to differentiate the similarities and differences within all five of their stories. It was an educating, inspiring and challenging process. The next chapter will present the life histories of Tara, Spencer, Doris, Dawn, and Serena. Each pseudonym name was selected by the participants; all other names presented within the life histories were selected by the researcher.
CHAPTER IV

LIFE HISTORIES

Life History (1): Tara

Tara has been coaching basketball for the past 10 years at the club, provincial and university level. She is presently coaching at the provincial and university level and continues to stay involved in the developing programs. Tara and her husband live in a small town near the university with their daughter.

Development Stage – “Growing Up”

Tara grew up just outside of a city. She was brought up by her mother in a single-parent home. Growing up, Tara was familiar with women leading the household within her immediate and extended family. It was a very hierarchal environment where the women made all the decisions and their voices were heard. Tara explained:

Literally we are all tight knit and we are a very matriarchal family. So my grandmother was in charge and now my grandmother is ill, so my aunt, she’s the one in charge now. . . . the women have control and the men . . . my husband says this all the time, the men just sort of shut up. Men don’t really have a lot of opinions. . . . Yeah, we rule the roost for sure.

In Tara’s extended family, her aunt makes all of the decisions and her mother is the caregiver. The caregiver is in charge of taking care of any family member in need of a home. Tara’s immediate family consisted of her older sister (from a different father) and two cousins (daughters of uncles) who all lived under the care of her mother. Tara’s extended family becomes more complicated. In short, Tara has nine other half-siblings (that she knows of) from her father, but seven of them come from different women. Tara’s father left them at a very young age with no emotional support and very limited financial support.

Tara’s mother was educated in social work but unfortunately was never able to find work in her area of expertise after moving to Canada. She therefore depended on factory work
to support her family. In spite of many growing pains, Tara and her mother maintained a close and supportive relationship. Moreover, Tara had a very strong relationship with her grandfather. She described him as her backbone and a continuous source of faith when things got hard. Unfortunately, Tara’s grandfather died during her early years of adulthood which understandably caused her much distress. Tara said he was the person she most trusted and adored; “He was my bridge; he was everything and he was the first person I went to. I think back to how my grandfather really protected me from what, I guess could have been a very negative situation growing up.”

Tara navigated through obstacles and challenges as a child by being active. She was always playing games with the boys and girls in her neighbourhood:

Everyone was poor . . . you don’t really have a lot. There weren’t a lot of gadgets and things so you learned to just play with what you got and it’s very natural and you grab a twig from a tree and you figure out how to play baseball and you know, you run up and down on bare feet all the time and you’re on the beach.

Tara said one could be as active or as inactive as one wanted to be. “I think I played with everybody and had a good time. I ran around, I ran a ton!”

Growing up, Tara was seen as a “tomboy”. She dressed casually in slacks, shorts, t-shirts, jeans and sporting gear. While she interacted with both the boys and girls, Tara connected more with the boys because they tended to be the most active. That connection lasted until her body began to change. Tara stated, “I developed really early and stuff like that and that’s when I started to learn, like I was no longer one of them [boys]. I was now a girl.” Initially, Tara explained that the boys were not interested in an intimate relationship with her, but they did give attention to her other girlfriends. This stage was a challenging and emotional time for Tara. However, Tara did receive plenty of positive attention from the boys because of her strong athletic abilities.
One thing Tara discovered was that the more active she was, the more interested in competition and organized sport she became. She began to share some of her childhood memories around organized sport. Tara was first introduced to organized sport by a coach, Mr. Shaw in middle school. “We moved . . . and there was a coach there Mr. Shaw, and he pulled me into track so I actually started running track, running hurdles.” Tara also began to compete in basketball, softball, badminton, and volleyball. Although Tara enjoyed competing and being successful at most sports from the beginning, basketball was different. Initially, Tara felt that she was not a strong basketball player; however, she enjoyed the fact that she had to work hard to be good at something. She embraced the challenge of not being the best basketball player right away. She explained:

I was horrible. I was, and I think it was the challenge of the fact that I was so horrible. I kept trying . . . because track came easy to me. [Volleyball] came easily. I mean I was a very strong kid. I could hit a home run without a problem, but [basketball], I was awful. Like, I was the worst kid on the field and I kept thinking, I just got to get good.

Another obstacle in Tara’s life was her financial status. In order for Tara to compete in basketball, she had to earn money. Track was easy and cheap, but to join competitive basketball was expensive for her and her family. Tara decided to work at bingo in order to save enough money to play. It was another challenge, but Tara worked hard so that she could experience the more competitive side of sport.

Despite these obstacles, Tara recalled one specific moment during middle school that brought her primary focus to basketball. While participating in gym class, the students watched a basketball player from a national team demonstrate a skill. Immediately Tara knew she was going to be a basketball player:

My inspiration, Mr. Shaw brought in this girl and she had played on the national team. She was a big strong woman. . . . She was very masculine looking and he
said oh, she’s a forward for the national team. She [did a] demonstration and I turned to my best friend at the time . . . and I said ‘I am going to be her. I am going to play on the national team!’

Transitioning from a recreational player to a competitive athlete was a significant and exciting time in Tara’s life. Tara now had a goal to strive for in sport, more specifically in basketball.

During high school, Tara was more of a social student than an academic one. She always went to class but never really applied herself. Despite Tara’s lack of motivation towards her school work, she often helped younger students with reading and writing during breaks at lunch time. She loved the interaction with her peers, students and teachers. Tara explained her view on academics: “I did enough just to get into university but didn’t really apply myself.” Although Tara wasn’t completely committed to her academics, she was always involved in after school activities, including track and field, basketball, softball, badminton and volleyball.

Tara spent most of her time playing and travelling with her basketball teammates, which is why the basketball world slowly became her social life as well. At this time, Tara continued to live at home and found that her weekends gave her an escape from the stress of her family. Tara emphasized; “I was never home, always in transition . . . so now sport became my life, hotels became my home and my home became my hotel.” She continued that almost every weekend she was away, so she felt that her family home was literally some place to stop in for a couple days.

With hard work and continuous opportunities, Tara began to excel in basketball and slowly became a local hero. Her community and school were always supportive of her athletics. Luckily for Tara, this allowed her to get away with things that maybe her other classmates would not be able to. Tara explained:

I think my ability to do so well in sports put me on a pedestal with lots of the teachers and then I was a nice kid. I took care of the kindergarten kids and I was a nice kid and
always tried to be helpful. . . .There were about four of us out of my age group that would probably be potential elite athletes. So for myself it was [basketball] and track . . . we kind of knew we were special and you . . . for whatever reasons, you know you’re special. You know, you get interviewed by the community paper.

This recognition from her local community helped Tara increase her confidence, and also put a positive pressure on her to play hard and become a good role model.

As a teenager, Tara did not have a boyfriend. She had a couple of male friends as she got older, but never really felt comfortable on an intimate level. As her teenage years progressed, Tara was unfortunate to have experienced an abusive relationship with an older boy. The older boy used his age and looks to pressure young girls into abusive situations. Tara got trapped for a while, but with the support of her girlfriends she got out of the relationship.

Tara expressed how thankful she was to have had such a strong network of girlfriends. They would do everything together. More importantly, they respected each other’s strengths and weaknesses by supporting one another through the so called “intimidating and awkward” teenage years. Unfortunately, even with the support of a strong group of friends, three of Tara’s friends got pregnant at a very young age (grade 9). At that time Tara believed that she had to make a decision as to what path she intended to follow. Tara needed to start thinking about her future and make tough decisions.

Sport became a way out and a positive choice to avoid this “other” lifestyle. “Close friends and I knew that we had one of two options. For me, I could follow their path or I could let basketball take me somewhere different; like in that moment.” That was when Tara found more strength to fight the odds and overcome the obstacles in her journey. At that moment, she decided it was all or nothing; she chose basketball.
Tara had many influential teachers and coaches while growing up; some were good and some were bad, but always a learning experience. Tara shared some of her overwhelming early experiences playing at the competitive level:

He [coach] didn’t hit me but he called me a dumb truck, like . . . he was just abusive. . . . You know, I was athletic, so he loved the fact that I was athletic, but oh yeah, so I was jumping through hoops to try to play well.

Tara believed that even though this coach was abusive, she needed to please him regardless of his remarks. Psychologically unsteady from her father, Tara was afraid to lose another man in her life. Tara was searching for a sense of security; unfortunately, she found security in an abusive coach-athlete relationship. Tara was feeling an internal pressure to impress this coach.

Despite her negative experiences, Tara was able to reflect on some of her most positive, influential and significant learning moments while playing with the provincial programs:

We had fun! We played! Like . . . we loved being together. We had a good time. Our coach was really good to us, you know, she treated us like human beings. Not like numbers on the court and then the next summer, another coach took over and, he was mean. He would sleep with players. Yeah he was the coach who would use his power over . . . and he sleeps with players and if you didn’t sleep with him you knew you would never play and . . . so I lost my starting position to a girl who was sleeping with him.

Tara explained that she just wasn’t savvy enough to play the game. “I didn’t know how to play the game.” Although it was difficult, Tara tried to work hard, stay focused and remain team oriented. From a psychological standpoint, Tara found it especially hard when she would play well one game and, without any feedback, would be on the bench the next game. Tara believed that her experiences were important for molding her coaching philosophy. She recognized which qualities and tactics she intended to keep and which ones she intended to let go.

Admittedly, Tara had to overcome numerous obstacles to survive in the sporting world. She said that there came a point where she just couldn’t worry about the politics anymore:
Provincial is provincial and club is club. Playing club [basketball] was very successful for me. Like club we were winning champions. With the provincial team I was treated like crap and we weren’t winning so I just said, fine. . . . I just said; ‘You are what you are. You are part of my life but you’re not my successful part of my life,’ and this is so, I guess, I compartmentalize. . . . I really separated the two and I just kept separate entities in my life.

After some provincial experience, Tara began to play with the junior national team where she had a similar experience to the one she had with her provincial team. Tara explained that the junior national coach was sleeping with senior national team member. She shared her experiences:

It was single men coaching women and it was men in their mid-thirties coaching 16, 17 and 18 year olds, they would be arrested today if these things happened and I, so I played for the coach and it was interesting that summer because I just loved it. I loved the coach and I loved playing.

Despite the abuse of power, Tara excitedly expressed that the first summer was “fantastic”.

After that summer, Tara was selected again to train with the junior national team to prepare for the Junior World Championships. Her plan was set to play for the provincial team and train all summer. She was excited and ready. Unfortunately, the following summer Tara was cut from the provincial team: “I got cut the next summer. The head coach came in and politics abounded and you know he wanted players from his own institution so he brought his own forwards [Tara’s basketball position] with him because he had worked with them.” Tara was devastated, especially when all her teammates and colleagues kept reiterating that she deserved to be on the team.

After this huge disappointment and setback in Tara’s playing career, she made the choice to quit. “What happened was, I quit. I quit basketball. I actually quit!” She acknowledged that she was frustrated and had enough of the politics. After the word got around that Tara had quit basketball, someone unexpectedly had a very positive impact on Tara’s life. She explained that a rival coach had driven for over two hours to visit her at home.
Tara remembered the day like it was yesterday, when he walked through the door of her house and said: “If you quit, you are doing the sport disservice. Please do not let this man stop you from being as great as you can be and from being something in this sport.” At that moment, Tara was motivated to push the limits. Tara then called up the national technical director and said:

I want you to tell the coach [provincial team coach who cut her that summer] that I want to try out for a [different basketball position] now. Tell him he needs to watch me on this date.’ It is a regional game. We’re going to be in the finals and I’m going to get MVP at the regional games.

Tara explained that the head coach of the provincial team never came to watch but the technical director did. She excitedly said; “We won. I got MVP! So he [technical director] called up the coach and said, ‘she needs to be on the provincial team, end of discussion.’” By taking a risk and facing a challenge, Tara had created another opportunity for a new experience.

After the initial battle was over and Tara was put on the team, her mindset began to shift once again. She had a constant internal battle to try and decide what to fight for and what to leave alone. Tara explained:

Because I knew politics by then I was like, you know what, and I just don’t care. And I totally changed from being a kid who would fight for everything to just not caring. I literally stopped caring because I just said, it’s bigger than me. I think that was the moment where I realized it didn’t matter how many times I wanted to fight, it was bigger than me and I just didn’t have another fight left in me.

At the same time, midway through high school, Tara decided to transfer to another high school that had a more competitive and successful basketball team:

I wanted to win also. So now I sort of moved from just loving to play, to now I just wanted to win. It was all about winning for me and I wanted to go to the team that won back to back. . . . We had this urban team that never won. Yeah, two years back to back and I made this big move for this one reason and we never won. What a character builder that was. . . . I was angry. I was really angry.
Tara embraced change but always managed to keep close ties with her friends and family.

Change also kept Tara motivated and committed to life. She explained:

I decided . . . and I do this with my life, and I don’t know why . . . I decided I wanted a break from the people I grew up with. I wanted to forge my own identity with new people and so I packed everything up and went to [High School A] and everyone else went to [High School B] . . . and it’s funny because we never won.”

Tara was blessed with caregiver qualities like her mother. She enjoyed taking care of people such as her family, friends and teammates. Along with Tara’s commitment to helping people, she maintained a support group in her life, not only with her friends, but also with her family and sport colleagues. As a single parent, Tara’s mother played a significant role in her life. Their relationship was solid but certainly had its “bumps and bruises.” Tara told me that she felt extremely supported growing up with her friends and family. “Umm . . . she [mother] was supportive because my mom really wanted me to do whatever made me happy.”

As Tara approached high school graduation, she began to think about her academic and professional future. Tara was interested in law, but never really got excited about the academic component of university. Her choice to pursue university was primarily for basketball. She explained:

I always wanted to go into law, so I thought the best degree to aim for would be criminology. It was very interesting but at the same time I wasn’t much for academics. I mean I enjoyed school for the other aspects like mentoring by helping the kids younger than me read but I never really applied myself to the fullest for good marks. I got by, and sometimes I was treated different with my academics because I was a successful athlete. But all in all, university was a place where I could play [basketball] and continue my athletic career with a scholarship.

Tara was recruited by a few National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) universities and offered athletic scholarships; however, she decided to play for a Canadian university that was close to the national training centre. Tara got into university as a sports administration student but moved into pre-law to give herself a chance with her academic interests.
Tara’s first year playing at the university level was an encouraging experience. She had a successful season and was awarded All-Canadian [which is the top honour for university athletes in Canada]. Tara said that her first year of university positively turned her life around after being cut from the junior national team that summer. It was an extremely rewarding and confidence building experience. Tara said; “My life just seemed to work out like that. It was like really awful things would happen, and then something good would happen.”

After her first year of university, Tara found out that her coach was being fired for sleeping with the players. She admitted to knowing that her coach was sleeping with her teammates, but still did not want him to be fired:

Most [players] were open to it [coach sleeping with players]; some, not so much. And it was . . . interesting because another rookie and I were really close and angry because we both made the decision to come to that university to play for this particular coach and so initially we didn’t take the sides of our teammates.

Tara articulated that for a while she was angry and did not understand the whole situation. She felt she was naïve. Tara said everyone was over 18 years old, therefore, they were old enough to make their own decisions: “You made the decision; you decided to sleep with him, why should the rest of us have to pay for it?” She continued:

That is what he did. It was literally if you were a star the first year, then he wanted to groom you right and then, they were like we did this because we were afraid that he would do it to you too, you think you are smart enough.

Tara then realized that her teammates were actually making a stand to protect the younger athletes. After reflecting on the situation and putting her own views to the side, Tara had a change of heart. She realized that the situation had been about power and began to recognize this for the first time. This was a major eye-opening experience for Tara with regards to the coach-athlete relationship.

Tara’s second year at university was an unpleasant experience, but a learning experience nonetheless. Tara realized that she displayed a bad attitude towards her new coach.
This new coach was a former national team player and teammate of Tara’s; therefore, this caused Tara to automatically lack respect for her as a coach. Tara said: “She [coach] should not have put up with many of the things I said to her.” Tara explained that she was vocal to her coach and her teammates, which slowly began to break the team’s dynamics: “I think I was very detrimental to the team that year.”

Unfortunately, Tara had a difficult time respecting her coach because of her age and the fact that she was a former teammate. Tara looked at her as an equal and couldn’t see her as an authority figure: “She should not have come to coach. She was not ready. And I think it was my fight with her: ‘All you care about is playing, you don’t care about coaching.’” Tara wanted to be coached and taught but didn’t feel that she was getting what was needed from her coach. Tara believed she was too young to be hired as a head coach: “The new coach coming in was 23 and all the players were 18, 19 and 20. It was awful; it was an awful position for her.”

It appeared that after every three to five years, Tara either searched for, or was given a new opportunity for change. She had changed high schools and universities for new experiences and different opportunities. After her third year of university, Tara decided to switch universities for a new basketball experience and a change in academic programs. In terms of playing basketball, Tara knew exactly what she was getting into regarding her coach-athlete relationship. She was well aware that the coach had a reputation of sleeping with his players. Tara said she was mentally prepared for it: “I knew what I was getting into . . . it was funny, I think because I was older, the mind games he played on younger players, he couldn’t play on me.”

Tara’s new university coach was already married once to a former player (now divorced), and he was seeking a new prospect. Tara shared the details:
So the year starts and there is this first year player and I’m like ‘Oh what are you doing tomorrow?’ ‘Oh, me and Jack are going running.’ ‘Oh, where were you today?’ ‘Oh, I was sitting in Jack’s office.’ Okay. So then after about two months I marched into Jack’s office and I sat down and I go ‘Jack, I can say this to you because you and I are almost peers. I go, ‘if you touch her, I will call the cops’ and he just kind of looked at me and he goes, ‘what are you talking about?’ And I just said, ‘end of story’, I said; ‘I will not do it. I will not be a member of this team. I will not allow you to touch an 18 year old girl. Not as long as I’m here. It’s not going to happen.’ And he’s like, ‘I wouldn’t do that. I wouldn’t do that duh, duh, duh’, And he’s like vehemently denying the whole relationship. And I’m just like, ‘Jack I’m telling you. Like, do not pass go on this. Like, this is not going to happen.’ So I played two years for Jack and you know, Jack was like, he could be a tyrant and he could be very nasty. You know, a nasty coach but with me it was a different…and I know it was because I called him on a situation. I don’t know if it’s because I basically said to him I’m not going to put up with stuff from you that’s like that. So, he never treated me like that. He actually treated me with a lot of respect and I actually for the first time I was in a coaching relationship with a male that was respectful; it was very interesting to be the player who was treated with respect and to watch how he treated other players. Because then I was like, wow, what a dynamic. You know, just to watch how he’d yell at someone for something that I had just done that and he wouldn’t yell at me.

Tara later found out that her coach and the younger teammate ended up getting married once the player had graduated from university. This came as no surprise to Tara. Despite her coach’s unprofessional behaviours with his female athletes, Tara enjoyed her experience as the more mature athlete and teammate. Moreover, she embraced being the caregiver for her teammates:

I actually enjoyed, sort of being the matriarch of the team and that’s what it became. Like, he [coach] would always sit with me and talk and. . . . I really enjoyed being that sort of . . . they used to call me ‘band-aid’ because every time they needed something. They were like, I was like, oh I have tampons in the bag. I became the caregiver role.

Professional Development Stage: “Athlete to Coach”

At a different university and under a new coach, Tara finished off her basketball season but regrettably didn’t finish her degree. She felt pushed away and ostracized by the overwhelmingly feminist classmates and professors while doing classes in Women Studies. In addition, Tara’s personal life became complicated. Therefore, she decided to drop basketball
and school from her life altogether and move away with her fiancé of three years (together for six years; they met during Tara’s 1st year of university). This decision was made to give her relationship a second chance after finding out that he had been unfaithful to her for the majority of their relationship. Even though deep down she knew it was the wrong choice to move away with him, Tara once again found it hard to let another man leave her life. Tara took a chance and embraced another change in life.

Tara moved to start a new life, away from basketball, school, friends and family. Shortly after the move, Tara’s relationship ended but they still remained friends. She was now 26 years old, living in a new province and enjoying her freedom. Tara began to teach, and after a couple years of working in the school system, she was asked to coach the high school basketball boys’ and girls’ team. This was Tara’s first involvement with basketball since she moved. After much thought, Tara accepted the position and found her love and passion for basketball once again.

Tara was excited about her new life and eventually met another man (Steve). “It was a random moment in time where like, if I had been five minutes earlier or five minutes later or I’d been in a really bad mood, yeah, I never would have met him.” Tara and Steve instantaneously hit it off and became very close in a short period of time. Steve grew up in the western part of Canada. He is an introvert, whereas Tara is an extrovert. She claimed that their opposite personalities complement each other. One thing they do have in common is their passion for competition and activity. Steve is an active man and enjoys mountain bike racing, but does not have very much interest in or knowledge of basketball, which in Tara’s perspective, is a good thing.

At this time Tara had been away for four years but her journey ran short after a conversation with her mother, she found out that her sister was getting married: “I found out
my sister was getting married and she was moving out of my mom’s house. This meant my mom was going to be alone.” Tara felt that she couldn’t let her mom live by herself. Therefore, at the age of 30, Tara decided to pack everything up and move back home to live with her mom. She explained that she unconsciously held a grudge against her mother for feeling obligated to move back home:

So I packed up from what had been my life to come to something that was really foreign to me and now you don’t . . . like you [mother] take for granted that I’m here, so there was a lot of resentment that I had to deal with for about two years after I got back and I was really angry. . . . I didn’t really deal with it . . . I didn’t tell them [family], I was just resentful for a long time and then when I did, I exploded.

From a relationship standpoint, Tara and Steve broke up before she moved back home. He was going to travel to Australia for a year to “find himself” while Tara planned to move back home. They decided to take time apart but made a conscious decision to keep in touch.

Once Tara was settled, she started a job with a fundraising company and decided to finish her bachelor degree through correspondence. She was also offered a number of different coaching and executive basketball positions. Initially, Tara declined most offers but agreed to help her past club as an assistant coach:

I wouldn’t mind assistant coaching, so I started assistant coaching but then the head coach, his family couldn’t keep up the commitment so I ended up being the head coach of the team and then I became the president of the club within a six month period because the president retired. Oh, yeah it just sort of became, it’s yours. The mantle’s yours. And I really made a commitment to myself to have the opportunities for the girls that I had because you know scholarships were big and I started making contacts in the states for scholarships and then I eventually just married the club with another club and we just became one big club.

After developing the club for two years, Tara decided to step away and start another journey with one of her mentors. Tara began to transition into the university coaching environment. Tara described one of her mentors as an octopus:

I call her the octopus right because once one tentacle gets you, the rest are wrapping around you. So she was like, ‘Oh you want to be coaching chair of the region?’ I’m like no. ‘Sure you do.’ So I became chair. ‘Oh, do you want to coach at the regional
games? Sure you do.’ So literally it became like this never ending opportunity and like, this ball . . . like this big boulder rolling down the hill with no stops along the way. So I literally fast tracked. Like, I went from being this club assistant coach, to club president, to then coaching chair of the region, to coaching chair of the province, and then to regional games assistant coach, regional games head coach, provincial team assistant coach.

Tara explained how she instantly became a continuous learner. She embraced the opportunities that her mentor provided for her and began to quickly build her coaching credentials. When Tara began coaching again, she realized that continuing her education had become an important part of her personal growth. Tara explained:

Yeah, like I had my level 1 in high school and hadn’t really thought of getting anything higher than that and then once all of this started, you know I quickly got my level 2 and my level 3, and just starting rolling with it. And then I went and got my personal training certification just so I would understand like, when the trainer started talking about biomechanics and so I started educating myself on different areas of sport and then I started taking courses on counseling and how to talk to athletes and team building and, you know, so different areas to become, like a total coach as opposed to being just on the court.

Continuous learning became a strong part of Tara’s coaching philosophy. She always looked for opportunities to learn and improve, while striving to understand more about her athletes and the game.

After being involved with basketball again and gaining confidence through her influential support system, Tara’s coaching philosophy became more open and stronger in terms of a vision and purpose. Her philosophy was more engrained with a higher purpose, while her attitude, competitiveness and outlook on the bigger picture were constantly changing. She expressed that trying to reach out to her athletes during her first years of coaching was a difficult task. She wanted to help them understand the importance of the bigger picture of sport, especially for student-athletes: “We’re struggling . . . the whole learning how I coach and me trying to get them to understand that it’s not about the wins and losses. It’s just bigger than that.”
Regrettably, she didn’t always see sport and coaching that way. Tara explained that with more experience and interactions with her athletes, it became more important for her to develop the person, as well as the athlete: “More than anything I want to make great women; women who can think for themselves, stand on their own two feet, and who don’t need someone to tell them how to live.” Again, Tara admitted she didn’t always see the bigger picture, especially during her first years as a coach. She said, “I was mean.” Tara explained:

It’s been a journey. . . . One of my mentors always laughs at me because my first year of coaching I was like my former coaches. I was just mean! I was all them combined. I was nasty, Well, I wouldn’t call anybody a cunt, obviously. But yeah, I would swear.

Tara explained that she didn’t know any better and only realized a change needed to be made because she felt awful after every practice and game:

I felt awful. I felt so ill afterwards. Like, and I kept thinking to myself if I feel this horrible at the end of the day of doing this, I’m not doing it right. It’s not me. Whoever this person is who shows up at the court isn’t who I am as a person because I can’t feel that awful if that’s who I am. So that was really my turning point; that I just felt so ill about it.

Tara explained that her first year university coach, who had been fired for sleeping with his players, was still one of her mentors:

He had a really good feel of how to coach people. Like, he was incredible and I think that’s why we fought so hard to keep him because he did things like check in with us so we all had . . . he’d have paper and we’d write how we were feeling and like what type of day we were having and he would check in with us, like, how’s your day been and really get to know us as people.

Tara began again to talk about the “octopus coach,” Mary, and how she continued to push Tara outside of her comfort zone. Mary also showed Tara the more humanistic and inclusive style of coaching. Tara stated that another one of her mentors, Sara, had a very different coaching approach. Tara believed it was important to learn dynamic coaching styles. Sara was a great role model coach because she had two daughters. Tara went into detail:

She had a very different philosophy on how to coach women but she was still, she was a great role model in the respect that she had two young daughters and had coached
while they were babies so she was a different type of role model for me. Yeah, so that first year was with her and I really enjoyed my experience with her and then her daughter got sick and ended up with cancer and so then they offered me the head coach role. And I actually turned it down because I didn’t think I was ready.

At that moment she realized her life was planned out. Tara said: “You need to be ready for the unexpected, and expect the unexpected!” She expressed that she was always ahead of herself and her plans. “I’m ahead of the game.” Tara explained her concerns when Mary sat her down and asked her what her fears were, in taking the head coaching position. Tara explained:

I’m a woman of colour and I’m overweight in a system controlled by white men, like, I don’t want to become part of the politics. I’ve seen what the politics have done to me in the past as an athlete. I don’t want to suddenly challenge them as a coach.

Tara articulated that within her athletic career she felt her skin colour was a personal obstacle on the court. She expressed her thoughts:

I think I didn’t look the same in shorts . . . and it’s funny because the coach who cut me from the junior national team. Now, we actually talk and he, years and years later, he and I actually have this coaching-peer relationship. And he said to me, ‘You know, I had two players . . . two previous black players and they gave me such attitude I didn’t want another one.’ He goes, ‘Like I didn’t know you but I just assumed.’ And you know, how brave of him to be open about where he was at that moment, right.

Leadership Stage - “The Elite Coach”

When Tara finally accepted the Canada Games coaching position, she was grateful to have Mary on board as the assistant coach. She modestly expressed how nervous she was at the time because of her lack of confidence. Tara didn’t believe she was ready for that level. However, after having Mary with her for a year, Tara’s confidence increased and she began to believe that she deserved to be the head coach.

Due to time commitments, Mary left after the first year, and Tara asked another coach to join her coaching staff. Tara explained that the new member of her staff played an influential role in her learning and development: “It was wonderful. She would say ‘well,
what are you thinking,’ and she would really challenge me and get me to think through things and just sort of walk through what the process was of being head coach.” Tara continued:

I knew we would think along the same lines in terms of coaching philosophy. And that was interesting because she is the polar opposite to Mary. So now I’ve had several incarnations of female coaches and I had seen these different aspects of them and it’s funny because this new coach, I wouldn’t say she was a nasty coach. She’s definitely a coach of the past. She’s a lot more like them [male coaches] and a little less humanistic and it’s more about getting the job done versus the players. And it’s interesting because I kept thinking wow, because she said, ‘you got to teach them this and you got to create them in your image.’ Because her thing was that coaches create teams in their image, while Mary taught me that players don’t have to look like robots. Because everyone’s different and everyone’s physically different and you have to figure out what they do well, and then help them feel good about what they do well, and then learn to play at a higher level versus them all looking the same on the court. . . . What an eye opening experience for me to see this difference, but we were very complimentary. We worked very well together.

After discussing her coaching philosophy, Tara described the process of developing her own identity as a coach. She said that it was a combination from some of her most influential mentors. Her style of coaching would vary depending on the level, age and personalities of the athletes she was working with at that time. However, the one aspect of Tara’s coaching philosophy to remain constant was the “bigger picture”:

What we did was we had some younger players. And I really wanted to work with the younger players because they won’t have a huge role on the court so the most important things for them would be developmental and really learn some technical . . . and get better from that standpoint as well as play. For the older players, I want them to learn how to use what they got. We’ll fix little things but really to use what you got and be good at it so it was a really nice marriage of the two philosophies.

Tara expressed that one of her best experiences was coaching at the Canada Games. Once she gained the confidence and embraced the position, Tara began to enjoy the entire process. The team ended up winning the gold medal, but the most rewarding success for Tara was developing networks with other coaches and providing a positive experience for her athletes. Tara shared her experience:

What an experience it was; to meet other coaches from other sports. That was probably the best part about it. I mean, winning was nice. Like, to meet other coaches from
other sports, like badminton, gymnastics and [basketball] and to meet them and talk to them about their coaching life and you know, how they manage having children and a family and because at this point, Steve and I weren’t married yet and I wasn’t even sure if I was going to have kids. Like, is it doable? Isn’t it doable? Like, what do you do? Like, Mary has never had kids and doesn’t want kids and so she has a whole different outlook, right so who can I talk to?

Another feeling of success for Tara came from the positive implementation of team discipline and respect: “Discipline was a big part of it. Without being nasty, you know respect; respecting each other, respecting yourself, respecting your coach, respecting the environment. You thank everybody. You apologize . . . just let people know you appreciate everything.”

Tara continued talk about the players, the team and team cohesion:

The girls were awesome. We stuck together. And it was interesting because we were one of the few teams where we actually liked each other and we went...we did everything together. All the other teams were like, well what are they doing. They would try to pull out members and they were all like, well there are 14 of us. Can 14 of us go? It never became one or two. It was always 14.

Another great moment for Tara was when the father of one of her players approached her and said: “You know they would run through a wall for you. Did you know that? Like, they love you!” Tara said that she had not realized the impact she had on her athletes until that moment. That one comment from a father made her feel appreciated, special and confident. Tara explained a moment like that makes a thankless job like coaching worth every long day.

Tara continued to state that part of her coaching philosophy is “winning isn’t everything!” She shared her perspective on winning:

I say to my club teams, and I say it to my university girls and I know it’s hard for them to hear it but I keep saying, ‘I don’t care if we win.’ It’s not about the winning and you know they’ve really struggled with that because they had gone from having a male coach who came from the men’s game where boys just, you know they talk bad about each other but then they step on the court and play. And so I’m trying to break that silo down and I’m like, I don’t care. It’s not about that. How do we become friends and family and actually care for one another.

Again, Tara found promoting the bigger picture to the present generation to be a major challenge at the provincial and university level.
During this time, Tara and Steve began to rekindle their relationship. They began to talk and write more and more often and together made the decision to try to make the relationship work. Tara shared the details:

It went from the occasional email to actually writing letters to each other. I don’t know, I think letters were more personal and then you know it kind of . . . it became something where I could actually talk to him. Like, he became the person I could talk to that had no invested interest in my [basketball] and he had no invested interest in my work. Like, it didn’t matter. So I could say anything to him and he would listen and he would give me what he thought was the right response and he’d be totally off and I’d be like, that’s stupid but you know, he never had an investment in it so it just became like that between us and then somehow we ended up back together. Like, I don’t really know at what point it sort of switched and then he . . . and then I suggested he come out here. And I said, why don’t you just come out here and we’ll just see how things go. And we’ll just roll with it and . . . yeah, so he moved out here.

Tara and Steve lived with her mom for a while, but in separate rooms. They decided they both needed their independent lives in the city without each other. Once they both gained independence they decided to begin a life together.

After many years of long distance and hard work, Tara was happy with the way her relationship had unfolded. She and Steve were both content with their common law relationship, with no immediate plans to get married in the near future. That was until Tara found out she was pregnant. Tara confided that she had always wanted children:

I always wanted kids. At the reunion [high school] the first thing people said to me, because I was pregnant at the time; so the first thing they all said to me was like, ‘so where are your ten children?’ Because when I was a kid, I always said I want ten children . . . four of my own and I want to adopt 6.

Tara stated that she did always want children but didn’t know it was feasible at this time in her life. They were thrilled; however, they also felt the need to make the next jump in their relationship before having a baby: “I was just never sure if I really wanted to marry. Like, I was happy with the way things were. Like, we were living together . . . we were living common law and things were tickety boo, they were just fine.”

Tara continued:
I just thought, so my players have always been my kids and so, I think that sort of changed my coaching too and I’ll touch on that . . . and so my players have always become my daughters and sons and so I kind of always been that with them and so when I got pregnant, I was like, okay so now I’m going to have my own. But I said I’m not getting married after I have this baby. I don’t know I said I just want to get this done. So we got married!

A head coach position at a university became open while Tara was pregnant. The athletic director at that time strongly pursued Tara for the position. She drove to Tara’s hometown and offered her the head coach position, knowing she was pregnant. She explained that she would be supported 100% as a mother and as a coach. “They knew I was pregnant. They actually knew I was pregnant. And they said, yeah, well we know you’re going to have a baby and we’re fully supportive of that. And I went, well okay, well, call me in two weeks.” Tara shared that she never thought coaching would become her full time job. It was never something that she intended to actively pursue at that time in her life:

I never really thought of coaching. I actually had stepped away from it for a year because of the baby. And she [athletic director] was like, ‘we’ll find a way to support you to help you be effective while you’re in the gym, during games, during practices.’ You know, all these things and I thought, I’d be an idiot not to take it but you know, I still hesitated because it was like . . . such a change. And so then my sister . . . always my sister sort of said to me ‘the one thing you dreamed of since you got back to coaching was coaching at university. Like, it’s here! And you are saying . . . I don’t know?!

Tara discussed the situation with her family and husband, and decided to accept the position. She was in transition once again. Within the first year of accepting her present position as a head university coach, Tara was getting married, having a baby, moving and starting a new job. It was an extremely busy and stressful schedule with new experiences and challenges. After making the decision to take on the coaching position, Tara moved forward without looking back. She excelled by pushing herself to the limit with self-reflection, focus, continuous learning, dedication and passion.
One opportunity led to another, and coaching became Tara’s livelihood again. She became enthralled with coaching and mentoring. Tara is currently coaching basketball within the Canadian Interuniversity Sport but admitted to having some major challenges in her first years as a coach, mother and partner. After Tara and her husband got married, things began to change. Tara explained:

I don’t know why but suddenly it was different and we struggled a bit. We talked about the fact that it might be because I’ve had four of the five biggest stressors of life all within a year. . . . And I said, we can’t be divorced because then we would have all five of the major stressors! I don’t want to be in the Guinness book of world records for a year. So we’ve struggled a bit with that sort of thing and the move and him getting up and running but the thing, but you know, it’s all kind of falling into place.

Once Tara began to progress as a new mom and coach, she realized that her coaching philosophy had made some significant changes:

I have changed a lot, and it’s interesting because I think that the players were my girls, like kids, how I coached was different and now that I have a daughter I don’t coach the same. It’s really strange . . . the other day, it was funny, we had our [sic] Christmas party . . . and we [team] were doing a karaoke type thing. I was dancing around. I was just being an idiot, really. And the girls all said, ‘oh you got to come out dancing with us.’ And I realized in that moment that before my daughter, I used to be an idiot. Like, I used to have so much fun with my players. I would blast music when I was in the van with them and I would dance. Like, I would stand on the side and I would dance and I would do all sorts of things or in warm-ups . . . I was a person who had all sorts of fun . . . and since I had her, I wasn’t that person. I literally became this…I don’t want to say, like, cold, but I just cut myself off from them. . . . Yeah, it was really weird because in that moment I went ‘oh my goodness they haven’t seen that side of me.’ They haven’t seen that part of me that every other player I’ve ever coached absolutely adores about me . . . So now I am looking forward to now sort of reintroducing myself to them.

Tara enjoys being a role model and mentor for her athletes and young coaches. She tries to mentor through the provincial organizations and university programs. An example, Tara hired a young female as her assistant coach at her current university. Tara explained that she enjoyed seeing the passion in the younger coaches:

I have a woman working with me, Anne. She’s great and she played university for five years and one day she sent me an email and just said I’m going to be
doing occupational therapy on campus. She came in and we started talking and she told me a little bit about herself and I said, you know it would be great to have you come in just to work for us, and so she’s been with us and she’s awesome. I love working with her and it is good because she never really coached so she’s just learning the ropes. She said I never thought about coaching but now I kind of like it and so I’ve been teaching her. Like, I’ve been sort of a mentor coach to her which is great. And then, I have a sport psychology student working with us as well.

Many responsibilities came with coaching at the university level. One was attending provincial and national annual meetings. During Tara’s first year of coaching, Tara chose to be an observer and listener, instead of an aggressive initiator from the start. Tara shared her experience at these particular meetings, which were attended by predominantly men:

I like to watch dynamics. I’m very much the type of person who likes to see where, who the players are to know, like in the past I’ve, and there have been times where I sent emails to different people and they totally disregard it, right. So now I’ve learned to watch first, hear how they like things to be suggested. Make them think it’s their suggestion.

Tara explained that she chose to be more observant during her initial meetings with the other coaches. Tara believed it was important to gain confidence amongst her colleagues before providing her opinions, feedback and positive influence within the group.

Tara loves basketball and working with the student-athletes, but even though Tara has tremendous passion for her profession, she still finds it extremely hard to balance coaching, relationships, and motherhood:

It’s hard. You know it’s hard to juggle. Like, even now and I have all the support and I still think to myself, because you start questioning like am I good mother. Like, oh, she’s got a cold today. Like, is that because of me? You know, like one of my assistant coaches, like his son who is two weeks older. He’s like oh, my son is always in bed at eight. Like, my girl is in bed at 11. You know, like it’s, just even the little things, like am I bad mom.

In terms of partner support, Tara provided a description of her daily routine:

He’s [Steve] good but he works shifts . . . like, so if he’s working, it’s not necessarily a good time for him. He’s not as helpful as I’d like him to be. That’s probably the biggest challenge we have. . . . He races bikes, like mountain biking and he’s like you promised me I could train today and now because she’s sick you want me to look after
her. And I’m like, yeah. What are you giving up? And I’m like it’s my job and then he goes but this is my job too. No, it’s a hobby. Yeah, so like, it’s tough and that’s probably the biggest thing we argue about is you know the balance of time when he has something and I suddenly go oh, I’ve got a staff meeting can you take her at the last minute because I had forgotten to tell him like a week ahead. And he goes ‘you know you take me for granted’, which I totally do. I totally admit it. Yeah, and I totally take him for granted and I totally appreciate the fact that he sticks it out because I’m awful. I am. No I’m bad.

Tara continued to explain that the battle of scheduling becomes even harder when you add the administrative duties of a university coach. The administrative tasks are on going and need to be addressed beyond office hours. Tara explained:

And then there’s the administration side of things. Now I go to work in the morning and he’ll have her so she stays in bed and I will work eight o’clock until about eleven o’clock and then I come home and then I’ll have her from about eleven-thirty until about three o’clock and then bring her back to work with me in the afternoon. I will let her nap in there a little.

In the end, although Tara’s schedule is busy, she still manages to stay positive and confident about her career and life. She is a passionate supporter and mentor for bringing more women into coaching. Tara reasoned as to why she became an elite coach within the basketball community and shared some advice:

I think it’s the fact that I’m not afraid to ask for help or admit my weakness. When I admit my weaknesses, I will then go and ask someone to help me and I would say that for any woman, you got to know you can ask for help and you got to be willing to do it because you’re just not going to make it if you don’t. I would say that would be my biggest piece of advice.
Life History (2): Spencer

Spencer has been coaching soccer at the university level since 1994. She is presently 37 years old coaching at the national level. Spencer is happily married to her partner Dave and they reside in a town with their one-year-old daughter Ella.

Developmental Stage – “Growing Up”

For the most part Spencer grew up with her mom in the suburbs. Her mother and father split up at a very young age and during this period Spencer spent most of her time with her grandparents. This was partially because her mother was a flight attendant, which meant she was always traveling.

When Spencer was in middle school her mother re-married, which resulted in a positive environment for Spencer. She explained: “I grew up with him and I called him dad. He had two step-sons; so I had two step-brothers from the previous marriage.”

While Spencer grew up as a single child her extended family provided her with two step-brothers, two half-brothers and a half-sister. Spencer explained:

My biological father, I am the last of his children, he had a girl a lot earlier with another woman and he ended up having two boys. So I have two half-brothers and a half-sister but two step-brothers. I grew up more with my two step-brothers, but they lived with their mom. We saw them on the weekends and stuff. So that was part of my growing up. I didn’t really have brothers or sisters. So I was an only child, but I had a family on the weekend. I never really knew most of them. I met my half-sister once when I was 14. So it was very interesting growing up.

Spencer continued to describe her family dynamics and relationships. “I really don’t know my biological father very well. He is more of a stranger if anything else. My mom and I had a pretty normal relationship.” Spencer described her mother to be controlling at time, but at the time she thought it was normal behaviour. She constantly asked Spencer what she was doing and where she was going. “She was very controlling now that I look back on things and talking to other people. . . .She had very high [italics added] expectations. . . . Which is a good thing I
think, but to a certain extent.” Spencer described the children as objects that were seen but not heard. She did what she was told. She said her grandmother was the same way; however, she felt close to her grandmother:

I feel very close to my grandmother. It is weird. I didn’t really know I grew up with my grandmother that long. This is one thing that my mom didn’t actually tell me that I actually lived [italics added] with my grandmother for that long. I knew I spent a lot of time with her but never knew the extent of it. I never knew that I lived with her for five years until a year, a year and a half ago.

Spencer believed she grew up differently than most of her friends. Spencer said that “normal” is a relative term in her life. She stopped seeing her half-brothers once they became teenagers. However, Spencer was close to one of her cousins and they often played together:

We were very, very close and with his friends. Well, I realized they were my friends too! But at the time, I thought that I would just show up once in a while and play with them, but as I just found out, I lived there [grandmother], so they were actually my friends as well!

Spencer continued to describe her relationships outside of her family:

I remember having few close friends. I think I was very independent, growing up as an only child, plus I traveled a lot with my mom, so I got to see things early on in life. Umm, I always had one or two good friends. But I was never that person who had a lot of close friends in school; like I knew a lot of people, but I never really had a lot of friends.

Physical activity and play were important to Spencer; she was extremely active and always managed to be outside. Her family and friends always played outside. She doesn’t remember having many girlfriends, but if she did, they would have been active like her:

We would always go cross-country skiing, tobogganing; we did a lot of things with my mom and dad. Come to think of it. Maybe the reason why I didn’t have a lot of friends was because I always had gymnastics, or was playing ringette or playing soccer. Almost every night I had something. So I guess my friends were more with the groups than individuals.

Spencer admitted that she was very much a “tomboy” growing up with her friends at school: “I was never a doll person; I was a Tonka truck person.” She was always extremely active and enjoyed the competition with her male friends. Spencer went into more detail about
what her mother thought about her tomboy traits: “And I think my mom didn’t like that . . . not that she didn’t like what I was doing, but that other people saw me as a tomboy. . . . I played more with the boys.”

Another childhood memory for Spencer was her experiences travelling. Spencer loved that she could travel around the world with her mother and see places that many people, especially at such a young age, never get to see and experience:

I loved it [traveling] right from the get go. I was pretty much born into traveling. We traveled all the time. . . . We would go to Paris, New York or Africa. And I went to England, Singapore, Montréal to London, England and spent three days there and then went to Singapore or India and spend two days there.

Spencer reassured me that she doesn’t see her childhood as a negative experience:

I don’t remember a lot of negative things. It was always, for the most part, I was the kid that . . . I was where I was supposed to be, I did what I was told. I wasn’t a shit-disturber at all. I was very used to being in a strict environment at home. So I was already used to the discipline and atmosphere with traveling; there is not a lot of room for error when you travel across the world; so that actually was another discipline area.

Once Spencer moved to another community with her stepfather and mother, sports became a more important part of her life. When they moved, Spencer started to play more competitive sports: “So I got involved in soccer, gymnastics, and ringette more competitively. My mom really encouraged me, but my dad [stepfather], because he wasn’t traveling like my mom all the time, he ended up coaching me in ringette.” Spencer became active in organized sports from a young age and competed provincially in gymnastics and ringette:

For . . . almost ten years. I got pretty competitive. So I trained in the morning for gymnastics and I would go back after school. . . . I loved the whole thing about being good at something and training for it . . . I guess I was competitive. I must have been now that I think about it. I really liked being good at something.

As a young athlete, Spencer realized that she was extremely motivated to excel, especially from the internal pressure she put on herself:

Well . . . It was more really enjoying being better than someone else. It was an internal thing. And I think that may have come from my mother who had very high expectations.
I felt growing up that I was never good enough. I never accomplished enough and that I had to do more and more and more and more.

Spencer’s experiences in school were mostly positive. She loved being at school, and academics were another place for her to excel. Spencer’s marks were excellent and she believed that it was because of the high expectations she felt from her mother: “I think again that comes with me trying to be the best and being better than other people. I was always good in school; top of the class.” Spencer believed that she excelled in her academics both because she was naturally gifted and she worked very hard. Spencer believed that her life mimicked an adult life when she was a child because she was forced to grow up fairly quickly with traveling, athletics and academics. She had to be excellent at time management in order to fit everything in and more importantly, to excel.

After reflecting back on childhood, Spencer discussed how she managed to have time for a boyfriend:

I think I dated the same guy throughout the whole span of high school. I do remember dating the same guy for a long time. But it must have been a year or two. And then I may have dated another guy at the end of high school. I was more of a boyfriend kind of girl.

Even though Spencer had a boyfriend throughout most of her high school days, she explained that her focus was on school and sports; anything other than those two was far down the list.

Spencer ended her gymnastics career because of injuries and her lack of advancement in the sport. However, she was lucky to have her first gymnastics coach for a role model: “She grew up in the same town as I did. She was a hard worker. I remember really liking her and she liked me. I really liked people, who really liked me back. So it was great for me.”

She then became involved with coaching in order to give something back to the young girls. However, Spencer’s coaching career was shot lived because she was introduced to soccer by her second high school boyfriend. She immediately fell in love with soccer and began to
focus on competing. In her last year of high school, she played high school and club soccer.

Around this time, she also decided to give up ringette to play ice hockey. The sports she was involved with were changing, and she was gaining experience in different sports. She explained how happy she was to be dating a soccer player because he was able to teach her so many things about the technical and tactical aspects of the game.

In high school, Spencer did not see herself as a typical teenager. She was not interested in the extracurricular activities that most teenagers indulge in:

I tried smoking and I remember my mom caught me in high school. I had a pack of cigarettes in the closet and then she made me chuck them in the toilet and gave me the whole lecture of how it was bad and how I am involved in sports; and that was it . . . I never touched them again. Obviously I didn’t like it too much. And I wasn’t that big social person to go party. I didn’t drink often or too much, just once in a while.

Despite her concentrated focus in sport and school, Spencer then began to experience a dark time during high school. She was presented with many challenges during her younger years that she continuously had to hurdle. One challenge and disheartening event was trying to deal with her stepfather leaving her mother during her last year of high school. Spencer went into detail:

He [stepfather] was very much a part of my life. But he was also very much of a womanizer, flirty professor; especially in the academic area. I know my mom was away a lot and I am not sure exactly what happened but I can imagine. He ended up going on a trip to Zimbabwe for this university thing. He was involved with a lot of purification stuff, so Africa makes sense. So he went there . . . he was gone for about 10 days. He came back . . . I don’t know if it happened the day of, but I remember it was pretty close . . . and he said to my mom, ‘I am in love with someone else, I want a divorce.’ I don’t know what happened but I ended up staying in the house with my Dad and I remember him when my mom was away on trips and he would be up all night on the phone talking to this woman in Africa really loud and I was in my bed and I could hear. I remember one time it was so loud, I remember getting up and going to the phone and picking it up and I starting yelling and swearing at this lady. ‘I am in the house and you are still married to my mom.’ I remember going crazy and my father would be sitting there drunk.
Another challenge for Spencer was dealing with her father’s drinking habits; he was an alcoholic, and drank almost every day. He would make Spencer get him drinks and sometimes he would be up all night talking to his new lady friend:

I really didn’t understand it. But, yes he was an alcoholic. I remember pouring him drinks. I would get home from school and he would say ‘I will take a scotch!’ and I would pretend to be a bartender and I would pour him a drink and I remember my mom taught me that with every drink you put more and more water and less and less scotch.

Spencer elaborated on her parents’ separation. She said it took them eight years before they finally got a divorce, because it was her “mother’s way or nothing.” Spencer completely understood why it took eight years: “I know my mother was thinking, ‘How dare you!’” So we lived in the same house together for those eight years. After that time, Spencer moved into a house her father owned on campus. Spencer continued:

I lived on campus because I started to struggle in school and I started basically trying to get attention anywhere. I started going out more and staying out later, getting rowdy and being rebellious. I actually almost committed suicide; but not on purpose. I basically took a whole bottle of Aspirin.

Spencer lived there during her last year of high school and for the entire three years of her undergraduate degree. Spencer had an emotionally difficult time during her parents’ divorce; unfortunately she felt caught between her mother and stepfather: “So that period in high school was pretty messed up. I remember my father dragging me to court to witness against my mom, if she did something bad.” We talked about how emotional that experience had been for Spencer:

I had [italics added] to. I was summoned to court by my own father. I remember sitting there. . . . I remember missing 3 or 4 days of school just sitting there waiting to be called and I never went in . . . but you had to show up. Once while he [stepfather] was leaving the court, I yelled in public, in the middle of the court room that he was the worst father in the world! I remember yelling that him. ‘You are the worst father ever!’

Spencer’s family story unfolds: her father currently lives in the same house that he bought, and her mother lives in the other one. The African woman came over to Canada when Spencer’s parents were still legally married. As soon as their divorce was final, her stepfather
married the woman from Africa, and became responsible for two more children. The twist in the story is that the African woman recently left Spencer’s stepfather. Now Spencer’s stepfather is alone with two more kids to take care of while he continues to drink. Spencer clarified that her stepfather no longer has anything to do with her life:

He doesn’t talk to me or his other children. When my parents separated, it was like we got separated as well. That was it. I didn’t talk to him. I no longer had a father. The good thing is that I kind of understand why . . . he did the same thing to his two other ‘blood’ sons. He doesn’t send cards or anything. It is like out of sight, out of mind.

After this experience, Spencer had to deal with the abandonment issues she developed with men. Internally, she feared that all men were going to leave her. Spencer believed that her father-daughter relationship affected the way she dealt with her boyfriends and relationships. Spencer explained:

I actually got really clingy to guys. . . the boyfriend I had in university, I stayed with them regardless, you know . . . that university thing [relationship] that you are not suppose to stay in . . . well I did. Well for me . . . I stayed in it because I have had two dads that left me and I always feared that every manly figure will keep leaving me.

However, after time she was able to break up with her high school boyfriend who she knew wasn’t right for her. In spite of Spencer’s lack of stable relationships with men in her life, she was still close with her mother and continued to have a special bond with her grandmother. As previously mentioned, Spencer explained that she had a couple of close friends, but it was hard to manage and stay connected through all of her traveling with soccer:

I was still all about traveling. I mean I had a couple friends. But I don’t remember university. I don’t remember going out in university. Well number one I was playing for my second year I was playing hockey and [soccer] going from practice to practice and plus school. I was studying all the time. Any free time I had was with school. And by my third year I didn’t really form any relationships. I don’t remember going out with university friends. I was always doing sports.

Professional Developmental Stage - “Athlete to Coach”

Spencer decided to pursue a three-year degree at University 1 because it was close to home and she had been recruited to play both soccer and hockey. Unfortunately, the summer
before heading to university Spencer got a major concussion: “That summer I got a 3rd degree concussion. Basically I fractured my skull, broke my nose, shattered my cheek bone and I was in and out of the hospital for three months.” Spencer explained that prior to her injury she was a straight A student with great athletic potential for a first year athlete. That being said, Spencer struggled in both areas when she returned to school:

So I have been recruited to play hockey and [soccer] after only playing for a summer and I tried to play hockey in the end but I couldn’t even concentrate in class and school. So I basically played the second part of the year but every time I stepped on to the ice I would get a headache. It’s funny, now that I know about concussions and about injuries; I can’t believe they actually let me play!

Spencer articulated that it was very tough for her to focus as an athlete and student during her first year of university. However, Spencer jumped back into competing fairly quickly after such a severe soccer injury:

So I played [soccer] for four months and then I got selected to play on the provincial team and then a week before I was supposed to get to nationals but then the concussion happened. So then I played the next summer and by the middle of the next summer - I didn’t realize that I must have been really good, really early - I was invited to a national team training camp the next summer. Because apparently there was this [soccer player] that could pass the ball really well; and then I made it! I played my first international in September 1992 and I started playing [soccer] as my number one sport.

Spencer was extremely passionate when talking about her journey in sport. She expressed that being involved in her previous sports, such as gymnastics, and ringette really helped her become an elite athlete.

Spencer continued to talk about her experiences at University 1. During her second year she played soccer and hockey, and during her third year she played only soccer. Although she loved hockey, the training and traveling with the national team became extremely demanding, therefore, Spencer decided to concentrate on her academics and soccer. Despite being so busy and not having much time for social engagements, Spencer graduated from University 1 on a high note. During her last year her marks improved back to A+’s and Spencer graduated from
University 1 as “Female Athlete of the Year” and as an honours student. Her experiences helped her develop into the woman she is today.

During the summer months Spencer was still involved with sport. She would work at a summer camp, a sport store and a hockey school:

I worked at a multi-sport camp with little kids. I worked at a hockey school. I worked at a sport store, tuning bikes and skis; I skied a lot. I forgot about that. I skied a lot. . . The skiing there is great! So I did that for four years straight. I remember my mom, every time she picked me up I would have something hurt, broken thumb, sprained this, or a gash here. It was from going over those jumps and missing or something like that.

Spencer was a hard worker and a mentally tough person. She was a “risk-taker” and a “go-getter.” If she fell, she would get right back up. Spencer was motivated even when training by herself, because she loved the fitness aspect of sport. She explained that she really started to train when she was playing for the provincial and national teams:

They gave me a training program and I did that on my own. And now that I think about it, I think that the training helped me get through a lot of stuff that was going on at home with my mom and dad [stepfather]. The training helped me because I remember running and thinking about a lot of things. And I got a lot of stuff out with running. It was an escape but also mentally helped me.

Spencer explained that most of her training was self-motivated. She loved running and the feeling she got after training: “I was very self-motivated. And probably because I was always on my own, I trained on my own, I was an only child. I wouldn’t have been able to do things if I wasn’t self-motivated.” Spencer explained:

I would go full out, always. I was always the one pushing and finishing first in the fitness. I am actually still like that. I love the training part of training and sport. I love [italics added] training. And then I worked, basically I paid for my own undergrad through sport camps and working at a sports store and scholarships here and there and off jobs here and there.

After Spencer’s undergraduate degree, she wanted to continue her education. Therefore, she decided to go to University 2. Since soccer and hockey were not officially varsity sports at the time (once a sport has varsity status each athlete has five years of eligibility), Spencer had all
five years left of eligibility. She decided she wanted to play soccer and pursue a Masters degree in exercise physiology. Spencer moved all her things and left the past behind. This was the first time Spencer lived away from her home town.

Once Spencer arrived in her new town, she went directly to campus to visit the soccer coach. At that time she found out that there was no university soccer coach that year. Spencer knew that this year was the year that soccer became a varsity sport in the Provincial University Athletics; therefore, Spencer’s next step was to visit the athletic department. Surprising to Spencer, the athletic department knew that she was on the national soccer team and offered her the coaching position. Spencer responded: “I said I can only coach if I can play as well.” Although excited to coach, Spencer expressed that she had limited coaching experience at that time. She had been an assistant coach for a high school team and got her level 1 for coaching soccer. Other than her high school assistant coaching duties and her multi-sport camp experiences, Spencer was a rookie coach.

Spencer decided to accept the head coach position at University 2 and immediately became interested in taking her coaching levels: “When I came to [University 2] I had level one, then I pursued my second level. So that is when I started taking and getting interested in all the levels.” Spencer explained that because she took on this responsibility with academics and competing at the national level she began to feel burnt out:

I ended up coaching and playing my first year, but because I was coaching [university] and playing national [soccer], I kind of got a bit run down. I was tired and hurt all the time. It was hard to play and coach. So I played for two years and then just went to coaching.

Spencer explained that once she moved away from home and began a new life for herself, she began to see a psychologist. She said it was one of the best decisions she made for herself on a personal and professional level:
I started seeing a psychologist. And I figured out that my mom is, well not crazy, but you know. So I always said, ‘I can’t be like that.’ You know when you start seeing things from the outside and saying ‘I am not like that, I can’t be like that.’ It was one of the best things I have ever done.

Spencer needed to understand more about her family and her mother’s actions and personality.

She wanted to make sure she wasn’t “turning into” her mother:

My relationship with my mother is good, but still really rocky. . . . I was always brought up to keep all your stuff inside. Don’t talk to the neighbours about what is going on, don’t say anything, don’t tell anyone your problems, you know? Don’t tell anyone and our life is perfect and don’t dare tell anyone the giant problems going on. Obviously this helped me understand why I do the things I do sometimes.

After reflecting on some experiences and challenges during her first year of major change,

Spencer stated that one positive thing was that she didn’t have to worry about her financial situation. She explained:

Surprisingly enough my mom finally went back to my real father because apparently he didn’t pay for child support, or something ridiculous like a hundred dollars a month when I was young. So she took him back and said we are going to end this, and we are going to end it right now. She told him I was going to do my Masters and it is going to be this much for this, this much for that and you are going to pay it in a lump sum. And somehow my mom gets everything she wants and she got the money so I didn’t have to pay for anything during my Masters.

Spencer thought it was ironic how things just happened to work out for her mother years later.

Spencer said the only work she did during the three and half years was coaching and being a teacher’s assistant. She added: “Well, and playing for the national team and train for the world cup.” At the end of the conversation, Spencer realized it was a good thing she didn’t have to work for money while she had all the other commitments.

Immediately after completing her Masters degree and the second World Cup, Spencer became a full-time faculty member with full pay and benefits. Spencer said: “It was great!” She went into more detail about her new experiences at University 2 that helped her become the coach she is today:

I was doing my Masters for three and half years. My second year of my Masters
was during the first World Cup; so not a lot happened during that school year. I finished just before the next World Cup. So I kind of worked around the World Cup!

Spencer’s first experience as a World Cup athlete was in Scotland at the age of 21. Reflecting on her experience, she realized that she acted young and immature at this stage. She expressed that she was very nervous but at the same time felt extremely important; according to Spencer, more so than she should have. Her ego was enhanced because she was young and naïve, while not really understanding the importance of playing in the World Cup. Spencer believed that this could have been a beneficial attitude for her to have at that particular time, because it allowed her to see how hard she had to work after playing in different soccer nations. It mentally prepared her for the next couple years of hard work she needed to undertake to advance to the top. She did not want to sit on the bench at the next World Cup; she was going to be a starter and it was going to be obvious to everyone around that she deserved to be a starter.

Spencer stated that the national coach during her first World Cup experience was fabulous, and continues to be one of her mentors even today. She explained that not every athlete connected to this coach, but she did. With this coach, Spencer learned as a player, coach, leader and motivator. He was quiet and a technical specialist; however, he always challenged her to think outside of the box.

Spencer’s second experience at the World Cup was even more challenging because she was now a starter, and she turned out to be an influential player. The downside to her experience at the World Cup was her coach-athlete experience. The team was lead by a different coach than the previous championships and she couldn’t find a connection. She stated that “I couldn’t connect with his style of coaching. We clashed.” Spencer went on to state that he was constantly yelling and swearing to motivate the athletes, but that is not how she was motivated to play or reach her top performance.
On the positive side, Spencer learned a significant amount from this coach as a young coach; she learned qualities that she would never implement in her coaching philosophy. She also learned qualities she needed to implement within her coaching because he was lacking them. Spencer said that her coach lacked the ability to provide adequate feedback to the players. Therefore, Spencer gave an over abundance of feedback because as a player that is what she desperately wanted and needed from her coach. Now that Spencer had the chance to reflect on her experiences, she said that each coach was amazing for his own reasons. Each year that she played at the national level with different coaches and teammates allowed her to grow into an elite coach.

Spencer retired from soccer in 2002. She explained that she was injured again in 2001, but was still looking to play in the next World Cup Championship. Unfortunately, her luck turned short. Spencer went into detail:

I think it is because now I recognize the pattern. Because I was the player representative for the [Soccer] Canada Board and so I was always trying to make things better for everyone. But having a player on the team, who is a player representative on the board that might talk wasn’t a good thing for the coach. Every player representative since then has been axed [italics added] from the national team within about a year of playing.

Spencer continued:

However, I did get invited to one camp after the World Cup, but I was planning on retiring after the World Cup, and I was like screw you, I am not going to retire; I want to retire on my terms not yours so then I got invited to a camp after World Cup, played, started, and played awesome and said, ‘That’s it, I am done.’ So then I retired!

After retiring, Spencer decided to continue her education by pursuing a PhD in Sport Psychology at University 2. She began her PhD, took a leave from her faculty position and started coaching provincially. Spencer articulated her personal challenge after retiring from soccer, and admitted that it was hard to lose her identity as an elite athlete:

I was on leave for three years to do my PhD. When I started my PhD . . . the joke with the [soccer] team was that, you still have eligibility left, you have five years of eligibility, you should play. But I was frustrated because I kind of lost my identity and I was no
longer a national team athlete. So what was I now? Who do I compete with? Who do I play with? So I tried out for the varsity hockey team at [University 2]. And I made it! And I played for two years! I loved it because I was competitive. We practiced every morning. I didn’t want to coach and play so I decided to play hockey instead of [soccer].

Spencer was 32 years old when she played university varsity hockey: “It was great because I was the fittest there and that was my thing. I was trying to kill everyone on all the fitness testing. My records still stand today!” Spencer has a desire to be better than everyone else, which instills excellence:

My thing . . . again it is about always being the better than everyone else; when I am coaching at [University 2] every time we do fitness testing, I do fitness testing. And if there is anyone that can beat me in all the things, then I will take them out to dinner, or whatever. But nobody to this day has ever beaten me on all of the fitness tests. I am always beating one of them on something.

From a relationship standpoint, Spencer dated another soccer player for a short period of time while doing her Masters degree. Shortly after that relationship ended, she met Dave. Spencer and Dave met though mutual friends and began to date. Dave is a national manager in the health sector, and Spencer described him as a “weekend warrior” in terms of physical activity. He enjoys biking, hiking and hockey, but nothing too serious. At the beginning of their relationship Spencer was working full-time, coaching provincially, competing internationally, training for soccer and doing her PhD. Spencer revisited the various things on her plate during that period of her life:

And I was coaching, I started coaching the junior provincial team and the under 19 [Provincial] team. So I coached 1999, 2000, and in 2001 I coached the provincial team and 2002 I started to develop the under 17 program for provincial [soccer]. I coached the under 19 and under 17 provincial teams. But I was also on the board of directors as well in 2000. So then, I was ridiculously busy.

She shared how her personal relationships were at the busy time. She explained that they rarely saw each other: “If we actually counted the amount of days that we actually saw each other, it has only been a total of six weeks.” Despite the lack of time spent together after five years of dating, they decided to get married. Spencer said it was a wonderful and supportive
relationship. Spencer admitted that they did everything backwards. “After we had been together for about four years we bought a time share together, and then we got a house, and then we got cats, and then we got married!”

The day after the wedding Spencer and Dave found out they were having a baby - they were surprised! Spencer said: “I found out the day after my wedding that I was pregnant.” This was a scary and exciting moment for Spencer and Dave. They were nervous about managing and balancing their lifestyles, but were excited to be parents. Spencer had priorities and coaching commitments. However, her life certainly did not go on hold after she found out she was pregnant. Spencer revisited her experience as a pregnant coach:

I was running along . . . oh and Dave came with us because in case something happened he wanted to be there just in case I gave birth away. All the parents were like ‘Tell her to stop running.’ And I was running up and down the sidelines with a big belly! [laugh]

Spencer explained that she coached during the majority of her pregnancy: “I coached the under 23 provincial team because I coached that summer pregnant. We went to the national championship with [University 2] that November and Ella was born December 5th.” Spencer explained everything went smoothly except for the disappointment she felt after having a caesarean section. Even during Spencer’s pregnancy she had high expectations for excelling and doing everything “the right way.” However, she quickly got over the disappointment and realized how lucky they were to have a healthy baby girl.

Even though she enjoys being busy, Spencer told me that she took time off from January to September to be with Ella. Unfortunately, Spencer did not enjoy her time off; she had post-partum depression for over a year. Spencer was not educated in the consequences or realities of post-partum depression, so she did not see a doctor until Ella was 13 months old. Spencer shared her challenging experience:

It was the longest year of my life. I kept on putting pressure on myself. I kept thinking I can do my PhD while I am off. I am then wondering why I am not getting my work done
on my PhD. I had problems with breast feeding and it was like nothing ever worked. I was like 'how can this happen?' . . . Like that is how hard it was. I can be a national team athlete, but I can’t be a mom. How is that possible? . . . And I just didn’t understand. It was the depression. I just wasn’t educated in that area at all. And finally I went to my family physician. At first I said I didn’t want to take anything because I was breast feeding my daughter and they say it doesn’t affect and I said, ‘baloney!’ [Then I was like] ‘ok, I have been crying everyday and I have been crying everyday for a year, I am pretty sure there is something wrong,’ and then she gave me prescriptions and within 24 hours I remember driving and I was like ‘wow, the sun is out! I don’t think I saw the sun in a year!’ I am like, ‘I should listen to some music’. I haven’t listened to music in my car or anywhere for like a year. It was like night and day. It was nuts! It was a very rough year, but that was the end of my post-partum depression.

Despite her depression, Spencer felt extremely supported after Ella was born. She said that Dave created a new job so he could travel less and work from home more. This way he was around for the baby and could help around the house. Spencer said: “It was just crazy with me and him gone all the time. We could never have done it [without Dave’s job change]. The baby would have spent everyday, all day, at day care and we didn’t want to do that.” Spencer revisited a moment where Dave showed wonderful support:

I was coaching the junior national team at the time. We had a tour in Victoria in February, and England came to play. We had two games against England and the baby was three months old. Dave came with me, he took a week off and we brought the baby and I had planned my training times around my breastfeeding times and I had a little walkie-talkie for Dave and he would say, ‘Are you almost done because the baby is getting hungry?’ And I said ‘ok’ and then we would finish. I had my assistant coach finish the practice and I would run back into the house and breastfeed the baby.

Ironically, Ella also became a world traveler from a young age:

Ella actually traveled a lot for her first year now that I think about it! She came to Victoria in February and then in the summer we went to Colorado and Dave took time off for Colorado and in August I had to go to Halifax for the national championships, so they came with us again.

Spencer shared her enthusiasm about the support she received as a female coach and mother.

She said:

Dave is really supportive. Absolutely! When I was going through that really tough time, the only thing I really love to do was coaching. I hated teaching, I hated everything, and I am not quitting my teaching, but I hate doing activities. Like it is fun, but I didn’t enjoy it. It is like phys-ed for big people. But for the amount of work and amount of hours and
for the amount it is worth on your transcripts, overall time, like, it’s not worth it. So Dave is like, ‘quit!’ I said ‘I can’t quit work.’ He said, ‘Yes you can. I make enough money, quit and you can just coach.’ I don’t make anything coaching, it is all volunteer positions. And he said, ‘That is fine. If that is what you love to do and want to do, then just coach! Do what you love.’

Spencer reinforced what wonderful support she has from her husband. She said he truly cares about her quality of life and professional life. They now take turns with traveling and taking care of Ella. Spencer goes away for soccer and Dave goes away on golf trips. This way they both have their time away.

Spencer described her current monthly schedule, to demonstrate their busy lifestyle. She did admit that it was a much busier month than average but they will still, on occasion, have to juggle schedules like this one:

We had national championships for [University 2] for a week in November, and we hosted it here but I stayed in the hotel with the girls. So that was the first of the four. I left on the 13th to go to NAFSA and got back the 19th, and then I left on the 26th and got back on the 30th. He was away for a week after the national championships. . . . So it was two weeks until Dave and I saw each other, so for the whole month of November we have seen each other eight days.

Spencer explained how it becomes extremely hard at times, especially now that they have someone else in the middle who is so important to them. Spencer shared more challenges:

It is hard more on Ella and the relationship with her because when I get back she is very clingy and when I have to go, she doesn’t want me to go. You know that makes it tough and then you think sometimes I say, ‘is it worth it’, but then I think at the same time she has a role model, you know? And when she gets a little bit older I will take her with me. And for the World Cup, Dave is going to take her so she will be there. Whatever he will take two weeks off work and he will go with her. But with that being said, would I be able to do the things that I am doing with out him, Dave, my husband, absolutely not, there is no way! . . . You know we really work like a total team.

Spencer expressed that even though Ella is a special addition to the family, they don’t plan on having more children. It is a lot of work with scheduling and planning. Spencer explained that it is tough on everyone:
I mean with our lifestyle where I am busy all the time, it would be very hard to have another child. It wouldn’t be fair. Someone would get the raw end of the deal and it probably would be the children. We worked it so that . . . she doesn’t spend more than five or six hours at day care, never a whole day, so I take her in the morning and then I go to teach or work and then Dave picks her up early afternoon and takes her home [inc]. And that is possible because we set it up that way. Where there are some kids that are there all day . . . I couldn’t even imagine. You are not even raising your own kid. But it is no one’s fault but that is not my choice to raise a child. So, I keep saying, we got it right the first time . . . let’s not try to mess with it! She is perfect! I don’t need another one.

Spencer talked about certain people and programs that helped and mentored her along the way, especially with being a young mother and successful coach. Spencer explained that she applied and was accepted to the Women in Coaching mentoring program through the Coaching Association of Canada. She explained that it was one of the best things she could have done for her career in terms of balance and support. She got the support of Soccer Canada and then found a mentor-coach to work with during the program. Spencer explained that although she did not have a female mentor-coach, she found a coach in New Zealand while she was on tour with University 2 and worked with him for two seasons.

Spencer used some of her own stipend to bring this New Zealand coach to Canada instead of using the programs travels funds to go there: “So I had my own personal coach there working with me. But I kind of invented it [the position].” Spencer explained that she learned a lot from her mentor-coach and was able to see the game from different angles. She also explained that by having the mentor-coach working with her, her confidence actually increased: “The more I learn about or take courses, the more I realize that I know stuff. And I gain confidence in the way I am doing stuff and you get that feeling, ya, I am ok!”

Spencer expressed the importance of mentorship and how formative her experience was with the Women in Coaching Mentoring Program:

She [previous Olympic coach] was telling this story about when she had children and how the National Sport Organization were like ‘no, no there is no way.’ So I thought of that story when I had Ella, so I told [Soccer] Canada that if you want me to coach, you
have to bring me a babysitter or I can’t do it. I am not, not breastfeeding. . . . They were like ‘No, if you want a babysitter, you have to pay for it.’ I was like, ‘Ok, then I quit!’ They were like, ‘you can’t quit.’ And I said, ‘I quit.’ I said, ‘either you put it in the fees or find it in the budget somewhere, someone has to have money; you give money for men to play, so you can find money. . . . So they took it to the board and it came back and they said, ‘the board feels that if you want to do this that you should bottle feed your child and leave her home.’ I was like, ‘I am sorry. You are kidding right?’ . . . I wasn’t going to wait for the other people. And they came back and said, ‘well, how are you going to justify that to the athletes?’ I said, ‘I am going to tell them up-front, part of your fees is helping this person come here because otherwise I will not be able to come.’ And they were like, ‘Oh, ok.’ I wouldn’t have done that, if I hadn’t of heard her [previous Olympic coach in the Woman in Coaching Apprentice program] story.

Spencer continued to talk about the benefits of the Women in Coaching workshops. She explained that some of the best moments and learning experiences occurred while sitting around with the other female coaches, listening and talking about different experiences, challenges and successes as coaches: “We just sit there and talk about things. It is a typical woman-female, guru, gab-fest. But it is about something constructive, not about what we are going to wear; it is about coaching; decisions, dilemmas, challenges and obstacles as coaches.”

Spencer then shared her biggest challenge and obstacle in being a woman in a male-dominant position:

Just being a woman. Because how could I possibly know anything about [soccer] because I am female. I used to think that. We are our own obstacles. Mind you I was very young when I started. I started coaching the national team when I was, 28. And a senior national team when I was 36. But I think it is being female in a male environment, always having to fight for everything. You know. Not just you as a female but your female sport. But I realize you usually only have one female in a board room, so I go back into history and think of evolution. . . . They don’t stand up for anything concrete. The meetings last five hours instead of two and all they need to think is what is best for the players. . . . I think it is what guys are like, in everything they do. You sit back and watch them, and think, you are not evolved at all [laugh]. It is true the way they do everything! But again we [females] do the same thing; we get up, we organize and that is what we are doing. And thank God females are mothers and house builder people. Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone was the same? Ya that is how I always sit back and try to rationalize things, I go back to the apes and gorillas! . . . Ha! It is better to think that way than keep on getting disappointed.

Another challenge for Spencer was that she would over commit her time. She realized that a reorganization of her schedule was needed to successfully finish a PhD. Spencer therefore
decided to step down from her position with the soccer provincial board of directors, after being a member for three years. She then let go of the under 17 and under 19 provincial programs, but decided to develop the under 23 provincial program for one year and continued to coach the under 19 national team. Spencer shared her experience on the board of directors.

You mean all the men [except for me] board? I swear to God I can summarize my time on the [Soccer] Canada board as the player rep and on the provincial [Soccer] board like this: What about the women? What about the women? What about the women? [italics added]. Yes. What about the women? And that was pretty much it. It was [soccer] and they were all men. Still now with [Soccer] Canada there is national flagship with the senior men’s national team and they don’t understand. . . . The women’s team is much more competitive on an international standpoint. We came fourth at every international event except for the first year. Our girls fully pay to play and the men are fully paid to play!

Spencer then talked about the emotional side of being one of the few female leaders in soccer: “If I keep on looking at what is wrong and what is going on, I am just going to bang my head against a wall and it is going to suck and that is not the part I like about coaching.

Leadership Stage – “The Elite Coach”

Presently, Spencer is the head coach of the senior women’s soccer national team. She explained that it wasn’t in her immediate plan at that time to head up a national team. She applied for a manager position to gain more experience at the senior level before jumping right into a national program. However, the situation changed and she was offered the head coach position. After much thought and discussion with her family and colleagues, Spencer accepted the position. She explained her thought process:

When I got the coaching job, the [Soccer] Canada national team, I technically never applied for it; because I applied to be a manager, because I didn’t feel ready, . . . And then they called me and said, ‘we would like you to be the head coach.’ I said, ‘but I didn’t apply for that’ . . . so it took me a while to think about it and I sat down with my husband and we talked about it. And I said, ‘ok, so this is not a U 19 where we go away once a year, this is like, six or seven trips a year.’ And he said, ‘well, do you want to do it?’ And I said, ‘I think so, I am not sure if I will be good at it, but I think so.’ He said, it didn’t matter . . . and asked again, ‘do you want to do it?’ . . . Ya! I do. He said, ‘well then do it.’
Immediately after Spencer accepted the position she knew she had to learn about this level and style of game and surround herself with quality coaches. She accepted the challenge and understood that she had to change her mindset towards her athletes. Spencer called her ex-boyfriend and another coach to help her with the first selection camp. She realized that she had to learn, and if it meant swallowing her pride for a moment to make her a better coach and her athletes better, then that is exactly what she was prepared to do. Spencer confronted her team:

I said it to them right after the selection camp; ‘We are going to learn together. We have three years to the World Cup to have you prepared for the World Cup and we have to learn together and I am not going to pretend to know everything about seven’s because I don’t. So we are going to do things, and maybe on the next tour we are going to change things because it wasn’t the right way of doing it and then we change things together and then I am going to give you feedback and I am also going to need your feedback and then we are all going to go on this trip together.’ It worked because they all jumped on board!

Spencer believed that many coaches would not be able to confront their weaknesses, admit they do not know everything about soccer and more significantly, admit they may need help. For Spencer, being able to do this would make her better. She consistently brings in guest coaches during home based training to learn from them. Spencer constantly seeks opportunities to improve her coaching. A recent example occurred when Soccer Canada did not have enough funds to send a whole team to a training camp, where the World Cup would be held the following year. Therefore, she asked to be sent to scout out the facilities, environment and check out some coaching opportunities while she was traveling. Spencer enjoyed the developmental aspect of coaching and seeing her athletes improve. Spencer said that “seeing people get better, seeing people develop, and seeing people . . . when you teach them something new, and they get it. You see progression and improvement.”

Spencer reflected on why she continued to stay in a sporting environment like soccer, which is predominantly comprised of men and has a low salary. She began to debate whether
she stayed because she excelled and became passionate about coaching, or whether it was vice-versa. Spencer gathered her thoughts:

Maybe both! Because I love hearing my athletes tell me after they graduated the benefits my coaching has brought to them as people. They would come back and say, ‘I started playing [soccer] with a club and now I really realize how important it was to do this and how it relates to school and you taught me about imagery and now I am doing imagery!’

Spencer seeks to educate her athletes and staff about the holistic side of coaching. She believes in having a whole team of experts around her in order for a team to reach its top potential:

They are on fitness programs and they have been on them. . . I am starting to implement certain things that I am starting to learn in sport psychology . . . and now they are asking, ‘We want a sport psychology program.’ . . . They want it . . . and it is amazing to me! Now watching the athletes who weren’t suppose to be the best of the best, and now after being part of our program for a year, it is amazing, we have broken them down and now all of a sudden they are changed. Yes, it is a lot of work to completely focus on them, but now they are so much better. They are better athletes, they are better players and my big thing is developing a complete player. I could care less if you are the best athlete or player in the world, if you are an asshole off the field, I don’t want you! You know? You are representing your country, you are representing Canada and you are representing your university, whatever it is. I focus on the whole thing – holistically. You are representing the thousands of people and youth that look up to you, so behave like it! Be respectful; be respectful to your environment. I focus on the whole thing. ‘No you don’t drink on road trips or on this dime and I don’t care if it is the last day’, you just don’t do that. What you do at home, act like an ass, I don’t care, but that is a different story. I look at the big picture here. The big picture. It is not all about being a better [soccer] player; it is about focusing the whole thing and learning how to be a good person.

At the beginning of her coaching career, Spencer found it hard to visualize herself as a university coach because all of her experiences were at the elite level; she only knew elite and national caliber programs. Spencer explained that at one time, the soccer culture was very laissez-faire. Spencer could not comprehend running a mid-level program; she had to make immediate changes:

I was like no. I am going to make this just like the national team, because that is what I know and that is all I know. And then it took me about five or six years to really start understanding what I wanted. At first I was like, this sucks, I didn’t want to coach. These girls don’t appreciate, understand, they don’t get it. And I started recruiting the people that I wanted and then it made sense.
Spencer reflected on her coaching philosophy and how it has changed over the past fourteen years. She continues to learn and grow, which allows new philosophies and new ideas to materialize. Spencer explained:

I think more, I take in what I learn as I move on. But it has always been about excellence. Over the past six or so years it has been really about getting the best players that want to be here and that want to play at the level I coach. A lot of them came through the junior provincial program. So they were junior provincial and they wanted to go to university and then, I guess they, liked the way I coach, so they came to [University 2]. For some of them, this is the last stop for [soccer] and some of them I coached for seven years straight with the junior provincial, junior national and university. Now the whole idea behind the team or the university program, I focused on the players taking it to the next level; preparing them for the national team. Doing and providing them with all the stuff that they do at the national level. So when they get to the national try-out or they get to the national team, they are ready. It is the same. They do all the fitness testing, they have a certain schedule with sport psychology, we do off-season training; we do everything.

Spencer’s coaching philosophy and program development is constantly changing. Still, she believes that there is a difference between men and women in sport leadership. She believes men and women are wired differently, which may cause them to look at development and learning in a different way:

Understanding that there is more to life than [soccer]. [Soccer] is just, [soccer] is an avenue by which you learn things about life. You know? Now I don’t know if that is being female or that is just me. I don’t know . . . but, the understanding that it is not war. . . . I think also, just being able to talk and understanding the players’ thoughts and how they feel about things and take all of this into consideration. I am not here; I am not a dictator to tell you what to and where to go. I am here to assist in you becoming a better athlete and being a better person, so you know. Your life isn’t just about sport; it is about learning from the challenges and obstacles and learning to become a better person.

Spencer explained that an autocratic style of leadership is very obsolete. She admitted to previously having a dictatorial coaching style, mainly because that is how she saw her coaches and role models behave. “Everything was dictatorship when I was growing up and being coached. And then I started to find my own philosophy. Slowly, I began to coach the way I wanted to be and the way that felt right.” However, Spencer believes that she leaves herself more
vulnerable by having a more holistic and empowering coaching style: “But at the end they grow more. I grow more. It is looking at the bigger picture instead of ‘this is the way.’” Again, Spencer expressed the importance of creating her own coaching philosophy that complements her personality and how she wants to feel at the end of the day:

You know learning is very important and having Ella has been so amazing. I now approach coaching differently, not just the practical, but everything, especially the way I approach athletes and I realize that they are people. I realize that everything I say and everything I do will have an impact on them. You know, and I can be nice to them. Just because I am their coach, it doesn’t mean I have to be mean. You can be nice and we can sit down and have a conversation. You know, when we are on the field it is a different thing. When we are having dinner, we talk about life and friendships and, you know it is completely different. But I don’t think I would have been like that if I didn’t have Ella.

Spencer believes that Ella has made a positive impact on her coaching philosophy. In addition, Spencer believes that her coaching style stems from how she was brought up and the experiences that she went through as a child, student and athlete:

Well, obviously the way I was brought up always feeling . . . it is how you portray yourself, it is how people view you, that you have to work hard but you also have to take care of yourself and enjoy life. That is why the coaching and elite thing is not all about what just happened on the field. I changed a lot since I started my PhD. I am learning more and reading more about psychology . . . that has made a difference. Definitely just life has impacted my coaching, i.e. Ella. Going through what I did, knowing that [soccer] isn’t the ‘be-all and end-all.’ You know. It should be fun; but understanding that my idea of fun is very different from other people’s. My idea of fun is working hard, training hard.

It has taken Spencer a while, but she now understands that not everyone is playing, competing and participating for the same reasons. She believes that coaching and leadership are situational, and will vary between each team and event.

Spencer explained that she does not spend a lot of time celebrating successful events or moments. She keeps going, moving forward and trying to excel in her next challenge. However, she does occasionally allow herself to feel accomplished. Spencer admitted that her sense of accomplishment varies from time to time; sometimes she feels great and other times she believes
it was simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Spencer went into more detail:

I always had help. I mean you can never accomplish anything by yourself. Even the [University 2] team, I have great help. When I get [conference] coach of the year, I have lots of help. It is not just me. I have assistant coaches; I have athletes that work hard. I have people that support me. I wouldn’t have been able to do any of this. . . . Celebrating my [italics added] accomplishment is hard but also that is one thing that I had to work on for the athletes because my expectations were always so high and I never used to give them time to reflect and celebrate. I was like ‘ok, you did well, but that is what you are supposed to do.’ As opposed to ‘good job’ and I think a lot of that happened after having Ella. ‘Oh my God, you peed in the potty, good job!’ You know! We celebrate everything! You know! . . . As opposed to ‘of course she is supposed to pee in a potty’, you need to make her feel good about it. That is such a little thing that can be directly applied to sport and coaching. This girl couldn’t pass, and now she can pass. I shouldn’t make her feel like that isn’t a big accomplishment, because it is. She just worked her ass off and it, you know, makes a big deal out of it, so celebrate it! It is pretty amazing where you have come from point A to point B and the teams that you were able to touch and make a difference. Oh ya, and now I understand it! And I know . . . the more you learn, the more you realize the more you have to learn!

Reflecting on her past experiences and coaching philosophy, Spencer admitted that she is just beginning to get used to the idea that not everyone has to like her or her coaching:

For example, at the end of the year, the evaluations come in and I looked at the comments. The biggest comment was ‘she is unapproachable’, that was the biggest one for me. . . . So I started to work on that. And I think having a child definitely helped . . . You know, you don’t talk to anyone. I was very closed because of what happened. You just want to get the job done and that is it. I started getting better the last couple years, everyone says there is a ‘pre-baby coach and a post-baby coach.’

Dealing with conflict, and controlling her emotions are challenges for Spencer. She is also challenged to let go of her own expectations and needs, to impress or please everyone around her. Spencer is slowly realizing that you can’t make everyone happy. Spencer explained:

In terms of being the ‘pleaser’ I would read those evaluations and I would really try to implement all the stuff and I would take things personally when even just one person said something and everyone else would say ‘oh ya, she’s great!’ And then one would say, ‘she picks favorites.’ You know how there is always that one. And it hurts me [she puts hand up to heart] and it would kill me. So I just really tried to work on it. But now I also understand more and I try to explain a lot more things so I can put the ownership back on the athletes. Empower the athletes. I needed them to know: ‘I am not going to be everyone’s best friend. I have been coaching some girls for ten years and I have been coaching some people for a month and I have been coaching you for three days.’ I am
going to treat everyone the way they deserve to be treated but it is not going to be equal because it can’t be.

Another challenge for Spencer was trying to deal with conflict in her profession. However, each year she is becoming better at dealing with conflict in coaching and life and trying to not take things too personally:

When things get out of hand, I am much better at dealing with it now; certainly more then putting it aside, or getting away, or just shutting down. I do not like conflict really at any level. I just want to get away from it. . . . I know what my limitations are and I am aware of what I will accept and what I am not willing to accept. If it is over that, I am like, ‘that is not acceptable.’ And I will fight for what is right even if it affects the people that I am involved with. But as you know, sometimes you have to pick your battles. So I just say what I believe, I don’t know how to ‘beat around the bush.’ I am very direct . . . sometimes I offend people and some people say that it is great. Sometimes I am not as politically correct as I should be. But I think, ‘do you get what I am saying?’ and they say, ‘yes.’ Then I don’t care. As long as they understand and get the point.

Spencer emphasized she really enjoys the challenge of multitasking in the male-dominated environment. She explained:

There is always this thing about a male environment in sport. . . . I think I know what I know and what I grew up with. And still it is a very male dominant game in the sporting world. I don’t mind, but I am always trying to prove that I belong with the guys. I belong, and I am good. I think we [women] have this perception that we have to be better than everyone else and than you really need to be in order to stay there.

Spencer shared her perceptions and beliefs as to why she feels there is a lack of female coaches and leadership in soccer:

Maybe there haven’t been enough role models. Maybe because it is such a male dominant game; and maybe because there is a lot of stuff that is so, then you look on the surface of things, the whole club thing and you have to drink and party to become involved with [soccer].

She explained that there are limited leadership opportunities in soccer and therefore, each coach or leader must be prepared or willing to create their own opportunities:

There are not a lot of opportunities for women, but I never really stood back and waited for things. I applied for things, I was more aggressive, and I was a ‘go getter.’ I would make things happen; ‘We need more money, we are going to do this, or we are going to do that,’ and people are like you can’t do that, and I am like, ‘why not?’ And they say; ‘You just don’t!’ and I say, ‘Why? Let’s just do it!’
So I make things happen, or I will just ask. People are like, ‘You don’t ask to get a job.’ And I was like ‘Yes you do!’

Spencer didn’t wait for opportunities to come to her; she created her own journey. She embraced challenges and picks her battles as a coach, woman and mother. Spencer describes her “go-getter” personality:

Just recently I put a proposal in to [Soccer] Canada, proposing that I really love coaching and I really love my PhD, and what we are really lacking in [Soccer] Canada is one of the many areas in terms of elite performance. . . . It is not even a job, it is a job I invented myself because this is what I wanted to do. I am not sure if it is going to happen but it is now out there. And I am talking to people and they are like ‘oh that is a great idea!’ and I’m talking to a board room member here, a board room member there, somebody here, somebody there. And things then start to happen. So I was always a go-getter. I didn’t wait for things to happen to me.

Finally, she shared her aspirations and goals for herself, her family and her teams:

I want to win a World Cup! Umm, I want to finish my PhD. I just want to get it done. . . . I want to work full time as a sport psychologist with a team. I am not sure if I necessarily want to do a whole lot of research. I like research but I don’t love it. I want to spend a lot of time with Ella. I want to be very involved with her life.
Life History (3): Doris

At the time of the interview, Doris was a 60 year old woman in her 38th year of coaching volleyball at the university level. Doris has been married to her husband for 22 years and lives happily within a city life with no children of their own.

Developmental Stage – “Growing Up”

Doris grew up in a small town on the east coast of Canada with her mother, father and older brother. Her father was a sergeant major in the military and her mother was a stay at home mom. Doris described her relationship with her parents:

I was very coddled. My mother kept me in the house. So maybe that’s why when I got a chance to get out, I did, because there was such an age difference between my brother and me. My father realized all of a sudden, I was the baby and ‘we’ve got a girl,’ they were very protective. So until I got to school, my mom had to keep a close eye on me.

Doris explained that her brother was a star athlete in their community, and this always sparked Doris’ interest in the sporting community.

My brother was eleven years older than me and he was a star growing up in the 50’s as a rugby player in high school and then a hockey player. . . . So every home game we went to watch him play. No one ever told me I should do it [play sports]. I was never encouraged. I never took swimming lessons or piano lessons. I was kind of like the trodden child who did something special here. They [parents] were overprotected. Then for me to get out with the kids, it was like wow! I was having a good time.

When Doris was allowed to explore and play, she became passionate about all types of movement. She loved being active and competitive. Doris embraced physical activity even more after being introduced to physical education class and after school sports. Doris started physical education classes at age 10 and she remembers being so excited the night before her first class that she woke up her mother and said, “I’m so excited mom I can’t sleep. I can’t sleep we’re going to have phys-ed.” Doris continued to explain how fortunate she was to be involved in sport at a young age:

I started playing [basketball] when I was probably 11 or 12. You know . . . I think maybe the friends I hung around with, peer group influence, social relationships have a lot to do
with women and girls playing. You know affiliation is huge. . . . And so in junior high, . . . I played on many teams and I was always sort of playing like we played touch football with the guys, or softball I was always sort of out there playing as well, or hockey or floor hockey . . . I was always involved in things to do with movement.

Again Doris expressed, “I got pumped for phys-ed!” Activity was a very big part of her childhood. Movement, exercise and competition are what she remembers most about being a child. From a very young age, Doris understood the concept of competition. She explained:

You know it was like junior high we played against each other in the city and I never understood why we didn’t win; why we weren’t winning. I just couldn’t understand that. And then so in grade 9 some pals and I started playing together, we won the junior high championship. So I continued to play. I went to high school and played volleyball, basketball, softball and a little badminton. But those three sports mainly because they were year round. We won three provincial titles. We won every city, district and area.

Doris liked the recognition and competitiveness of sport, and especially enjoyed the feeling of winning. She believed that she was fortunate to be involved in sport because it instilled a very unique confidence, which lasted her a lifetime:

In high school we won three provincial titles, one [volleyball] title, and one softball provincial title [sic]. So I was used to winning. . . . I was on the Canada Games team for the province and most of my teammates were university athletes. So I was always surrounded by good team-mates. I never thought I was a superstar. I just thought I was one of the groups. So I was always surrounded by winners. . . . We just expected to win.

She believed sport was just part of her life. “We both [Doris and her brother] had distinction rings from [University 1]. From that perspective it was just sort of a way of life.”

Unfortunately, her father didn’t believe this was a suitable way of life for a young girl. Doris’ father was adamant that she didn’t go into phys-ed. He would say phys-ed was too masculine for young girls. He wanted Doris to excel as a nurse. “He brought me up to be independent, and then when I was independent and went into phys-ed against his wishes, he still wanted me to be a nurse, I thought . . . ‘I want to be a nurse? No way!’” Doris explained, “I just did what I wanted. I was pretty independent.” Therefore, Doris continued to be passionate about anything that had
to do with movement, which included her education. Again Doris expressed, “I mean it’s who I am right. I have that . . . movement, I move.”

Even though athletics was a big part of Doris and her brother’s lives, this was not the case for her parents. She said, “My mother couldn’t ride a bike. Very non-athletic . . . couldn’t throw a ball. My father, I guess he never really had the opportunity. He never played a lot of athletics.” Despite their inactivity, Doris said that her father always told her that she could do whatever she put her mind to. Despite her parents being overprotective at times, Doris explained that she was lucky to have had her parents’ guidance. She was allowed to do what she wanted even though certain things were “strongly suggested.” Doris was independent and she credits that to her parents, especially her father:

He [father] was always really positive with me growing up and in those days there was no talk of medical school and business. Women just didn’t go in that direction, not like today . . . Although I’ve ended up in a good spot, I think I just might have taken a different route. My father used to say ‘You know Doris, you are so disciplined . . . you could easily be in the army.’

Doris would say, “I’m not going into the army!” Her father was a believer in discipline and structure. He wasn’t an educated man in terms of academics, but he became a sergeant major and was able to financially support both children through university.

Doris’ social life was always a positive aspect of her childhood. She grew up in a small community with lots of friends and support. She hung out with both boys and girls but felt more comfortable with the boys. “I got along with guys. I had a good rapport with guys.” She explained:

I think I was the tomboy. I like to play with guns and stuff versus dolls but my mother was always trying to dress me up and curl my hair. I was always playing with the guys outside and because I could play with the guys, I was able to do more things. You know I wasn’t considered prissy.

However, in high school she began to hang around with mostly girls, especially her athletic friends and teammates.
Doris then reflected on her educational experiences, which seemed to be a passionate topic:

I loved school. I just loved going to school, couldn’t wait to go to school. Because there was no one in the house growing up, I was by myself. My brother was older and his friends were way older and I was the little kid that was in the way. So I was brought up with a lot of older adults [great grandmother, grandmother, brother and brother’s friends]. Therefore, I really liked school because I got to be with my pals; I really liked that component [sic]. I did decently academically. . . . But I wasn’t a student. I was not somebody who loved books or loved reading. I was smart enough to get through. I went to class and I listened. And that’s how I would learn. I didn’t really spend a lot of time studying.

Doris stayed in the top half of her class, in marks, but her favorite part of school was the friendships and sports.

For Doris, the social aspect of school was the most invigorating. She loved her friends and became interested in boys at a very young age. “I had boyfriends all along. My first boyfriend, I was 10.” Doris continued to tell me about her youthful dating:

I remember we went to watch my brother’s hockey game and he [boyfriend] came too. I remember his name was Ryan. It was interesting . . . but then he moved away and that was the end of that. Then in high school, I had boyfriends in high school. And first year university or so, and then I didn’t have any after that. Busy doing things you know. Then it wasn’t really until after university that I really had any kind of a steady relationship. I went out with people but there wasn’t anybody special.

As we began to chat more about her high school and university days, Doris explained that she always knew she would attend University 1. The university was close to home and it was where she grew up watching her brother as a star athlete, Doris stated that, “I knew exactly [the university she would attend]; I mean there was no other place. I didn’t know I was going into phys-ed. But I knew I was going to [University 1] and I was going to be a teacher.” While talking about university, I asked Doris if there was any recruiting going on by the coaches from University 1, or in other places in Canada. Doris explained that coaches didn’t recruit back in those days. You just went to the university and tried out: “Recruiting never existed back then. It was all walk-ons. And the coach had seen me play and when I showed up she said, ‘I was
wondering if you were going to come to try-outs.’ But nobody ever talked to me. It was unheard of.”

Doris was extremely active during her university years and played many different sports. She articulated her experience with sport and of winning: “We won every title. So we thought we were pretty good. We won 94 games in a row. Not all at the university; some were senior; some we played teams from Quebec.”

As well as being competitive, Doris is also a hard worker. She loves being in shape, challenging her body and seeing results. As Doris explained,

I enjoyed, I mean I loved winning. I enjoyed the playing and going through phys-ed, I was so fit. I was like that; [Doris knocks on the table]. I remember my father bumped into me one time and said, ‘Oh.’ My father was like 230 pounds. I was like really hard; really chiseled and hard and in really, really good shape. And it made me feel good. I felt good about myself. I loved playing, I loved going to practice. I liked all that. I never minded the work.

However, in terms of training for sport, Doris explained that no one really trained as intensively or frequently as they do today. She just trained because she enjoyed the feeling of being fit and strong.

While revisiting her advancements as a successful athlete, Doris began to reminisce about some influential people in her life while growing up:

Well in high school we had a coach. Certainly in sport, she exposed us. She gave us lots of exposure and gave us the fundamentals. I’m not sure she knew all that much. But she took us everywhere, she exposed us, she disciplined us, we were well behaved, well mannered and she developed our life skills. She had us disciplined and that served us for our entire life.

She continued to emphasize the importance of developing life skills with young adults. Another great role model was one of Doris’ university coaches. Doris explained: “Mrs. P had the touch. I would have scrubbed the floor with a toothbrush; you know the gym floor, for that woman. She really knew how to make every single player feel valued.” Doris was excited when describing her relationship with Mrs. P. She went into detail:
I don’t know if Mrs. P just always had something to say to somebody. We worked hard; she made us work. Fitness was good; she pushed us up and down the court. She was a motivator. . . . I saw her at our reunion this summer. And I told her what an impact she had on me. I said, ‘you know Mrs. P you impacted a lot of people because you impacted me and I touch a lot of people and you just carry on through.’ But I’m not her by any stretch of the imagination.

Doris revisited some of her learning experiences she had as an athlete. She was confident and had faith in most of her coaches but had a bad experience with one coach who did not think of the team first in her coaching philosophy. The coach constantly used “I” when addressing the team. Doris responded to the problem by speaking openly to the coach:

I was very direct. I told it [constructive feedback] to her because I felt that she should know and hopefully it would help her. . . . She was there for four years and they [her athletes] never gave her credit. We felt that we could have done it without her. This woman worked hard for the team, she did, but it was like she took the credit and the kids didn’t like it. And it started from that first year. She was trying to change but that was the image.

In sum, in reflecting on her development, Doris believed she experienced certain opportunities that not all young women her age would be able to do because she was direct enough to show her confidence in certain situations when dealing with athletes, coaches and athletic directors.

Professional Developmental Stage – “Athlete to Coach”

While talking about training and playing during the summer months, Doris revealed that she never had a job until grade 12. She spent most of her time hanging out at the beach with friends. After university, however, it was time to face reality. Doris finished her degree, and with the help and motivation from her teachers and coaches, Doris applied to a number of teaching and coaching positions in Quebec, Ontario and Nova Scotia:

I don’t even know how it happened but somebody said you should apply for that job and a professor came up to me, the head of the school and said, ‘Do you really want to go to [University 2]?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I applied for the job.’ And he said, ‘I know you did.’ . . . I got all three jobs and I chose [University 2] because the others [positions] were all high school. So I went to [University 2] to coach [volleyball] and they also needed somebody to coach field hockey so I coached both because I was young and keen. I
coached both sports which was an extremely heavy workload. In field hockey we played my old university and tied them 1-1 for the championship and automatically gained credibility. I just went in expecting to win and we didn’t win the championship but the program just took off. The women’s [volleyball] program was ranked 3rd in the CIS [Canadian Interuniversity Sport].

During Doris’ first years as a varsity coach, she explained that there were some obstacles, such as an absence of assistant coaches and limited recruiting. However, on the positive side there was more funding (once equality was established within the university). There was a big discrepancy between the different universities and the amount of funding provided to the women’s athletic programs. Fortunately, Doris advanced quickly in the athletic environment. At the young age of 22, she became the Women’s Athletic Director at University 2. Doris walked into University 2 as a champion with instant credibility, but more importantly, she presented a plan of action with confidence:

> When I walked in I had instant credibility because I came from a championship team and they thought, ‘Here she comes for a sure fire to win.’ And I walked the walk. I walked in like I was going to do that. I didn’t walk in saying I don’t know how we’re going to do it.

Doris was also one of the first people to recruit in Atlantic Canada. “I went to work at 22 years old at [University 2] and I started recruiting because I knew that [University 1] had all the talent and I had to get my butt home and get some players because I didn’t want to sit back and lose.”

Doris pursued opportunities, made initiatives and took risks. After two experimental and positive years at University 2, Doris decided to pursue her academics once again. “I just thought being at a university where everyone else had a Masters or a PhD and I felt a little inadequate. I left to take my Master’s degree.” Doris’ decision to take a risk and make a life change was partially influenced by a family event. Sadly, her older brother died in a car accident while she was working at University 2. At the time she didn’t believe it affected her or influenced any of her decisions. However, looking back at her decisions now, she realized that her lack of mourning due to her brother’s death may have caused her to make some rash decisions.
At the time I didn’t think it impacted me in that regard but I think it did. I think it had a huge impact on my life looking from this end back, on my behaviour it had an impact, but at the time I didn’t think about it. I probably would have just gone three summers and stayed at University 2. This is what I should have done because I broke the train of recruiting and I think we would have won a championship if I had stayed there the four years with the group.

After moving to the USA and beginning her Masters, Doris began to date but claimed that at that time, she wasn’t ready for any type of relationship. She continued to explain that even though she wasn’t ready, she met someone during her Masters studies and they became serious; in the end they got married. “When I was in the States I met a fellow and I ended up marrying him; which was a disaster.” Doris explained:

I met him in the fall of ‘71 and ‘74 I married him and ‘77 I was divorced. He just didn’t have any responsibility in him and I couldn’t respect that. It was like having a partner take your credit card to spend your money. It was like having a child. But he was a lot of fun. It was a guy I certainly don’t regret going out with, but I just shouldn’t have married him.

Doris continued to reflect on her past relationships, and the learning experience and support that came out of each situation:

Yup. Oh and he [ex-husband] loved it [Doris’ coaching]. He was very supportive of the team and me, but he just couldn’t get his act together. He was the type of guy that could never finish a job and he had delusions of grandeur and always wanted to be the boss. It was very interesting I would say ‘Mike, go mow the grass.’ And he’d come back and I’d said, ‘Are you done?’ and he’d say, ‘Yup all finished.’ And I’d go out and look and there would be one strip not done and the mower still sitting there. ‘Did you do the dishes?’ He always left water in the sink with two dishes. Stuff like that he just could not finish things. And that’s how he was in life so in terms of work, he had all kinds of opportunities, started this recycling company but he didn’t have the work ethic.

Doris shared that she was extremely disappointed in her decision to get married. She was not used to making mistakes in her life, even when it came to her personal relationships:

Except the problem was . . . it was a mistake. I made a mistake and I am not used to making mistakes. I didn’t make a lot of mistakes. I did a lot of things right in my life. And that impacted me. And that’s why for years and years I beat myself up about it and then I met my current husband in 1984 and he’s just the epitome of responsibility.
Doris chatted about her personality and how these actions and irresponsible behaviours did not sit well. Doris worked hard and enjoyed being in control of her life. She was a “doer” and a “finisher.” In more detail, Doris continued to explain how this experience affected her emotionally.

Oh I was a rail. I was 20 pounds lighter by the time I got rid of him. I was so stressed by his behaviour. And he’d go take the credit card and the bill would come in with $2200 of diesel fuel. And he would say, ‘Oh I’m going to pay it back,’ and I thought, the money was going to come in and he would keep it and not tell me and think that I wasn’t going to find out. Stuff like that went on, it was endless, and I couldn’t take it anymore. It just drove me.

After reflecting on her personal life, Doris explained how professional opportunities kept unfolding perfectly for her after her Masters. While Doris was finishing her Masters in the United States, her coach replacement at University 2 decided to resign. Subsequently, University 2 recruited Doris to join their athletic department once again. Doris went back and stayed at University 2 for another four years and she gained excellent professional experience. Doris demonstrated her direct personality and persistence:

When I was at [University 2] coaching field hockey, they didn’t have a field. The coach before me would have had the girls jog to the field with their equipment. So it was a warm-up. So we went down there and I said to Father Jim, ‘We need a place to play. We shouldn’t have to go down there. We are a university team. What about the field?’ He said, ‘Well you can’t use the football field.’ So I said, ‘What about the end zone?’ and he said, ‘Ok go ahead.’ So I went out there and we practiced in the end zone. The head football coach was practicing on the football field and he comes up and asks me . . . ‘Ma’am, we want to practice kicking at this end and is it ok if you go up to the other end?’ and I said, ‘Sure.’ So we picked up our stuff and moved to the other end. Changed ends and I’m on the field now! I’m making the most of the situation because I don’t think we need to run down there. And the secretary told me that Father Jim was standing in the window laughing [laughter]. He said, ‘I never saw anyone tell head football coach what to do and it’s a woman.’ And he was laughing. And he called me into his office. . . . He said, ‘Well I want to give you a field’ . . . I said, ‘Really?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, we’re going to give you a field.’ I said, ‘Well geeze thanks very much.’ It wasn’t the greatest field but we had our own place.

Doris experienced her first glance of the inequalities in sport at University 2. During her athletic career, she hadn’t noticed many inequalities, but she mentioned that once she went to University
the inequalities between men’s and women’s sports became extremely apparent. The list of inequalities was ongoing, such as equipment, funding, training time, and facilities. In spite of the inequalities, Doris loved her experience at University 2.

After four years, Doris was recruited by another university to be the head volleyball and field hockey coach. The major selling point for her, was that she only had to coach field hockey for two years and after that she could concentrate on volleyball. Doris explained that she got a divorce during her fourth year back at University 2; therefore, it was a perfect time to leave things behind with no baggage and new beginnings. “We were divorced. It was ideal. I was divorced in February and this opportunity came around that time.”

Even though Doris was happy at University 2, she was always looking for professional advancement. Doris explained how this new job unfolded and why she viewed it as a good professional decision for her career:

I came for the interview and I said, ‘Well I don’t really know if I want to move from [University 2],’ and the athletic director said, ‘Well in two years you could just coach [volleyball], and thinking of the location of the university, [which was in a much bigger city]. I went back and spoke to my athletic director and he said, ‘You won’t be back.’ I said, ‘Well I might be back.’

After consulting with a couple of her mentors, Doris decided to accept the position at University 3 for a new challenge and a new beginning.

Leadership Stage – “The Elite Coach”

After accepting the offer at University 3, Doris explained that she inherited a decent and successful program. The athletic director kept his promise that Doris only had to coach field hockey for two years. After the two years, she was offered a position that was predominantly coaching volleyball and teaching. Doris explained the arrangement:

Their emphasis on [volleyball] kept me here. I mean I do other things other than just coach. I also teach for 30% [of the time]. So I’m 70% athletics and I have to do the same thing as our men’s coach for 100%. That just makes it hard.
Doris enjoyed her new job and was happy about her decision and position. After many years of coaching, Doris became extremely passionate about the psychological aspect of sport. Her interest in sport psychology began in 1972, with a course in the psychology of motor learning. Doris enjoyed learning about open skills, closed skills, discrete skills, mental imagery, and mental practice. In the 1980s, Doris listened to a seminar by Sport Psychologist Dr. Terry Orlick, which reignited her passion for the psychological aspect of sport. Doris explained: “I knew there was more that you could do to get people to play. That’s what intrigued me the most.” Because of this new found passion, Doris decided to take a year sabbatical from coaching and take a PhD in Sport Psychology from University 4 in the United States. At this time, Doris was in her early ’40s and had been coaching at University 3 for 13 years:

And then when I went to [University 4] to do my PhD. I met Sue [Head Coach] in 1984 at the pre-Olympic tournament. So I kept talking with her and when I decided to do my PhD, I spoke with one of my colleagues and he had done his PhD at [University 4] and said, ‘There’s sport psych at [University 4] and she’s one of the best [volleyball] coaches in the country.’ So perfect! It wasn’t a great, outstanding program in sport psychology let me tell you. It wasn’t the best yet. There were other places that I could have gone but the best coach was there.

When Doris decided to leave University 3 she left her assistant coach in charge for the year. She explained that even though her assistant coach did a great job, being away from the recruiting and fundraising for an entire year was a major challenge. Doris explained how it was hard to lose control of the program, knowing that you are that much closer to a national championship. In the end, Doris believed she made the right decision and felt that she had become a better person because of it; she had no regrets. She believes that she became a better coach because she had to make hard decisions:

I had to go. I was better for it. The problem is that you go and nobody recruits for you. That’s the problem, so you start over again and it took five years to build the program to a championship team again. That’s the downside of taking a sabbatical. But the upside is what I brought, the extra education and opportunity. I had the opportunity to take my team to the [University 4] play and watch different teams in the NCAA [National College Athletic Association]. I would have never been able to do that.
Nobody else can do that. But because of my connections I could do that. There are pro’s and con’s to having that experience. I loved every minute of doing my PhD, working with the athletes and working with Sue. I did a study for her on one of her players and basically after she liked my work, she said, ‘You can do whatever you want with this team.’ She took me to the final four and I was with that team every day; all their home games.

Doris continued:

Sue is a very dear friend of mine and a tough gal. I said to her, ‘So Sue I don’t know how to thank you for your trust’ [sic]. She said, ‘It’s yours to lose.’ I said, ‘So how good is this team?’ and she said, ‘Final eight team.’

Doris went on to explain that she was confident that she could bring her team to the final four and if she could win two games as a coach they could be national champions. After that conversation, Doris knew she had Sue on board. Doris said:

I challenged her back and I knew that. And that’s why I think she liked me so much because, ‘This is what you need to do if you want me to help that kid; this is what you need to do.’ Everybody tip toed around her because she was a superstar - a rock star. And I came in and said, ‘This is what I think and you don’t need to do everything I say but this is what I think.’ And most of the time she would do what I said.

Doris completed her PhD after a year and a half and explained that 100% of her focus was on school:

I finished in the early ’90s. I’m used to working hard. I took a course before I went, two courses after, I had my data collected, my proposal done, my comps [comprehensive examinations] all done because that’s all I did. I didn’t do anything but school. I didn’t work. I didn’t have an assistantship. I’m used to working hard. Coaches work hard. I’m used to that, so it was nothing. The other thing is if I had to have an assistantship, everything was related to my dissertation.

From a relationship standpoint, Doris met her current husband in the mid ’80s during an athletic banquet. She described him as an extremely passionate and supportive partner: “He’s into sport. He was a president of a [provincial sport organization] and in the golf association.” Doris began to compare the difference between her past and present relationships. She explained that they are polar opposites and she probably was attracted to her current husband because she
had such a terrible experience with her former husband’s irresponsible behaviours. She then went on to describe her present husband:

Very responsible! He has daughters from a previous marriage and he put both of them through university. And I supported him 100% because that was the thing to do. He has a great rapport with his daughters, excellent rapport. We have one grandson from his oldest daughter, he’s now 10 years old and we have a granddaughter 2 years old and a grandson 6 months old from his second daughter.

Doris began to show pictures of her family. “I met him [husband] in ’85 so it has been 22 years.” Doris reflected on the wonderful professional support she receives from her partner:

Not a lot of people would tolerate their wife working as a coach and he’s very supportive. He’ll come to practices and he’ll stand on the sideline you know. He likes to take our granddaughter. . . . The baby comes to practice and the manager takes care of her and my husband is happy just being in the gym . . . he’s unreal. Really is supportive. He teases me by saying, ‘I like your job more than you do!’

She explained that it was hard to actually find a partner who would support her career and not be intimidated. Her relationships between the late ’70s and mid ’80s were all short term. She was always dating but nothing was substantial. We continued to chat about her feeling towards partnership and children:

I grew up in a nuclear family and I never sort of regretted not having children. The time wasn’t right. . . . Then when I met my husband I was 37 and so then you are getting into 40 and didn’t want to have kids right away. I guess it’s the same as saying, ‘This is what I want,’ but it wasn’t a pressing need for me and if it happened, it happened. I think a lot of players become part of your family.

Doris truly believed that the players become an integral part of a coach’s everyday life. She explained the emotional differences between coaching at the national level and coaching at the university level. As a varsity coach, you can have a more holistic coach-athlete relationship as compared to the national level, which is predominantly focused on outcome. Doris shared her experience with the national program beginning in the late 1970s:

Well I stayed involved in the national programs on boards and coaching as a guest coach . . . or assistance coach [sic] growing up. I was always staying involved in administration, board of directors and travelling with teams internationally, right up until my PhD.
She expressed that she loved her experience at the international level but never wanted to be the head coach. “Personally I never wanted to be a head coach of a national program. I don’t think there is all that much support in Canada for it. At that level, I would rather be an assistant.”

Doris’ true passion is working with student-athletes at the university level.

Today, Doris doesn’t share that same passion for the national volleyball programs. She is an active sport psychologist who also happens to be a successful volleyball coach. She wanted to volunteer her services to the national program, but they didn’t take advantage of her knowledge, not the way Sue had. Doris explained:

It’s interesting you know. I volunteered to help with sport psychology for the national team. I don’t want any money for it. I will help our [volleyball] team. I just don’t want it to cost me anything you know? Fly me up there, feed me, and I will [sic]. I go to [University 4] and they are dying for me to help. Our team wouldn’t use me; I’m thinking what’s wrong with this picture? They don’t want my help but the best coach in America wants it so that makes me feel pretty good! I feel valued.

Passionately, Doris explored some of her experiences at University 4 while working with Sue as a graduate student in sport psychology:

Two years ago I was down with my assistant coach. She came down and we’re watching them [University 4 volleyball team] play and they lose. Sue says they didn’t practice well and Sue is upset with it all. I said to Sue, ‘I can help your team.’ She would go up one side and down the other in the class room and pick on each player for something while watching the offensive clips and defensive clips [sic]. At the end of an hour and a half they were all shell-shocked. . . . Sue says, ‘Well I’d like to introduce you to a very good friend of mine. She helped us back in 1990-91 blah, blah, blah.’ So I went up and proceeded to help. They are so happy I’m here you know. And I figure I can help. So Sue says after, ‘Oh Doris, you are at a whole new level. You are so much better than you were in 90-91.’ I said, ‘Sue I can stay another week. I would have to change my ticket.’ She said, ‘How much that is going to cost?’ I said, ‘Probably a couple hundred bucks.’ ‘Ok, do it. You can stay with me.’ I sent my assistant coach home and I stayed an extra week. I really should have stayed with her. She really needed me. That year she really needed me.

Doris then began to describe the unique professional relationship she and Sue had developed:

Really and truly she always treated me equally . . . She’s like a rock star. But her director of [volleyball] operations said, ‘You are so good for Sue because she knows you care for her for the right reasons. That you aren’t looking for anything.’ And I’m not. She’s not
paying me. I don’t get to go down there that often. I’m there. I’m honest. I’m supportive. I’m direct. And if Sue doesn’t listen to what you say, I don’t take it personally. She’s going to do what she thinks. I will say very rarely she doesn’t listen to me. But other people get offended. But I have enough confidence.

Doris began to talk about confidence and the importance of developing this confidence each day. Doris believed that she gained a lot of her confidence in life and sport, from her family. She believed her father helped her to develop this confidence. “Well I think I had a father who really told me I could do anything. He really embedded that. There’s no question that winning helps.” Doris provided me with a childhood story that captured her father’s character and what he instilled in her and her brother:

Our mother was very loving and nurturing and she said, ‘If it weren’t for your father I would be such a pushover.’ And it’s true. He was tough. When my brother wanted to quit school when he was 14 because his pals were quitting, and he wanted to quit and go to work with Dad. And Dad said, ‘You think you’re going to drive around a car?’ He said, ‘You want to work son? I’ll show you what work is.’ My grandfather was the foreman of a coal company. My father had my grandfather give him every possible dirty job. And he would come home and we had a wood shed at the time and he would be out there and he would be black from head to toe, he would get in the tub, have dinner and go to bed by eight every night. My mother and my grandmother said, ‘Oh boo-hoo-hoo, poor [brother] so tough on him.’ He was so tired at night, so dirty and filthy. And my father would drop in and make sure my grandfather wasn’t letting up on him. . . . And after a month my brother said to my father, ‘I think I’m going to go to high school In September.’ ‘Now you’re sure you are going to go back to school?’ My brother was smart. ‘If you are going to do that you can stop working and play ball. You don’t have to work anymore.’

Doris continued:

I thought that was interesting because my brother would have been a nothing if my father hadn’t done anything during that time. And you know what, he gave him tough love. But if that had been my mother it would have never happened you see? She knew it. She was crying and going on. My father said, ‘He’s going to work. He’s going to know what it is to work with his hands for a living.’ My brother was a civil engineer and you know what, when he was at university he came home and there was a job at the airport sweeping sheds for double time and my brother wouldn’t go do it. He said, ‘I’m never going to work with my hands again. I’m going to work with my brain.’ He wouldn’t even go. It had such an impact on him that blue collar work. He respected people who did it but he wasn’t going to do it. He was a civil engineer and he was a deputy mayor of the city earlier. And his friends said to him afterwards, ‘I wish our father had done what your dad did.’ And I think that’s why I coach that way. I always have consequences and
you know he’s in me. And I know how to get results. And Sue is the same way; she knows how to get results.

Doris admitted that Sue is a tougher coach than she is, but she explained her reasoning; “She’s tougher than I am but she can be because she’s got them on full ride and there are a lot of assistant coaches but I’d say she’s tougher than me.”

After returning from her PhD and working with Sue, Doris was energized and excited about sport psychology and coaching. She began to teach seminars at University 3:

I had taught sport psychology before I went for one year. I had just started. So then I came back and I started teaching sport psychology and using it and doing seminars. I had a lot of energy for sport psychology when I came back. And then I taught and won a couple of [volleyball] championships.

After coaching five more adventuresome and successful years at University 3, Doris decided on her next adventure; she took another year sabbatical in 2002 to live in France for five months to write a book and learn French. Doris met some people prior to her trip and it so happened that they had a place in Nice, France. They invited her to stay with them while she went to school and wrote. In short, she explained:

I met some of their friends who told me I could stay at their apartment while I wrote my book. It was three blocks from the ocean, the Mediterranean. I went over there for five months; never stayed in a hotel and I learned French.

Prior to the trip, Doris was able to collect all of her data for her book from interviews and therefore was able to completely focus on her writing. Doris wrote a book on the psychological tools she believed could help coaches. She was excited to take the time off however worried about leaving her program for another year, with little direction and recruiting:

Well the problem is now the team is coming around. We always make the playoffs but last year was really the first year they really came together and even players who had me for a couple of seasons and they played for an interim coach for just a year and the lack of discipline developed . . . it’s unbelievable! And I come back next year, there’s just something in the developmental process it’s like you get five years and you take a year out and it wobbles. It’s the strangest damn thing. It floors me. And it was the same as the last time I went away. And they both did well but then when you come back and try
to keep your program going it’s like starting over. It’s really weird. And every time it has happened.

Despite the challenges, the time away was worth it to Doris. At the end of the day, Doris published an educational coaching book for her fellow colleagues and the general public. Doris said that another highlight was when Sue wrote a foreword before publication. “And so Sue’s written the foreword in my book. She doesn’t do that for just anybody, you know, put her name on a book. Give me a break right.”

Doris believed there were some inequalities presented to her as a coach. She explained, “I think that it’s a full-time job coaching women, so now men would want to coach them?” I asked Doris if she thought that young female athletes could visualize being a coach as a full-time and credible job. Doris responded:

I don’t think they are seeing it, I think they just aren’t going to pay the price. You know the family is first. They make the choice that they are going to go the direction of raising the children and spending time with them and coaching is not conducive to that lifestyle.

Doris searched for reasons as to why there are limited numbers of women in coaching. She wondered if it was because it takes special personality traits to become a full time coach. Doris stated:

I think it can be done, I think it can be done if you want to do it. I just think to be successful, there are a lot of coaches out there, men and women that are really successful; and there are lots that aren’t really successful. I mean they get the job done but they’re not really high achievers. I mean losing, no one likes to lose but some people accept it better than others. And I just think that women don’t want to do it. It’s a confidence issue. ‘I don’t have the certification, I don’t have this, I don’t have that,’ and the guys think ‘I can do that.’ It’s just an attitude. How many female soccer, [volleyball], and basketball players at the university level, as an example, watch their husband coaching a team and sport that they never even played before? . . . These women who played university ball would be ten times the instructor. It happens all the time in all sport . . . I think it’s an attitude. Men just think, ‘Oh I’ll do that. I’ll take the kids and go out,’ and they don’t even know the stuff. They don’t have any problem going into unknown territory. With women everything has to be lined up, ‘Oh I don’t know if I would be able to control the group.’ . . . It’s just endless the reasons they give you why they don’t want to get involved. I said, ‘Geeze you played. You played get out there and do your fundamentals. You know how to teach a lay-up it’s a two foot stop and shoot the ball. You know this stuff: two feet, shoot the ball.’
Doris believes that it is imperative for coaches to see the potential in young females and look to mentor assistant coaches. This includes providing opportunities for their athletes to gain confidence as leaders and coaches. Doris explained:

One of the things I do is I really try and mentor my assistant coaches and give them responsibility and drills and of course I’m there watching it. But today I did a seminar for CEO’s and presidents about sport psychology, performance, leadership, how to motivate people and how you select your team, for about forty-five minutes. But during that time my assistant coach ran the practice today and she asked another guy to come and help her and he’s working with a couple of players and he’s the men’s assistant coach and she knew she needed somebody to help.

Doris thinks with this opportunity her assistant coach has gained confidence and respect from the athletes. She explained it is important for coaches to be aware of how to delegate and to realize that they do not need to be in complete control all the time. Doris said: “Most coaches have a very high need for control.”

Doris continues to state: “Bottom line is; it’s not ok to lose. It’s not ok.” Despite her extremely competitive nature, Doris believes that she continues to be a positive role model for her athletes “I feel that. I feel that from my players. I feel my players admire me, they respect me, and they think, ‘Isn’t that great that our coach can do that, coach can do this.’” Doris described one example of empowerment she used in practice last season:

We start the practice and I began by asking them what they thought we needed to work on. And we’re standing in our circle touching feet . . . ‘What do you think we need to work on girls?’ So they tell me and that’s pretty good. And I could have said all those things but.

An important aspect of Doris’ coaching philosophy is to empower. She empowers her athletes to make decisions, be confident and speak their minds. Doris explained that the present generation she is working with is much different than the athletes she worked with twenty years ago:

Twenty years ago if I would have asked them questions, the athletes would have been, ‘Well I don’t know you’re the coach so what the hell do we need to work on.’ . . . They
would not have even thought about that. Today’s athletes, today’s kids . . . they want to talk. They want you to talk, they want to talk. I’ll sit there and talk and I know when I have to shut up.

With today’s generation, leadership is something Doris struggles to find for her volleyball program. She explains her perspective:

It’s not easy because they all are so nice to everybody. Nobody wants to say, ‘Cut off the baseline come on we need you to do this!’ But when you get a good leader it makes a huge difference. I have some that try so I think there will be a few that step up.

Doris explained that effort is one of the essential qualities to look for in females athletes. “You can’t coach effort. I say that all the time, ‘you can’t coach effort.’ So if they aren’t going to give you effort you have no business being here.”

Not only does Doris teach within the faculty and coach full time, as previously mentioned, she also speaks to CEOs and other business leaders. Doris expressed that motivational speaking and being a guest speaker are some of her favourite parts of being a leader in sport:

Love it. Love it, and they love sport. They love sport. And when I talk to them I talked about lay-ups and turnovers and they may not know what it is but there’s no point in me trying to make a business scenario, it all transfers. They’re allowed 15 turnovers. That means they can make mistakes folks. People make mistakes. We can just have too many.

Doris believes that her PhD was a turning point in her life, which really helped shape who she is today. She explained:

My PhD certainly was a big growth period for me. I think back you know and I think coming to University 3 and being exposed and getting into the national program because at [University 2] you are in a [small town], you aren’t the first people to think about it, it’s always the city for some reason.

Going back through the essential parts of Doris’ coaching career, I asked what seem to be an obvious question, but probably was the most imperative question of all: I asked Doris if she loved to coach. She quickly responded, “Yeah, and I knew I was good at it.” We continued to chat about her professional development as a coach. “Oh yeah I always went to coaching clinics
and whatever opportunity I could . . . I was the assistant coach in Canada Games. I was always trying to better myself with lifelong learning. I was always looking for the edge.”

In the end, Doris stated, “Thirty-eight years is quite an adventure as a coach. And believe me when I say it, female coaches are few and far between that coach over ten years.” Doris believes that coaching is an important part of her personality and relationships with others:

I like the relationships. I like the fact of giving back and mentoring coaches. . . . I’m a maker of people, but I’m also hoping that people who have been assistant coaches of mine are going out and making a difference in the world.
\textit{Life History (4): Dawn}

Dawn has been coaching rugby for the past 16 years at the youth, college and university level. She presently is a full time rugby coach at the university level. Dawn and her partner have been living together for the past three years just outside of a city.

Developmental Stage – “Growing Up”

Dawn was raised in a small town in western Canada with her parents and three siblings; she had one older brother, a younger brother and a younger sister. They grew up in a predominantly farming and sporting community. Dawn explained that sport has been a part of her life for as long as she can remember. She grew up on the fields in the summer and in the arenas in the winter. Dawn’s parents were extremely active in the community as relentless volunteers for boards and committees.

Dawn began to play rugby mainly because her older brother started to play at a young age. Dawn remembered the day when her brother and his friends were playing and she started to yell to her parents, “Can I play? Can I play?” After some time, Dawn was finally allowed to play with the boys. She stated, “I guess he [father] found it easier to watch me when I was playing than [when I wasn’t].” That was the first time Dawn became involved in rugby as a player. Similar situations happened for other activities; she saw her older brother and then wanted to play as well. Dawn explained; “Anything there was to do activity wise I got involved there.” She was on the go all the time as a child. “There was no time to sit still.” At school she played badminton, volleyball and basketball, but rugby and fastball were the sports she enjoyed and focused on the most.

Dawn’s parents were extremely supportive of all of their children, especially regarding their extracurricular activities. Dawn considered her parents to be “superstars,” because of how they were able to handle all four children. “There were four kids in our
family and I wonder how they balanced everything.” She explained that her family was always ‘on the go’ and when everyone was at home, they could be found outside. Dawn shared some childhood stories:

   My brother’s friends and I would play [rugby]. Mom and dad used to laugh because they had two little trees in the front yard that we used as posts, and they didn’t grow. When I graduated from high school they were about the same size as they were when they planted them and you go back now and they are huge trees in the yard; so once they got rid of us it gave the trees a chance. We played soccer out there and [rugby], pretty much anything you could think of. There was lots of creative play, climbing trees, hanging out, and things like that. One thing I know about this play environment, I play more with boys . . . I had a cousin, Kris, but it was mostly me and the guys.  

Dawn started to support and help local sport teams early in her life. As a young girl, she was a bat girl for the local competitive women’s fastball team:

   That team had a lot of success in the early days and they went on to win national championships and medals in most years. And again I was exposed to not only their team but also teams they competed against and saw some exceptional female role models.

Although she spent a lot of her time helping out and watching the women’s teams, it never bothered Dawn to play with the boys. She never saw gender as a problem, and did not feel a sense of team segregation. As a young athlete, she accepted that she was usually the only girl and played on an all boys team:

   At that point I didn’t think of it until, like playing [rugby], until I started traveling to different communities there was always a big spectacle that ‘Dawn’s the only girl,’ because I was the only girl playing ‘boy’s’ [rugby] . . . I got a lot of recognition because of it, but outside of the community, and in the community itself, a little bit of ridicule for being a girl playing a guy’s game.  

Dawn explained how she thrived off of the recognition, but the ridicule was tough to deal with as a young girl. She would ask herself, “Why do I like this so much, if I shouldn’t be doing it?” She knew it would be a constant challenge to overcome. However, Dawn’s parents were extremely supportive of all of their children and their activities regardless of what the community believed. Dawn admitted that her brothers probably had a more
difficult time with Dawn’s recognition; “I think that they [brothers] found it more difficult than I did, because I played more often than they did, so they took a lot of ridicule I guess as well because, ‘your sister is playing, how come you’re not?’”

Another obstacle Dawn faced while playing rugby with the boys was the question of where to change before practices and games. Dawn said that during her younger years, she would get ready at home before leaving for a practice or game. But when Dawn got older and began to travel, she was changing in bathroom stalls or any little room off to the side:

There were times when I changed in shower stalls in different [facilities] if they didn’t have separate dressing rooms or a place that I could change outside of the team room. Then there were days when I changed at home then traveled with the team on the bus to wherever we were playing. So we just kind of made it work.

One of her best memories was going to a community that actually redesigned a storage room for her to change in. “They redesigned a room for me and put chairs and stuff in there. It was awesome. It was a little town. It was my room.” Dawn explained that even though she did receive some attention, she missed out on the pre-game locker room experience. “You miss what goes on in the dressing room for the kind of main period in time but then about fifteen minutes prior to the game I would go in and join the guys. Dawn said that her teammates at the time were positive and supportive, and she was able to develop some great friendships within the group.

Dawn labeled herself as a “tomboy” growing up. “I was always playing sports. In elementary I was a tomboy.” In spite of the fact that she was comfortable hanging out and playing with the boys, the fact that she was a girl continued to be a challenge for the community. Dawn shared another story that paints a picture of the obstacles she had to overcome as a girl playing a “boy’s” sport:

I had the Human Rights Commission, and they actually ended up getting involved in my [rugby]. One of the years my team went to provincials and they [Provincial rugby Organization] didn’t send my player’s card back. We played our first game and I
scored a couple of [tries]. And following the game the coaches went through to verify the cards on the rosters and my card wasn’t there, so they contacted the [Provincial Rugby Organization] and said, ‘Hey you forgot Dawn’s card.’ And they said, ‘No we didn’t. Girls don’t play [rugby]’ So with that, the two teams went through the game sheets and they made a decision to take back any [tries] that I had factored in on. So instead of our team winning our first game we ended up losing it and that was a pretty traumatic experience. My parents were then on the phone with Human Rights, and [Rugby Canada] said, “Well girls don’t play; it is a game for young boys.” . . . It was in the 70’s and the Human Rights at that point spent some time chatting with us, but had also stated that because [rugby] was its own separate body it had the right to choose whether it was for boys or girls. It wasn’t until quite a few years later that a young female [rugby] star fought to play with the boys [sic] and took the case to the Supreme Court which made a difference for a lot of young girls, in terms of giving them the opportunity to play.

Her parents didn’t have the money to take the case to Supreme Court but they supported Dawn through the entire process.

Dawn enjoyed both the educational and social aspects of school. She was an above average student, which helped Dawn enjoy school even more. “I was a good student as well, which means in a sense more recognition because I was good at it and I got a lot of pats on the back and pink stars at the top of the paper.”

In terms of leaders, Dawn said that she and her siblings had remarkable physical education teachers growing up. She described a few of her teachers: “One lady who played on the national fastball team, a gentleman who coached the international fastball program and another gentleman who was at the national level. We were lucky early on to have good quality role models.”

Dawn moved on to high school, which was from grades seven to twelve. At her high school there were approximately one hundred and twenty students with a large majority of them being boys. “It was a very small but positive environment to learn.” She explained that because there were a limited number of females at her school, she had an advantage because she was able to play up a level for the senior women’s rugby team. “So then it would push
me a little harder to be better; especially when you played against athletes from in and around the region that were really good athletes.”

After Dawn was exposed to playing rugby with women, she was able to compare her experiences of playing with the girls versus playing with boys. Dawn said that playing with the older girls was her favourite:

I think in terms of competitive drive, having an older brother and his friends, like if I wanted to touch the ball I needed to go get it. And I wasn’t the one to just hang out and not go get it. So I think that helped me to kind of build that competitive spirit. . . . The other side when I was in grade seven as well, I started to play with the senior women’s [rugby] team, and I think my parents were much more aware than me that I was at the end of the road on the guys side of the sport like, ‘at some point Dawn you need to move on.’

When Dawn started to play rugby with the girls, she was fortunate to have a couple of female friends from fastball playing on the senior team; because of this, the transition into girl’s rugby was exciting for her. “So to be actually able to play on a team with them was kind of fun.” Dawn also expressed how happy she was to finally be a part of the pre-game locker room experience. “I finally realized that this is what the dressing room is about and more team time.” Dawn elaborated on the level of play while moving to the girl’s side. She explained that two of the female rugby players were exceptional, but the rest of the ladies were older then her mother. “It was a fun group of people and it was fun just to be able to play with the girls. They treated us and referred to us as the ‘kids’ line [sic]. It was a good group of people.”

Academically, Dawn continued to do well in high school until she broke her ankle in grade 9. This particular injury put Dawn behind in school, especially in math because she missed a couple of important math classes and was never able to catch up. However, other than math, her academics were still average and after some time she was back to excelling in all academic areas.
In high school, Dawn played on a provincial competitive rugby team. The provincial team recruited the top competitive female players. Dawn and one of her friends played on this team and competed nationally. At the time, Dawn was only 12 years old and she explained that it was one of her best experiences. She was able to play with extremely competitive women who played hard, but also knew how to have a good time. During these years, Dawn was exposed to smoking and drinking at a premature age. She reflected back on that time and explained that she did not partake in the drinking and smoking right away. However after a while, Dawn said that she thought, “Okay if those guys get to drink…” This made Dawn grow up more quickly than most kids her age:

It made me grow up before my time, and then I would head back home and I was hanging out with kids in grade 12 at school as well. I would head out to the parties. I ended up actually, in a sense, quitting drinking at a time when all of my friends were starting, well I shouldn’t say my friends, I should say my classmates. So at a grade nine, ten, eleven time frame I didn’t need to do it. It was like I’ve already ‘been there, done that.’

Dawn’s priority at the time was sport, and she decided that it was more important than drinking and partying. “I just stopped because I had other things to do, and at that point for me, sports were way more important.”

Understandably, Dawn loved the feeling of winning. Both her rugby and fastball teams were extremely competitive and successful, even at the national level. She explained: “The summer of grade seven we actually won provincials for the first time in fastball.” Dawn continued: “And after that a group of us continued to play together and went on to win nationals in fastball in our grade ten, eleven and twelve years. It was a very successful core of ball players.”

Dawn’s dating life began at a much younger age than her peers. Dawn dated one guy in high school, on and off for about three years. He lived in a small town about 20 miles away, where she played fast pitch regularly. However, it wasn’t until grade eleven, when
Dawn began to hang around with her teammates, that she wondered why she had more of an attraction to a girl she played ball with than she did with her boyfriend. From this point, Dawn became interested in one of the girls from another city that her team picked up for a ball tournament. Dawn shared her feelings:

I couldn’t quite sort out what that was all about back then. I had more of an attraction to her than I did to my boyfriend at the time, and I thought, ‘Wow this is strange and this is weird.’ I guess not knowing what to make out of it at the time. Trying to understand who I was and what I was about. And I laugh because when I look back now, I was also fortunate to be a bat-girl for the ladies ball team. There were some people there who were gay and some who were straight. And nobody pushed anything on anybody—they were just really open.

One of the positive aspects of dating a teammate, Dawn shared was that everyone traveled together and there would be constant support from your partner. As Dawn began to learn more about herself, she kept things very casual in her dating life, after all, sport was more important.

At the end of high school, English Literature became Dawn’s favourite academic subject; she loved poetry and writing. “I loved it. And I had a real passion for teaching. I would go back on my spare, everyday I had an hour spare so I would go over to the elementary school and volunteer with some of the teachers, working with the kids.” Dawn was involved and on the go; she always needed something to do. “I think when I look back now there wasn’t a lot of time to just sit and relax.”

Although Dawn had many passions, rugby was her number one priority as a young woman. At the age of 18, Dawn received a few scholarship offers to the USA when she was finishing high school, but they were mostly for fastball. Regardless of the offers, Dawn realized that the team she played for at home was still highly competitive and a proper education was a priority for her. Therefore, she decided to stay in Canada and go to University 1. She chose University 1 because it was only three hours away from home, and
she was interested in their Physical Education and English academic programs. Her choice was made because she felt that she could have the benefit of having a university experience while still being close to her family. The best part, said Dawn, was that she always had full support from her parents.

Once Dawn got settled into university, she decided to play for the more competitive club team in the community, instead of for University 1’s rugby team. The university team had more of a beer drinking environment at the time, whereas she wanted to stay within a competitive environment.

During Dawn’s first two years of university she was focused on school and rugby, but not really on her social life. However, after her second year of university she met Lisa. They initially met playing against each other in fastball. Dawn and Lisa were in a relationship for three and a half years. Lisa was Dawn’s biggest fan; she never missed a game. They had a very supportive and valuable relationship. Even to this day, Lisa continues to be an important person in Dawn’s life.

At this point, Dawn was heavily involved with provincial rugby. She continued to play at the national tournament each year. In 1990, at the age of 22, Dawn led her province to another National Championship tournament where she was recognized by the Canadian national team staff for the first time. Dawn was then invited to Team Canada’s first training camp for the national team. While this was an incredible experience for Dawn, she ended up getting cut. And although she was young, Dawn was still disappointed and took the experience personally. Dawn talked about her experience of being cut from the national team. She said the toughest part was the fact that she was from a small town, and she had to deal with the media, friends and family:

If I go back to the first time getting cut from the nationals, the part for me that was tough was that my picture was in the paper back home and everyone was talking
about me making ‘Team Canada’ when I got invited to camp and it was like, ‘Oh she’s great, she’s going to make the team.’ My parents were so proud and then I got there and I got cut and it took me a long time to phone home. I thought I was such an embarrassment and it was going to hurt my family. . . . But when I phoned them, both mom and dad were on the line and were like, ‘Did you have fun?’ I was sobbing and was like, ‘I got cut,’ and again they were like ‘Dawn did you have fun?’ I said, ‘Did you not hear me; I got cut,’ and they were like, ‘Dawn did you get to play high level [rugby]?’ It was amazing, that part for me, because in my mind I thought, ‘I need to quit, I’m no good, and this is devastating.’ Mom and dad were both really like, ‘Dawn did you get to play high level [rugby]?’ They put it into perspective.

Dawn believes that this experience was an incredible life lesson for her. To this day, Dawn shares that story when talking to athletes, parents, and coaches.

Interestingly, Dawn was also invited to the regional training camp for fastball. She tried out, and from there she was invited to the national team training camp. Even though fastball was not her true love, she recognized it as a great opportunity. However, a regret that Dawn had was her decision not to try out for the national fastball team. She morally felt she could not go to the final camp. Dawn explained her story:

I made the decision not to go to the final camp because one young lady that was invited, her dad was best friends with the head coach of the team and one of the other head guys of the program. And this other young lady was by far a superior athlete to a lot of us and didn’t get along with the coach and her dad didn’t get along with the coach and she never got an invite. For me I thought it was unjust and I made the decision not to go.

Dawn said her mother told her up front that she would regret such a decision. “[Dawn’s mother said] ‘Dawn you’re going to live to regret this, you know it’s an opportunity to go, it’s not going to solve that issue.’ But from my personal standpoint . . . I just couldn’t do it.”

Today when Dawn reflected back on this experience, she said;

I regret it. So my mom was right. You look at it and people make teams for different reasons; there are good players that are passed up all of the time for different things. . . . It is amazing reflecting back at all the life lessons especially when you recognize them as an adult.
Overall, as an athlete Dawn expressed that her coach-athlete relationships were extremely positive experiences. She had both female and male coaches who created opportunities for her to grow as an athlete and a professional. One coach, Dawn explained, created volunteer opportunities for his athletes to travel around the community and run camps and clinics for young girls. This progressive program kicked off Canada Games for women’s rugby. Dawn went into detail:

We would travel around to all of these little communities and for example [one of today’s super stars] was in one of the towns as a young kid, 10 or 11 at the time, and we would watch her whip around, and it was like, ‘God look at this young girl.’ Another girl that went on to play on the national team, again a very talented young kid. And again I thank our coach for allowing us to go around and run the camps. We learned a lot from them [coaches].

She loved being in front of a group. Dawn really enjoyed instructing and being with young female athletes. She also appreciated learning from all of her different coaches.

After reflecting on some of her past experiences, Dawn talked about her most memorable role models during her growth into an athlete and coach. She said that it was hard to pick a couple that stand out, when so many people have touched her life. Dawn then began to share stories about some of the most influential people that she still models today:

It’s hard to pick one because there were so many people that have had such a positive impact in my life. But I’d go with B.M. [national fastball player]. I played [rugby] with her as well and she was a teacher back in town. She was just a calm, well rounded person.

And then there was:

S.C. who coached me . . . S.C. was a role model of mine when I was playing against her . . . she was somebody who got the job done, and you just watch her every single time she stepped [to play] she had this drive. She wanted to be the first to the [everything], win the battles and she coached in very much the same way with the expectations for excellence.

Another one of Dawn’s role models was D.B.:

D.B. was one of my fastball coaches early on. He instilled heart and desire. I could take that now and apply it to the team at the university level and say, ‘Look, here is a
level of education you can strive for.’ D.B. was somebody who would look at each athlete that was on the team and found out what their interests were. [He would] talk to me, during fastball season, about [rugby] as well and new poets who were publishing and then turn and talk to somebody else about political studies. He made sure he found out what people were interested in. So he was another great role model.

Dawn reiterated that it was extremely hard for her to name just a few role models. “I could list so many. There were girls who played on the fastball team, girls who I played rugby with. There were good people around me in so many different ways.”

After reflecting on her role models, we talked about her own playing style as an athlete. Dawn admitted that her training style somewhat mirrored S.C. from a work ethic standpoint. Dawn shared her perspective:

Well it got to a point where I trained, but I didn’t initially. I just played and played but I was the feisty. . . I was the aggressive . . . and created a lot of opportunities. . . .I was a pretty hard worker. I didn’t have great hands. I could score but it wasn’t pretty.

Moreover, Dawn believed that she was coachable and a great team player. She felt that these were some of her strongest assets to a coach and the team:

I was a great team player. . . . But I was the kid that if the coach asked you to do something or if something was good for the team; I would do it. So when I kept learning more about training, I was like; ‘How do I get to the gym, so I can get better?’

Dawn began to train more attentively once involved with the national program. She learned that specific training would be beneficial for her rugby game. “When I was doing it [training] with somebody else, absolutely, I did. On my own, I didn’t enjoy it as much. It was more social.” However, Dawn did love to practice. She was playing every chance she got. Dawn assured that the past training styles were not nearly as sophisticated as the training today.
Professional Development Stage – “Athlete to Coach”

During Dawn’s time as an athlete, she was confronted with many challenges and experiences that were essential for her development as a person and an athlete. She shared her perspective:

I’d say my student teaching experience was a challenge and great experience [sic]. You are out in different communities and people are watching what you are doing and how you are doing it and providing you feedback. I used that training as a coach for my university team today. I thrive on feedback. That helped me learn some things that I need to look for in order to improve as a teacher and a coach.

Other learning experiences came from the team environment, as well as playing with different athletes and friends:

We had a fun group of female athletes that were playing university sports. And quite often I think we learned from each other. There were a couple of girls that were volunteer coaches back in their small communities and stuff like that. . . . I just think that we had a good group of people and everybody realized the benefits of sports.

Another noteworthy experience occurred during university; the provincial rugby program was looking for a volunteer representative to run female rugby in the province. Dawn spoke with her parents, and her mom said: “If you want to see something change then you have to be part of it and you make the change.” At the age of 19, Dawn made the decision to accept the position as the volunteer female rugby provincial representative. This position gave Dawn the opportunity to attend the Rugby Canada’s annual meetings. In addition, she traveled across Canada to be part of role model workshops, development workshops and leadership workshops. “That [experience] had a significant impact on me as well.” It had a significant impact because she was the only female at the provincial meeting. Dawn’s experience opened her eyes to possibilities, and unfortunately, also to the “old boy’s club” of rugby. Dawn shared her perspective on her first boardroom experience:

It was very intimidating. It was tough to speak out in front of the group [men] about the things I was very passionate about. At one meeting I presented a package and called for a vote on the package and there were about three guys that voted and I
made a comment, ‘Look I have been here all weekend and I want to make decisions about what’s best for the game, not what’s best for men’s [rugby] and not what’s best for women’s [rugby] but what’s best for the game overall.’

Dawn said that if she was planning on investing so much time and effort into a presentation, she would ask them to: “Put down the newspapers and put out their cigars and to shut-up and listen.” She put it that directly. She explained that it wasn’t exactly tactful, but it worked.

Everyone cleared off their papers, put out their cigars and actually sat forward to listen to her presentation. Dawn told me that after the presentation, she began to shake. It was an awful and intimidating experience, she said, but she believed it was necessary for her to move forward in the world of rugby. Dawn continued:

So I went through the presentation again and called for the vote again. When I walked out of the room my knees were shaking so much as one of the gentlemen came over and put his arm around me and said; ‘You did exactly what needed to be done. Thank you for doing it.’

Dawn explained that it was a powerful moment and an emotional experience. “It was an emotional one because I broke down crying. Now when I look back at the many young girls that would be good coaches but they just don’t want to walk into that room.” During moments like this, Dawn’s support and inspiration came from her parents. Dawn shared her parents’ voices:

And again if I listen to my parents say, ‘Dawn if you want something to change, you need to do it. Don’t sit back and complain about it if you haven’t done anything to make a change.’ It was very helpful; it helped in a number of ways.

Dawn said that the gap between men and women is getting narrower but in her perspective, there is still a large need for change in sport. The young female coaches need a strong support network.

During university, Dawn’s social groups were predominantly made up of women. She had a couple of male friends but the majority of her social groups were female.
teammates. Unintentionally, as Dawn grew older, she felt closer to women as friends. There was an apparent difference between the bonds she shared with the girls over the boys.

Going back to Dawn’s passion for writing and English, she explained that journaling really helped her to relax and express her thoughts while growing up: “It was an opportunity for me to write and express what I thought and not have to tell people. I would just write.” Dawn wrote in her journal every day for ten years. Today, she wishes she still took the time to write in her journal because she believes that it would be beneficial to her as a coach. Dawn added, “Maybe after today I will start again.”

After university, Dawn started to work with a foundation that had a number of different programs for activity and healthy living. At the same time she was volunteering for her provincial rugby program. Dawn traveled in and out of the province to schools and clubs to hand out posters to girls and ask them to give rugby a try. Dawn explained that she would take them through a session on physical activity, and discuss the benefits of a healthy heart. Dawn shared her travel experience:

There was a lot of traveling and sometimes all you had time for was a bowl of Kraft dinner; but it was a good experience. [I had flexible hours] that I could travel out and then travel back to my sports for [rugby]. I arranged my travel around my sports schedule.

Dawn did not stay at that particular job for very long after she got cut from the national program again in 1992; she decided to leave the job because the national team coaches explained that in order for her to have a chance to make the team the next time, she would need to play in a more competitive environment. Therefore, at the end of the rugby season, Dawn packed up her bags and moved to a bigger city to play for a more competitive team:

I packed everything up and quit my job. I had a lead on a job with the government, it was working with disabled individuals to try to provide physical activity, but the government grant got pulled. But I decided I was still going to move anyway.
Soon after moving Dawn took her first referee level for rugby and began to referee immediately so that she could start to make money. In the meantime, she continued to search for full-time work. Dawn explained how she stumbled upon her first job:

I was looking for work and there was a little Petro-Canada gas station down at the end of my street that had ‘Help Wanted’ so I was like, ‘Well why not?’ So in my spare time I will go there and keep looking for something else and I worked for a guy by the name of Fred and that ended up being one of my best working experiences to date.

Dawn went on to explain her experience working for her boss at Petro-Canada:

He is a great man! He flew me across the country to go to a bunch of seminars; he wanted me to take on my own gas station and he was going to back me. So that was a good experience. We went to Vancouver, we went to Halifax, and we went up to Yellowknife, for different work experiences. I think in his mind I was going to take over and run his multi-million dollar corporation. He was a great boss and a good man.

Dawn’s experience with Petro-Canada taught her to be savvy in business and organization.

After seeing an opening, Dawn decided to apply for a fitness supervisor position at a new college (College A) in a city near by. She was offered the position and accepted it immediately. She became heavily involved with the college’s extracurricular activities.

After a few years of settling into her position, Dawn began to search for young women interested in playing college rugby. Dawn shared her experience:

It was challenging to begin with because we started the provincial College Athletics Conference for the women’s [rugby] side. There was men’s [rugby] but no women’s program. I went to talk to our athletic director and I gave him a proposal and he said, ‘No,’ and I was like, ‘These girls are used to getting to play and we just want to get a club team going. If we have a club team, girls will choose to come to this college because there is women’s [rugby].’ And he didn’t think it was possible. But we started the program.

At this time, Dawn was in her late twenties and she started a not-for-profit club organization to start up the team. She did continuous work outside of the college to get the team up and running. Initially, the athletic director did not allow Dawn to associate her team with the college; she was only allowed to use the students. Dawn said; “After I put all of the pieces in
place and showed him that we could raise some money he let us.” After numerous visits to the athletic director’s office and with hard work, determination and persistence, she was successful in starting the first “official” women’s rugby program at College A.

While working at the college and training hard, Dawn was still striving to be on the 1997 national team. Unfortunately for Dawn, the national team sent out invitations to the top twenty female rugby players in the country and Dawn was not one of them this time. Once Dawn got word of the invitations she finally booked an overdue surgery for endometriosis. The surgery was set for two days after the national club championships. The ironic part of this story is that Dawn had an amazing performance at the tournament championship (which the national coaches attended). After the tournament, Dawn left for her surgery and then arrived home to find a letter in the mail inviting her to the national training camp. Dawn explained:

I went for my surgery and when I got out of the hospital and got home there was an invitation in my mailbox for the camp in April. So I talked to my doctor and he was like, six weeks you can’t do anything. I waited for a few weeks and didn’t train and didn’t do a lot but then went back and trained. I went to camp. Anyway it was a good experience. I realized there, in camp, that I could be more of a benefit to some of the young kids coming up and helping them to calm down and get the best out of them. That was more my focus.

After the training camp, Dawn decided to tackle another long overdue surgery on her shoulder and give her body a rest. Dawn retired from competitive rugby in 1998.

During her time with Petro-Canada and at the college, Dawn shared her life with Jen. Jen and Dawn were together for ten years. Initially, they were very good friends but when Dawn moved away, Jen was traveling to see Dawn every second weekend, and their friendship turned into a serious relationship. Jen was also an athlete who was active prior to having her children (with a previous marriage). Jen had two children (Lara and Denis) who
Dawn adored and shared the commitment to raise them with Jen. Dawn said that having two children was a different experience:

It was very different, I love the kids. They are great kids. For them I think it was great and hard [sic]. You know, a young guy going to school. He [Denis] was 9 at the time, and how do you explain to your friends that mom has [pause]. So I was the nanny sometimes with his friends. He would say, “Oh my nanny’s going to pick me up.” I was like alright then, as long as I know who I am today. [Lara] is fine with it, she is older than [Denis] and she likes sports and all that as well; so that made an easy connection for the two of us.

Dawn worked at the college level for about six years and then accepted a position at Rugby Canada. She was very excited about the change and to have the opportunity to make a difference at the national level. Dawn was set for another move. She became the manager of female rugby for Rugby Canada: “I loved it. It was a good position.” The following year Dawn was an assistant coach for College B, and the next year she was an assistant coach for a university team within the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). Dawn explained that it was definitely a different experience: “It was a different role going from being the head coach to an assistant coach, but it was a great learning experience.” The following year she was back at College B to be the head coach for the next two seasons. Dawn shared how she loved the college atmosphere because her main responsibility was just to coach:

As head coach at [College B], I tell a lot of people, that I had more time to coach as a part-time coach there [College B], than I do as a full-time coach [at present university position], with all of the paper work and administration that we have at the center. It was a great coaching environment there. They set it up well and they support it well. They were a good staff.

Once Dawn was heavily involved with coaching, she expressed how it became difficult for her to not be “the athlete” anymore. “Oh yeah, and anytime you are in play-offs it’s even harder.” Dawn shared that she has been away from rugby as a player for the past five years, but is always tempted to go back and play. She gets the temptation every so often, but at the end of the day, reality kicks in and she never does go back.
Dawn explained that as a young coach she took all her necessary coaching levels in order to advance up the coaching ladder. Today, she believes that it is essential to attend workshops and seminars every so often to stay up-to-date on new ideas and research. During the conferences, seminars and meetings, Dawn feels that she is still a minority as a woman but she certainly has more confidence than she did when she was 19. In spite of her confidence, she explained that there are still many road blocks for her as a female coach:

There are not a lot of female coaches to share experiences and ideas with. In terms of obstacles I think just being comfortable and confident with your own knowledge and that’s one of the things. You second guess everything that you do, and I don’t know if that’s just the nature of every coach or just a female coach.

Dawn and Jen had been going through a difficult time in their relationship during numerous changes going on in their lives: “That was tough because I was gone a lot, and training a lot . . . I didn’t have a lot of balance.” Dawn expressed that she enjoyed the relationship and there were some nights when she just wanted to be home with Jen and the kids. Nonetheless, she continued to do what drove her and that was rugby: “More often than not it was me doing what I was driven to do.” Dawn elaborated on the importance of support:

I think it is possible to have the support and to have balance. But that individual [partner] has to have things that they are passionate about and driven to do so they aren’t just sitting at home waiting for you. If you’re with somebody who has other interests and other things to do then absolutely it is [relationship] possible. You need to make it a priority and if you don’t make it a priority then it’s not going to happen.

Dawn and Jen waited until Lara graduated from grade 12 to end their relationship. Dawn explained that it was the best decision for everyone. She still remains close to Jen, Denis and Lara.

Leadership Stage – “The Elite Coach”

After working at Rugby Canada for a number of years, Dawn received a phone call with a request to put her application in for the full-time women’s rugby head coach position...
at University 2. After considerable thought, Dawn submitted an application and was called in for an interview. After completing her interview, Dawn admitted that it was not as strong as she would have liked it to be. For some reason, she was nervous and not especially confident:

I think University 2 needs to change the sense of style and structure a bit but it was good. It was a good opportunity to come in and figure out what I wanted to do. I was not very confident; I didn’t have a very good interview. It was one of those days where you were like, ‘I didn’t sell myself very well there.’

In spite of her impression that she had a bad interview, Dawn was offered the position at University 2. After a quick negotiation, Dawn asked for a month grace period before making a decision. During this time, Dawn went back home and took some time to weigh the pros and cons:

There were a lot of things that I wanted to make sure were in place and in order before I agreed to take it; especially because my job at [Rugby] Canada was a really good job. College treated me well as a coach too.

One thing Dawn knew for sure was that she wanted to be a full-time coach. This had been one of her goals during the last number of years, and she saw this job as a big opportunity for her:

As a young kid I thought I was going play professional and then I thought I was going to teach. It [coaching] was just something that evolved as I moved forward. I think once I got College A going, I decide that was the thing that I wanted to do.

After speaking with the people closest to her, Dawn decided to accept the position at University 2.

After sharing her memories of advancing to a head coach position at the university level, Dawn shared her coaching philosophy and what approach she took upon her initial meeting with her new team. Dawn confidently articulated that she believes in an athlete-centered coaching philosophy. She also demands excellence and effort while operating from the team’s values. The team comes first, with the decisions that the players and staff make to
move the team forward: “When I coach, I want to empower the athletes so I provide the leadership core with a great opportunity to take responsibility.” Dawn acknowledged that respect is essential for a coach-athlete relationship and earning respect takes time. She explained her long process of earning respect:

I think it is being true to your values and being true to the team’s values. From the technical and tactical standpoint it is just giving them the tools to perform and then showing them how those tools work. That is the benefit of video coaching I find. Right now that is so significant. It just makes such a world of difference to be able to pull something back and be able to say look what you did here. . . . I am stricter now, in terms of demanding excellence than I was at the beginning. I often gave the kids the benefit of the doubt. Now it is like, ‘This is what I asked you to do; this is what is asked of the program. It’s not an option.’

Dawn believes that the current generation of players is different, but she happily expressed that this year she will finally have all the players that she recruited for the team. For Dawn, this makes a difference in terms of players and personalities responding to her coaching philosophy as a whole: “They take on you [coach], but they also take on whole other sense of them, which just makes it rewarding to watch them grow.”

In spite of the university’s excitement about having Dawn as the full-time coach, the transition did not come easily. First of all, Dawn was still trying to deal with the stress and emotional strain caused by the changes in her professional and personal life. Furthermore, she had to deal with a number of controversies with the athletes and previous coaching staff, after she accepted the position:

I knew as soon as I accepted the job that there would be so much controversy because the volunteer coach who had been completely committed to the program was doing his Masters and doing a ton of work with a coaching program and then went on to be the head coach. He had been, in a sense, promised the position; and so when I accepted the position a number of the players sent me hate mail saying, ‘Who do I think I am?’ and, ‘The only reason I got the position was because of equity, who do you think you are? I’ve never heard of you.’

Dawn shared that the first thing she did as the new coach, was send an e-mail to the team members stating the following:
First thing I would like to say is that it is nice to see that you have so much respect for your previous coach that you would take the time here to send me this note.  [Second] I need you to realize that I have been given the job and I don’t plan on going anywhere. So we are going to take your emails and put them away for now.

Dawn continued to give details about another incident. She had a couple of the athletes try to explain to her that they were promised the captain and assistant captain roles. This raised another issue that Dawn had to deal with, even before her first season started:

In the first year, we let the girls decide on captains and assistants. For the first bit, that captain would come in and say, ‘Everybody hates what you are doing. This is crap.’ And, ‘You don’t know what you are doing.’ And of course, you question what you are doing.

Dawn explained her response:

I was like, ‘All right here is a board and I understand that there are a lot of issues and the only way for me to change them is to actually know what they are so this is the opportunity for everybody to speak up here.’ There was complete silence and a lot of the kids were looking around thinking, ‘What’s going on here?’ Then I said, ‘Hang on . . . here are the issues that the captain has brought forward.’ And I pulled out a list on the board. ‘If this is an issue for you please put your hand up.’ The captains were looking around and realized they were the only ones. . . . I talked to the captains and told them that, ‘Your job is to represent the team; not yourself. If you have an issue as an individual, you come see me as an individual you don’t come see me as the captain.’ I talked to the girls and said that, ‘If you don’t like the way that the team is run, ladies I am here for the long haul, I’m not here for the short-term. . . . If you can’t accept how we are going to move forward, the door is right there.’ We sat in silence for ten minutes. So that was a really challenging time.

This was an extremely challenging and emotionally demanding time for Dawn as a coach:

“For me as a coach this was challenging because there was not a lot of professional development and support in our group.”

Another challenge for Dawn lay in choosing her coaching staff. She explained that she took some time to do this because she wanted to find coaches who had different styles from her own coaching style, but the same coaching philosophy as her own. Dawn explained:

I wanted to find people who could connect with athletes in different ways and would be able to teach in areas that I am not as confident. If I look at one assistant coach,
she is a former student-athlete and had just graduated with her mental skills training [sport psychology] and I thought she would be a great addition. . . . Another assistant coach came on in the first year as well, she had just graduated with her law degree, and she was a really good competitive coach. [The third member of my coaching staff] was a statistics guy. He looked at the numbers. We had a real mix of people from different backgrounds. . . . Another lady I coached with, I brought her in as an assistant coach and she is great and had incredible organizational skills and attention to detail.

Every year, Dawn’s coaching staff grew. She brought in the team’s own sport nutrition coach and fitness coach. The coaching staff has a wealth of knowledge but Dawn expressed that it sometimes became difficult to manage. Although for the most part, Dawn has been lucky with her coaching staff, she admits that it is still difficult to find respectful and trustworthy assistant coaches who don’t try to take over the head coach position:

   It’s tough at times to manage; and you think everybody is there and are talking about where you think things should be going. . . . So, that part is tough. There are a couple that I think are lone soldiers, and I’m like, ‘Look if you want to be head coach somewhere, you can apply and go do it but right now I am. If you don’t agree with me it is for you to discuss with me and not the athletes.

As time went on, the players began to mold into a team under Dawn’s leadership. Her next challenges would be with administrative duties and struggles with the athletic department.

Dawn shared that her current athletic director claims to speak about excellence, but Dawn said: “What appears to be excellence in his mind changes from time to time.” For example, Dawn stated:

   I look at our woman’s soccer team and out of all of the sports they should be the ones who are carried on a pedestal; that sport should be marketed. And for as much as I enjoy watching a football game, they have not achieved what the women’s soccer team has and when we take a look at awards that are presented, and we are talking about financial awards, I feel the women’s soccer team gets the short end of the stick. I feel that the women’s rugby team does too but again if all of the stuff that we have is based on excellence, then soccer should be carrying the flag.

Dawn continued:

   I have real issues with the athletic director and how he operates. I have issues with the financial management of our teams. The way that he sets up our organization is for each of our coaches to work against each other instead of working together.
At University 2, Dawn does not have that luxury, even as a full-time coach. She understands limitations but feels that all head coaches and assistant coaches should have some perks, especially within the athletic department. Lately, Dawn feels like she is doing a lot more fighting than coaching. “That is the part for me now; I don’t know how much longer I will stick it out on the coaching side of it. I just don’t like the internal battles. I know they are everywhere. We have a wishy washy organization.” Dawn shared that she really enjoys her new position and location. However, she admitted that she wasn’t convinced about the position, but was very open to learn. “Yeah well I didn’t know I was pretty open to see what was out there. It was a city I always enjoyed traveling to, so that definitely put it up there on the map.”

Despite the obstacles, Dawn understands that her future looks bright and full of opportunity. She shared her thoughts:

I think I will continue to be in sports and sports admin. And I have a real passion in trying to get young women in sports. For all of our girls, we put them through coaching drills each year and then when we send them out to the community - they have to come up with a plan and I have to see it. Then I provide them with feed-back on their teaching. You watch them grow. . . . Again, it is getting young girls interested in coaching and by going out in the community and talking to young kids about the program. We offer a lot of programs with our team. We are running coaching camps and kids clinics.’

As a female coach, Dawn believes she needs to talk about things that work, the challenges she faces and the changes that need to be implemented into the present programs.

Dawn enjoys only certain parts of recruiting and administration. She enjoys meeting one-on-one with the athletes and learning about where they have come from as a person and an athlete. Dawn does not like sitting at the field all day watching different team’s practices and games; what she enjoys the most is the on field coaching. She loves interacting and implementing different techniques and tactics, and watching her players develop and grow as
athletes, rugby players and people. In the end, when the time came for Dawn to really reflect on the importance of sport, Dawn said that rugby had taught her not to take rugby and sport for granted and to appreciate each and every opportunity that it presents.
Life History (5): Serena

Serena is the only coach interviewed from a sport dominated by female coaches. She coached softball for over 20 years while at the same time always holding a full time position within a sport organization or university athletic department. She has been married for over twenty years to her husband Ryan and they have two children. Serena has coached at the high school, club, provincial, university and national level.

Developmental Stage - “Growing Up”

Serena was born and raised just outside of a city in central Canada. For the most part, she was raised in a divided family. Serena expressed her feelings about being put in the middle of her parents’ arguments, and explained that she had an emotionally challenging childhood. Serena constantly felt as if she was in a tug-of-war and grew up believing she was part of the problem. Although her parents divorced when she was 4 years old, their fighting lasted until Serena was about 14. During this time Serena lived with her mother who was unfortunately not competent at living on her own. Consequently, from the age of 10, Serena was doing laundry, grocery shopping, banking - “generally everything.”

Serena’s mother never remarried but her father did when she was 8 years old. He married a younger woman whom he had begun to date while still married to Serena’s mother. From Serena’s perspective, the only positive outcome from this experience was that they eventually got married and are still together today. Serena admitted that, at first, it was extremely hard to get comfortable with her father’s new wife, but as adults they now have a good relationship: “Yes, I think that my relationships with my step mother and my father are much better now that I am an adult, because I was very clouded by what I thought was, but I think it is much better.”
Despite her parents’ difficult break up, Serena felt lucky that her parents had taught her to see the world without colour or gender barriers. Serena believed that she could do anything she put her mind to; this was an attitude her parents helped her develop throughout her childhood. Even though Serena tried to keep a positive outlook with her parents, she found herself reaching out to other networks of support and guidance. As a young leader, Serena found positive mentoring from her coaches and teachers. “I remember in high school there were some really good coaches who really provided a good foundation for me.”

One thing that kept Serena grounded was organized events. Her experiences in extracurricular activities after school helped her to stay focused. Serena explained how her mother and father were not invested in her extra activities and did not drive her to games or practices. Fortunately, the school buses took her everywhere she needed to go. “Well it was something that occupied me. So they didn’t have to really do anything. . . I loved sports and I loved playing and I loved doing those things. I liked play days at elementary school.” Serena went into more detail:

I was always sporty and playing outside with the kids. That’s what we all did; we all played outside all of the time. There were lots of kids on my street. The only organized sport I ever played was at school until I could drive, and then when I could drive I played club volleyball as well, and then I could get to that kind of stuff.

Serena did not feel any differently from the other girls growing up, however, she felt more comfortable with the boys. She considered herself a “tomboy”. She just loved to be involved in different sports and activities: “I was probably more comfortable with boys though, and still to this day. But I think that is because they are more interested in sports. I don’t connect as well with women who have no background in sports or recreation, because there is just no real connection with them.”

Serena loved her high school years. She excelled both as a student and an athlete. High school was where she had some of the best times of her life:
I was in the jock group and everybody thought that we were the greatest things ever. Other people will tell you things about their high schools especially about our high school where we went and not enjoying it but if you were an athlete, it was good.

Serena explained that she spent most of her time playing basketball, volleyball, field hockey and soccer: “But volleyball and basketball I was really good. And then we had intramurals and all of that kind of stuff, where I played badminton.”

It wasn’t until Serena was older that she began to understand the importance of participating in sport. Initially it was an escape from her parents, but over time Serena became passionate about sport: “I think it started as an escape but then I loved it more and more.” For Serena, sport was an outlet to relieve stress:

It was a reason why I didn’t have to do all the stuff at home, because I had to go to practice or I had to do this and I had to do that. So that was good. But then the more I got involved the more I think I just loved sports and it just became something that I do.

Serena’s high school had an incredibly positive atmosphere with strong leadership from teachers and coaches. Serena continued to comment on her other extracurricular activities during high school:

I played the clarinet and saxophone. That was a big part of our life too. I guess there were about eight of us athletes who were also involved in music in the band. We had a really good music program and a really good music teacher and everybody loved him so we all wanted to be part of what he did. Just like, we had great coaches and great teachers in that school as well. There was a lot of leadership there . . . and it was built on ‘freedom with responsibility.’ So it was built on giving kids a lot of leeway and a lot of say in what we did, as long as there was a lot of responsibility and everyone knew what the consequences were. That was the whole purpose of that school; it was kind of an experimental thing, so it attracted a lot of really good teachers there because of the type of school environment. People like me, who were already pretty independent, would really thrive as student leaders. We really hooked in with the strong teacher leaders and coaches, which became a really strong bond [sic]. Our athletic council was great, we did all kinds of really fun things and fund raising things, and non-profit things and that was because we were all into that. Athletic council became a big thing for us as well.

Serena saw herself as a leader: “In athletic council I became president. I was always captain of the teams, I always volunteered to do extra things and it helped my leadership skills.”
Serena also believed having adult responsibilities and older people around her helped her leadership skills:

I think I always wanted to be busy because it benefited me at home to always have something to do so I was always really busy. I would always volunteer; I always wanted to do more. . . . I think we all do this with young people. If we see the benefits of helping them, we sort of latch on and say okay here is what else we can do, and I think people in our school did that.

Serena shared some of her relationship experiences she had during high school. “I would say that I had two or three really great friends, and I had lots of people who said they were friends. We were friends, we were all friends but I had three really close friends, two girls and one guy.” Serena began to date in high school but nothing was serious until she met Ryan. Ryan was in grade thirteen and Serena was in grade eleven when they started to date:

Yeah, we met when I was in grade 9 and he was in grade 11. He was in the athlete group and then we were really good friends for a long time and then we just started to date, things changed and I don’t even know what it was. One day he just walked me home and it changed then. . . . we sort of hooked-up and that was it we were just together.

Ryan and his family instantly became a positive support system for Serena. They dated and also continued to be great friends.

High school was a wonderful experience and learning environment for Serena. Serena enjoyed every subject, except for math. She was successful and found that academics came easily to her. However, she still put a lot of time into her studies and managed to graduate with a 93% average. She also enjoyed being around her classmates and teachers.

Another factor that increased Serena’s involvement with sport was getting her driver’s license. This provided Serena with more mobility, which allowed her to become involved in sport outside of school. She participated in club volleyball and was able to experience different styles of coaching and leadership. Serena was always on the go which provided her with more experiences to prepare her for university sport:
They [coaches] were not spectacular - that was my first interaction with male coaches. And so they were, it just didn’t have the same feel. But my experience was so good in high school, that it is probably a difficult comparison. . . . It wasn’t the greatest experience [with the university coaches]. But I think it was because the other ones were better so I think that’s why.

Serena explained her rationale behind choosing University 1:

I went to [University 1], because my mother went to [University 1] and she thought that was the best school to go to. I only applied to two universities and I don’t know why I didn’t go to [University 2] actually. It would have made more sense. . . . I wasn’t being recruited by anybody at the other university. I was only being recruited by people at [University 1]. In the summer, Mary, who was the [softball] coach at the time, was recruiting me as well. My mom worked by the university, so she could drop me off most times on my way to school. It just logistically was better.

Serena continued to do well academically at university; however, it did not happen without hard work. Serena completed a three year degree in history and political science with aspirations of becoming a lawyer. She set goals for herself but was never 100% sure of the future:

I knew I didn’t want to be a teacher, because my mother was a teacher. But I never really thought that I would have a career in recreation because at that time you couldn’t see that. So, I thought a lawyer would be a good thing to do.

Soon after choosing University 1, Serena decided to play varsity softball instead of varsity volleyball. Her only rationale was that softball season started first:

I got into it first. I don’t know why I never went back to volleyball because I was a very good player and I would have made it. I would have been starting centre probably, I was good. I did it for five years and it was so important in high school and then for some reason I just changed over.

After reflecting on her coach-athlete relationships, Serena compared her first experience with a male coach in the club volleyball to her first experience with a university softball coach:

So when I went to [University 1] the head [softball] coach was the national coach, who had won a battle for Canada’s national team at the World Cup. She was very successful, very hard, not interested at all in people, only in [softball]. . . . She didn’t really care what else you were doing.
After having experienced empowering leadership in high school, university sport was a difficult adjustment. Serena was used to her coaches caring about her as a person. Serena explained:

It wasn’t something that I was really used to. It was a hard adjustment for me. I would say that by the end of the time that I was there we had kind of reached a truth but I wasn’t really happy that she wasn’t interested in what I would call now ‘personal development’ I wouldn’t call it that then but. She had no interest in our academics; she had no interest in our lives. She was old school; she was an old school coach.

Serena shared some of her experiences that helped her to develop as a coach and a leader:

I learned a ton. I would not be the coach I am today if I hadn’t had the experience with her first. I know that absolutely, for sure. But it wasn’t always enjoyable and the team wasn’t very ‘teamy.’ It wasn’t a tight group, there were some of us that were pretty tight but it wasn’t the strongest team. She liked to go wrap [pick favourites] around one person, so if you weren’t the one person, who I wasn’t, you were always like a back-up player all the time, and I never thought that we would be successful and it wasn’t. We were okay, successful but we weren’t great.

She found the overall environment at University 1 to be cold. It was considered a commuter’s school and people came and left often. She said that there was very little connection, with limited orientation. “You just don’t feel like you are part of anything there and that’s what I didn’t like.”

Contrary to her experience with sport at University 1, Serena’s academic experience had a positive effect on her learning and studying habits. Serena explained:

They have a very strong history of global sciences there, so the academic stuff was really good. I enjoyed that, I enjoyed the challenge of it. I was in a huge shock when I got my first C+. Really, getting my 93 average [in high school] and I didn’t really have to work at it because I was fortunate to have things drilled into me when I was really young.

Serena’s parents did not help her financially with her living or education expenses; she had to pay for everything herself. Therefore Serena started to work at Sears. Her uncle worked for Sears as a director, and from the time she was 15 until she finished university, Serena worked and
saved money. She had to work full-time every summer to put herself through university.

During this time, Serena lived with her uncle:

He [uncle] was great. He really provided. I didn't have a super close relationship with him but he provided me assistance. He got me the job; or well he got the door open. My first year I did very well, and then from that point on I always had a job there. I must have been there for eight years. But it was great. They paid me the same wages they would pay me as new people coming in, so I didn't have loans and it was much cheaper then. I think you could go to school for $2,000.00, I'm sure you could. I think my first year it was only $1,700, but it is nothing like that now. So I could make enough money in the summer and still have money left over. I was lucky that I didn’t have any loans or anything when I finished.

When Serena was in grade 13, she and Ryan got engaged before starting university.

They decided to get married at the end of Serena’s second year of university, when Serena was 21 and Ryan was 24. At that time, Ryan was playing on a national sport team and graduated with a degree in science. After graduation, Ryan pursued a specialized course in computer programming. Initially, Serena intended to complete a four year degree but she and Ryan received a surprise at the end of her third year: Serena was pregnant:

I had gotten really sick and I had either not taken my pills [birth control pills] properly or I threw them up. I had the really bad flu. So unexpectedly about a year after we were married I was pregnant. My first child was born in July and our two year anniversary was a week later. So at that time I decided not to go back. At that time you could do three year degrees so I had enough to finish my three year degree, so I did that.

After completing her degree, Serena volunteered with the provincial organization and coached her former high school softball team. This was Serena’s first coaching job; she was 22 years old and she was a head coach.

Professional Development Stage - “Athlete to Coach”

Serena explained that she knew she could be a coach after her university experience. Serena admitted that it was not something she had thought about when she was younger, but when the opportunity came up it was perfect timing:
I’d come out of the program with Mary and another coach and I was like yeah I can do that. They phoned and asked me, they knew I just finished up school, so I said, ‘Yeah sure I can do that.’ So I went back and did it, and we won the championship.

Serena was confident in her ability to put together a program and lead a team, because of her past experiences with high quality programs. She was also able to develop good relationships with the athletes. Another advantage for Serena in this situation was that she had never played with any of the current high school players. This may have helped her gain respect from the players.

Serena explained that she had always enjoyed the idea of coaching: “I always volunteered to do intramurals at high school and that kind of stuff. I thought that coaching was cool, I liked it and my role models were really good at coaching, so that was easy.” The year of volunteer experience was a major confidence booster for Serena as a coach and as a leader. She explained:

I loved it. It was good for me. There had to be a staff volunteer because they don’t allow someone from the outside to coach at a high school. The teacher that helped out was great! She didn’t know anything about [softball] but she was a phys-ed teacher. So she was really good to balance general team building and that sort of stuff. Like things that I didn’t have a lot of experience in. So she was a huge part of that, a really, really big part of that.

Serena was grateful that one of her mentors was taking a chance on her as a young coach. This opportunity provided a transition to many more experiences and opportunities:

I would probably guess that she was probably about 32. So ten years older than I was, for sure. So she was really great, and the kids were good. . . . I think that I did the right things but those kids were good, they were a good team, they just needed a little bit of extra pushing in certain areas. They were good together, they were very strong together. Then when we won, Betty [head coach at University 2] was at the final, she came up to me there and said to me, ‘Wow you have done great with this bunch of kids, would you like to coach provincial?’ And that is how I got into coaching provincially.

Betty was the head technical coach of provincial softball, which is part of the provincial Woman’s softball Association.
Serena believed that she had become involved in a sport with no real barriers; “It is interesting how I moved from that type of situation into softball, where there were no barriers.” After being recruited by Betty, Serena began to help with the under 16 provincial team when she was 22 years old, soon after her first child. After having a baby, Serena started to work as a program coordinator. Just after Serena finished school, she took a job with Softball Canada. She was responsible for the athlete development programming; she therefore ran clinics all over the province. Serena would take her child with her knowing that she could count on a player, parent or teacher on the sidelines to baby-sit during each practice.

Serena admitted that if she were asked to explain her coaching philosophy years ago, she would have no clue how to answer the question. But after many years of experience and dealing with different coaches and athletes, she felt comfortable answering the question and expressing her coaching philosophy: “I think that I brought in what I had lived, with Mary and other coaches.” She explained that she had to leave some coaching qualities behind because a number of her mentors coached with an autocratic style. They didn’t look at the bigger picture in relation to the person and player. Serena explained her thoughts on why women may have coached the way they did in the past:

I think everyone coached that way, I think it was just the way you coached at that time. I think the women were emulating the men, because they wanted to be successful, they wanted to be thought of as a coach, not as a man or a woman. I think that [at] the high school level, they all coached that way. The athletes are too entitled, they know what they want and they know what they are entitled to. It is not as easy to be a coach now as it was then, because like you just said, you do it or you get out.

Serena is interested in the athletes and the bigger picture:

I brought in excellence, I brought in work ethic and training, and I brought in planning, because I was always a planner and organizer, so I brought that, but I was also interested in the kids. We did lots of team building things and fun things and I got the parents involved. So I took the best of my experiences and just changed it a little bit.
While Serena was pregnant, she still maintained her commitment to Softball Canada. She described her duties:

We trained in the winter and then we put the kids into the club league on Saturday mornings, these are kids from all over [the province]. We would organize billets, they would come in on Friday night, they would play club league on Saturday morning, we would train Saturday afternoon and we would train on Sunday. . . . So it was a big commitment for $250, but we weren’t in it for the money. It was to get better, to become a better coach.

Serena believed that she was a good coach, so she wanted to give this opportunity a try. However, she was paired with an unusual partner during the year. Serena said that they played against each other and tended to have quite different personalities and coaching styles. Serena explained that this woman came from the same era as Betty, and from Serena’s perspective Betty was not the most reasonable person when it came to sport and coaching:

She was hard on those kids at [University 2]. So this girl was a product of that . . . so it wasn’t a great coaching match up because we didn’t share the same values at all, but we made it work. We didn’t share the same values and we were never paired up again after that.

Serena coached the same program for a couple of years, which she believed was the beginning of her coaching career. Serena then advanced to coach at the university level, ran the provincial programs and became the executive director of provincial softball. To be so involved and to be able to put her heart and soul into each program, Serena explained that the time commitment was enormous.

A positive aspect of Serena’s lifestyle and work was the flexibility. She only went into the office a couple of days a week, while Ryan worked three days a week. “It worked out pretty well.” Serena explained that she maintained that routine until she had her second child. Serena was now 25 years old and she had to coach through her pregnancy because she was only allowed sixteen weeks of paid time off of work. Serena shared her experience:

I took the four months and then I decided that I would just go back part-time, and so they created a position for me at [the provincial softball organization] that was part-
time technical director which really was full-time but I could do half of it at home, because it was coach education and officiating education. So I only had to go into work three days a week and then I did other stuff at home and I taught coaching clinics because by that point, for sure, I was already a level 2. I just kept going along with the certification program.

During September of 1988 the head coach (Mary) of University 1 asked Serena to coach University 1 for a month until she and her coaching staff got back from the Olympics. Serena accepted the offer knowing that it would be great for her career, while understanding that it would be a huge sacrifice for her and her family:

I knew that I’d have to be there at seven in the morning five days a week. I was working full time. I mean it was exhausting. Six to eight every morning and I had to commute. I had a child too but I felt that I shouldn’t pass it up.

After the positive experience she had, Serena was disappointed when the coaching staff retuned from the Olympics and did not ask her to stay on the coaching staff: “That is how they are, because her assistant coach is also her partner, is also the assistant coach of the national team. I think I got $2,000; they paid me well for sure. But I was really disappointed in that.”

One week later, Betty at University 2 asked Serena to be her assistant coach. Once Mary heard that Betty had asked Serena to be part of their coaching staff, Mary called Serena to present her with a similar offer. Both head coaches realized that they were ready to retire soon and needed to hire an excellent candidate to take over their programs:

So I had to make a choice then, but I made the right one. I thought [University 1] wasn’t that great, I didn’t like the environment. I thought that it was going to be hard to recruit people here because I don’t believe what I am saying, so I said to her, ‘No I think I am going to stay where I am at,’ and she was pissed off.

Serena was happy with the way things were unfolding for her career. She continued to share the opportunities that brought her to an elite status:

The executive director position came up at [provincial softball office] at the same time that Betty asked me to be her assistant coach at [University 2]. . . . I didn’t get the job at [provincial Softball office]. . . . I thought, I was naive though, I had no idea the politics. . . . I think it would have been taking a chance on a younger person with less experience
but also a person who had proven themselves and who had a really good work ethic; like they would have gotten their bang for their buck, for sure.

Serena continued to explain different obstacles that perhaps affected her confidence:

When I was coaching with Betty I wanted to get better at it, but it was a nightmare, because she was competitive and so demanding, not only with the kids but with the staff, it was difficult, I never had headaches in my life until I started coaching at [University 2] and then I had tension headaches all of the time. Yes, I was sick. She was so hard on them and so irrational at times, I mean people don’t know, when they see her now, they have no idea what she was like, but if you talk to people who coached against her in the era they would tell you the same thing. She would pick a couple of kids and she would ride them all year. And I was replacing her long term assistant coach, who was her long time assistant, but who had also been abrupt, she [Betty] walked all over her. It was her job in the morning to bring Betty her coffee and hold her umbrella when it was raining. I said from the beginning that I am not doing that, I am doing this to become a better coach and hopefully to become a head coach at a university.

As an assistant coach, Serena’s explored her duties:

Well it was difficult to say, it was not written in stone. She would do all of the practice plans and then we would divvy it up at practice that day. I did individual work with the kids. I did all the administration work for the program. No we did the recruiting together. There was no email at that time, remember this was a long time ago, it was 1990. Email was just starting at that time, and not everybody had it. But the scheduling and the facilities, and the clothing and the uniforms all the game sheets, all of the reporting, I did all of that.

Serena explained that she enjoyed the position immensely, even though it was extremely stressful: “It was highly stressful and you had to be good always. You always had to be good. But it was enjoyable and we did well. We had national team kids so the high performance was all there.”

Serena decided to keep some of the coaching ideas and leave others behind. The team talks were one area of coaching where Serena did not share the same values as Betty. Serena shared some of her learning experiences:

I’m trying to remember about team talks, she is a real believer having one voice at half time. So at half time it was all her. With my assistant coaches I always have their input for the most part. There may have been two or three times that I say I am doing this one myself and usually it was because we weren’t playing well. It had nothing to do with tactics or anything, it was just we were taking it for granted. They just needed
motivation at that point. For the most part I feel that I am an empowering leader and I like them to feel that it is as much theirs as it is mine. So I never stopped my people from speaking.

After a of couple years, Betty finally retired as head coach of softball but continued to be the athletic director at University 2, Serena then stepped in and became the head coach the following year:

I was still working with [provincial softball organization] as executive director, not coaching provincials anymore. I stopped in ’92. But I was the personal coach for a bunch of athletes on the national team. So I was responsible to monitor their training and make sure we do individual sessions and that sort of thing.

Serena explained that she had been provided with ample opportunity for softball work in Canada and had many women and coaches to look up to. However, she did not feel that many of the other coaches shared a similar coaching philosophy to her own. She explained how there may have been one coach with a similar perspective:

Maybe my boss at the [provincial softball organization], because it’s a PSO [Provincial Sport Organization], so it is non-profit, so it was volunteer board, so the president taught wellness and I learned a lot from her about [softball] and administration. I also learned about perspectives, wellness and whole person development. So she taught me a lot, and we spent a lot of time together because we would have to go to meetings all over the country as the executive director and the president. You know you are in a hotel room, you’re on a bus, and you’re on a plane. So she was really, really good. She kind of created the touchy feely side of coaching for me. And of course, Mary was a huge mentor for me in terms of [softball] and excellence, and so was Betty. Betty taught me about the value of scouting and the value of pre-game planning, the value of video and the value of hard work. So I learned all of that from her.

Serena did things differently as a head coach but continued to implement all of the elements she had learned. In addition, she continued to create and develop a more personal touch to the coach-athlete relationship. She enjoyed that aspect the most.

Serena believes that another one of her major strengths is her organizational skills. This quality was put to the test when she was juggling a number of different roles; she was taking care of her two children, coaching a number of different teams and was an administrator for provincial softball organization. She was thankful that the position was flexible, which
enabled her to manage everything. Due to a lack of funding, Serena negotiated an arrangement where she would only go into work four days a week instead of five. Serena described the family team effort that was needed to make everything work:

I always had Mondays off. . . . And then Ryan always kicked in too, it was always us doing things together. It was an equal partnership. It has always been, we clean together, and we cook together. I can do everything he does, and he can do everything I do. It has always been that way and the kids have always benefited from that.

Serena stayed at the provincial softball organization for a long time because of that flexibility. Serena stopped being a provincial coach in 1992, but became a personal coach for five individual athletes on the national team. She was responsible for monitoring their training and participation in individual sessions.

Despite her past experiences, Serena explained that she felt enormous pressure when she first became the head coach at University 2: “I felt continuing in Betty’s shoes was difficult. Bernie my assistant coach, he had gone to [University 2] the year before I did, so he was one of her assistants before I got there, and then we were the two assistants after that. So I kept him on.” Serena explained how she put her coaching staff together: “I surrounded myself with people, who were good, but also, with people I liked, and that has always been big for me in coaching. It has to be fun for me with the coaches. It has to be fun.” Serena continued to explain the pressure she felt during her first year as head coach:

It was a lot of pressure, I remember my first CI’s [Canadian Interuniversity sport championships] I said to Bernie when we were getting ready to go play the semi-final game, I felt so soft, I said to him, ‘You go, I’ll just stay here.’ He looked at me, and I think I was actually serious at one time, he said to me, ‘You aren’t actually going to stay here?’ I said, ‘I really want to stay.’

Serena shared that she had a constant “horrible” but competitive feeling right up until the day she retired. She had extremely high expectations of herself, the team and the program. She continued:
And I feel sick every time we go to play [in the provincial finals] final but I’m telling you that is what makes me good, in coaching, because I feel that I take it personally and I feel that it is on me . . . but it takes a huge toll and that is why I had to stop, because after 17 years of that.

Although Serena still enjoyed the relationships she made while coaching, she needed a break from the stress and time commitments:

I mean I love winning, I am really competitive and I love winning, but I loved the relationship with the kids more. That was way more important to me, but I couldn’t get rid of the other part. Every year at the beginning of the year I would say to myself, ‘Okay I’m going to keep perspective; I am not going to take everything so personally.’ I looked after the process because the process determined the outcome, like if you didn’t have the process you wouldn’t get the outcome you wanted. But I always thought the outcome was really important to me. The outcomes for the most part were really positive and Betty would just say, ‘you’re crazy,’ and I would say, ‘I know, I know!’ I’d be in my office crying and I’d be like this is how it is for me. I don’t know how to get out of this. She didn’t have any ideas.

Serena shared how she got involved with the national team program. She explained that all of her provincial and university coaching experiences had prepared her for the next step. Serena met the head coach of the national team and she instantly realized that the head coach and Betty coached very similarly. Serena admitted: “She and Betty are exactly the same. The two of them would say that they are both different from each other. I’ve been assistant coach to both of those women and they are exactly the same.” Serena was asked to do a one week training camp before the national team was going to the Olympic qualifiers. It was a great experience and happened at a perfect time because when she came back, there was a full-time job opening at University 2:

There was only one position that was going to be posted for outside. So everything else was going to be done internally, like every incestuous institution does. The one job was the program manager for the community, which is not even my gig at all. Like camp? I had never done a camp for little kids or anything. I was preparing for that interview when Amy [former national team coach] would have me out, so I would go to training and then I would have six or seven hours to myself just in the hotel room. I would just go back and go over it [preparation interview notes] and over it and ask myself questions.
The committee, especially the dean and Betty, liked what Serena had presented. Her interview was extremely well done and professional. Serena explained that they had someone else in mind for the position but because she continued to surprise the committee during the interview, they could not say no to her. The dean said to her: “You know we kept having you back because we couldn’t believe you could keep doing as well as you were doing.” Serena went into more detail about her situation at that time:

At that point I was ready to get out of [provincial softball organization]. I had gone as far as I could go, and it was time to have more security, have a pension, have more money, and that sort of thing. My kids were older, so that was 1998, so I was 35. All that time I am coaching [University 2] and I am coaching provincial and I am doing a little bit regional work for the national team but not actually in the program, then I got asked to go out to Vancouver.

After a long process, Serena was offered the job, but it came with a twist – the athletic director (Betty) explained to her that the dean wanted her for the position but did not think she would have enough time to be both a coach and an administrator. Serena said that this topic never came up during the interviews but she was able to regroup and tell herself that taking one year off from coaching was okay. She said: “But I will be back. I will just keep working until I finally get back in. So I put my assistant coach as the head coach for the year that was ’98.”

The unfortunate part of the situation was that Serena felt that the varsity softball team should have won the nationals that year. She expressed confidently: “I know if I were coaching we would have [won]. He [Bernie] couldn’t handle the pressure of that team and be able to make the adjustments he needed to make.” Serena articulated that she completely removed herself from the team that season:

I didn’t go to a single practice, I went to some games, because he begged me to and that he said he would only do this with the understanding that he was not going to be the head coach and that I would be back. He said, ‘I am not doing this to be head coach, I am doing this to get us out of this year and you will be back next year.’ So I went to the games that were at home and I sat on the stands and we bought walkie-talkies and I would tell him what I was seeing, and we won the [provincials], I mean we killed the other team. I think we won 4-0. But not in nationals, that was hard, the kids were
resentful. The kids were really angry [because they had to see their ‘nice’ assistant coach move into the head coach position. This confirmed to the athletes the value of Serena’s coaching] They were angry but I think it also taught them a lesson because everybody loves the coach at the time, he is the very easy-going kind of guy, but that’s not how it is with coaches, you have to have discipline. So in some ways it was bad but in other ways is was okay.

Serena summarized why she felt they should have won that year: “Two years before, we had won nationals, in 1996 and the young group were in third year when we won, were on the team in 1998, and we should have won. There is no question that we should have won.”

In spite of the disappointment after the team’s loss, Serena expressed that she really enjoyed her current job. The position was a demanding and a high energy job; however on the downside the position had very limited support:

I had nobody. I had one person and him and I did everything. All of those coordinators and all of those people that they have now; we did everything. It was ours, I can’t even tell you, and it was ridiculous hours. We expanded the program, and we changed the curriculum, we did a lot of really good things, but it just became a monster.

Soon after the season was over, Serena met with Betty to express her interest in coaching again. She said to Betty: “I want to go over what we are going to do about getting my coaching position back because this is just crazy.” Serena pushed her on a many different levels, especially with respect to women in coaching and advancement. Betty then spoke with the dean and by the next season Serena was the head coach once again. Serena was now the program manager and the head coach of University 2.

Later that year, Serena received a phone call from the head coach [Amy] of the national team asking her to be the assistant coach. She explained to Serena the process required her to apply for the “Women in Coaching Apprentice Program” to help pay for her funding. Serena went into detail:

She had everything ready. So I applied for the apprenticeship, I got the apprenticeship, did a tour of the world that summer. We went to Holland and Germany in preparation of the Pan-Am [Pan American] Cup, which is the continental qualifier for the World Cup and then Amy left, she retired. Then another coach came in after that and that was
a little crazy. I think I became the consistent person for the national team, from 2000 onward, until I finished in 2006. I was the high performance director, assistant coach, program manager; like I kind of did everything.

**Leadership Stage – “The Elite Coach”**

Serena shared the process she went through to make the opportunity with the national team possible:

So in 2003, I went to Betty and said I want to take 13 months off as a leave of absence because we were preparing for the Pan-Am [Pan American Games] Olympic Games qualifiers. So [Softball] Canada asked me if I would be the full-time assistant coach for that 13 month period.

Serena was given the time off and was expected to help the national team progress into the best possible position going into the Olympics. Serena explained:

Argentina is in the Pan American Games obviously and they were ranked number one in the world. We weren’t going to beat them, but we were hoping to beat the Americans to come second, which would have gotten us into another Olympic qualifier level. It is all about levels.

Serena was exposed to many new and exciting opportunities to excel:

I approached Betty and she was very supportive, so I took off from March 2003 to April 2004, I wasn’t full-time at the university. Now I was away for big periods of time but then when I was back in town I would do projects for Betty and she would pay me for them. I was out in Vancouver and then I would be back. So Betty phoned and said, ‘Can you take a position up until the end of March, as much as you can do?’ But she knew that I would be away for a week and then I could be there and then I would be away for a week so that is when I was the program director, which was great, because it expanded my recreation, which I hadn’t really had a lot of. So career wise, that was huge. It was really good. Then I went to the Pan-American Cup and during that time, the equipment manager announced that he was leaving in March of 2003. He grabbed me and said, ‘I’m retiring and you should have my job.’ I said, ‘I am coaching nationals so I can’t, there is nothing I can do about that.’ . . . He went and told them that he’s retiring and ‘she [Serena] is not going to be here for 13 more months, so you should put someone in place interim, and when she is back you should open it up for her’; which she [Betty] did.

When Serena returned from the Pan-American Cup she was to go through a hiring process for the position of intercollegiate manager at University 2. This position was something she had always wanted to do: “It is perfect for my skill set. I had just come off being the hired
instructor for Canada. Things happen for a reason.” During this time, Serena was also offered the head coach position of the national team. She had been asked on a number of different occasions but had declined each time. Serena explained:

They [Serena’s children] weren’t in university yet. I would have had to take them out of school and move to Vancouver and I would have had to give up my university job; which I worked so hard to get. I was 37 at that time, so I had to start thinking about pensions and that sort of thing; I had worked a long time in the non-profit sector. We had enough money to pay the bills, but we hadn’t put a ton of money away. At one point I had accepted it and then a week later I had gone back and said that I can’t do it. I hadn’t told anyone I accepted it and I got talked into it.

Another reason Serena had declined the head coach position of the national team was because of the lack of program funding. She said there wasn’t enough funding in the national program to be successful: “I can accept not being successful, but not having the tools to be successful, and when you don’t have the structure to attempt to be successful; I’m past that.” Serena shared her feelings around coaching during that particular stage and time in her life:

You know what, I’ve moved on now. I haven’t coached [university] since that last game in the fall, but I am coaching the provincial team now. . . . I missed it, but I am frustrated because I think the coaches are really poor right now. . . . I miss the interaction with the kids, and there are some kids now who would be seniors who I coached in university and the Canada Games and that sort of stuff. And I feel badly for them because they haven’t had a decent coach for a while.

Family has always been a very important part of Serena’s life; she understands the importance of having supportive and caring relationships. She reiterated that her lifestyle would not have been possible if it wasn’t for the support from her partner Ryan. Serena described her husband’s amazing support:

Ryan is all for it. I am making Ryan the assistant coach, so he will come on the trips and we discussed it and I said that you are going to be my assistant coach, and he said, ‘No I am not doing that.’ I said, ‘Yes you are, get your stuff together, because you have to be approved, my darling.’

Serena and Ryan worked full-time, coached and took care of two children. When not working or in school, the family was at a field somewhere. Serena said that they tried really hard to
keep the kids out of softball, but because she and Ryan were so active that both of their children were constantly around the athletes and coaches from a young age. In spite of their decision not to have the children involved in softball, they both ended up playing organized softball once they were teenagers:

They could do all of the stuff, but they never played organized [softball] until they were fifteen. Neither one of them did. You know how hard it is, they know why we did it. I just laugh at that, but I feel bad for [the children] because I think it is hard on them. Everybody has opinions and everyone will say what they want to say, and they hear it.

Serena gave the example of an internet website where many players, parents, coaches, administrators and fans of the sport can search and chat online about anything or anybody anonymously. Serena shared her family’s experience:

For a long time, we had this on-line program where you didn’t have to identify yourself, it just went out, I don’t know where it went. This was when I was the national team coach, and of course there’s going to be, there were brutal things about me on there, and I would catch [the children] on there and I would be like, “Get off of it!” [italics added] I would say, “They will write anything you guys.” And, I hated it, because I would read it too and I shouldn’t have, then when I caught them on it, I stopped because we made it a pact in the house that nobody goes on the site ever again. Then we stopped. But it is hard for them; it still is hard for them.

Even though Serena did not want her children in softball, she loved traveling as a family to watch her children play. Serena also loved traveling as a coach. She loved experiencing the world with the athletes, coaches and her family. Serena and Ryan share a passion for travel:

“We don’t travel as much as we would like to but it is because it has been so busy, it just hasn’t happened but it will.” However, the family does take vacations once in a while outside of sport commitments:

Our best vacation is in the Caribbean for a week just us together and that is when we realize what good friends we are too. We can spend as much time as possible together and not have any problems. So that is our best vacation. People always say, ‘You look so rested’ when I come back, but it is because it is totally stress free, I’m with the person who is the most important to me, and so it is good.
Serena created opportunities for herself to travel and also for other female coaches to gain international travel experience: “I took coaches who were up and coming coaches to help them get better. Like, I am the master coach for a [university coach], so I got her involved, and she became the video coach [of the national team].” Serena explained how this young coach recently asked her to be her mentor coach. She accepted the offer and says that it was a great relationship: “I think it is great to be able to pass on what you’ve learned to other people.”

Serena believes that people tend to flock to her as a mentor. Coaches and administrators talk to her and want her to mentor them, but she doesn’t say yes to everyone; especially because she has been “burned” in the past. She is very careful who she says yes to these days:

But if it is somebody who has passion and obviously shares my commitment around coaching and ethics and whole personal development then I’m all for that for sure. Now I am doing some coach education stuff, I am back into that and doing some certification clinics and doing some public speaking. I don’t like preparing for it, but then once I get there, I like that.

Reflecting on her position with University 2 as the intercollegiate sport manager, Serena admitted that it was a perfect position for her personality: “The intercollegiate job was perfect for me, I loved it because I could work with coaches but there were things I didn’t like for sure, but that is with every job.” However, while Serena was trying to be both the head coach and the intercollegiate manager of University 2, she felt that the team suffered due to her lack of time to socialize and really connect with the players:

I think my team suffered a bit with that. I think I didn’t spend as much time team building and the social stuff. I would go to practice and then I would go to work. I didn’t spend a lot of extra time with them. I regret that, I don’t think there was anything I could do about it, but I regret it and I think it took away from my enjoyment.

Serena described her emotional and physical state during the end of her last season as head coach at University 2:
I got to the stage where, particularly before a final, that I would be at my wits end. I would be exhausted, really emotional, and cranky with everything and everyone at home, at work, with the kids; because it was too much, I couldn’t do it. And that last year almost did me in, being responsible for the transition and coaching and looking after everything else. . . . I was doing all of the promotion plans plus the transition, plus my regular job, plus coaching.

Serena then shared how she had let her personal health become less of a priority due to the demands and stress of her job. Her demands were much higher than her resources and support systems, and she believes that her health suffered because of this. Serena went into detail:

I handled it but not particularly well. And for myself, I think that is why I got sick this summer. I think I pushed and pushed and pushed and my body said, ‘Okay I’m going to stop you now.’ I’m lucky that my body reacted the way it did, because it could have turned into cancer, the pre-cancerous condition was there, and it could have turned into cancer. I was forced to go into emergency and have a blood transfusion that is how much I bled out. You know, you just keep thinking it’s going to stop, it’s going to stop. Then when I went to the ER I got a huge lecture from the nurse and the doctor, about how I let it get to the stage where I needed a blood transfusion and that I could have affected my brain’s ability to function because my haemoglobin was so poor and here is the specialist you are going to go see on Monday and they made the appointment. That is when they found the problem and then it was like okay, let’s do this.

The stress finally caught up to Serena; psychologically and physically her mind and body wanted to shut down. She felt that she was not getting much support from her athletic director, who kept piling on the work:

I’m sure it is because of that, I didn’t look after myself; I was way too stressed out. . . . I am lucky because if it had proceeded in a different way, I may not have paid as much attention, but when you are bleeding for 45 days, you’re like, okay.

Ryan kept asking her to get something done and to look after her health but Serena continued to push it down her priority list.

In 2006 Serena was head-hunted by a rival university to become their intercollegiate manager. She explained that it was a job offer that would have been extremely hard to turn down. The athletic director proposed that Serena would be able to create a position that would apply her strengths and enjoyments. This opportunity would also be less stressful for her, and much better for her overall health and quality of life. Serena shared the story:
Well, I got head-hunted to go to [University 3], and I was given free range to create the job. So I created the job description for here [University 3] and I think I wanted to get away from the athletic director [Betty] that was a part of it. I kept following her, you know, she used to be assistant manager, I used to be assistant manager; she used to be head coach, I used to be head coach; she used to be equipment manager, I was equipment manager. I also felt that my career path to be an athletic director, and I know that she is not going to be going anywhere. I also felt it was very important to have other experiences other than one university, and have experiences where I was in charge of the rules. I was in charge of the strategic things.

Serena accepted the position and gained authority over most situations with the athletes and coaches. She has been working at University 3 for the past two years and admitted it was a much needed change for her, to work under a different athletic director. She now works under Kat who is a long time friend and colleague: “Kat was the president of Softball Canada, Kat was a member of the national team program, Kat was a CIS coach and she and I have known each other for a long, long time.” Serena explained that Kat really wanted her to work at University 3 and despite her ongoing list of accomplishments; Serena believed that it would be a positive change to be mentored by a different leadership style:

I knew that it wasn’t going to be a bad idea to be mentored by somebody who would say, ‘No, we can’t do that.’ And I have learned a ton from here [University 3]. Kat is really straight forward and blunt, sometimes too straight forward and abrupt with people. But she will just say, ‘You’ve got to look at things from my perspective,’ I have thirty-one teams I have all of these things and I only have this much money. I can’t do that, and then people say okay. Whereas on the other side people say, well maybe we can do it and we should talk about that and we can put it in the plan and you’ve heard it all. And never had I made the decision at the [University 3] and then had Kat reverse it. And that had happened all of the time at [University 2] because she [Betty] doesn’t want to say no. So I would say no, and she would say, ‘Well there must be some way we can come up with it.’ And there wasn’t. So then we just kept trading the money from program to program to program.

Serena continued to share her experience at University 3 and what it was like for her to be working with Kat:

I think it is really good to be up front. I don’t think you have to be mean about that stuff, and the present athletic director I am working with, she has a reputation of being pretty mean. I know, she doesn’t think she is being mean. It is not intentional. It’s almost like she is a man, she just says the thing and then you go out and have a beer like it is no big deal. Now, she never says stuff like that to me, I don’t know if that’s
because I just don’t get in trouble or she thinks that because of our relationship she shouldn’t say those things to me, but she doesn’t intend it that way. I’ve learned that it is good to be straightforward. I think I was pretty straightforward before but I think I am a little bit tougher now.

Serena was happy with her decision to change universities. At University 3, she is learning and assumed more responsibilities than she had at University 2. The biggest difference for her was the amount of professional and personal support she has within the athletic department: “I have lots of support and people don’t take your ideas and make them their own.”

I asked Serena whether she thought she was ready, or wanted to make a jump to an athletic director position. Serena said that being involved with Softball Canada would be a tough battle to manage time, commitment and sacrifice, but she is willing to take the risk.

Serena explained a past experience:

I think that [interview process] was validated in this process. That guy was really happy with my interview; I couldn’t have done it differently. That is what I am taking away from this; sometimes you can play the best game you’ve ever played and lose. There is nothing we could’ve done better.

She explained that the interview process replicated a final match. Her adrenaline was increased for the whole week:

I said to Ryan, [when] he took me to drop me off on Wednesday to my interview, ‘I feel like I do in the final’; it is the same thing, that horrible feeling. Just like in sport I hated warm-up day of big games, once the whistle blew that feeling was gone, as soon as I answer the first question I know I will be fine. Then we were going to work the next day, and I said well here is how it is different. It is that feeling when you coach, but usually we won an hour and a half later I had a goal outline around my neck and I would be coming home on a plane and I would be like, I feel good. I accomplished a goal, I feel good. I don’t have that because I don’t know what is happening. I still feel that ‘knotty’ feeling; it was like that heightened arousal when you are on the edge. It wasn’t as bad as the preparation but it was still there.

Serena shared her perspectives on her journey in a sport dominated by women coaches, mentors and colleges:

I think [being involved in a sport dominated by women] is a strength and a weakness, I think that the best thing was that I never thought that I couldn’t do it and I never felt that there were barriers to being successful. The flip side of that though [is that] it
made it harder for me to mentor people with barriers, that I had to really strengthen my empathy for people in that position and I had to learn more about what it was like because I never had that, ever.

Serena explained why she believes a man will be hired as the next athletic director:

I believe that the men’s basketball coaches and the men’s football coaches played a role in the decision making that and they would rather a man in that position. They want a man who could go up and talk to the guys get buddy-buddy with the guys; I know that is a fact. Now that doesn’t excuse the fact that the whole committee should have been able to get beyond that but I know that they got to certain people. And our present female athletic director was not successful in that area and I am sure they used her as an example. It’s not that she doesn’t have the strengths; it’s that she is female.

Serena believes that she is faced with more obstacles now that she is looking to break into the higher level positions or the “glass ceiling”:

I think that now I am seeing it more, I didn’t really see it before. When I started in the coaching apprenticeship program the women were told about being kept down by men. I remember a woman in soccer, they wouldn’t tell her what time team meetings were... so she wouldn’t show up and they would be like, ‘Why isn’t she here, she is not on the team anymore.’ But they purposely did that. I just think, ‘This is a national team and you are trying to qualify for the worlds or something like that, and you are playing games like this?” I had trouble fathoming that. I am so goal and outcome oriented, why would you ever do anything that could possibly affect your outcome?

Serena continued to express her thoughts about trying to understand the difference between men and women in sport:

I think I understand it more. I started to understand it more, the more I was with other women coaches. I went to two of those [retreats with the “Women in Coaching Apprentice Program”] and that is when I started to realize... they [women] just opened me up to what other people had to deal with. It was good networking for sure. It made me understand better what women coaches in other sports have to deal with.

Serena expressed how she sees the differences between male and female coaches: males and females, for the most part, lead in two different environments. From Serena’s perspective, female coaches are more about team building and are concerned about the athletes’ everyday lives (school, social, family, etc), whereas male coaches are more focused on the training and outcome. Since Serena has left University 2, they have had a male coach; Serena said that may
be why the girls are “clingy.” There isn’t enough team building or understanding of how female athletes interact.

Serena also talked about how she has been blessed with good mentors, and believes that is why she has become such a high quality mentor herself. Serena believes that it takes many experiences and courage to reach out to networks for advice.

Serena and her family are extremely happy. Serena continues to be involved with Softball Canada and mentoring young female coaches. Currently, Serena and her husband live in a smaller community near University 3. In the end, Serena shared her perspectives that have helped her to become the leader she is today:

I think that I knew early on what I wanted to be in terms of coaching; so I was pro-active. And I think that is big and I think that women need to be more pro-active. Men have no problem saying that I want to be part of this program. Women wait to be asked. I think you have to be pro-active, if you want it you have to go after it. You don’t have to be aggressive but you have to say, “This is what I want to be; what should I do?”
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Support

This chapter will look at the various people who have supported or influenced the participants’ lives. Life course theorists argue that amidst personal and social life changes and transitions, threads of continuity persist in a person’s life; among these threads are significant individuals to whom one’s life is linked (Giele & Elder, 1998; Sweet & Moen, 2006). Erikson’s psychosocial theory (1950) proposes that through social interactions and intimate relationships, children begin to develop self-worth and a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities. In the present study, the participants felt they had a variety of sources of positive support across their life span. The sources of support will be presented in turn in the following sections: (a) Family, (b) Friends/Teammates, (c) Teachers, (d) Coaches, (e) Mentors, (f) Role Models, and (g) Partners.

Family

Family is an important factor in one’s development as a child (Brustad, 1988; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). In the present study, all five participants felt supported by their families during the three stages (developmental, professional developmental and leadership stages) of their lives. However, the parental influence and support received during the developmental stage seemed to have had the most influence on their growth as students, women, and in particular, as athletes. There were two sub-themes related to family support: (a) Family Support and (b) Active and Passive Support.

Family Support

Konner (1991, as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993) stated the habits children develop in the first years of life and the outlooks they learn about life’s possibilities are
difficult to alter. It is therefore essential that the early family environment provides stability and stimulation for developing habits and attitudes later in life. For some children, time at home is a blessing; their parents are warm and loving and help to create an environment full of challenging opportunity. Parental support and encouragement, according to Erikson, enables children to resolve the psychosocial crisis of Industry versus Inferiority towards the positive pole, by facilitating a sense of pride in the child’s accomplishments and skills. For others, spending time at home can be a dramatic and overwhelming experience. For children to cope with the problems at home, they require an abundance of energy, which leaves them with little energy left to devote to growth-oriented activities. Children with limited encouragement and support from their parents therefore need intimate relationships away from the home environment in order to master the development of industry.

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) stated that one of the greatest drains in a child’s life is dealing with the stressors and strains in a single-parent family. In the present study, three of the participants grew up in a single-parent environment. Similar to the Csikszentmihalyi et al. study, these participants found that there was a lack of personal attention from their parents to protect, guide and stimulate them. However, Csikszentmihalyi et al. also stated that some children from single parent homes may learn to do more for themselves, and therefore gain valuable life skills for survival (p. 153). The finding that the female coaches in the current study developed independence early in life may be related to growing up within a single parent household and finding encouragement and positive feedback from other sources of support. This would allow the participants to emerge from this stage (Stage 4) with a sense of competence and belief in their skills.

Crosnoe and Elder (2004) demonstrated that parent-child relationships have long-term impacts on children’s behaviours that continue into adulthood. Spencer’s biological parents
separated when she was a child. A couple of years later her mother remarried; then, during high school, Spencer’s mother and stepfather separated, leaving Spencer once again without a father. This was a stressful environment, which forced Spencer to find supplementary support groups. Spencer was drawn to academics and sport; these two activities allowed her to focus her energy on events outside of her home. In addition, her mother traveled often for work, so that she was forced to gain independence relatively quickly. Her complex mother-daughter relationship created an environment of high expectations. Spencer explained that she was a ‘pleaser’ growing up; putting pressure on herself to succeed in both academics and athletics to make her mother proud. Spencer continues to have this tendency to please even during her professional career. According to Erikson’s psychosocial theory, Spencer should have found it difficult to develop a sense of industry and intimate relationships later in life because of her lack of encouragement and involvement from her parents. However, as this was not the case, the importance of acquiring support from sources away from home, is highlighted. In fact, it was sport experiences that largely enabled Spencer to positively resolve the Industry vs. Inferiority and Intimacy vs. Isolation stages of development.

Other significant findings in the present study related to the home structure include the following: (a) all participants grew up in a middle-class home; (b) four of the participants grew up as an only child (one of them had an older brother who was 11 years her senior but he passed away); (c) four participants in the present research perceived their parents as not being highly involved in their activities; and (d) four of the participants found that their home environments were extremely challenging at times, due to family dynamics.

Bloom, in the book, *Developing Talent in Young People* (1985), studied the lives of elite level individuals in the domains of the arts, athletics, and academics. Bloom found the family environment, at its best, was an environment that created high levels of support and challenge
with a child-centred approach. For the most part, the participants in this study grew up in family environments where they were neither challenged nor supported with a child-centred approach. Each participant had to work for attention from their families and had to create her own goals in play, organized sport and within her school environments. Despite the lack of positive attention and challenges from their families, the participants were free to make their own participation decisions in play and organized sport, which helped them to gain independence, develop talent and become successful. Despite hardship and lack of parental encouragement for four of the participants during the early developmental stages, each woman was able to develop a sense of industry and intimate relationships with other people in life (e.g. coaches, teammates, friends, mentors). Importantly, for these participants, it was the sport environment itself that substituted for parental influences and enabled positive resolution of these stages of development.

There is a lack of literature on the effects of family support on a child’s development into an elite athlete or coach, and as such, further research on family structure, environment and support is needed.

Active and Passive Support

For the present research, “active support” refers to parents being emotionally and physically involved in their daughter’s life. “Passive support” refers to parents supporting the participant’s decision to participate in activities while not being an active contributor to her activities. For example, four of the participants had parents who supported their activities by not holding them back in their decisions to be active and competitive. Dawn’s parents were the only parents to show constant active involvement with her activities.

Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s (1993) five-year longitudinal study of 208 talented adolescents in science, athletics, math, music and visual arts revealed that the parents played an integral role. The authors stated that “no child succeeds unless he or she is strongly supported by adults,
usually parents, and usually both parents” (p. 150). The primary caregiver(s) of the current participants provided either active or passive support to their daughters’ activities, especially sport.

The family support in the present study reportedly contributed to the perspectives, experiences and growth of all five participants. VanTassel-Baska (1989) stated that family construct is one of the most significant influences in the development of talent. The type of parental support makes a difference in the self-efficacy and independence of youth. This also relates to Erikson’s (2001) 4th stage of development (Industry vs. Inferiority) where encouragement by one’s parents and teachers plays an essential role in developing a sense of self and leadership skills. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) further suggested that families who can provide both support and independence for their children are most likely to raise talented children. Four of the participants did not perceive their parents to have been involved in their sport activities. However, their stories seemed to reveal a development of independence as a result of the parent’s lack of involvement in decision-making and absence of sport-related roles, such as driver, fan, and coach. As an example, Doris had supporting parents, but they were not overtly involved with her extra-curricular activities; her parents did not attend many of her games, but allowed her to make her own decisions. Another example of parental support was seen with Spencer. Despite her challenges at home, Spencer’s stepfather was often involved actively, and he supported her athletic and academic activities for part of her developmental years. This was a positive memory for Spencer. In different times in Spencer’s life, she received both passive and active support. Each participant was supported in different ways and by different support groups.

An example of positive active support is Dawn’s family. Dawn grew up with parents who were extremely active with her, as well as her three siblings. They were fully involved in
Dawn’s sports and activities with guidance and excitement. Dawn also had a very strong relationship with her brothers and sister. As a result of having such a large family, Dawn always had someone to play with and was able to develop competitiveness and the ability to be a team player. “I had an opportunity that both my parents were very, very active in volunteering and just being part of the [local] organizations.” Complementing Dawn’s experience, Hoyle and Leff (1997) found that parents often assume the role of facilitator, motivator and coach in the life of a young athlete. Further research indicated that active parental support is associated with a more positive evaluation of performance outcome and greater enjoyment in sport (Leff & Hoyle, 1995). However the present researcher suggests further research in this area.

House’s (1981) research on social support indicated four different attributes of support: (a) emotional support, (b) appraisal support, (c) instrumental support, and (d) informational support. Emotional support involves provision of care, empathy, love and trust (House, 1981; Krause, 1986). Appraisal support includes the communication of information, which is relevant to self-evaluations, rather than problem solving (House, 1981). An example of parental emotional and appraisal support was demonstrated to Dawn after she was cut from the national team: “Yes, but when I phoned them [parents], both mom and dad were on the line and were like ‘Did you have fun?’ They put it all into perspective.” Their responses indicate both emotional support and suggested alternative, less stressful ways to appraise her situation. House (1981) defined instrumental support as the provision of tangible goods and services, or tangible aid such as financial assistance. For example, Dawn’s parents were active in her sport life as coaches, drivers, chiefs and fans, while providing positive guidance for Dawn throughout her developmental years as an athlete. Finally, informational support is defined as the information provided to another during a time of stress.
Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedom, Taylor, and Dowda (2003) studied 380 students in grades 7 through 12 and found that parental support was an important factor for youth physical activity, acting directly or indirectly through its influence on self-efficacy. Parental support is evidenced through the following behaviours: (a) transporting their child to and from physical activity venues, (b) watching their child participate in sport, (c) participating in sport and physical activity with their child, and (d) positively reinforcing their child for participation in sport and physical activity (p. 281). Dawn was the only participant whose parents illustrated these behaviours and yet all of the participants became successful coaches, thus suggesting that more is at play here than active parental support.

In summary, the five participants in this study developed confidence and a strong sense of self through exploration and encouragement. Moreover, they related positively with their environment. Although all of the participants felt supported in their sport involvement by their parents, only one of the participants received active parental support. This finding runs contrary to much of the previous literature which suggests that the development of talented children requires active involvement of parents. In spite of the lack of active support, these participants developed a sense of identity as athletes as leaders in their community and confidence in their abilities through exploration and positive reinforcement from other sources of support. These will be described in turn.

Friends / Teammates

The influence of friends and teammates was found to be important for each participant, predominantly during the developmental stage. Past research using Eccles’ expectancy-value model (Eccles & Harold, 1991) revealed that parents have the most direct impact on socialization when a child is young; however, the influence potentially diminishes during adolescence when teachers, coaches and especially peer influences become more prominent (Anderssen, Wold, &
Torsheim, 2006; Weiss & Barber, 1995). Similar to Eccles’ findings, the present participants were drawn to their friends and teammates for additional social and emotional support. Moreover, the findings of the present study indicated that the most significant social and competitive learning experiences for these participants as athletes came from playing with friends (both boys and girls), and practicing with teammates.

Ostberg and Lennartsson (2007, p. 97) listed two antecedents of social support: (a) social networks, a vehicle through which social support is provided (Kahn, 1979); and (b) social embeddedness, which is the connectedness people have to significant others within their social networks (Berrera, 1986). As athletes, the participants created social networks with their teammates, and experienced connectedness as a result.

As a child, Tara was fortunate to feel supported by her friends and teachers. Her friends allowed her to grow, take risks, be competitive and become comfortable with both girls and boys. She felt a sense of belonging and was continuously looked up to by her friends as a role model athlete. She was competitive in both play and organized sport. Tara still remains close to her childhood friends and classmates. As suggested by Erikson, individuals receive messages about their skills and accomplishments through the development of intimate relationships.

Friends and teammates were also an important part of Dawn’s adolescence. As a young girl, she was fortunate to be surrounded by a number of friends, teammates and role models in sport. Doris also had a supportive group of teammates to play with while growing up; they helped her to learn different behaviours and perspectives, and become a competitor. Doris stated that “I was surrounded by good teammates. I never thought I was a superstar, I just thought I was part of the group. So I was surrounded by winners.” Similar to the participants’ experiences, Duncan, Duncan, and Strycker (2005) found that having friends, who supported one another’s engagement in activities, was positively and significantly related to increased physical activity.
Although Spencer didn’t have sufficient free time to form a “set” group of friends, her teammates and coaches provided her with a positive social and emotional support group. With competing and traveling at such a young age, there wasn’t much time in Spencer’s life to develop a steady social group of friends outside of sport. Conversely, for Serena, friends provided a central support group while she was growing up. Her friends, teammates and teachers provided an escape from her family environment; through school and sport activities, she found a sense of belonging and connectedness. Erikson stated that it is vital for people to develop close, committed relationships with each other. Close relationships are essential in the development of a strong sense of personal identity (Rice, 2001). All five participants identified themselves as having close relationships with friends, coaches and partners during their developmental and professional developmental stages which according to Erikson is required in order to develop committed and secure relationship later in life. All five participants are currently engaged in a long-term intimate and committed relationship.

The participants learned teamwork, competitiveness, leadership, cooperation, winning attitudes, and confidence from their peers. Peers and teammates became an avenue for each participant to learn about themselves and to foster their talents and interests.

Teachers

Partington (1995) stated that devoted teachers who help performers reach a high level sometimes make the difference between very good and expert performers. Teachers played an essential role in each participant’s life, especially if she did not feel adequate support from her family. This was seen in Serena’s case, where she had to mature fairly quickly by having to assume adult responsibilities from a young age. Serena’s teachers provided her with opportunities in sport, school and extracurricular activities and created a safe environment for her at school. They provided a place where she could use her independence to gain confidence and
leadership with her classmates, teammates and teachers. She was given opportunities to grow as a leader and receive positive encouragement and feedback along the way. According to Serena, her teachers and friends provided the most important source of support for her during her developmental years.

Similar to Serena, Tara grew up in a single parent home, and turned to her teachers for positive encouragement. Once she was recognized as a potential “star” athlete, her teachers went out of their way to help her pursue her potential. She enjoyed the way in which her teachers made her feel special because she was an excelling athlete. Tara felt she gained a sense of confidence through her friends and teachers.

Bloom (1985), in his work on developing talent, found the coach/teacher provided positive feedback and allowed the children to explore and play all areas of sport. As a child progressed, motivation to practice and/or rehearse became more intrinsic. Similarly, in the present research, three participants stated that teachers enhanced their confidence and experience at school during the developmental stage by providing both positive feedback and recognition. Finally, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) stated that teachers who encourage integration by providing support and harmony and who stimulate differentiation by making involvement and freedom possible should have more success as teachers. Teachers need to understand how to provide information but more importantly how to spark the joy of learning (p. 195). The interviews suggest that the participants learned the enjoyment of learning from their teachers, coaches and mentors throughout their lives.

The participants’ perspectives provide insight into the successful resolution of Erikson’s 5th stage of development of Identity vs. Role Confusions. During this stage, those who received proper encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration emerged from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence.
Coaches

The coach-athlete relationship is a dynamic and complex process in which both the coaches’ and athletes’ needs are expressed and fulfilled (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). Zourbanos, Theodorakis, and Hatzigeorgiadis (2006) stressed the significance of coaching behaviours on an athlete. A coach-athlete relationship is at the heart of achievement and mastery of the personal qualities such as leadership, determination, confidence and self-reliance. Moreover, effective coach-athlete relationships create a holistic environment with positive growth and personal development as an athlete, coach and person (Jowett, 2005, p. 412). The participants believed that their coaches significantly influenced their growth as athletes and as people, both positively and negatively. Positive and negative perceptions of coaches are presented below to accentuate the influence of coaches on athletes although further examples will be presented in the mentoring and role modeling section.

Negative Experiences

An example by Tara:

I lost my starting position to a girl who was sleeping with him. . . .I just wasn’t savvy enough to play the ‘game’. . . there were girls who say I will come play for you [coach] with a wink and a nudge. . . I didn’t get it. . . .and he was always very mean to me.

Another example by Doris:

Now my last year I had a coach and she would talk about the team saying, ‘I did this and I did that.’ And we did not like that. And it was like you almost wanted to lose just to put it in her face. She would talk about herself . . . she was hard to take. And when I graduated I told her. I said, ‘everyone’s saying there is no I in team and you’re saying I . . . I wouldn’t do that if I were you.’

Spencer explained that she had a negative experience with one of her coaches, stating that “I couldn’t connect with his style of coaching. We clashed.” Spencer went on to say that he was constantly yelling and swearing to motivate the athletes, but that was not how she was motivated to play or reach her top performance.
The examples presented described emotional abuse, uneven relations, or lack of respect. These experiences decreased the participants’ self-confidence and motivation in sport. Moreover, it hindered any kind of vision or team chemistry that each participant believed to be essential for a positive sport experience. Despite their negative experiences with these coaches, the participants were able to learn from each coach, use what they liked and dismiss what they did not. The participants claimed that these coach-athlete experiences helped them to develop and mold their current coaching philosophies.

**Positive Experiences**

All five participants also had positive experiences with coaches. Doris was fortunate to have had an inspiring female coach to look up to as a young athlete. Doris explained: “She [coach] gave us lots of exposure and gave us the fundamentals. . . . She exposed us and disciplined us and we were well behaved and she did all of the life skills.” Other coaches had a memorable impact on Doris as well; she claimed that she would have cleaned the floors with a toothbrush for one particular coach. There was always a mutual respect between coach and athlete. Spencer’s coach from her first World Cup experience continues to be one of her mentors today. She explained that not every athlete connected with this coach, but she did. With this coach, Spencer learned and developed as a player, coach, leader and motivator.

The present results with respect to the influence of coaches partially support Erikson’s theory. Erikson describes the importance of support, encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration for the development of identity and feelings of independence, which the participants received from their positive coach-athlete relationships. Interestingly however, the participants appeared to learn from their negative experiences as well, contrary to Erikson’s suppositions. It may be that “successful” people learn from and grow as a result of both positive and negative experiences. This would be an interesting avenue for future research.
Mentors

All five participants believed that mentoring was a significant aspect of coaching. In addition, they believed that mentors should strive to develop the maximum potential of their players, as athletes and as women. According to Gunn (1995), mentoring is a process that links an experienced individual with someone who needs support and guidance. It can facilitate career development and expand opportunities for those who are traditionally hindered by organizational barriers, such as women and minority groups (p. 3).

Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) described effective mentoring as communication and connecting on an emotional level while assisting with physical, emotional, and logistical aspects of leadership. Marshall (2001) explained mentoring as “a strategy used to help coaches grow professionally. Mentoring is a flexible process that should reflect the unique culture and objectives of the sport organization. A mentor provides support, reinforcement, counsel, friendship and constructive examples” (p. 4).

All five coaches mentioned having one or more mentors during the three stages (development, professional development and leadership). For these participants, their mentors gave them confidence, awareness, knowledge and opportunity for further development in coaching and life. Tara shared how one coach saw her potential and provided her with new and exciting opportunities throughout her career as a developing coach. Spencer explained how the Women in Coaching Apprentice program was helpful in understanding other female coaches’ challenges and experiences:

One of the great things about the Women in Coaching workshops was all these women just sat down and. . . . It was about coaching, decisions, dilemmas, challenges and obstacles in your coaching.

Dawn’s employer at Petro-Canada taught her to be business savvy, provided an opportunity for her to travel, and helped her to become a more versatile professional. She was
fortunate to observe an excellent leader at a young age. Dawn’s employer helped her to achieve confidence, leadership and management skills which were essential for her success in her Petro-Canada position but more importantly, were transferable into coaching.

Mentoring is known to have a particular benefit for women and minority groups in the realm of business (Rubens & Halperin, 1996), and this may also be the case in sport and the field of coaching. Allen (1995) stated that mentoring is about equipping and empowering individuals to achieve goals, and defined mentoring as “having a significant beneficial effect on the life or behaviours of another person” (p. 14).

Salmela (1994a) suggested that one of the most effective ways that expert coaches learned was through mentoring. Mentoring can be informal or formal. Three of the women went through a formalized mentoring program through the Coaches Association of Canada; however, they all had informal mentors as athletes and as coaches. Congruent with Marshall’s (2001) statement, regardless of whether the mentoring process is formal, informal, one-on-one, or research based, it needs to be used to help develop women coaches of the next generation.

In the present study, participants shared their experiences of being guided with support and knowledge, and being provided with opportunities and the confidence to take risks in these opportunities. In addition, they described a variety of mentors during different times of their lives. This confirms one of the findings in Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, and Salmela’s (1998) study in which the authors interviewed elite coaches and found that different types of mentoring occurred throughout the development of expert coaches.

Mentors saw potential in the participants and recruited them for new opportunities, and sometimes the participants recruited their mentors for support and guidance. Similar to Werthner’s (2005) findings from 15 interviews with Canada’s top coaches at the Olympic level, coaches in this study were open to learn not only the technical and tactical part of the sport, but
also communication, team cohesion, and conflict management. Werthner stated that “what needed to be learned was consciously sought by the coach. Importantly, all coaches saw this learning as a necessary and ongoing process” (p. 6).

Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) found that female athletes who had women coaches were more interested in the coaching field than those who had male coaches. Interestingly, all five participants of this study had a positive female coach as a mentor at one point in their lives. The participants viewed these female coaches as mentors for different reasons, including discipline, coach-athlete relationships, work ethic, coaching philosophy, family-life, and/or motherhood.

A New Zealand study by Skilton (1995) reported that the majority of elite female coaches agreed with the suggestion that a lack of women mentors and a lack of role models create barriers for women in coaching. Interestingly, 91% of the same elite coaches agreed that a mentoring program for women coaches would help to increase the number of women in coaching. According to Caplan (1995), same-sex mentors serve a number of functions for female students and professionals, and have been found to be highly important to women’s professional development. Women are usually aware of the unique barriers they may confront within the workplace. Furthermore, professional women are often eager and willing to provide support and guidance to female students and professionals (Caplan, 1995), as found in the present study.

Bloom et al. (1998) concluded that mentoring has become an increasingly important element of coaching. In their study of 21 expert Canadian coaches of sport teams, Bloom et al. found that their participants perceived that a mentor’s role was to teach young coaches skills, provide access to valuable information and establish important networks. They were not there to judge but to assist them in learning effective tools and strategies for developing their own
independent coaching styles and techniques. The participants in the present study found that their mentors provided advantages and guidance, predominantly in the areas of opportunity, knowledge, coaching style, role conflict and specific coaching qualities.

Although not specifically mentioned in Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial stages, I believe the positive influence and encouragement experienced from the role models and mentors during the developmental stages helped the participants to develop a sense of pride, confidence and self-worth, and inevitably influenced their success as coaches.

Role models

Role models can come and go in one’s life. For the five participants, role models were introduced in the developmental, professional developmental and leadership stages of their lives. The role models were athletes, teachers, and coaches. In a study on gendered coaching, Edwards (2000) described a role model in coaching as someone who: (a) enacts a professional approach to the role of coach, (b) demonstrates belief in fair play attitudes, (c) accepts losses with equanimity, (d) shows a caring attitude towards members of their own and opposite teams, (e) uses the ability to demonstrate skills, positional attributes and tactics with confidence, and (f) espouses equitable gender beliefs (p. 290).

Although role models and mentors can be the same person, in this particular study role models were not always someone the participants spent a lot of time. Therefore, I am introducing a second definition of a role model as a person who has immediate impact and a long-term effect on the growth and motivation of another person, regardless of proximity. A role model provides an understanding that one can mirror the success of that particular person.

All five coaches stated that they had a role model at one point in time who influenced their lives positively. Whether it was as an athlete, teacher or coach, each participant had her own person or teammate to look up to when she was a young athlete and coach. Dawn expressed
that her teammates became an essential part of her development, and she felt lucky to have had many role models:

There is a fastball team, I was their bat girl. I would run out and pick up the bats and that sort of thing. That team had a lot of success in the early days and went on to win national championships and medals in most years. And again, I was exposed to not only their team but also teams they competed against and saw some exceptional female role models.

Tara also described one of her most influential role models as a woman who was a full-time coach and mother as “a great role model in the respect that she had two young daughters and had coached while they were babies so she was a different type of role model for me.”

This study supports Fasting and Pfister’s (2000) work on the importance of role models for young women in sport as well as in everyday life. Each participant of this study had a female role model in her life that she looked up to, who was able to instill confidence in her for the future as an athlete and a coach. Parallel to the present findings, role models can have an immediate impact on young women and affect the development of self-confidence positively (McCharles, 2003).

Although Serena had to grow up fairly quickly with respect to her personal life, she had many female role models in sport throughout her entire athletic and coaching career. Women coaches within softball saw Serena’s potential in coaching and leadership and took her under their wings; from there, Serena was on her way to the top without even recognizing it at the time. This is comparable to Everhart and Chelladurai’s (1998) research stating that female athletes who are coached by women are more likely to stay involved in sport and are less intimidated by the profession. In most of the research examined on women in coaching, a recurring theme was that there is a need for more female mentors and role models. Female athletes and developing coaches benefit from being exposed to same gender mentoring and leadership, both formal and informal (Lough, 2001; Werthner, 2005).
Partners

The support of the participants’ partners was mentioned frequently throughout all five interviews. In a study by Bruening and Dixon (2007), eleven participants agreed that the one area that suffered the most in the effort to balance work and family was their relationships with their spouses or partners. One participant in this study explained that she had a 6-week-old child and was lucky to even have a five-minute conversation with her husband. She believed she wasn’t being a good spouse at the time and hoped their lifestyle would get better in a couple of years. This participant showed the guilt that is often expressed by female coaches when they do not have enough time to spend with their partners. More importantly, it confirmed the need for a supportive partner in order to balance both work and family.

Interestingly, in the present study, the participants said that they had strong support from their partners. Four participants stated that the support of their partners made all the difference for them to be able to coach at an elite level. Doris expressed that she continuously feels supported by her husband. She explained that he is the team’s number one fan and promoted Doris’ professional career, which is extremely important to her. She took pride in labeling herself as a coach and professional, an accomplishment explicitly enabled by the support of her partner.

Robertson (2000) published a paper entitled, *In their own Voices: Women Coaches Raising a Family*, which explored the perspectives and experiences of some of the top female coaches in Canada. She found that female coaches relied heavily on partner support. This stands true in the present study: all five participants believed they would not be able to be in a relationship, have a family and coach at an elite level without their partner’s support. Three participants mentioned that having their partners involved in sport was essential for support because it provided a mutual understanding between the two partners. However, the remaining
two participants enjoyed not having their partners involved in sport, so that sport did not consume their entire relationship. Serena explained that she and her husband are partners, colleagues and best friends. They are enormously supportive of each other and are enthusiastic about each other’s professional development and everyday lives. From Serena’s perspective, her partner has been a significant support for her as a person, coach and professional.

In a qualitative study, Bruening and Dixon (2008) situated work-family negotiations within a life course perspective. Their participants consisted of 17 NCAA Division I head coaches of both individual and team sports who were also mothers. Bruening and Dixon found that 13 of their participants believed they would not be able to coach at the university level if it wasn’t for the support of their partners. Furthermore, the same 13 coaches still felt supported after having children; however, the focus of support was more towards the children. Similar to the present research, the partner became one of the major sources of support to help the women feel confident and supported in their many different roles, as coaches, partners and mothers.

Holt (1981) addressed the challenge of balancing the demands of work and family with females in higher education. Only the female administrators who had secured quality childcare arrangements and had a supportive husband felt any relief from their career pressures. Although daycare was mentioned only twice in the present study, it seemed to be important for the two mothers to spend quality time with their children by making sure that they were not in daycare all day. They both wanted the chance to develop and take care of their children, especially while they were young; daycare was not a full-time option.

Throughout Spencer’s interview, she often reflected on how lucky she was to have such a supportive husband, especially after their child was born. He contributes beyond her expectations and sometimes changed his priorities so that Spencer could coach at the international level. He has traveled with Spencer to take care of their child, and continues to
support her growth within the soccer community. Spencer admitted that she could never “do it all” without the support of her husband. Erikson’s 7th stage, Generativity vs. Stagnation, of human development is a time period when people focus on both career and family. In the present study, the participants were highly focused on successfully balancing both career and family. I believe each participant was successful at this particular balancing act partly due to the support of their partners. According to Erikson, mastering this stage would allow the participants to feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community.

As mentioned in the review of literature, female and male coaches have different family responsibilities, expectations and social and emotional conflict (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Watkins, Herrin, & McDonald, 1998). There is a lack of theoretical research on the importance of partner support for female coaches. More research is needed to develop programs and initiatives to help female coaches with a partner and/or family who are not predominantly involved in sport. Programs need to be developed to help partners understand the role of elite coaches. Moreover, national sport organizations must understand the time constraints and sacrifices made by coaches, and in the end, support coaches properly, with benefits, childcare and a proper salary. These improvements could increase the number of female coaches, as well as increase the longevity of their careers.

Conclusion

In this study, the influences of family, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors, role models and partners played essential roles in the experiences of each participant throughout all three developmental stages. Parental support and involvement were highly influential in the development of each participant’s personality and independence specifically. The supporters displayed an array of support (active and passive), guidance (formal and informal) and provision
of opportunities for each participant. Both active and passive support seemed to play a role in the development of independence and decision making abilities of the young female athletes.

Coaches, teachers and peers had a lasting impact on the participants’ lives. Each participant had support during their development from one or more sources of support. This is believed to help them along their journey in becoming a “successful” coach, and more importantly helping with their longevity in sport.

The findings indicated that support from various sources helped the participants resolve the tasks of developing industry, identity and generativity. Although Erikson’s theory does not mention role models or mentors, these were critical sources of support for these women coaches. Further, these coaches appeared to learn and grow from unsupportive relationships with parents and coaches, something that may set these women apart from those who do not succeed in establishing careers in coaching. Further research is needed to explore this possibility.
CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

Overcoming Obstacles

The goal of this chapter is to understand the participants’ challenges and their methods of coping with these challenges. The chapter is divided into two sections: (a) The Challenges and (b) The Coping Strategies.

The Challenges

All five participants were presented with many challenges throughout the developmental, professional developmental and leadership stages of their lives. The challenging experiences were both positive and negative, but in the end, each experience helped them develop into who they are today as coaches, partners, and mothers. Erikson (1950) believed that challenges are overcome with encouragement from supporters, self belief and taking control. This section shares how the participants believe they took control of their lives and coped with their many challenges. This section will be divided into three parts: (a) The “Old Boy’s Club,” (b) Internal Conflict: Work-Life Balance, and (c) The Critical Years.

The “Old Boy’s Club”

Knoppers, Meyer, Ewing, and Forrest (1993) focused on the effects of gender ratios on social interaction between men and women coaches. They found that since the control of sport is largely in the hands of men, it is this homo-social group (or “old boy’s” network) which sets the roles and has the greatest bonding and power in the workplace, resulting in further gender segregation. Support for Knoppers et al.’s research was found in Young’s (1990) and Cameron’s (1996) work, in which 80% of their participants agreed that the old boy’s club was a barrier to women. The findings of the current study suggest that the old boy’s club still exists in sports
dominated by male coaches (SDMC), and was identified as an obstacle for four of the participants. As Spencer explained:

But I think it is being female in a male environment, always having to fight for everything. You know. Not just you as a female but your female sport. But I realize you usually only have one female in a boardroom, so I go back into history and think of evolution. How did two men act in the wild? They beat the shit out of each other so they can get the girl... now that is how they are with everything.

Dawn also experienced the old boy’s club during her developmental professional stage when she was asked to present her work in a board room full of men for the national sport organization. At first she was intimidated by the environment, but realized she had something important to say and therefore took control by asking the men to “put down the newspapers and put out the cigars and shut-up and listen.” She then continued with her presentation. After this experience, she walked out of the room shaking and crying. Reflecting on this today, Dawn can understand why some girls and women would find sport an unwelcoming environment. Although Serena developed in a sport dominated by female coaches (SDFC), she experienced similar challenges later in her career during the leadership stage when she was trying to advance in a more senior sport administration position. Spencer shared her experience of participating in a board meeting with predominantly men. She explained that they tend to dismiss the issues for the women’s teams:

You mean all the men except for me on the board? I swear to god I can summarize my time on the [Soccer] Canada board as the player rep and on the provincial Soccer board like this: What about the women? What about the women? What about the women? Yes. What about the women? And that was pretty much it.

Marshall (2001) and other researchers (Anderson, 2001; Byrd-Blake, 1994; Culcross, 2004; Funk, 2004; Hall, 1996) identified factors that characterize role-conflict and challenges for female coaches. Some of the factors cited by the participants in the study include burnout, lack of financial incentives, family size, lack of experience, and family conflict. Other factors seen in
the present study include time management, attitude of the generation, old boy’s club, gaining respect, and work-life balance.

Past researchers have found that women continuously try to “prove themselves” to earn respect from their male colleges (Acosta & Carpenter, 1999, 2004; Demers, 2004), especially in terms of leadership and credibility. Fortunately for Spencer, she realized that although she had doubts about herself while working with her male colleagues, she explained that it usually turned out to be a positive experience because she gained a greater sense of confidence by thinking: “I can do what he [male coach] can do, and maybe even better.”

Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial theory would suggest that the participants were able to deal with the above situations and challenges because of the confidence and strong sense of self which was developed from encouragement, recognition and success during childhood and early adulthood.

*Internal Conflict: Work-Life Balance*

Inter-role conflict or role theory (Barnett & Gareis, 2006; Kanter, 1977) predicts that the multiple roles held by individuals as workers (e.g., employee; employer) and family members (e.g., child, parents, spouse or partner) are in conflict with each other because the demands outweigh the resources. With multiple roles, the time spent on one role interferes with the time that could be spent on another. Consistent with Kanter’s theory, this was a struggle for the participants; more predominantly for those in the four sports dominated by male coaches (SDMC).

Serena, from a sport dominated by female coaches, seemed to have less work-life conflict as a coach for a number of reasons. The first was her flexibility within her working environment, especially during her time at the provincial organization when she had young children. There were a high percentage of women working in her office, which allowed for more
understanding and flexibility. The second reason was her freedom to bring her children to practices and games. Serena did not have to start a trend of “best practices.” She consistently had female mentors who have “done it” prior to her. Finally, she never felt the need to prove herself to men. Women were the dominant force in her sport; therefore, she felt comfortable as a woman to lead at each new stage as a coach. Erikson’s psychosocial theory acknowledged Generativity vs. Stagnation (7th stage) as a stage when people build their relationships and focus on career and family. The participants in the present study found it was important to balance and focus on both coaching and family. However, a significant reason why they could successfully balance both areas was because of the support and encouragement from various sources of support, mainly their partners.

Past research by Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly (2002) and other researchers (Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986; Pastore, 1991,1993) suggests that role-conflict creates consequences for work and family such as psychological distress, poor health, decreased marital or job satisfaction, reduced job performance, and an intent to leave one’s profession. These factors must be considered for two of the participants involved in the sports dominated by male coaches, due to the fact that the timing of their interviews was during their first year of motherhood. In addition, both participants who had their babies later in life (after age 35) were part of a sport dominated by male coaches and were already considered elite coaches.

Dixon and Bruening’s (2007) findings supported the theory that coaching mothers experience conflict with their multiple roles, often because of a lack of time and energy to address each role effectively. Similarly, in the findings of the present research, the three female coaches who have children found it difficult to manage both work and family life.

From an emotional standpoint, Spencer and Tara felt guilty for not putting their children to bed early enough, leaving their children while traveling, and not being able to give them their
full attention. In addition, Tara continued to feel guilty for not always being organized, not communicating efficiently and effectively to her partner, and continuing to work during the evenings. She felt guilty when she started to compare her child to other children. When she heard her assistant coach saying his son was in bed by 8 that night and hers was in bed by 11, she began to blame herself for bad parenting.

Spencer struggled with the National Sport Organization to obtain support with respect to her responsibilities as a parent. Some obstacles mentioned were babysitting, travel, expenses, and above all, emotional understanding and support. Luckily, she had continuous support from her husband with childcare, domestic responsibilities, travel, long hours, and late nights. However, this struggle with sport organizations should be addressed more in depth. Similar to Spencer’s experience with the National Sport Organization, Bruening and Dixon (2007) found that athletic directors did not always welcome children in the office, even in cases of emergencies. As a result, some of their participating mothers did not feel comfortable bringing their children to work, which in turn caused them to feel inadequate in their abilities to fulfill their responsibilities at home and at work. This affected the participants’ ability to balance the roles between mother and coach. Robertson (2000) examined the lives of women coaches who were also mothers. One coach stated that she believed coaching in Canada is a great life, but also stated that it would be extremely challenging to balance both motherhood and coaching, especially at the elite level. The literature acknowledges that it can be challenging and stressful for coaches with multiple roles of mother, partner and coach. However, Stryker (1980) suggested that the more people are connected and the deeper the ties to these people, the higher the identity commitment and the greater the identity salience. Salience is defined as the difference between an individual role-identity and relevant counter-identities in a given situation (Burke, 1980).
Kahn (1978) stated that role-conflict most typically involves having too many tasks and tasks that are too demanding. Taylor (1992) suggested that role-conflict is specifically relevant to the coaching profession. The participants in the present study also demonstrated this. Taylor stated that role-conflict could take place with coaches in the role of physical trainer, technician, fundraiser, accountant, parents, administrators and recruiter. Further conflict occurred for the present participants when they did not feel confident in a task or they disliked certain roles that had to be fulfilled as a full-time coach. Dawn explained she had issues with the leadership at her university. The athletic director would have the coaches working against each other instead as a team. Therefore, she always felt limited in her support and resources. Tara shared that her administrative tasks are endless and require attention beyond office hours. This causes even more stress in the home environment because she still needs to do work when she gets home from her office or practice.

Work/family conflict was a significant concern for the participants. The participants frequently mentioned not having enough time to manage their multiple roles to fulfill their expectations. All participants have high expectations for their athletes, and furthermore, high expectations for themselves as coaches, mothers and partners. In the end, it was a constant struggle to balance the various roles due to high demands and low resources.

*The Critical Years*

Previous researchers (Byrd-Blake, 1994; Culcross, 2004; Funk, 2004; Hall, 1996; Young, 1993) have suggested that the best years for career advancement are between the ages of 25 and 35 (critical years). However, these years coincide with the most practical years for childbearing. For the present research, the critical years refers to the personal life experiences of the participants between the ages of 25 and 35 years old, which is during the stages of professional development and leadership. Erikson (1950) believed the critical years were a time to develop
committed and secure relationships and to focus on career and family. By being ‘successful’ at these steps, Erikson believed people will create a sense of personal identity and a feeling of contributing to their home and community, which is a positive step in long-term development. Although the majority of the participants had demanding and challenging times professionally and personally during the critical years, they were able to feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth professionally and maintain the feeling of productivity and contribution.

As previously mentioned, the interviews revealed the challenges experienced by the participants in balancing work and personal life. However, as found in the present study, this challenge appears to have been even more difficult during the critical years. Doris was married before the age of 25, divorced within the critical years, and then married again after age 35 with no children of her own. Spencer was married at age 35 and had a child outside of the critical years, with no plans to have another child. Dawn had a partner during the critical years and helped take care of two children, but left her relationship with no children of her own. Tara was married after the critical years and had one child during the same year (age 37). Interestingly, the only coach who was married and had children before the critical years was Serena (SDFC). Serena was married before she was 20 years old and had both children before the age of 25.

Underlying some expectations of occupational gender stratification are the ideas that for many women, the family is a higher priority than the job (Padovic & Reskin, 2002), and that this value system limits both their attention to prepare for high responsibility jobs and the time they spend working to pave their way to job advancement. This describes one of the internal battles the women displayed in the present study during the critical years and which they continue to experience today.

It became apparent from the analysis that the critical years have a significant role in professional advancement and quality of life with one’s family. More specifically, I interpreted
the timing of a challenge or change with work and family (e.g., marriage, baby, new job), as the
determinant of the amount of internal conflict a woman will have as a mother, partner and
professional. The period between the ages of 25 and 35 years old is critical for both professional
development and child rearing; therefore, more research is needed to understand ways to create
an environment in which women coaches are able to balance and succeed in both roles,
especially in a male-dominated domain.

The Coping Strategies

The participants developed coping strategies during the three stages of development,
which helped them remain confident in dealing with the challenges of life and coaching. Two
general coping strategies have been distinguished within the literature: emotion-focused and
problem-focused. Emotion-focused strategies do not directly influence the stressor itself but aim
to temporarily alleviate the emotional impact of the stressor. Problem-focused strategies aim to
address the stressor directly, such as time management. They involve an effort to do something
active to alleviate stressful circumstances. Past research has indicated that people use both types
of strategies to combat stressful events (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

The participants in the present study coped with challenges and daily stressors using
emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Spencer describes her way of emotion-
focused coping strategy by saying to herself that “some things aren’t worth getting worked up
for.” She tried not to look at the things that were wrong but build on the things that were right.
Examples of emotion-focused coping techniques used by the participants were exercise and
cognitive restructuring. Serena used her highly effective time management and organization
skills (problem-focused coping) to help her juggle the many different roles she had in coaching
and life.
The following section will explore two coping strategies that helped these women pursue their various roles and challenges: (a) weaving and (b) passion.

**Weaving**

Garey (1999) introduced the term *weaving* to express the desire for women of this generation to pursue both work and family. I found that coaches who had one identity but not the other often experienced a sense of incompleteness. *Weaving* was a common theme for all five participants. Each participant was internally driven to pursue multiple roles, but found it difficult to separate and balance work and family. This complements Erikson’s 6th and 7th stages of development of intimacy and generativity in which he believed it was essential for people to work on their intimate relationships and focus on both career and family. This finding was complementary to Allison’s (2006) study, in which she stated that a woman’s need to nurture creates a balancing act between family and career; women need to be able to separate work and family, while being strong and confident in their interpersonal skills. Tara shared her ability to weave. She wakes up and goes to work in the morning while her husband stays at home until eleven. Tara returns home, and her husband goes to work. She stays home to do work until three o’clock then gets herself and the baby ready to head back to the office so the baby can take a nap and Tara can do more work. That is just part of a typical day for Tara balancing both motherhood and coaching. Tara also said she didn’t know if it would be possible to balance her daily schedule if she wasn’t within a 13-minute walk from her house to the office.

The ability to weave between their roles as partners and coaches was found to be an essential component of the five participants’ lives. Interestingly, the five participants claimed to have had positive and active support from their partners and as a result, they made little mention of a concern for juggling domestic responsibilities. This finding runs contrary to most of the previous literature which suggests that women still carry most of the domestic load.
The dual identity of coach and partner was challenging but rewarding for four of the participants. Serena was the only participant to get married at a young age and stay in the marriage throughout the developmental, professional developmental and leadership stages. Serena coached within a sport dominated by female coaches and revealed her stress regarding work and family differently than the other four participants. She had professional and emotional support, in terms of flexibility and mentoring from her national sport organization, athletic department and spouse. However, Serena had two children in her young twenties and at times, her family struggled financially. In Serena’s life experiences, two significant factors were apparent within the analysis: (a) she was the only participant to have children before the age of 25 and before she was at the elite coaching level, and (b) she was the only participant from a sport dominated by female coaches. I believe Serena’s variety of role models throughout her developmental and professional developmental years taught her that women can balance both coaching and motherhood. More importantly, I believe it was never a question in Serena’s mind that she couldn’t handle both roles. Further research should be conducted to identify the influences that helped guide Serena’s journey to the top of her field.

In a study of 17 women coaches with families, Robertson (2000) suggested two options for women in coaching: (a) putting their coaching career on hold until their children were independent, and (b) job sharing as co-head coaches. Neither of these recommendations received strong support from the female coaches in Robertson’s study. These women wanted to be able to “live it all” and feel supported in each role (coach, partner and mother). Out of the 17 perspectives, many of the participants in the study struggled with the guilt of not having enough time to spend with their children. In addition, they constantly debated leaving the coaching profession. Robertson (2000) found that female coaches seem to have alter egos: one is the “competitor and over achiever for success” and the other is the “empathetic and caring mother.”
This proved to be a constant balancing act and forced them to reflect on what they loved about being both a mother and a coach. In Robertson’s (2000) study, a participating coach expressed her belief that the most important lesson she wanted to teach her children was that she had her own life and had independent roles as mother, partner and coach. More importantly, that she was happy.

Overall, each participant in my study was relatively positive with respect to her multiple roles, and would not want one role (coach) without the other (mother). They enjoyed weaving their roles because each was an important part of their identities. An important observation derived from this research is that all five participants stated that they would not be able to ‘have it all’ if they did not have a supportive partner.

**Passion**

Orlick’s (1998) definition of balance captures the ideal state of enjoyment and satisfaction as an athlete, coach, partner and mother. He defined balance as “finding beauty, passion and meaning in the different loves of your life, and living those loves – everyday. Balance is respecting your needs for achievement and relaxation; work and play, giving and receiving, intimacy and personal space” (p. xiii). At young ages, the participants were passionate about extracurricular activities and educating youth. They all strived to be leaders within their high schools and communities. Each participant loved school for her own reasons. Tara stated, “I had a real passion for teaching . . . I had an hour spare so I would go over to the elementary school and volunteer for an hour with some of the teachers, working with the kids.”

All five participants expressed similar values, which are the need for balance, commitment, competitiveness, support, achievement and success. The participants desired to have the roles of coach, partner and mother. They wanted to be the best they could be at each
role, but at the same time maintain balance and most importantly, their passion. As Dawn explained:

I was a good student as well, and it means in a sense it was more recognition because I was good at it and realistically I got a lot of pats on the back and get the pink star at the top of the paper or whatever the pieces were.

In the end, passion was described as a coping strategy because each participant continued to enjoy and love coaching, in spite of the extra demands and lack of resources. Each participant remained in coaching because of her passion for competition, sport and mentoring. As expressed by Doris: “Yeah [I love coaching]! One day I’ll wake up and if I don’t [love it anymore], then that’s the day I pack it in. It’s the kids that keep you going.”

Conclusion

Each of the participants in this study experienced challenges during the process of becoming and being an elite coach. They had to deal with the old boy’s club and also balance their work and family lives. The findings defined the critical years of a professional mother as being between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. This section described each participant’s life in terms of “the critical years” to try to gain an understanding of the significance of this time period for female leaders, more specifically, women coaches. Future research should look into understanding the differences, benefits and limitations of having children before or after the critical years. What can organizations do to support mothers of young children during these times, to promote and prepare them for professional advancement?

This chapter also presented emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies the participants used to maintain their balance in work and life. The participants stated that despite the challenges, they continued to be passionate about their sport and coaching. They weaved between family and coaching because of their passion for their roles and their desire to maintain these roles.
Erikson’s theory would suggest that a strong sense of identity would have enabled these participants to better navigate the challenges presented by the work-life balance. It may be that their established identities as both coaches and mothers enabled them to juggle demands more effectively. The relationships between identities of mothers and coaches and the establishment of successful careers in coaching would be an interesting line of future research. Perhaps these women need both identities in order to fulfill their potential in each area of life.
CHAPTER VII
RESULTS

Personal Qualities

This chapter reflects on the personal qualities that consistently emerged throughout the interviews. Erikson (1950) was largely concerned with how personality and behaviour is developed across the lifespan and especially during childhood. He was firmly focused on nurture and experience. The personal qualities illustrated throughout the interviews, in my belief, were developed from childhood experiences primarily, which shaped the participants’ development, learning, personality and leadership. The chapter will be divided into four sections to provide a more in-depth analysis of the significant personal qualities that facilitated the participants’ development as elite coaches during the three developmental stages: (a) Independence: The Trailblazer, (b) Creating Opportunity: The Risk-taker, (c) Commitment to Excellence: The Hard Worker, and (d) Ability to Multitask: The Jack-of-all-Trades.

Independence: The Trailblazer

One of the main qualities the participants developed during their developmental years was independence. Independence is defined as not being influenced or controlled by others in matters of opinion or conduct; thinking or acting for oneself; being an independent thinker and not depending on authority or control (Webster Dictionary, 2003). The participants were all “trailblazers” who were not afraid to lead the pack, try something different and embrace change. Congruent with the experiences of the five participants, Hanson and Kraus (1999) found that young women who were involved in sport developed attributes such as self-confidence and independence that may have benefited their academic and everyday lives. Through sport, girls can gain confidence by believing in their own success and as a result, learn many positive attributes such as determination, drive, and perseverance, thus becoming more self-assured,
capable and assertive (Bailey, 1993; Cohen, 1993). The acquisition of these qualities for the participants in the present study was partly due to the participants’ parents giving them the freedom to play and take risks as young girls.

Dixon, Warner, and Bruening (2008) found that when parents encouraged their children to participate in sport without pressuring them, the participants of their study were able to develop their own independent passion for the sport (or reject it). In the present study, results show that during the developmental stage, the family environment had a significant impact on developing the independence of the participants. Erikson (1950) believed that this kind of independence was developed by positive resolution of the developmental tasks in early childhood. The participants developed independence from an early age and expressed this during their professional developmental and leadership stages.

Babkes and Weiss (1999) explained that there is a fine line between supporting one’s talented child and exerting over-the-top pressure; parents may create unnecessary pressure and anxiety by having unrealistic expectations for their children. In this study, none of the participants felt pressure to compete or excel in sport. Doris explained that her parents challenged her, but more importantly, they allowed her to become an independent woman: “They brought me up that way. I could do what I wanted. I had the ability. He [father] was always really positive with me in that I could grow up to do anything.” Overall, the participants felt that their family environments played a central role in the development of confidence, independence and leadership.

In each of the participants’ stories, there was a common theme with respect to making difficult decisions during the developmental or professional developmental stages. Each participant claimed to have been able to follow through with her choices without any pressure or interference from her parents. Whether the parents provided support by being active or passive
in their daughters’ decisions, their guidance seemed to have had a positive effect on their children’s abilities to make decisions independently.

Dixon et al.’s (2008) study on the proximal and distal impact of early family socialization demonstrated three mechanisms of sport socialization that impacted female athletes’ lives, including (a) role modeling, (b) providing experiences (opportunity), and (c) interpreting experience. Moreover, they found that “parental influences impacted their enduring involvement in sport by normalizing the sport experience and by allowing a voice in their own participation decisions” (p. 538). In particular, parents allowed their children to voice their own opinions and empowered them to make their own decisions.

Family life provided an essential learning environment for the five participants and each participant learned specific qualities and gained personal strengths, which evolved throughout her childhood and adult life. For example, Serena found herself taking on an adult lifestyle at home. She had to do the majority of the housework (laundry, pay bills, cleaning, cooking, etc.), and if she wanted to get somewhere, she had to find her own way. Although this was hard at times, Serena became mature and independent at a young age.

Overall, the development of independence was important for the participants to survive in a male-dominated environment that lacks social and professional support for female coaches. Moreover, independence was crucial for each participant to take responsibility for her career development and advancement.

Creating Opportunity: The Risk-Taker

A risk-taker is one who “goes against the grain” or someone who risks loss or injury in the hope of gain or excitement (Webster Dictionary, 2003). The five participants of this study went against the grain in many respects including playing with boys as children, changing
schools and locations for athletic or career advancement, risking a job change for career
development, and pursuing a career in the male-dominated world of sport.

The present research found similarities and differences among the experiences of the five
participants. Growing up as risk-takers, one of the most prevalent similarities among each
participant was that they all defined themselves as “tomboys” when they were children. I want
to emphasize that despite the problematic nature of this term, the participants used this word
extensively throughout the interviews to describe themselves. They clearly conveyed that one
does not have to be a “boy” or “act like a boy” to be active or involved in sport as the term would
suggest. The participants simply stated that they predominantly played with boys, wore casual
clothes instead of dresses, and for the most part preferred Tonka trucks over Barbie dolls. This
marked an early sign of the participants “going against the grain.” Dawn explained:

I was always playing sports. In elementary I was a tomboy. . . . I enjoyed playing with
older girls for sure. I think in terms of competitive drive, having an older brother and his
friends, like if I wanted to touch the ball I needed to go get it. . . . The other side was in
grade seven as well; I started to play with the senior women [rugby] team, my parents
said, ‘At some point Dawn you need to move on [from playing with the boys] [sic].’

Interestingly, Gneezy and Rustichini (2004) discovered that when girls competed against boys,
they tended to run faster and became more competitive than when they were running against
other girls. This finding is similar to the findings of the present study, with respect to the
benefits experienced by the participants as a result of growing up feeling comfortable and
confident playing and competing with boys.

Risk-taking and creating opportunity were key factors in the participants’ development
into athletes and coaches. Knoppers (1987) described opportunity as “the shape of one’s career
ladder, perceived obstacles and satisfactions, access to training, availability and type of
feedback” (p. 13). Each participant was provided with new and exciting opportunities from her
teachers, coaches, friends or parents. It seemed that the more opportunity and change each
participant was faced with, the more successful she was in the leadership stage. As mentioned above, the participants did not seem to mind going against the grain and creating their own opportunities. For example, Spencer created opportunities, especially within the soccer community, allowed herself to be more aggressive in certain situations and went after opportunities without letting anything stand in her way.

The participants learned how to independently manage their time effectively and multitask in their roles as coaches, partners and mothers. In addition, the participants went through some major obstacles to pursue their coaching careers. For example, Spencer fought to have baby-sitting money put into her national team budget so that she could take her child and baby-sitter on road trips. Dawn left her partner to pursue her coaching career in a different city. Although she and her partner shared a number of great years together, Dawn felt that she needed more support for her coaching career to advance. Tara was pregnant when asked to coach at her current university. She took the risk of moving into a new city for a part-time job. Some of these changes made for the advancement of one’s career would rarely need to be taken by male coaches.

As the participants became better known within their respective sports, they were all recruited for their present university coaching positions. Spencer shared her experiences of being recruited:

The first thing I did [after arriving on campus] was I went to find out about the [SDMC] program. I found out they didn’t have a coach . . . . That September [SDMC] had just been accepted into the [Provincial] University Sport. So it was the varsity for the first time ever the year I came in – but they didn’t have a coach and they knew I was a national team player. So they asked me to coach.

Tara told her story:

I got a phone call from the university. I got the opportunity . . . . They knew I was pregnant. They actually knew I was pregnant! And they said, ‘Yeah, well we know you’re going to have a baby and we’re fully supportive of that.
In this study, it was observed that different people gave the participants many opportunities, and they had to pursue these opportunities in order to gain more experience and confidence for career advancement. Serena stated that she believes men usually have no problem selling themselves as people and coaches; however, women tend to be more modest in promoting themselves and less proactive with new opportunities. The participants created many of their own opportunities, pursued tasks and goals, and took risks that others said were not possible. They did things a little differently to reach their present elite level. According to Erikson, only when a person develops a confident sense of one’s self and one’s skills will risks be taken.

Commitment to Excellence: The Hard Worker

A “hard worker” is someone with a belief in the moral benefit and importance of work and its inherent ability to strengthen character (Webster Dictionary, 2003). There is a lack of literature on the value of hard work within the coaching profession and more research is needed in this area to capture the necessity and value of work ethic. This quality is presented to reiterate the value of hard work by each participant. All five participants experienced the demands of time commitments required to be a student-athlete during high school and university. Each participant mentioned this experience as being an essential part of her development, especially in understanding what it takes to balance both school and sport as a young adult. Serena stated that she was often involved with many things at the same time: “In athletic council I became president. I was always captain on the teams, I always volunteered to do extra things and it helped my leadership skills.”

Later in their lives, during the professional development and leadership stages, the five participants believed that continuous learning in current research, attending conferences and
obtaining coaching levels was an essential part of coach development. Some participants may have blossomed earlier than others; however, they were all successful at a young age.

Two of the participants have competed as athletes at the national level; two of the women hold a PhD; four of them have coached at the international level; and all five of the participants are considered one of the top certified female coaches in their respective sports. The “hard worker” relates to Erikson’s sense of industry in which the roots of work ethic are established.

Ability to Multitask: The Jack-of-all-Trades

A “jack-of-all-trades” is a person who is adept at many different kinds of work, for example: coach, manager, recruiter, fundraiser, mother and partner. A study completed by Cote and Salmela (1996) listed five sub-components of organization for elite coaches working with individual athletes, four of which relate to the present study: (a) working with parents, (b) working with assistant coaches, (c) helping with personal concerns, and (d) planning training.

Although not focused on a specific team sport environment, the present research found that working with assistant coaches, helping athletes with personal concerns, and planning training were all part of their organizational roles as a coach. For example, Dawn had been fortunate with her coaching staff; however, she admitted that it is still a challenge to find respectful and trustworthy assistant coaches who don’t try to take over the head coach position. Another aspect of organization for coaches is their personal concern for the athletes. The participants created a coaching environment with an open door policy so their athletes would feel comfortable talking about sport and life.

From a team sport perspective, Bloom (1997) found eight components of organization: the vision, planning, team selection, goal-setting, team rules, building team cohesion, administration concerns, and working with supporting staff. Complementing Salmela and Bloom’s work, a study completed by Edwards (2000) on the roles and qualities of elite field
hockey coaches found 19 roles that the participants felt to be the coach’s responsibility. A coach was a selector, planner, leader, manager, analyzer, communicator, pre-match preparer, organizer of the warm-up, controller of the match, trainer, teacher, learner, role modeler, equipment controller, advisor, socializing agent, disciplinarian, developer of support network, and creator of representative pathways. The majority of the qualities of organization found in Edwards’ (2000) study were mentioned during the interviews of this study thus supporting this notion of “jack-of-all-trades.” In addition to the Edwards study, the present research found that the coaches acted as administrators, fundraisers and recruiters. In the same study, Edwards found specific coaching qualities were necessary for coaches to carry out their roles (p. 281). These qualities were communication skills, leadership skills, knowledge, managerial skills, personal qualities, attitude, motivational skills, and technical skills. In the present study, all eight qualities were mentioned by the participants. They also described empathy, support, and competitiveness as important components of one’s attitude in coaching.

The participants in the present study had a number of different roles within their coaching positions, while managing their other roles in life as partners, professionals, and in some cases, mothers. Research done by Robertson (2000) on women coaches raising a family exemplified the challenges of balancing their life roles with their coaching roles. However, each coach managed to continue to be passionate about coaching and was successful at bring a jack-of-all-trades.

Conclusion

All five participants were given opportunities; they were all independent, took risks, worked hard and became jacks-of-all-trades. The four qualities presented were consistent throughout the participants’ interviews, especially within the leadership stage. All four qualities
were named and defined to capture the essence of the elite female coach. The qualities provided a more specific overview of each participant’s personality as a coach and person.

The present findings do not necessarily indicate that the aforementioned personal qualities are what make an “elite female coach.” The goal was to present the reader with a better understanding of the lived experiences of these particular elite female coaches, and to provide a description of their personal qualities. The participants’ personal qualities indicate successful resolution of Erikson’s developmental tasks. Interestingly, the ability to multi-task is not addressed by Erikson’s theory and yet is considered a requirement for success in balancing work-life demands in today’s society. This may reflect a societal change since Erikson’s theory was developed.
CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS

The Bigger Picture

This chapter is intended to provide an understanding of the participants’ perceptions of their coaching philosophies. The theme “bigger picture” arose from two complementary categories: (a) Leadership Styles and (b) Coach-Athlete Relationships.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style was a recurring topic discussed by the participants while sharing aspects of their coaching philosophies. For this section, two areas will be discussed in depth: (a) The Transition of Leadership Styles, which represents the participants’ first years of coaching at the elite level, and (b) The Enjoyment of Mentoring, as part of the participants’ leadership style.

Leith (2003) suggested three different types of leadership styles: (a) directive leadership, (b) supportive leadership, and (c) participative leadership. In Leith’s terms, directive leadership is predominantly task-oriented and is focused on achieving team goals. Supportive leadership is relationship-oriented; coaches who use this style show personal interest, are friendly and approachable, provide ongoing personal consultations, encourage athletes to express their feelings and concerns, strive for harmony within the team, and stress rewards rather than punishment to reach goals. Participative leadership is task-oriented as well as relationship-oriented. With this style, coaches tend to allow team members to have a voice in defining their own goals, permit athletes a voice in structuring their practices, negotiate problems or differences of opinions that arise, allow team members some control over performance progress, and use rewards/punishment systems determined by team members (p. 22).

In the present research, the participants understood the importance of changing their coaching styles for different events, ages, levels, athletes and generations. As Leith stated,
different situations will call for different styles of leadership; this is called situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974) and it is believed to be the most effective coaching style (Leith, 2003).

The five participants’ coaching styles can be interpreted as participatory and supportive; the participants cared for their players as athletes, students and women. Moreover, their supportive and empathic natures created effective team dynamics and positive coach-athlete relationships. Spencer explained that with a more participatory and supportive coaching style, the coach leaves herself more vulnerable, but in the end she stated: “They [the athletes] and I grow more. It is looking at the bigger picture.”

Similar to Leith’s (2003) work and the present findings, Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) found that an essential quality for a coach is to remember that every athlete is different and that an athlete-centred model is the best way to satisfy the needs of all athletes. The athlete-centred coaching style is explained by Kidman (2005) as an empowering coach; “the empowering coach is when athletes reach ownership of knowledge, development and decision making, which will help them to maximize their performance. An athlete-centred approach promotes a sense of belonging as well as providing athletes a role in decision making and a shared approach to learning” (p. 13). In the present study, all five coaches implemented an athlete-centred coaching philosophy. Dawn stated: “I have a very athlete-centred coaching philosophy and I demand excellence and ‘effort’ excellence. I operate off of the team’s values for the year. And we decided on the values as a team.”

Empowerment is an essential part of this philosophy and all five coaches indicated that they wanted to motivate their athletes through empowerment and not through fear. The athlete-centred model allows each participant to teach her athletes to be better critical thinkers and decision makers. When talking about their coaching philosophies, the participants reiterated the
importance of empowerment as well as allowing their athletes to make decisions and be accountable for their actions. Dawn explained: “When I coach, I want to empower the athletes so I provide the leadership core with a great opportunity to take responsibility.”

The participants in this research reflected on their present coaching style and philosophy and believed they utilized a more athlete-centred coaching style as elite women coaches. They believed in situational leadership but shared that they had to transition into this style, which felt more natural once they gained confidence and belief in themselves.

*The Transition of Leadership Styles*

Holistic and athlete-centred coaching styles were not always the approach for every participant. Three of the participants began their coaching careers using a coaching style similar to the ones their former coaches had used, which was a more direct and task-oriented approach. This style of coaching was challenging and stressful for the participants. In the initial stages of coaching, the participants constantly struggled with “what they saw and experienced” versus “how they felt and what they believed” to be the *right* coaching style. They struggled with their confidence to implement a style of coaching that they felt was the most effective and influential. Spencer shared that she didn’t always see the coach-athlete relationship as two way communication. She coached in a more autocratic style and at the time didn’t realize the impact a coach can have on her athletes. Presently, Spencer sees her players as athletes and as people, she coaches with an athlete-centred approach and says it is important to see the “Bigger Picture.”

Scott and Brown (2006) suggested that leadership is in the eye of the beholder. People observing the behaviours of their superiors try to match the behaviours against their leader’s prototype. Four of the participants were coached predominantly with a more direct coaching style, by mostly male coaches. The participants wanted to change “the way” of coaching, but initially were not confident that their female athletes would appreciate and respect their style of
coaching. However, after gaining more confidence and developing as coaches through experience and education, each participant realized that her coaching style needed to be a reflection of who she was; more importantly, it needed to feel right. Eventually each coach altered her coaching philosophy to best suit her personality, beliefs and values. All five participants believed that with the current generation of young girls, the athlete-centered coaching style is the best way for their athletes to benefit, in both the short and long term. The following is a statement by Spencer explaining her experiences with past coaches:

Because that is how I saw my role models. Everything was dictatorship when I was growing up and being coached. And then I started to find my own philosophy on my own. Slowly I became the coach that I wanted to be and the way that felt right. I believe taking feedback is very important and utilizing it and learning from it. . . . You are leaving yourself more vulnerable; but in the end, you grow more. I grow more. It is looking at the bigger picture instead of this is the way.

As demonstrated in this study, Chafetz (1990) also found that women must find acceptance and gain respect for “their” style of leadership that is viewed as “different” from the majority of men. Similar to my participants’ views on their own leadership styles, Dennis and Kunkel (2004) believed that women manage more effectively in corporate America, using networks, being themselves as leaders rather than bosses, using people-oriented skills, heightened sensitivity, creating problem solving skills, intuitive management and participatory leadership.

*The Enjoyment of Mentoring*

As previously mentioned, Marshall (2001, p. 4) defined mentoring as: “a strategy used to help coaches grow professionally. It is a flexible process that should reflect the unique culture and objectives of the sport organization. A mentor provides support, reinforcement, counsel, friendship and constructive examples.” Each participant stated that mentoring was an important aspect of their coaching. When young female athletes and coaches see women coaching
successfully, they become aware of the possibility that females can coach at a recreational and an elite level.

In the present study, all five participants recruited former female athletes to be assistant coaches. By mentoring female athletes in sport, they can take ownership of increasing the number of young women involved in coaching and sport. This finding is supported by Everhart and Chelladurai’s (1998) results that female players who were coached by women perceived less discrimination and were more inclined to enter the coaching profession than those who were coached by males. Female coaches are important role models who inspire girls to be active and to aim for positions in the world of sport. Everhart and Chelladurai concluded that these results support the need to hire more female coaches.

Demers (2004) identified a number of action points to help the advancement of women in coaching that complement the findings of the present research: (a) taking graduate students as assistant coaches, (b) recruiting athletes as coaches for summer camps, (c) presenting life models to athletes, (d) being attentive to athletes with leadership and coaching potential, (e) setting up coaching clinics for women only, (f) promoting and educating certification programs, and (g) being involved with their sport federations in developing female coaches through mentoring programs.

In the present study, one or more of these points were prevalent in the participants’ lives, as athletes and as coaches. Overall, the participants believed that the opportunities they provided to work with youth and mentor coaches helped their athletes develop confidence and leadership skills, which established a foundation for coach development. As told by Dawn:

For all our girls [university athletes] we put them through drills each year and then when we send them out to the community, they have to come up with a plan and I have to see it. Then I provide them with feedback on their teaching. You watch them grow, I look at this and I think the girls are ‘volun-told’ [sic] to take these courses and force them to do it; there is a better chance they will get into coaching down the road.
Serena appeared to have had a more straightforward journey in finding women to help guide her into coaching. Even though some of her mentor coaches had an autocratic leadership style, they were still willing to help her move forward in the coaching profession. In addition, Serena’s experiences showed her that it was possible to coach and have a family at the same time. She was able to observe female coaches of different ages and levels take care of their families. Moreover, she felt comfortable enough to ask questions and discuss issues knowing that the majority of her mentors had similar experiences. She felt confident as a “mentor coach” with her accomplishments and knowledge. However, as a mentor coach, Serena’s ability to mentor female coaches from sports dominated by male coaches presented an obstacle. Serena believed that she did not always have enough experience and knowledge to properly mentor young coaches through certain situations and obstacles. Serena shared her first experience in a mentoring program:

I didn’t really understand [some of the stories female coaches would share during women in mentoring programs]. . . . I think I understand more now. Now that I heard other women’s stories; they just opened me up to what other people had to deal with. It was good networking for sure. It made me understand better what women coaches in other sports have to deal with.

At the end of her reflection about her involvement in a sport dominated by female coaches, Serena believed that it was both a strength and a weakness:

I think that the best thing was that I never thought that I couldn’t do it and I never felt that there were barriers to being successful. The flip side of that though [is that] it made it harder for me to mentor people with barriers, that I had to really strengthen my empathy for people in that position and I had to learn more about what it was like because I never had that, ever.

Research by Bruening and Dixon (2007) found that female coaches felt a responsibility to care for their athletes much like a mother would for her children (p. 477). In short, many coaches take on a responsibility for the lives of their athletes. Bruening and Dixon also found that coaches’ roles changed once they had children. Similar findings of Bruening’s and
colleagues were found in the present research; four out of the five coaches stated that they felt their athletes were like their own family and children. Regardless of having children or not, they felt a sense of family. Doris stated: “I think a lot of players become part of your family”.

Furthermore, both Tara and Spencer stated that once they had their child, they began to recognize even more the importance of empathy, empowerment and knowing their players as athletes and young women.

The five participants stated that one of their favourite aspects of being a coach was mentoring their athletes and assistant coaches. They enjoyed watching their athletes grow into leaders and become accountable for their own process of development. Three participants stated that potential leaders are few and far between, but when they see a potential leader, they try to mentor the young females into team captains, youth coaches and eventually assistant coaches. Doris spoke in these terms:

I like the relationships. I like the fact of giving back, mentoring coaches. I just think it is my job to be a mentor of people, I’m a mentor of people, but I am hoping that these people who have been assistant coaches of mine are going out and making a difference in the world.

Generativity is particularly relevant here as it refers to the attention and concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. One of Erikson’s examples of generativity is mentoring younger people; the participants in this study clearly exemplified generativity.

Coach-Athlete Relationships

The coach-athlete relationship was continuously mentioned as one of the most important aspects for the participants as coaches. Officer and Rosenfeld (1985) defined a coach-athlete relationship as “unique and multidimensional, with the potential for high degrees of relationship ambiguity: the coach is part teacher, part friend, part counselor and part parent while the athlete plays the complementary roles of student, friend, client and offspring” (p. 360). Jowett (2005) stressed the importance of building an effective coach-athlete relationship. Moreover, Jowett
stated that the quality of a coach-athlete relationship is a crucial determinant of an athlete’s satisfaction, motivation, and improved performance. Each participant stated that a positive relationship was one of the most enjoyable aspects of being a coach. Serena explained: “I mean I love winning, I am really competitive and I love winning, but I love the relationships with the kids more.”

Furthermore, the participants continuously mentioned the importance of an open-door policy, respect, continuous learning, technical feedback, and motivating their athletes to strive for excellence as both students and athletes. As explained by Doris:

I feel that my players admire me, they respect me but they admire me and they think, ‘Isn’t that great that a coach can do that, can do this.’ . . . And we’re standing in our circle touching feet. ‘What do you think we need to work on girls?’ So they tell me and that’s pretty good but I could have said all those things, but with this generation it’s different [sic]. Twenty years ago if I would have said that people would have been, ‘Well I don’t know you’re the coach so what the hell do we need to work on!’ That would have been the nonverbal response. They would not have even thought about that. Today’s athletes, today’s kids, they want to talk. They want you to talk, and they want to talk.

Spencer commented on the satisfaction she felt from watching her athletes improve: “I like seeing people get better, seeing people develop, and seeing people when you teach them something new, and they get it. You see progression and improvement”.

The coaching values and coaching behaviours within coach-athlete relationships were seen as significant factors for the participants’ coach-athlete relationships. These two factors are presented below.

Coaching Values

For all five participants, specific values were a significant part of their coaching philosophy. Dixon et al. (2008) stated that as individuals mature, they come to define their own set of values, make a greater number of independent decisions, and start to develop their own social identity (p. 539). The three values mentioned most frequently throughout the interviews
as the most significant components of the participants’ coaching philosophy were excellence, discipline and respect.

Each participant expected excellence from herself and her athletes. Excellence was an ongoing theme throughout the interviews. Each participant had an expectation of excellence for their athlete and themselves. Excellence to the participants meant commitment, work ethic, and being the best that they can be at all times in sport and life. Discipline was also frequently mentioned throughout all five interviews. As young athletes, four participants mentioned discipline as an important influence while growing up. They experienced discipline from coaches, teachers and parents, which helped them to develop as athletes, people, coaches and professionals. This is why the implementation of discipline became a priority in their coaching philosophies: “Discipline was a big part of it [coaching style], without being nasty.” Dawn demands excellence from the beginning of each season. She sets the tone from the start without swaying from the team’s and coach’s values.

Another value that each of the coaches expected from her athletes is respect, respect for their coaches, teammates, and for themselves. Spencer explained that the coaches and athletes need to “look at the bigger picture” in terms of respect for each other. She said it is also about representing your university or country and respecting the responsibilities that come with being an elite athlete. Respect is important to instill in athletes, however, the participants also alluded to the importance in respecting themselves by honoring their own beliefs. Patti Howes (Robertson, 2000), one of the top coaches in Canada for her sport, shared her perspective that coaching is about goal-setting, about healthy bodies and minds, and about people becoming effective. Robertson stated that the most effective people are those who can prioritize, achieve their goals and find balance. From the perspective of the participants, all three values mentioned above are transferable from sport to academics and to everyday life; for this reason, they are
important values to implement as a coach and essential aspects when looking at the bigger picture. Spencer explained that “I look at the big picture here. The big picture! It is not all about being a better soccer player; it is about focusing the whole thing and learning how to be a good person.”

Finally, in a study done by Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2007), coaches highlighted the importance of holding athletes to high expectations, developing individualized programs, reinforcing expected behaviours, discussing inappropriate behaviours, and setting up a plan for dealing with parents and officials. In the present research, the participants’ values were similar to that of Gould et al.’s findings in which they strived for excellence, discipline and respect, while at the same time developing a holistic philosophy towards coaching.

Coaching Behaviours

The behaviour and leadership style of a coach plays a major role in determining the quality of success and the experience the athlete receives in his or her sport. Wang, Callahan and Goldfine (2001) stated that coaching behaviours can impact an athlete’s performance and psychological well-being.

Mageau and Vallerand (2003) researched the coach-athlete relationship within a motivation model and aimed to present this model to describe how coaches may influence athletes’ motivation. They listed seven coaching autonomy-supportive behaviours: (a) provide choice within specific rules and limits, (b) provide a rationale for tasks and limits, (c) acknowledge the other person’s feelings and perspectives, (d) provide athletes with opportunity for initiative taking and independent work, (e) provide non-controlling competence feedback, (f) avoid overt control, criticisms and controlling behaviours, and tangible rewards for interesting tasks, and (g) prevent ego-involvement in athletes (p. 887). The current participants’ perspectives on the importance of the coach-athlete relationship, an empowering coaching style,
and the impact a coach can have on an athlete’s life were consistent with Mageau and Vallerand’s identified behaviours. Leith (2003) also emphasized the importance of coaching behaviours in influencing a positive coach-athlete relationship.

In Bloom’s (2002) study on the role of elite coaches in the development of talent, he presented recommendations for coaches. The recommendations mentioned below are roles that were familiar to the present participants, within their professional lives (p. 482).

(a) Coaches should treat elite athletes with mutual respect and collegiality. As previously mentioned, respect was one of the main values that the participants implemented into their coaching philosophies. In addition, the participant’s mentioned throughout the interviews the importance of their athletes representing their university or country with respect. Finally, each participant also alluded to the importance in respecting themselves by honoring her own beliefs as a coach and person. Tara stated: “You know respect; it was all about the respect. Like respecting each other, respecting yourself, respecting your coaches and respecting your environment”.

(b) Coaches should stimulate and motivate athletes to excel beyond their perceived capabilities. All five participants’ enjoyed mentoring their female athletes. They demanded excellence in all areas of sport; more importantly tried to help instill the same qualities in their every day life. Dawn stated: “I demand excellence and effort excellence.”

(c) Coaches must understand that athletes need to enjoy their sport if they are to perform well. Three participants stated that enjoyment was necessary for their athletes as well as themselves, to perform to the best of their abilities. Moreover, it was important for the participants to create an open door policy for feedback, questions and mentoring with and overall positive training and playing atmosphere for their athletes.
(d) Top coaches should have a genuine love and devotion for what they are doing. All five participants expressed their passion for competition, coaching, and developing young women. Dawn expressed this passion: “I have a real passion for trying to get young women in sport”. This passion helped the participants overcome obstacles and stressors within their professional and personal lives.

(e) Elite coaches know how to maintain emotional control during sporting contests. All five coaches stated that they are not “yellers and screamers” from the side-lines. Some coaches expressed that in the past they had a more autocratic leadership style because that was the only style or behaviour they had learned from their coaches. As previously mentioned, once they became more comfortable and confident, each participant changed her coaching style to enhance her own enjoyment and the enjoyment of her athletes. The participants believed asking questions and providing constructive feedback are two effective behaviours that can motivate their players to become better athletes and people.

(f) Elite coaches understand the importance of incorporating mental training techniques into their athlete’s regimes. All five coaches have at one point in time worked with a sport psychologist as part of their coaching staff. Moreover, three participants actually went into detail regarding the specific tools in sport psychology that they found to be influential on their athletes, such as team building, confidence, and imagery. Interestingly, in addition to their coaching positions, two of the participants are practicing sport psychologists.

Werthner (2005) referred to three key qualities or behaviours that successful coaches acquire: (a) being open to learning and seeking out mentors or experts across discipline, (b) being open to listening to and learning from their athletes, and (c) incorporating self-reflection into their practice and enabling those around them to do the same. The participants currently implement these behaviours as part of their holistic coaching philosophy.
Conclusion

All five participants believed that their transition years were an important part of their development as elite coaches. During this process, most discovered how to be positive role models and mentors to their athletes. Furthermore by discovering an athlete-centred coaching style, they soon began to realize the importance of the bigger picture in sport. The participants felt that using the relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership styles not only benefited their athletes, but also benefited them as coaches and leaders, which allowed them to enjoy the coaching process to the fullest. All five participants felt more positive about their experiences in coaching once they had found a leadership style that matched their personalities and personal beliefs.

The coach-athlete relationship was also a major theme within the research findings. A positive and effective coach-athlete relationship was one of the most important and enjoyable aspects of coaching for the participants. In addition, they instilled values such as excellence, discipline and respect, which they believed positively influenced their players’ lives as athletes, students and people. Moreover, each participant believed that a positive coach-athlete relationship and positive coaching behaviours are essential for capturing the bigger picture in sport as well as in life.

While reflecting on Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial theory, the specific coaching values and behaviours were developed through successfully mastering the developmental and professional developmental stages and earlier developmental tasks. Confidence and pride in their accomplishments and abilities resulted from these successes. Mastering Erikson’s developmental tasks enabled the participants to establish their own individual identity including values and coaching philosophies.
CHAPTER IX
LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter revisits the research questions, summarizes the perspectives and experiences of the participants, and examines the reflective nature of the research process. The sections presented in this chapter are: (a) Lessons Learned, (b) Limitations of the Study, (c) Future Directions, and (d) Reflections on the Research Process.

Lessons Learned

This study began with an interest in discovering more about the lives of elite female coaches in Canada. Goodson and Sikes (2001) explored how individuals or groups of people who share specific characteristics (personally and subjectively) and experiences, make sense of, and account for the things that happen to them. In Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial developmental theory, he believed people had to successfully go through eight specific developmental stages in order to become competent in each area of their life. With Erikson’s theory as a framework, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of elite female coaches.

In order to organize the different stages in each participant’s life, the written life histories were presented in three stages that complemented four of Erikson’s stages of development. The Developmental stage included the perspectives, experiences, influences and challenges during the participants’ childhood development as daughters, siblings, friends and athletes. This stage consists of the developmental tasks of establishing industry or a sense of work ethic and the development of identity or a sense of self. The Professional Developmental stage captured the perspectives, influences and challenges the participants experienced as women, students, athletes and coaches. Erikson’s stages of identify formation versus confusion and intimacy versus isolation pertain to this stage. And the Leadership stage, presented a picture of their current personal and professional lives as coaches, role models, mentors, educators, mothers, and
partners. This stage involves Erikson’s development tasks of intimacy and generativity. Each participant shared her personal experiences and perspectives throughout all three stages of development, which contributed to my understanding of their lived experiences.

I have learned that elite women coaches of female teams share a number of similar experiences and perspectives throughout the process of becoming, and being an elite coach. Upon critical reflection and understanding of these experiences and perspectives, four major themes emerged that represented the lives of the five participants: (a) Support, (b) Overcoming Obstacles, (c) Personal Qualities, and (d) The Bigger Picture. Although the four themes have been presented separately, it is important to emphasize that the themes intersect and are interrelated. For example, in order for the participants to overcome obstacles they needed support from a number of different sources. In addition, the participants’ personal qualities not only helped each of them overcome obstacles but also allowed them to see the bigger picture in sport and life.

In summary the present research has generated a number of lessons learned which could provide direction for further action.

1. The participants of this research are a unique group of women; in the sense that they have been able to surpass obstacles, make a career out of coaching, and become “successful” in the process. The participants were continuously advancing to the next level in coaching and contrary to the literature that suggests that most women leave the coaching profession after five years or so, these women coached on a full-time basis for an average of 18 years.

2. The importance of support from a variety of sources was highlighted within the interviews. For some of the participants, their coaches, teachers and peers made an
everlasting impact on their lives. Interestingly, only one of the participants received the active parental support that previous literature claims is essential for the development of talent in young people. Furthermore, the participants appeared to be resilient to and learn from the unsupportive relationships they had with some coaches.

3. One of the most essential means of support during the developmental and professional developmental stages was the support of partners. Contrary to the findings of previous research, these participants had partners who supported their coaching careers and family responsibilities in meaningful ways. Erikson’s 7th stage of Generativity vs. Stagnation of human development is a time period when people focus on both career and family. In the present study, the participants were highly focused on successfully balancing both career and family. I believe each participant was successful at this particular balancing act partially because the support of their partners. According to Erikson, mastering this stage would allow the participants to feel that they are contributing to the world by being active in their home and community. In the end, this is believed to be an important asset for women in coaching to be able to weave among the roles of coach, partner, mother, administrator and many others roles. More specifically to motherhood, all three mothers within the present study reported that their roles as mothers were enhanced through same-sex role models, partner support, their abilities to multi-task and to balance work and life.

4. Without exception, all coaches within this study cared about their coach-athlete relationships. In relation to Erikson’s psychosocial model and the 6th stage of development of Intimacy vs. Isolation, each participant formed intimate, trustworthy and committed relationships with their athletes. Once their coaching philosophies evolved to fit their personality and their athletes, they began to appreciate the mentoring process
much more. In fact, they found mentoring their athletes to be one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling aspects of coaching. This pertains to Erikson’s notion of generativity, to guide the next generation.

5. The participants’ personal qualities were found to be central to becoming a “successful” coach. Erikson (1950) believed that these qualities were developed through mastery of the childhood and young adulthood developmental stages of his psychosocial theory. After successfully mastering each stage, one develops positive qualities to be competent in different areas of life. Overtime, each participant became more comfortable in the male-dominated environment in which they worked. I believe that each participant’s experiences of growing up as a “tomboy” (in their words), they were better equipped to navigate the professional and leadership stages in a male-dominated environment.

6. The significance of the professional and life struggles during the critical years (ages of 25-35) was apparent in all five participants. Some of these struggles resulted in experiences of failure, but each participant recovered and succeeded at their next challenge or opportunity. The participants were able to master specific developmental stages which assisted in developing personal qualities that guided participants to overcome obstacles. I believe the participant’s ability to create intimate relationships (Stage 6 – Intimacy vs. Isolation) and balance work and family (Stage 7 – Generativity vs. Stagnation) enabled them to enjoy coaching and stay in the coaching profession for a long period of time. However, I interpreted that each participant had to make conscious decisions and sacrifices within these critical years, which in all likelihood affected their personal and professional lives. On the other hand, the challenges, sacrifices and decisions helped to strengthen their personal qualities and skills.
7. The participants from sports dominated by male coaches had “street credit” as a young coach. I used the term street credit to define a person who was a highly recognizable and respectable athlete in her community. The athlete would be recognized by playing for the provincial or national team, developing in a national championship program, and receiving award recognition (i.e. All-Canadian). For example, Dawn was in the national training pool; Tara played for the provincial and junior national team; Doris was always playing on national championship team(s); and Spencer played for the provincial and national team. Interestingly, Serena (sport dominated by female coaches) played on an average university team but was mentored into a head coach position and found success in coaching at a young age. It may be that the confidence these women gained from their experiences as athletes helped to achieve “success” as a coach. According to Erikson’s 5th stage (Identity vs. Role Confusion) of development, recognition and encouragement develops a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. In this study, I believe the participants gained confidence and a sense of pride in their accomplishments as athletes which subsequently gave them “street credit” as coaches. It would be interesting in future research to investigate female coaches who had not had a successful athletic career.

8. The bigger picture was a process by which the participants evolved into successful coaches and leaders in their respective sport. After a number of transitions years and successfully mastering various developmental tasks in trying to define themselves as coaches, the participants established relationship-oriented, task-oriented and athlete-centered coaching styles which they found comfortable and personally rewarding. The finding that the participants experienced “transition years” in establishing their own
coaching styles was one of the most interesting findings of the study. Three participants began their coaching careers with a style used by their former coaches, namely one that was authoritarian and coach focused before evolving into an athlete-centred coaching style. This finding suggests that coaches, administrators and sport leaders could do a better job in mentoring and educating both athletes and young coaches on leadership styles, coaching philosophies and the coach-athlete relationship, and the benefits associated with an athlete-centred model. All five coaches had passion for competition, excellence and sport. They saw the bigger picture of the “meaning of sport” and how sport can develop young, positive and hard working leaders who know how to be team players. In the end, each participant believed the bigger picture of sport is life and that this surpasses the win/loss ratio at every level.

9. A comparative analysis of a sport dominated by female coaches and sports dominated by male coaches indicated differences between the participants’ experiences. One of the differences observed was that Serena (sport dominated by female coaches) had more opportunities to build her credentials and experiences through support, mentors and networks from other female coaches. I believe that Serena had advantages in her journey of becoming an elite coach through networking and support groups within her sport, including (a) clear opportunities to advance as a coach provided by her mentors; (b) female role models at every stage of professional development; (c) numerous types of female role models, such as mothers, administrators, youth coaches, university coaches and national coaches, with a combination of different leadership styles; (d) a chance to observe different leadership styles of women and become confident in the development of her own style from a young age; (e) belief that she could be a coach as a result of seeing other women as coaches; (f) feeling supported during all three stages of
development; (g) absence of intimidation or obstacles characteristic of the “old boy’s club” during her coaching career, (h) more flexibility and support with motherhood while coaching; and (i) being recruited for superior positions.

The developmental trajectories of all five participants in the present study have been described using Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development. I was able to explore the participants’ transitions during their development and professional developmental years from childhood to adulthood, and from athlete to coach. The developmental stages allowed me to explore the contributions of the participants’ athletic experiences to their coaching advancements. These five women demonstrated industry, intimacy and generativity, thus positively resolving the developmental tasks between childhood and middle adulthood.

This study’s findings raise questions about resiliency and the ability to overcome adversity as requirements for success. Although the abilities to cope with adversity are not addressed by Erikson’s theory, the participants in this study seemed to learn and grow from less-than-ideal situations. Most of the participants came from unstable family structures and did not experience the parental support that the literature claims is essential for the development of talent in young people. For these individuals, it was the sport environment itself that assisted them in mastering developmental tasks. Additionally, they navigated and in fact learned from unsupportive, and in some cases, abusive coaching relationships. Future research would benefit from exploring the developmental advantages gained through negative experiences.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the difficulty in capturing and expressing the “true” emotions of each participant. Although I recorded my perceptions of each lived experience, it was difficult to capture the richness of emotions expressed during the interviews by the participants. Another challenge was in addressing the complexity of the research question,
which incorporated the experiences and perspectives of elite women coaches throughout various stages of life and in their different roles.

Although the purpose was to understand the lived experiences, I was challenged to maintain this focus and not be drawn into an interest in understanding what made them successful. Given the participants’ long tenure in coaching and their successful performance records, I was continually tempted to venture into developing a “recipe” for success during the analysis and the writing stage. Furthermore, as a female coach of a sport dominated by male coaches myself, it was hard to withhold my thoughts and emotions, and maintain an awareness of any bias that may have influenced the interview process, my interpretation of the data, or my writing.

Another limitation was the overwhelming amount of data; therefore, not all of the participants’ experiences and perspectives were presented in the previous chapters. It was a challenge to choose only four major themes and maintain consistency in the four choices. Finally, although it was necessary to maintain confidentiality, I believe that it was a limitation to withhold the true identity of each participant, such as their name, sport, home town, university and present living location. Without this information, the reader may have lost a sense of connection with each life history.

Future Directions

One of the most prevailing problems in Canadian sport is the lack of representation of women in coaching. There are many theories as to why this situation exists but very few solutions. This is particularly puzzling as statistics show that female athletes and students presently account for almost half of the participating sport population (Sport Canada, 2007).

Although there have been some attempts to develop mentoring programs for young women, a more vivid message must be delivered to advocate for the capabilities, skills and
knowledge that a female coach brings to the professional world. Presently, women have acquired equity in many areas of life and are accepted in leading roles; however, in the area of sport, women have yet to gain the full credibility and professional respect equal to their male counterparts. It is generally understood that women who pursue a career in coaching still face many adversities and struggle to attain a level of leadership where they can achieve their highest potential. With sport still seen as an old boy’s network with predominantly male control, female coaches struggle with the preconceived ideas about women in power and athletes remain hesitant about having a woman as their coach.

It is important for women to be involved in leadership and mentoring youth. There are positive differences that female coaches bring to sport, especially in keeping potential female leaders involved in sport (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Women have had different experiences in sport and their lives may differ from men, which could provide a benefit to both males and females in the sport domain. Female coaches should be playing an active role in developing more networks and mentoring ideas, which suggests that further planning is required. However, in order to attract, develop and retain quality female coaches to play a significant role in the advancement of women in coaching in Canada, more research is required.

Enhancing and strengthening female participation in coaching roles requires education, support, change and acceptance. Just as most baby-boomers grew up with predominantly male doctors, educational changes and acceptance of female doctors has gradually increased to a point where many women now prefer to have female doctors. Exposure to female coaches should begin at a young age where role models are important and confidence begins to develop. Education, promotion and support of the importance of female leaders must be emphasized. A movement is required in Canada to educate young females regarding the positive aspects as well as the challenges associated with being a coach. Moreover, it is also important to propose and
implement well thought-out and proactive solutions to develop female coaches while ensuring some quality of life.

More research is needed on combining motherhood with coaching. Longitudinal research on the lives of female coaches with young children needs to be conducted in order to better understand the obstacles and challenges they encounter. It is also important to understand how female coaches overcome these obstacles and challenges and succeed in a male-dominated environment. What are the most difficult stages for a female coach and who can she reach out to for support during this time? This research should be pursued with both SDFC and SDMC.

More specific research should be done on the critical years and the effects they have on the lives on female coaches. A question to address would be: What happens when a female coach has children before versus after the critical years? This research could enhance our understanding of the issues faced during motherhood, and help to create a supportive environment in which women can coach while raising children.

Questions about the developmental benefits of navigating negative situations and unsupportive relationships are raised by this study’s findings. Future research is needed on the importance of resilience in achieving success and the potential role that sport involvement may play in developing resilience.

Research on the perspectives of the participants’ athletes regarding their coaches, their coach-athlete relationships, the athlete-centered model and individual team values would be useful. This research could contribute to our understanding of the development and “success” of female coaches.

Reflection on the Research Process

The research process – from the literature review, the interview process, the analysis and finally the writing – was an emotional, inspiring and challenging journey. I can relate to the five
participants individually and as a group, and I understand most of their challenges. More importantly, they showed me that through hard work, support, persistence, enjoyment and using my personal strengths, I can achieve my goals despite challenges and failures. I believe that the stories from these coaches will help to educate young female leaders and extend a sense of integrity for women in coaching and leadership. Moreover, I believe the reader was presented with a bona fide insight into the participants’ realities in coaching and in life.

I hope that all women and men see the importance of striving for excellence and seeing the bigger picture in sport and in life. During the professional development and leadership stages, women must continue to support other women and be less timid in presenting their strengths and selling their abilities. The men who currently hold positions of power in sport are encouraged to become more aware of their power base and how this may affect women, to recognize the value added by having female coaches, and to find ways of creating supportive environments for women in coaching. The women in coaching currently have a particularly important responsibility for mentoring young female athletes and coaches. Women need to be proud of their accomplishments and believe that it is okay to want to “do it all.” Importantly, both women and men need to work together to help attract, develop and retain quality women coaches.
REFERENCES


A review of IOC policy and activities to promote women in and through sport. 3rd World Conference on Women and Sport 7-9, March 2004, Marrakech, Morocco.


APPENDIX A
Information Sheet

Dear ______________________________.

My name is Beth McCharles and I am a PhD candidate in the Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences at the University of Toronto. I am contacting you because you fit the specific research criteria as an elite female coach in Canada and I would be very interested in you participating in the present research. The purpose of the research is to gather the lived experiences of women elite coaches in Canada.

As a participant, you would be required to have a minimum of ten years of experience at the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), provincial or college level and experience at the national level in Canada (assistant or head coach). In addition, you would be coaching women’s team sports.

To participate in this research, you would be asked to consent to two in-depth interviews which will be arranged within your availability and accommodations. You would go through an interview process of five or six hours in total. For the present research, I hope to create an atmosphere for you to express specific experiences of becoming and being an elite coach.

As a researcher, I aim to truly understand your experiences, influences, and support systems during your path of life. More specifically, I intend to tap into three time periods:

1) Developmental stage: to gather and share perspectives, experiences, influences and challenges during their childhood development as a daughter, sibling, friend, and athlete.
2) Professional developmental stage: to capture the perspectives, experiences, influences, and challenges as a woman, student, athlete and coach.
3) Leadership stage (present): to present a picture of their current personal and professional life as a role model, coach, mentor, educator, mother and partner.

You would not be identified in any publication/dissemination of the research findings without an explicit consent. In addition, all information collected during conversation/meetings/interviews will only be viewed by the researcher (myself) and the supervisor if requested, and remain strictly confidential.

If you have any further questions about this research study; or you would like to participate please contact me, Beth McCharles at 647.226.2023 or beth.mccharles@utoronto.ca or the supervising professor, Gretchen Kerr at 416-978-6190 or Gretchen.kerr@utoronto.ca.

Thank you for your consideration,

Beth McCharles (PhD Candidate)
APPENDIX B
Consent form

Beth L. McCharles, PhD Candidate and Dr. Gretchen Kerr, PhD
Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences, Faculty of Physical Education and Health
University of Toronto

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in the research conducted by
Beth McCharles at the Graduate Department of Exercise Sciences at the University of
Toronto. The project is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gretchen Kerr. The
purpose of the research is to gather the lived experiences of women elite coaches.

My participation will consist of participating in two interviews of approximately 2-3
hours long and to complete and demographic questionnaire to gather specific information
such as age, years of experience, level of certification, etc. I realize the interviews will be
scheduled at times convenient for me. I will also be asked to talk to the researcher about
my feelings, perspective and beliefs on my general development as a person and my
professional development and experiences as a coach. I understand that the information
gathered will be used only for this specific research study. The data will be transcribed
and analyzed for gaining an understanding of the elite coaches’ lived experiences. I will
be ensured anonymity by the use of pseudonyms in the information sheet, transcriptions
of the interviews, publications and presentations about the research with the supervisor.

I understand that since this activity may deal with personal information, I may experience
some discomfort. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be
made to minimize these occurrences. I am free to withdraw from any questions or the
project at any time.

I understand that the interviews will be tape-recorded and that the tape recordings and
other data collected will be kept in a secure manner. The researcher will be the only one
who will have access to the data that will be stored and locked in a filing cabinet in her
office. The data will be conserved for a maximum of five years.

Any information about my rights as a research participant may be addressed to Protocol
Officer for Ethics Research at Simcoe Hall, Room 10A, 27 King’s College Circle,
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1 or 416-946-3273.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.
If I have any further questions about the research study; I may contact the researcher,
Beth McCharles at 647.226.2023 or beth.mccharles@utoronto.ca or the supervising
professor, Gretchen Kerr at 416-978-6190 or Gretchen.kerr@utoronto.ca.

Researcher’s signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________

Participant’s signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________
APPENDIX C
Demographic Information

Name: ___________________________   Age: ________   Sport: ________

Relationship status: Single __   Married __   Common Law __   Divorced __   Other: __
Children: No ___ Yes ___;   If yes how many ___

Hometown:
___________________________________________________ _____________________

Education:
___________________________________________________ _____________________

Highest coaching certifications (NCCP, Provincial, National, international):

What was your age when each level of the certification was achieved?

1- __________________________
2- __________________________
3- __________________________
4- __________________________
5- __________________________
6- __________________________

- Years coaching in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport: _____
  o Years as head coach: _____
  o Years as assistance coach: _____

- Year coaching at the Provincial Level: _____
  o Years as head coach: _____
  o Years as assistance coach: _____

- Years coaching at the National Level: _____
  o Years as head coach: _____
  o Years as assistance coach: _____

- Number of International events as a coach: _____
  o Years as head coach: _____
  o Years as assistance coach: _____

Top level played as an athlete and where (CIS, NCAA, provincial, national, etc):

___________________________________________________ _____________________

Thank you,
Beth McCharles
APPENDIX D
Interview Guideline

The below guideline presents examples of questions used within the life history interviews. It is important to note that most of the answers to these questions came naturally while the participants shared their experiences, stories and challenges. The researcher aimed to guide the participants on the path of the three stages and their lived experience in becoming and being an elite coach.

1. Developmental Stage
   a. Reflecting back to childhood, how would you describe your family environment?
   b. What were your relationships like with your parents, siblings (if any) and friends?
   c. Would you describe yourself as being active from a young age?
   d. Did you participate in organized sport?
   e. Did you play school sports?
   f. Did you enjoy school?
   g. Describe your relationships with your teachers, friends, coaches and parents while in school?

2. Professional Developmental Stage
   a. Did you enjoy high school?
   b. What was it like playing for your high school and/or club team in your hometown?
   c. What were your relationship like with your teachers, friends, parents and boyfriend/girlfriend (if any)?
   d. Describe how you made the decision to go to [blank] university?
   e. Did you have any role models growing up? How were they a role model to you?

3. Leadership Stage
   a. Did you always want to be a coach?
   b. Do you believe you had mentors during your life time in sport and/or life?
   c. What is your coaching philosophy?
   d. Are you presently in a relationship? Tell me about it?
   e. Do you have any children? If so, has that impacted your life and career in any way?
   f. Why do you coach?
   g. Do you love to coach?
   h. What do you love about it?
   i. Do you have anything you would like to add that we may have missed during the interview?