REFLECTIONS ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOMEN WHO COACH CANADIAN HIGH PERFORMANCE MALE TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES

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By
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Laura Colleen Dahlstrom, candidate for the degree of Master of Science in Kinesiology & Health Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Reflections on Career Development: A Phenomenological Study of Women Who Coach Canadian High Performance Male Track and Field Athletes*, in an oral examination held on August 13, 2014. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

Canadian female coaches are typically young, single and without a family, leave within the first five years of coaching, often hold part-time positions and are unlikely to coach male athletes (Kerr, 2010; Reade, Rogers & Norman, 2009). Further it has been suggested that the Canadian sport system does not adequately support women’s entry into the coaching profession (Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kidd, 2013). Several studies have explored the challenges female coaches face in establishing a career and working in sport (Kamphoff, 2010; Kerr and Marshall, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Norman, 2010a, 2010b; Staurowsky, 1990; Theberge, 1993; West, Green, Brackenridge & Woodward, 2001). However, few studies explore female coaches’ positive coaching experiences, focus on women coaching high performance male athletes or explore a range of coaching roles to gain a better understanding of sport culture or career progression. The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the lived experiences of women who coached high performance male track and field athletes as a means to obtain a greater understanding of their careers as coaches and provide insight that could help other women succeed in coaching.

A phenomenological approach was used to provide a more complete picture of the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in coaching (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews modeled after Norman’s (2010b) interview guide topics were conducted with six women who coached at the university and/or national levels in Canada. A manual content analysis (Berg, 2009) was performed examining each case individually (within case analysis) followed by a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007).
Findings revealed three core themes: 1) the impact of gender ideology, 2) the role of the Canadian sport system and 3) personal strategies used to stay in the system. The implications for these findings are discussed in the context of dominant gender ideology inherent in Canadian sport culture and mainstream society, ideas for restructuring coach recruitment, development and support for coaches, recommendations for policy development, advice to females considering coaching career paths and directions for future research.
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Dedication

To my husband Barclay, thank you for your love, patience and encouragement as I worked on this project. I appreciate your support, willingness to listen to my ramblings and reviewing many drafts. Thank you for telling me never to give up.

I would like to thank my parents for raising me in an open-minded household and valuing education. Mom thank you for instilling your passion for reading in me as a child and dad for challenging the expectations of what a daughter can do, yes that’s right even though I may not have enjoyed cleaning those grain bins at the time I am actually thanking you for it now!

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The number of girls and women playing sports in Canada at all levels has been on the rise for quite some time (Demers, 2003; Kerr, Marshall, Sharp & Stirling, 2006). A national survey of sport participation in Canada reported that females outnumbered males in six out of 10 of the most popular sports (Idfedi, 2005). At the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) level female athlete participation rates nearly match those of male athletes (Reade, Rodgers & Norman, 2009). Despite the increases in participation at the athlete levels, the number of female coaches has not increased to the same extent (Kerr et al., 2006). With relatively few women coaching sport in Canada, the profession of coaching has remained almost exclusively a man’s world (Werthner & Callary, 2010). The severity of the issue is most evident at the highest levels of competition (Kerr et al., 2006). For example, women only accounted for 20% of coaches at the recent London 2012 Olympic games (Kidd, 2013). The number of women in head coach posts in the CIS has decreased from 19% in the 2010-2011 seasons to 17% in the 2012-2013 season (Donnelly, Norman & Kidd, 2011, 2013), as has the number of female teams coached by women, with 66% of men coaching female teams in the 2010-2011 CIS season and 68% of men coaching female teams in the 2012-2013 CIS season (Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013). Further, the proportion of co-ed teams coached by men has increased from 79% in the 2010-2011 CIS season to 82% in the 2012-2013 CIS season (Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013). Additionally, several studies (including Demers, 2004; Kidd, 2013; Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kerr et al., 2006; Werthner & Callary, 2010) have identified a need for more female coaches in Canadian athletics. They found women were underrepresented at all levels of Canadian athletics (i.e., from recreational youth leagues to national, Canadian
Interuniversity Sport (CIS), Canadian Colleges Athletic Association (CCAA), Canada Summer Games (CSG), provincial and paralympic levels).

One strategy used to address this problem in the past is the development and implementation of gender equity policies. Kerr et al. (2006) found gender equity policies enacted in organizations such as the Canada Summer Games and the Canadian Interuniversity Sport have had some success at increasing the number of women coaching at those levels. While there are obvious absences of women coaching at the national level and the number of female head coaches, their results indicate women represented almost 50% of assistant coaches in individual mixed gender sports. Recently, Kerr and Ali (2012) examined the perceived barriers to achieving gender equity, at the coaching level, within the CIS. They found that despite athletic directors’ desires to staff positions with female coaches and their strong efforts in retaining and developing female coaches once hired, the greatest challenge was getting female coaches to apply. As a result, it appears that gender equity policy objectives, aggressive recruiting strategies, and efforts to attract women to the profession have been largely unsuccessful at the CIS level. Interestingly, many of the athletic directors interviewed “expressed the need to learn more about why women don’t aspire to a CIS coaching role” (Kerr & Ali, 2012, p.4). Some also discussed the broader issue of development of coaches in Canada, noting that women are underrepresented at the grassroots level as well and the need to explore why those women who had initially showed interest in coaching, had left. Finally, they discussed the need for a more integrated system between universities and the broader Canadian sport system, and to establish full time permanent coaching positions, rather than following the trend of hiring coaches on part-time or contract basis. Although Kerr
and Ali (2012) recommended a need to learn why female athletes do not aspire to be elite coaches, it is equally as important to study those women who do aspire to coach and those who are coaching.

One explanation for the lack of women coaches was proposed by Theberge (1990), who suggested, “within sport coaching is a key site for the production of masculinity” (p. 64). In particular, the gendering of coaching as a masculine role has been found to be an effective strategy to keep women out of the coaching profession and maintain the patriarchal balance of power (Knoppers, 1992; Staurowsky, 1990; West, Green, Brackenridge & Woodward, 2001). Further, it has been argued the expectation that men, and not women, should coach male athletes arose from an underlying belief linking sport expertise and leadership with male superiority (Staurowsky, 1990). From this standpoint male coaches are perceived to embody the masculine athletic ideal and role of coach. Consequently, “[i]f men are to stay the dominant group with respect to gender, they have to continually show their difference from women and attribute superiority to that difference” (Knoppers, 1992, p. 218).

Women’s absence from decision-making positions in sport has also contributed to maintaining and reinforcing ideas supporting men’s superiority and women’s liabilities as important signifiers and determinants of status (Reskin, 1988). LaVoi (2009) suggested the implications for such beliefs reach beyond the organizations themselves to inform children’s beliefs, values and expectations of women’s role in sport. In fact, Demers (2004) was shocked to learn that many CIS female athletes believed “leadership is a male thing” (p. 7). Previous to Demers’ work, LeDrew and Zimmerman (1994) concluded the absence of female coaches and role models may lead
female athletes to devalue their sport and career aspirations. Similarly, Kamphoff and Gill’s (2008) survey of U.S. Division I athletes indicated female athletes had fewer intentions of entering the coaching profession and perceived differential treatment among male and female coaches. In comparison, Cooper, Hunt and O’Bryan (2007) found that although female university students were generally interested in entering the coaching profession, they perceived there to be several barriers (i.e., a lack of administrative support, family conflicts, inadequate salaries, negative attitudes of co-workers, a lack of professional role models, a lack of professional connections/networks, negative attitudes of athletes, lack of confidence, and homophobia) which prevented women like themselves from pursuing a coaching career.

However some women do enter and remain in the coaching profession despite knowing about the challenges they may face in their careers. The most recent survey of Canadian high performance coaches by Reade and associates (2009) found women coaches differ from their male counterparts. Their research suggests successful female coaches tend to be young, single, and without a family, unlikely to have a full time position or coach male athletes, more likely to have completed an undergraduate degree or higher and competitive experience at the national or international level (Reade et al., 2009). The literature depicts the career of a female coach as short-lived, with a trend of women leaving the profession within the first five years of coaching (Kerr, 2010). Other research has also suggested that such careers are plagued by numerous negative experiences (i.e., marginalization, isolation and a lack of recognition for their work; Cruz, 2009; Norman, 2010a, 2010b; Theberge, 1993). Yet there is anecdotal evidence to counter these findings. For example, one woman in this study held a CIS head coaching
position for 8 years working with both men’s and women’s cross country and track and field teams. For the past five years she has been a national team level coach. She is an anomaly when compared to academic, empirical evidence of the typical career path of a female coach (Reade et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010) given that she holds a full-time coaching post working with elite male athletes. She also started a family as she made the transition from her stable career in the health field to pursue coaching professionally. Bamberg and Andrews (2004) would see her as a counter narrative because her experiences do not reflect that of the norm. There are other women in Canada who hold head coach positions and work as national and university level coaches offering further counter narratives. It is imperative to learn from their experiences in order to encourage other women to enter and remain in the field of coaching.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the lived experiences of women who coached high performance male track and field athletes as a means to obtain greater understanding of their careers as coaches and to provide insight that could help other women succeed in coaching. I used a phenomenological approach to gain a more complete picture of the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in coaching. The specific research questions were:

1. What is the impact of gender ideology on the experiences of Canadian female coaches?
2. What does the Canadian sport system do to assist and hinder the development of female coaches?
3. How do female coaches manage their careers in Canada?
2.1. Introduction

The career paths of female coaches have been the subject of much previous research. An array of topics have been examined including work/family conflict, lack of role models/mentors, lack of confidence, sexual harassment, lack of financial incentives, burnout, competition from male coaches to coach female athletes, and discriminatory hiring, recruitment, and promotion practices (Demers, 2004; Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly & Hooper, 2009; Kerr et al., 2006; Kilty, 2006; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Robertson, 2010; Sagas, Cunningham & Pastore, 2006; Staurowsky, 1990). Although these studies inform readers of many different aspects of a woman’s coaching career, there are limitations to them. As identified in the methods chapter, these studies typically limit their population to women who coach children, novice athletes, and/or other women or they combine experiences of female head coaches from different sports and levels, women in sport management roles and volunteer female officials. This study is unique in that it explores female coaches’ experiences in one sport. Participants coach competitive male track and field athletes at the university and/or national level. It includes women who coach part-time as volunteers and those who work full time as coaches. The women fill a variety of coaching positions ranging from head coaches to assistant coaches and some have multiple coaching roles with different teams and work at different levels in their sport concurrently. This study strives to understand why they have succeeded in this profession despite the constraints they face and add new insight to the existing coaching literature to enable other women be successful in coaching.
The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of what is known about high performance female coaches in the Canadian sport system. A number of difficulties women face as coaches will be discussed. These topics include balancing coaching and family responsibilities, perceptions of coaching competency, resistance to female authority, the implications of being excluded from coaching networks, beliefs about socially acceptable roles for women and a brief summary of Canadian coaching programs and supports. Finally, the chapter concludes by charting out how gender ideology is a common theme that cuts across the women in coaching literature and provides insight on what’s missing from this body of literature.

2.2. Gender Ideology

First, a brief discussion of the broader gender literature implicit in the women in coaching research is necessary to provide the context for the present study. It is in this body of research that one can find a context for explaining the dynamics of sport leadership, explore the struggles women in non-traditional gender roles face, understand the reasons that cause some women to drop out of coaching and what strategies others employ and how these strategies work to help the women mitigate the challenges linked to their gender; such as gaining acceptance and succeeding in a male dominated profession. The literature on gender roles or doing gender and the glass ceiling concepts is extensive and parallel many of the discussions occurring in the women in coaching literature.

Women’s careers in sport serve as a testing ground and demonstrate the extent to which gender shapes women’s professional careers and private lives. West and Zimmerman (1987) provide an excellent overview of the evolution of the concept of
gender ideology. In the article they argued the actions, behaviours or interactions of men and women are guided by their assigned gender roles. It is suggested that people are socialized to believe that all roles are gendered and linked to their biological sex, where some roles are deemed to be more socially appropriate acceptable for men than women and vise a versa. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1967) was instrumental in shedding light on how gender is embedded in everyday interactions. Goffman first theorized this concept decades ago, however I find his ideas to be very relevant for present day discussions of gender roles and in particular women’s career paths in sport and coaching.

Resistance to female authority is a consistent theme throughout the women in coaching literature and one, which illustrates the difficulty of fitting into appropriate gender roles and doing gender correctly in a male dominated context. Bem’s (1974) Sex Role Inventory provided a starting point for many discussions regarding this topic. The inventory was used to characterize your personality as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or neutral, based on gender stereotypes. It was used to determine how well someone fit into traditional sex roles and was validated several decades ago, however it has cultural limitations. Resistance to female authority has also been previously discussed by Eagly and Karau’s (2002) who tested the gendered role of leadership and consequences for not adhering to normative roles. Using the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders incongruity between female gender role and leadership roles they suggest women who occupy leadership roles face resistance because leadership is not perceived as a female role. As a result, women are met with less positive attitudes, are evaluated less favourably and struggle to establish themselves as leaders more so than their male counterparts.
Another consistent finding in the women in coaching literature is the glass ceiling (i.e. the invisible barriers implicit in the workplace that prevent career advancement for women and other minority groups) inherent in the structure of sport organizations.

Kanter (1977) examined the structure of the work environment. Her analysis focused on opportunity, structure of power and access to resources as contributing factors preventing women’s advancement in the corporate world. Knoppers (1989) was the first to use this theory to explain the gendering of opportunity and work in the occupation of coaching. Kane and Stangl (1991) followed suit highlighting the role the gender of administration play in women’s career advancement. The ambiguity and overuse of the term glass ceiling provided grounds for Cotter, Hermnsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001) to develop a comprehensive understanding of the glass ceiling and established much clearer guidelines on how to detect or measure if in fact a glass ceiling effect was present in an organization. Further, Acker (1990) argued organizations are never gender neutral. She suggested women’s marginalization in the workforce is due to the workforce being formed around the needs of a male worker, which used to establish and maintain industrial capitalist society, as we know it.

2.3. Balancing Coaching and Family Responsibilities

Whitson and Macintosh (1989) discovered that when employees of Canadian national sport organizations (NSOs) were questioned about the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions including coaches, one of their main rationalizations related to the structural features of Canadian family life. It was generally believed that women have less time to dedicate to their jobs in comparison to men because it was assumed that females are primarily responsible for providing care and
completing domestic tasks within the family home. Similarly, Acosta and Carpenter (1985, 1988) found that male athletic administrators ranked “time constraints due to family duties” in their list of top five reasons why women leave the coaching profession while females who were surveyed did not (as cited by Pastore, 1991, p. 139). Whitson and Macintosh’s (1989) findings illustrate that Canadian NSOs have a long history of favoring male applicants based on archaic gendered assumptions about men and women’s roles in society.

Many of the female coaches interviewed by Whitson and Macintosh reported having lost out on promotions and opportunities to acquire further credentials, regardless of whether or not they presently had family responsibilities, planned to have a family in the future or believed that having family responsibilities would prevent a woman from giving her full attention and effort to the job. It was also found that women faced greater criticism and opposition than men when they choose to “take on extra-familial commitments which involve regular absences from the family, especially [when they take place] over supper hours and weekends” (Whitson & Macintosh, 1989, p. 143).

Although one might expect a shift in societal norms related to families since these studies were published, more recent work conducted by Kamphoff, Armentrout and Driska (2010), Kerr and Marshall (2007) and Kilty (2006) show that these norms still exist. Kerr and Marshall (2007) argued that the culture of sport is not generally family friendly. Practices and competitions typically take place before or after school and on the weekend which conflict directly with family time. It is not the norm for sport organizations to prioritize or accommodate families as many view childcare as a family responsibility and not within the control or interests of sport organizations.
Consequently, women who pursue coaching may experience the “double-shift” or “time-bind”, a phenomenon that has been well documented in other professions (Kerr & Marshall, 2007, p. 2). While there was some evidence that some men are assuming more domestic responsibilities, the gendered division of labour in which “women who pursue their professional careers while also carrying the burden of domestic responsibilities” continues to be the norm in most households (Kerr & Marshall, 2007, p. 2).

Participants in Kamphoff and colleagues’ (2010) study of former NCAA Division I female coaches indicated that in their experience “administration was not supportive of women having children, and ‘something needs to change’ if athletic departments wanted to keep women in coaching” (p. 366). One coach in particular, Tiffany, felt that “talking about leaving coaching was ‘almost always a conversation’ and it took a ‘certain woman’ to balance both family and work” (p. 366). She went on to explain the perception that women could not be good coaches, good wives and good mothers concurrently. This is standard to which she did not believe a male coach would be measured against if he pursued coaching as a profession “because being a ‘good father’ does not interfere with being a good coach” (p. 367). Further, Tiffany found it unfair how male coaches in her department were afforded the luxury of having their children travel with them. Another coach from this study, Sue, reflected on how no other female coaches at her university or in her conference had children. She was fired when she had a baby, and believed her pregnancy made her “no longer a desirable employee” (p. 367). Sue questioned whether administration even wanted to attract women and argued that administration needed to address the issue of women having children.
Kilty (2006) described the “challenges of establishing a professional career during child-bearing years and the added pressure to balance two extremely demanding tasks” as a recurring issue identified by attendees at the United States Olympic Committee/National Collegiate Athletic Association sponsored Women in Coaching conference (p. 227). Coaches presented the hardship of having to choose between “abandoning their professional pursuits for awhile, hoping to resume it later in life or delaying professional advancement to have families” (p. 227). Coping strategies used by this group to deal with this dilemma included not seeking out head coaching positions and continuing to work as assistant coaches while raising a family. The female coaches with children described the inner conflict experienced when they spent time with their team versus family. This conflict was resolved by defaulting to “gender specific socio-cultural norms or value of leaving the profession domain to focus on the role of mother” (p. 227). Kilty (2006) made use of Mercier’s (2000) explanation of the perceptions regarding the difficulty of working and having children in North America as being rooted in division of separate spheres of work and home. This division has historically portrayed work as the men’s primary domain and the family as the women’s primary domain. This separateness does not allow for loyalty among the work and family domains. As a result, women struggle to have both a profession and family and manage both domains well and face the perceptions held by others who do not believe the two domains can be managed well together.

However, Kilty (2006) found those women, who were able to combine family and coaching responsibilities successfully, mentioned the importance of having a supportive spouse and a network of friends and relatives willing to lend a hand. They
also noted the need to prioritize and adapt their expectations and standards, and knowing when to delegate tasks and ask for help. The female coaches interviewed in Kamphoff and colleagues’ (2010) study explained that it is “very very difficult” for women in particular “to balance work and family and impossible without a extremely supportive partner or spouse” (p. 307). One coach in their study discussed how she and her husband choose not to have children because she perceived it too difficult to balance her career with having a family. Another coach in the study felt that there is a tendency for women to leave coaching because of the difficulty of balancing both, and unless one has a partner who is willing to be flexible with their life, saying, “it’s very, very hard to do what we do” (Kamphoff et al., 2010, p. 307). Further, the common perception that “women in traditional partnerships are more willing to make ‘sacrifices’ for their husbands to further their careers then it is for husbands to do the same” for their wives was discussed at length (Kamphoff et al., 2010, p. 307).

2.4. Not Qualified to Coach? Perceptions of Coaching Competency

Relatively few women have achieved success as high performance coaches in the Canadian amateur sport system. A typical explanation for this situation is that women are viewed as under qualified for coaching positions (Whitson & Macintosh, 1989). Whitson and Macintosh’s (1989) study of Canadian national sport organizations found that women’s underrepresentation in high performance coaching has often been justified by a lack of qualifications necessary to be appointed to these positions. Members of these organizations frequently argued female athletes with high-level competitive experience did not seek out leadership positions within their sport once they retired, and thus do not get necessary training and experience. They also suggested active female coaches and
officials chose not to pursue the highest levels of awards and experience to qualify themselves for national levels posts. In other words, it was assumed that potential female applicants either lacked credentials, skills, training or motivation to be seen as qualified candidates (Hall, Cullen & Slack, 1989; Whitson & Macintosh, 1989). Kane and Stangl (1991) suggested this cycle of logic rests on the assumption that there is a direct link between being qualified and being hired. Consequently, women’s absence from the coaching profession suggests they must be less competent or interested in coaching than men.

Theberge (1988) argued this explanation simply diverts attention away from “structural impediments and history of discrimination that has effectively kept women from coaching and other male dominated professions” (p. 126). Whitson and Macintosh (1989) elaborated:

[The] obstacles to women’s advancement [in sport organizations] lay not only in the structures of the work practices of both these kinds of institutions, but in deeply held beliefs about male and female ‘characteristics’ and their appropriateness in different kinds of work. (p. 138)

Therefore, perhaps it is gendered assumptions, which often serve as barriers to women entering or progressing within the coaching profession, rather than women being less qualified or competent. Further, more recent research (e.g., Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kidd, 2013) has suggested that the Canadian sport system does not adequately support women’s entry into the coaching profession.

Theberge (1993) examined the experiences of female coaches in an effort to understand the social construction of gender within Canadian sport. Of particular interest
is the fact that many of her participants “explicitly linked their [coaching] efforts to become ‘invisible’ as women with pressures to demonstrate their competence” (p. 304). They recognized the male model to which they were compared and therefore developed coping strategies to de-emphasize their gender to counter it. Drawing on the work of Kanter (1977), Theberge suggested that women respond to their heightened visibility within the coaching field in two ways. To be seen as competent they either attempt to fit into the dominant culture by learning to become ‘one of the boys’ or they demonstrate their athletic ability.

Previous to this study Theberge (1990) had suggested coaching is a highly gendered occupation, which has typically been labeled as a masculine role. So while men are automatically assumed to be the sport experts (Staurowsky, 1990), women face countless questions regarding their competency as coaches because it is generally assumed that they lack the necessary physical size, strength and mental toughness required of the position (Theberge, 1993). Consequently, women experience difficulty meeting the masculine athletic and leadership standards to which they are compared. This unequal assumption of competence is what compels females to prove themselves as capable coaches while male coaches are accepted on credentials alone (Kilty, 2006).

This notion of masculine superiority is based on presumed natural differences among all males and females (Theberge, 1993). West and colleagues (2001) suggested women’s suitability as coaches is questioned because they are perceived to lack the necessary qualities. They argued that individual (past and current) athletic ability is indicative of coaching competence. Therefore, since men tend to outperform women athletically their coaching skills are more highly valued and they are perceived as more
competent coaches in comparison to women (West et al., 2001). Further, men are also assumed to more easily adapt to coaching female athletes than women will adapt to coaching male athletes (Theberge, 1993).

Athletes’ preference for masculine coaching skills is well documented. Studies have found male athletes displayed negative attitudes towards female coaches (Weinberg, Revels & Jackson, 1984) and male coaches to be rated higher than female coaches by male and female participants (Williams & Parkhouse, 1988). Although some adolescent athletes are open to the idea of a female coach, they indicated that they still preferred a male coach, perhaps because they had little exposure to working with a female coach (LeDrew & Zimmerman, 1994). Theberge (1993) felt the lack of women in key leadership positions (i.e., head coaches, administrators and broad members) resulted in “a generalized discomfort or reluctance among athletes to be coached by a woman” (p. 306). Kerr and Marshall (2007) suggested the preference for male coaches is due to a focus on athletic performance outcome ideal inherent in sport culture. From this stance, female athletes prefer male coaches because they lack role models and confidence that female coaches could facilitate the level of excellence they wish to achieve because so few women coach high performance sport. More recently however, Magnusen and Rhea (2009) surveyed Division I female soccer and volleyball players and male football players found that while female athletes were likely to accept either gender, male athletes still strongly prefer male strength and conditioning coaches. Male athletes in the study provided the following explanations for their preference. They have greater exposure to male coaches in general, have fewer opposite sex strength and conditioning coach role models and football is a traditionally male sport.
2.5. Resistance to Female Authority

Staurowsky’s (1990) study of women coaching men’s teams at the high school level brought to light women’s difficulty being accepted in coaching roles working with male athletes. Interviewees in her study reported that at the beginning of their first season with their team they had been frequently mistaken as “well-wishers, relatives, athletic trainers, managers, statisticians, reporters, or potential dating companions despite having teams in tow, carrying clip boards and whistles, and wearing clothing with coaching staff [emphasis added] emblazoned on it” (p. 166). They were met with varying degrees of resistance, which ranged from “sexist wisecracks from male coaches, to problems establishing authority with players and fellow coaches, to outright sex discrimination in the professional realm” (p. 165). However, those female coaches who persisted with their teams and were given the chance to demonstrate their expertise gradually saw resistance reduced in with their relationships with their male colleagues and felt a greater level of acceptance within their sporting community.

The women also expressed concerns that “their teams were targets of veiled sexism” (Staurowsky, 1990, p. 165). The sexist acts took the form of “glances and gestures from other teams, verbal references to the disgrace of losing to a woman, and the implications that their teams were tainted by the presence of women leaders” (p. 165). The women in this study felt that their teams were punished for their association with them as a female coach. Several coaches questioned whether their presence was harmful to their male athletes since this role was usually held by a ‘strong’ male figure.

Interestingly, her findings suggested that male coaches, officials and fathers more so than male athletes struggled to recognize female authority and believed that being
coached by a woman would compromise the development of male athletes. This belief was further depicted in the reactions of fathers encountered by female coaches in research conducted by Theberge (1993). Staurowsky (1990) found that although most parents generally accepted female coaches “a visible and vocal” minority made their resistance known (p. 167). Many of her participants encountered “fathers [who] discouraged their children from playing for a woman because it might be bad for them” (p. 167). The women coached cited examples such as one father who provided handwritten line-ups and strategies to her as a way to communicate his lack of faith in her coaching abilities. Another father made it clear that he thought cursing was unwomanly behaviour that his son should not be exposed to, not because he was against cursing but that he felt this behaviour was incongruent with the sex of the person who was cursing.

Theberge (1993) found figure skating coaches encountered similar reactions. One coach recalled receiving a phone call from a parent who stated their daughter was “at the age where she will perform better for a man, she will learn better from a man” (p. 308). Another coach encountered a father who feared his son would become too feminine as a result of being coached by a woman. In a phone call he stated, “I don’t want him to be effeminate and I’m terrified if he comes to a female coach he’s going to take on mannerisms” (p. 309). Theberge offered the process of stereotyping as her explanation for what provokes these reactions. She suggested that some athletes, parents and coaches expect women as coaches to mother and be better communicators whereas men as coaches are perceived to be more serious and technical experts. These ideas are based on
gendered notions that presume men are rational and instrumental and women are affiliative and expressive (Theberge, 1993).

Homophobia is another form of resistance to female authority. Participants in Kilty’s (2006) study felt that homophobia posed a barrier to professional opportunities for women who work in a male dominated field such as coaching. She cited Krane and Barber’s (2005) research on identity tensions experienced by lesbian coaches to explain that females who work in a heterosexist atmosphere are perceived as “not really being women” or as lesbian (Kilty, 2006, p. 225). Consequently, if a woman was a good coach she was assumed to be lesbian, which devalued her coaching performance because she was perceived to be “male like” (Kilty, 2006, p. 225). Griffin (1998) described the process in which people transform the private behaviour of one’s sexual preference into an indicator of one’s coaching competence. The prevalence of such stereotypes perpetuated negative beliefs about lesbians and ultimately hurt all female coaches regardless of their sexual orientation. Further, the social pressure to conform to the heterosexual norms is heightened with the fear of something different. Griffin (1998) and Krane and Barber (2005) explained this fear is heightened with the suggestion that sexual orientation can be “contagious” or that predator behaviour is linked to homosexuality. This fear promoted the belief that people ought to be concerned that a female coach may be gay and could pose a risk to their son or daughter and yet somehow the same standard is not applied to male coaches (Kilty, 2006). Additionally, some female coaches have identified the suspiciousness of homosexuality as a negative recruiting tool used against other female coaches to taint their team image and eliminate them from gaining recruits (Krane & Barber, 2005; Kamphoff, 2010). As a result, female
coaches struggle with this dilemma of how to represent themselves as they strive to present themselves as competent coaches.

Female authority is also tested when attempting to gain respect from male colleagues and athletes. Norman (2010a) noted that although the necessity in earning respect as a leader is not a new concept, it is essential for coaches. She suggested that although women can earn respect, it is a gendered process and therefore, they must work harder to be respected by their colleagues and athletes than perhaps their male colleagues. However, some women report positive relations with elite male coaches “because they had proved themselves as capable coaches to male standards” (Norman, 2010a, p. 510). This may explain why master female coaches in the United Kingdom reported varying levels of respect about relationships with men. For example, one woman in her study discussed struggles with less qualified male coaches but felt mutually respected by coaches who were similarly skilled and qualified to her. Similarly, another coach reflected that over the last 10 years she felt that she got along well with her peers, felt supported by them and had experienced no problems with “top level coaches at all” (p. 510). As a result, Norman hypothesized that “[it] appeared that any conflict and expression of male superiority dissipated as soon as these women reached the top of the profession” (p. 510). Norman (2010a) used this woman’s experience to explain this reality, “as the most qualified coach in the world in her sport she received respect, however only from those who knew her” (p. 511). As she explained, it was only in her relationships with elite male coaches that she felt accountable to their standards.

These beliefs were also evident in the challenges experienced by female coaches in recruiting male athletes to their teams (Young, 2005). The female coaches in Young’s
(2005) study reported recruiting athletes as their biggest professional challenge. Participants discussed the undesirable time demands required of the task in addition to the gender issues associated with the difficulty if recruiting male athletes as a female coach. It was evident these women encountered initial gender biases regarding their coaching competency and athlete preferences for male coaches. Young found it encouraging, however, that this initial bias seemed to diminish over the course of recruitment. As athletes acquired more information regarding the athletic program, team and coach, they gained confidence in the program and the coach even though she was a woman.

Staurowsky (1990) found that despite all the resistance from coaches, officials, parents and opposing teams, male athletes who worked with a female coach displayed the highest amount of respect for women coaches. Reaching this point however, did not come easily; each coach and team had to work through issues related to the coach’s gender such as her competence, authority, control, and communication style. A commonly reported challenge was overcoming the male perception that female coaches were not as tough as male coaches. Nevertheless, female coaches who established their power and control early on and made it clear they would act to preserve their authority were met with less resistance than those who did not. These women emphasized that they felt a greater sense of urgency in establishing one’s authority when coaching male athletes in comparison to female athletes.

Interestingly, the women in Young’s (2005) study also felt respected by their male athletes. His study found that being a successful athlete helped coaches to gain the respect of male athletes. That is, female coaches were able to garner the respect of their
athletes if they had either competed as an elite athlete or were a well-known former athlete. Coaches felt male athletes’ recognition of their coaching knowledge gained as athletes played a greater role in establishing respect than coaches’ personal athletic performances. Additionally, some participants argued respect for a coach is largely determined by the athlete’s own performances. When one coach was asked if she initially experienced difficulty establishing her authority she replied, “No, because I really think it’s a process of you get hired for a position, people think you are qualified” (p. 112). Many coaches emphasized having a positive coach-athlete relationship, holding athletes accountable and being firm with one’s expectations to gain respect from their athletes. Young was surprised to hear that none of the coaches he interviewed had been hit on by their male athletes or had experienced degrading comments made by their athletes. Rather, many stated they were seen as “a ‘teacher’, ‘older sister’ or ‘mother figure’” by their athletes (p. 113). Perhaps the reason why participants were viewed this way is because these roles are socially acceptable for women to fulfill.

2.6. Beliefs About Socially Acceptable Roles For Women

Leadership researcher Carli (2001) noted that men are generally thought of as being more influential than women except in traditionally feminine domains. As such, men frequently meet female leaders with resistance. However, women can reduce this resistance if they display feminine qualities. For example, since women have historically been responsible for tending to the needs of others they are perceived to possess innate mothering and relational skills. These gendered assumptions have sometimes been used to keep women out of coaching, marginalize them to lower positions (i.e., working with children or novice athletes, rather than elite athletes) or relegated them to coaching
females only (West et al., 2001; Whitson & Macintosh, 1989). While it was acceptable for men to coach either sex at any level, the case of women coaching men tests the boundaries found in the realm of sport. One group of researchers suggested, “the culture within men’s minor sports is more tolerant of women in authority positions because the sports are typically combined (i.e. men’s and [emphasis added] women’s team)” (Kamphoff et al., 2010, p. 304-305). This tolerance may explain why the highest percentage of women coaching men is found in the co-ed sport of track and field/cross country (CIS, 2005; Yiamouyiannis, 2008).

LaVoi (2009) presents a similar hierarchical division of labour in American youth soccer associations. Her study found that women were typically marginalized to less prestigious helping positions (i.e., the team manager) or as coaches of less prestigious teams (i.e., younger age groups and/or less competitive recreational levels). Thus, because women typically occupy the less powerful and supporting roles they pose little threat to the male dominated coaching hierarchy present in sport (Hall et al., 1989; West et al., 2001). West and colleagues (2001) explained that while women play an important role in the introduction of sport to beginner athletes, much of their preliminary work is undervalued. Throughout an athlete’s career they will likely have many different coaches. As an athlete progresses, a higher ranked coach (who is often male) takes on the responsibility of the athlete rather than the lower ranked coach moving up to the next competitive level with the athlete. Thus, only the highest-level coach receives credit for the development of the high caliber athlete.
2.7. Exclusion From Coaching Networks

Another point of interest is that women tend to experience difficulty in gaining acceptance into informal coaching networks (West et al., 2001) and are well aware of their token status and isolation within the coaching profession (Theberge, 1993). Being a minority and experiencing the token status made women feel “ostracized and alone” (Kamphoff et al., 2010, p. 302). Two commonly reported examples of tokenism and isolation included “being interviewed by a selection committee comprised entirely of men” and “being one of a few or the only woman coach at a clinic, competition, training camp or board meeting” (Theberge, 1993, p. 303). They also acknowledged having been excluded from the power structure (i.e., the old boys’ network) that governed their sport (Theberge, 1993). Some researchers (Kanter, 1977; Stangl & Kane, 1991) suggest these networks are sustained and preserve the male coaching model through homologous reproduction or the hiring from a principle of similarity. Thus, some female coaches feel they would be excluded from leadership opportunities because they were women in male dominated departments and exhibit a different leadership style than the norm (Kilty, 2006).

Kerr and Marshall (2007) suggested “male coaches appear to benefit from having more established connections with other men in sport organizations, sharing information with each other, and providing tips about the profession and about ways to get ahead” (p. 2). However, “this apprenticeship [was] lacking for women, as there are so few women in leadership positions and as men seem more reluctant to mentor up-and-coming female coaches” (p. 2). Although some of the female coaches from the UK interviewed in West and colleagues’ (2001) study reported being members of informal networks of coaches,
it was usually with other women. These researchers suggested this is problematic given that men disproportionately occupy the positions that have the power to appoint coaches in sport organizations (West et al., 2001). Additionally, coaches in Kilty’s (2006) study noted the lack of female mentors to provide guidance and facilitate networks and contacts. She suggested young female athletes are aware of this reality and thus become discouraged and choose not to pursue coaching professionally.

A few of the female coaches Young (2005) interviewed also felt somewhat isolated from their athletic departments. One coach stated that she and the other two female coaches’ offices were “down the hall and up the stairs” from the other coaches in the department (p. 153). She also reported that athletic department staff frequently asked male coaches to lunch but not the women in the organization. Another woman longed for a greater sense of connection given her office was in a different building than the rest of the coaches. Young (2005) suggested the sense of isolation reported by women in his study was similar to results of Pastore, Inglis and Danylchuk’s (1996) study of female collegiate coaches and athletic administration.

Others suggest, however, that women self select themselves out of these positions to remove themselves from a masculine dominated culture. Marshall, Demers and Sharp (2010) posit that female coaches eliminate themselves from these positions by choosing to remain at lower levels or dropping out of coaching before they reach their full potential. One might look to Cruz (2009) for an explanation of why women drop out of the coaching profession. Her study of women coaches’ experiences working for American university and college athletic departments found the gender dynamics of the workplace as being a key reason why they contemplate leaving coaching. Her findings
suggest female coaches engage in a series of relationship struggles with athletes, peers, friends and family, which they never seem to resolve. As a result female coaches are left with a diminished sense of self-worth and self-confidence. These leads them to question whether they should be coaching at all and inevitably drop out of coaching. Cruz argues that a drastic shift away from the profession’s male centered culture is needed in order to resolve these struggles. Interestingly, women tend to stay in coaching when they have a positive sense of self and when they are supported by a strong network of healthy relationships with athletes, peers, friends and family (Cruz, 2009).

These findings are supported by Norman’s (2010b) work which examined the experiences of UK master women coaches. The women expressed feeling as though they were operating in the shadows of male coaches. They discussed the devaluation of their work and reflected upon the pressures to perform. All participants felt they were driven to impress male coaches, players and their governing body in an effort to be recognized as competent coaches within their respective sports. Further, Kamphoff (2010) found that former American female collegiate coaches felt that “a lack of respect for coaches and the privileging of men and male teams” were the common factors they spoke of that contributed to their decision to leave the profession (p. 366). They suggested that “the perception that a good coach is a man”, the fact that men receive resources and funding, and that “female coaches are judged against male coaches” was an indication of how the sport system valued their skills and contributions to sport overall (Kamphoff, 2010, p. 366).

Greenhill and associates’ (2009) study of the impact of organizational factors on career pathways for female coaches in Australia also found networking could be a very
powerful tool in career development in advancing to the elite levels. However, they suggested that networking could also work against those coaches (i.e., female coaches) who did not have access to those same networks. They drew on the work of Pini, Brown and Ryan (2004) to suggest “women-only networks have a valuable role to play in securing greater equity for women in management” (as cited in Greenhill et al., 2009, p. 9). Accordingly, Greenhill and colleagues recognized the need to assign mentor coaches to lower level female coaches because of the potential to create the networks and confidence that females require to be successful in their careers. Many of the high performance female coaches they interviewed supported these prior findings and some admitted they had already been informally mentoring female coaches to keep them in the sport. However, they, like other researchers (i.e., Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Martel, 2007; Robertson, 2010), note that more females need to gain senior leadership roles in sport organizations to instil greater organizational change, increase support for female coaches and shift away from male dominance in sport.

2.8. Canadian Coaching Programs and Supports

Misener and Danylchuk (2009) shared Gowan’s (1992) position that coaching education and certification programs are necessary to guarantee consistent standards of coaching qualifications at all levels of sport. In their discussion of Canadian coach education history, Misener and Danylchuk (2009) recognized the instrumental role the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) has played in sport development in Canada and coaching development since the 1970s. This not-for-profit amateur sport organization, whose mandate is to improve Canadian coaching across all levels of sport, is recognized world wide for coaching training standards, and used as a model by other countries
Since its inception in 1974, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) \(^1\) has been the recognized national coach training standard for 65 sports in Canada with more than 50,000 coaches from all levels of sport attending their workshops every year (Misener & Danylchuk). Although the CAC is recognized as a world leader in coach training they are constantly seeking new ways to improve the quality of the training and programming they offer to better meet the needs of Canadian coaches (Misener & Danylchuk).

Marshall and Sharpe (2010) explained that several mentoring programs developed in Canada over the years for coaches take various forms. For twenty-one years (1977-1998) the Coaching Association of Canada supported as many as twelve coaches who were “offered full-time coaching apprenticeships that provided $12,000 for living expenses to apprentice expenses, and $4,000 for a mentor coach salary” (p. 138). The organization has also offered apprenticeship opportunities through their Women in Coaching Program\(^2\). Some of these apprenticeship projects were attached to major games including the Commonwealth Games in 1994, the Pan American Games for coaches in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1999, and the Jeux de la Francophonie in 2005 for coaches from abroad. Further, as of 2010, six women who participated in the National Team Apprenticeship Program that began in 2000 benefitted from a three-year commitment, which included a mentoring component. In addition, various mentoring

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\(^1\) The National Coaching Certification Program is a coach education program sponsored by the Coaching Association of Canada with national, provincial and territorial sport organizations to provide workshops for individuals coaching at all levels of sport in Canada.

\(^2\) The Women in Coaching Program is a Coaching Association of Canada initiative, which aims to provide professional development grants apprenticeship grants, and National Coaching Institute scholarships to female coaches.
programs have been offered to developing coaches at the Canada Games level in partnership with provincial and national sport organizations, the Canada Games Council and the Women in Coaching Program. Since 2000 the Coaching Association of Canada in partnership with the Women in Coaching Program has offered the Online Mentor Program matching inexperienced female coaches with mentors.

Werthner’s (2005) study explored the experiences of female coaches who took part in the Women in Coaching Apprenticeship Program (WiCAP). The program was established in 1999 and is a part of the National Team Apprentice Program (NTAP). It was designed to facilitate learning through “a learning environment with a structured mentor coach situation that has enabled the women coaches to have experts, both in coaching and in sport in general, with whom they interact with on a regular basis” (Werthner, 2005, p. 4). In addition to being partnered with a formal mentor, the program helped women overcome barriers of gaining experience at the international, world championship and/or Olympic levels, provided them with financial support needed to commit to coaching full time, and allowed them time to complete level 4 NCCP training needed to get hired in a full time coach position. Despite finding the program was not perfect, many of elements of the program including “the mentorship component, learning seminars, the opportunities to discuss issues and learn with other coaches, and the national and international coaching opportunities” are working (Werthner, 2005, p. 5).

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3 The National Team Apprenticeship Program provides women the opportunity to gain coaching experience working with their national teams leading up to Olympic games and major international events such as, World Championships.
Marshall and Sharpe (2010) draw on Croxon’s (2007) evaluation of the 2007 Canada Games apprenticeship coaches. The evaluation found a number of positive direct outcomes from participation in the program:

- Coaches were exposed to new ideas and resources; had a coaching role rather than a managing one; pushed to obtain higher certification through the National Coaching Certification Program and higher education; extended their coaching network; became more reflective of their experiences; had a collective voice as well as an individual voice; and were a part of a female coach community of practice. (Marshall & Sharp, 2010, p. 139)

Further, many of the developing coaches had begun to view coaching as a career option rather than just a hobby.

Mercier (2011) reported similar findings about coach career advancement and NCCP certification in a recent evaluation of the Canada Games Apprenticeship Program (CCAP) and the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association Female Apprenticeship Program (CCAA). In 2010 Mercier surveyed CCAP apprentices from the 2005, 2007 and 2009 Games. It was found that “70 percent of apprentices are currently coaching, with 27 percent planning to return to coaching in the future” (Mercier, 2011, p. 3). Further, “all [CCAP respondents indicated they] were NCCP level 2 certified and 23 percent were level 3 certified” (Mercier, 2011, p. 3). In comparison, CCAA apprentices (2005-2009 programs) reported “63 percent were still coaching, with just over half now CCAA assistant coaches; [and] another third were still involved with a CCAA apprentice program” (Mercier, 2011, p. 3). Mercier also found that “65 percent [of CCAA apprentices] completed their NCCP level 1 Theory and Technical components and 13
percent had completed their Level 3 Theory and Technical components” during their the enrollment in the CCAA program (p. 3).

2.9. Conclusion

“Understanding how gender ideology is constructed (in a social sense) can help researchers to understand the choices boys and girls make regarding their education and careers, how young adults choose partners and make decisions about fertility and how individuals negotiate their family lives” (Davis & Greenstein, 2009, p.99)

In summary it is evident that many of the challenges women face in coaching are connected to gender ideology (i.e., beliefs about gender roles). Canadian family life ideals promote a societal culture that expects women to prioritize raising a family and domestic responsibilities over obtaining paid work or pursing a career. Although exceptions exist, overall the literature suggested many female coaches struggle to balance coaching and family responsibilities. There is a tendency to assume women lack coaching qualifications and interest in coaching because so few women coach. Yet it is assumptions like this one that are the problem. Coaching is perceived as a masculine role based on physical differences in athletic performance that set a male standard, label them as sport experts, drive the preference for male coaching skills and provokes negative attitudes towards female coaches. However, more recent studies have suggested that perhaps such attitudes are slowly changing. Due to the persistence of this gender ideology, one objective of this study is to examine the impact of this ideology on female coaches’ careers.

The literature also suggested female coaches face many forms of resistance such as an unwillingness to accept women coaching men, sexist remarks and gestures, athletes being punished for their association with them, fears of homophobia and being labeled as lesbian because they were good coaches. Often it is male coaches, officials and fathers
who drove this resistance, not wanting to upset the status quo or promote a lack of respect and trust for female sport leadership. Although some female coaches have built trusting relationships and have had positive experiences with male athletes, they often report fulfilling the role of a teacher, older sister or mother figure rather than a coach. Often women are relegated to coaching children and novice athletes, coaching women only or co-ed teams and marginalized to less powerful helping positions such as the team manager. With few established female coaches, women report difficulty gaining access to coaching networks and mentors. Thus it has been suggested that the combination of a challenging work culture and a lack of support from within the system were the most common reasons why women leave coaching. While Canadian coaching programs such as the National Coaching Certification Program, Women in Coaching National Team Apprenticeship Program and grants may not be perfect, they do address some critical barriers for women in coaching. Building on the first objective of this study (to investigate the impact of gender ideology on female coaches’ career paths), the second objective of this study examines the role of the Canadian sport system on female coaches’ experiences.

What is missing from the women in coaching literature is a discussion of how female coaches have managed their careers. There are few studies that explore female coach success stories or the support they receive. Instead much of the existing literature tends to focus on the barriers women face and overlooks the valuable strategies some women have employed to succeed in this male-dominated domain. Thus, the third objective of this study is to highlight these successes, to increase awareness that women can and do succeed in coaching, to provide guidance to female coaches considering this
career path and help others discover what role they could play in supporting female coaches.
Chapter 3 – Methods

3.1. Researching Lived Experiences

Qualitative research is exploratory, thus useful when little research exists on the topic or the researcher is unsure of which variables are most important to examine (Creswell, 2009). Although the women in coaching literature is quite extensive, little is known about the overall career paths of elite female Canadian coaches. Therefore, this study strives to gain a more holistic understanding of their experiences with career development, by documenting and analyzing the lived experiences of women who coach high performance track and field within the Canadian sport system.

A phenomenological approach was used because its purpose is to describe and interpret the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This approach seeks to understand how participants experience a particular phenomenon, that is “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Researchers who use this strategy of inquiry are known for gathering rich descriptions of experiences and presenting their findings largely in the words of the participants, as they strive to relay the ‘essence’ of shared experience (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Creswell (2009) draws on the work of Moustakas (1994) to argue, “understanding lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 13). Additionally, as a part of this
process researchers are said to bracket or set aside his or her experiences in an effort to understand the experiences of the participants under study (Creswell, 2009).

3.2. Sample and Recruitment Procedure

I estimated there to be a total population of 25 women who coached Canadian high performance track and field and aimed to interview between 6 and 10 participants in the final study. I ended up with a sample size of 6, which allowed me to gather a rich description of each individual’s experiences and find variation among them. The selection criteria for this study required women to be currently coaching athletics working with high performance male athletes at the Canada Games, CIS, or National level with a minimum of three years experience coaching at this level. This study featured women who fill a variety of positions (i.e., full-time/part-time, paid/volunteer, managerial/personal coaching roles) with several years of experience in the field (between 12 and 40 years) at different stages of their careers as head and assistant coaches at the high school, club, provincial, university (CIS), and national levels. Further, one should also take note that track and field is a co-ed sport so the participants in this study coach both male and female athletes.

I chose this group of coaches for the following reasons: gaps in the literature, unique characteristics of the sport, the potential sample available to recruit from, and the accessibility of the population. First, as I reviewed the literature on women in coaching, I observed some trends. Previous studies tend to lump female coaches’ experiences together from different sports (Norman, 2010; Kamphoff, 2010; Theberge, 1993; West et al., 2001), with male coaches (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009; Werthner & Trudel, 2009), with women in sport management (Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore, 2000), and other
volunteers (Whitson & Macintosh, 1989). Several studies focus on the collective experiences of head coaches, those coaching either traditional women’s sports (e.g., field hockey) or women’s only teams (e.g., women’s volleyball team; Cruz, 2009; Kamphoff, 2010). We frequently hear about female coaches’ negative experiences and career barriers (Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Kane & Stangl, 1991; Norman, 2010; Reade et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010). Rarely however, do we hear about positive experiences and career enablers, women coaching Canadian male athletes or in co-ed sports, or the experiences of assistant coaches.

Second, the unique structure of track and field teams presents the opportunity to study a number of untapped aspects of the coaching experience. While there are some commonalities among assistant coaches across sports, such as usually being unpaid volunteers and having more hands on roles working with athletes, some responsibilities differ vastly. For example, basketball teams typically have two or three assistant coaches who implement instructions (e.g., practice plans and specific drills) provided by the head coach. In comparison, track and field teams have several (e.g., 5-10) assistant coaches who specialize in particular events, such as throws (i.e., shot put, javelin, discus, weight throw) or sprints (i.e., 50m-600m). Track and field head coaches rely on event coaches’ expertise in their respective event(s) and require them to spend time researching and planning training programs, in addition to facilitating them.

Third, there are few women who coach male athletes at the elite level in gender-segregated team sports (such as men’s basketball) in Canada (Donnelly et al., 2011,
2013\(^4\)). It is more common to find women coaching men in co-ed sports (e.g., cross country, track, swimming, tennis, golf) and most serve as the head coach for both a men’s and a women’s team (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012\(^5\); Donnelly et al., 2011\(^6\), 2013\(^7\); Reade et al., 2009\(^8\); Yiamouyiannis, 2008\(^9\)). Based on this information, it is logical to study the experiences of women coaching male athletes in a co-ed sport such as track and field. Additionally, I was curious how the career experiences of women coaching male athletes in a co-ed sport would compare to previous research focused on the experiences of women coaching all male teams or coaching male athletes exclusively. I was also interested to know if the participants in the present study would present their experiences in more positive light or provide evidence that co-ed sports may be more tolerant of women coaching male athletes.

Fourth, as a former track athlete, I had connections in the sport that facilitated the selection and recruitment of participants. From my experience in the sport I was aware of two key sources of elite female coaches to target my recruiting for this study, those coaching at the university level (CIS) and those with the national team (Athletics Canada). I used CIS, university, and Sporting Canada websites to identify potential

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\(^4\) Two women coached men’s CIS teams in gender-segregated sports in both the 2010-11 and 2012-13 seasons.

\(^5\) Currently women only coach 2-3% of men’s teams in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This figure has been a consistent finding over the last three decades.

\(^6\) In the 2010-11 CIS season 45 women were identified as the head coaches of co-ed teams. However, the study does not distinguished between sports.

\(^7\) In the 2012-13 CIS season 41 women were identified as the head coaches of co-ed teams.

\(^8\) A survey of over 800 Canadian coaches from a variety of competitive levels reported 2% of female high performance coaches coach male athletes and women coached only 12% of men’s teams in 2009.

\(^9\) Ninety-five percent of participants reported being the head coach of both a men’s and a women’s team.
participants at the university level. I contacted the head coach (or co-head coaches in some cases) of each team by email to inquire if they knew of anyone who fit my selection criteria. I used a key informant to recruit potential participants with the national team. My informant personally contacted her female colleagues coaching at the national level, promoting the study and inviting them to contact me. This was quite helpful given that no contact information was available on the Athletics Canada website for individual coaches. Additionally, she sent a mass email to her extensive list of contacts within the Canadian athletics community. As a researcher, I truly appreciate her contribution to this project, as it may not have been possible to make contact with all of the participants who volunteered to participate in this study without her efforts.

3.2.1. Participants.

From these recruitment efforts six coaches, including my key informant, took part in this study. The following is a brief overview of each individual participant and a table of participant demographics (see Table 1). Further details regarding the coaching context of each participant will be presented in chapter four.
Table 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Lisa</th>
<th>Kelly</th>
<th>Tracy</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Cheryl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Career</td>
<td>National Team</td>
<td>National Team</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Olympian</td>
<td>National Team</td>
<td>Olympian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>BSc</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>MSc</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>BAdmin</td>
<td>BEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCP Level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 Instructor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Coaching</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Position (years)</td>
<td>Assistant Coach National Team (4)</td>
<td>Assistant Coach CIS &amp; Head Coach High School (6)</td>
<td>Assistant Coach CIS (8) &amp; Assistant Coach National Team (3)</td>
<td>CIS Head Coach (9)</td>
<td>Assistant Coach CIS, Club &amp; Provincial Team (15)</td>
<td>Assistant Coach National Team (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer /Paid</td>
<td>Paid</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Paid</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Paid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lisa: Lisa had a career in the health field for several years prior to coaching professionally. She never intended to pursue coaching as a career. She had been disappointed that her athletic career came to an end due to injury before she could realize her Olympic dream. On the advice of her former national team coach, she began taking NCCP training and started coaching as a volunteer at the club level. That experience led
to her working closely with the head coach of the university club, which she helped to establish. After two years when he asked Lisa if she would like to take over the university team, she went on to coach them for 8 years. As the head coach of this team she made a name for herself and positioned the team well enough to secure a full time paid position. During this time she continued her NCCP training, coached on provincial teams, and built relationships in the CIS community. She felt that the Women in Coaching national team apprentice experience was a crucial step in gaining experience at the national and international levels to land her current full time paid position with the national team, which she has held for the last 5 years. In fact, it was that same former coach who encouraged her to apply for the program and volunteered to mentor her through the process.

**Kelly:** Kelly’s coaching career began in the sport of rugby, having previously played on the national team as an athlete. Although she had competed in track and field in high school, she did not take the sport up seriously until she could not longer play contact sports after she was injured in a car accident. She began coaching cross-country at her sons’ elementary school to be a role model for her kids. She organized fun runs to get kids and parents active in her community and invited ex-track and field Olympians to do motivational talks. At this time she also began NCCP training and volunteered as an assistant coach with a local club. Here she had the opportunity to shadow an experienced coach. However, after moving to a different province she struggled to restart her coaching career. She had to re-take the entry level coaching certifications and has found it difficult to take further coach education due to limited offerings in her province. Kelly stressed that one of her greatest difficulties in establishing her career has been locating
full time paid coaching work. She is currently employed by a private high school on a part-time basis. She is paid per season to be the head coach of the cross-country and track and field teams. She also volunteers as an assistant coach with a university’s cross-country team and distance event group.

**Tracy:** Tracy’s career path began during her first year in university and spans over thirty years. As an athlete from a small community she had played every school sport she could, including club track and field. Unfortunately, she was unable to compete as an athlete for her high school track and field team her graduating year or try out for the university team due to illness. It was during that first year of university that the head coach of the university team took her under his wing and she started considering coaching long term. In university she began coaching in the club system as she pursued her physical education degree. Once she started teaching she coached various sports in the school system, coaching several teams to be provincial champions. She was heavily involved at the provincial level with coaching and team selections for numerous provincial teams for the juvenile, junior and senior age categories. She also took a leading role in developing the Hershey Track and Field Games (HTFG)\(^{10}\) in her province. She even took time away from her career as a teacher to actively pursue coaching as a career moving to a different province to take her Masters in coaching and is a master conductor of NCCP courses in sprints and jumps. However, the politics of

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\(^{10}\) For over thirty-five years the Hershey Track and Field Games (2014) have engaged communities in the United States and Canada. In Canada the Hershey Company sponsors the program in partnership with provincial athletics organizations. The program was designed to encourage a non-competitive atmosphere for children ages 9-14 as they participate in a Run, Jump, Throw track meet to have fun being physically active and making friends. No admission is charged to remove financial barriers from participation and the use of equipment such as spikes, shoes with cleats or starting blocks are not allowed.
national team selection drove her to quit coaching for a number of years, as she grew frustrated with the system. However, upon moving to a different province she did return to coaching at the university level as a volunteer when she was approached to help develop the team and she has been in that role for the last 8 years.

Mary: Although Mary felt as though she fell into coaching as a natural transition from her athletic career, her interest in a coaching career was established some time ago. This is demonstrated by her extensive list of coaching credentials, which include a minor in coaching, a nearly completed psychology degree, being a certified strength and conditioning coach, and a Masters degree in coaching. Further, she actually started coaching as a teenager and taking coach training while on an injury break when she swam competitively. As a swimmer, she made it to the Olympic trials and landed herself a university scholarship, but she ended up dropping out of the sport due to injury. It was at this point that she began exploring throwing events in athletics and taught herself how to do the events, got noticed by the men’s throws coach and landed herself a position on the university team. From there she went on to compete for the national team and as an Olympian for throws and bobsled. She reflected that as a national level athlete in the sport of bobsled she had the opportunity to travel all over the world and spend time working with and learning from several elite coaches in the field from other countries. When she retired from competing she volunteered for a year as an assistant coach with the university track and field and cross-country team. She went on to manage the team over the summer, which led to her being given the opportunity to be the head coach, which she has done for 9 years now.
**Sarah:** Sarah’s coaching career started immediately after she completed her fifth year of CIS eligibility. Her coach retired at the end of that season and as a result, her teammates were left without a coach for that summer. At that point someone suggested that she start coaching. She agreed and began taking NCCP levels that summer. She also volunteered to be an assistant coach through the university season, which the head coach agreed to because he knew of her excellent record as an athlete. She also freely admitted that it probably also helped that at the time there was no one else to step up to the plate and the coaching community wanted to actively recruit female representation for provincial teams. She went on to build a reputation for herself in coaching by becoming heavily involved in coaching provincial teams and the head coach of a local club. Similar to Tracy, her greatest struggles have been with the politics of team selections; these experiences will be discussed, in further detail, in the findings chapter. In fact, Sarah has not been afraid to make her point of view known and removed herself from the coaching staff for a team when she did not agree with the stance taken by the head coach. She freely offers clinics to schools and sits on various committees to improve coaching in her province. However, unlike the other women in this study, it appears as though coaching is simply a past time for Sarah as she indicated that her full time career in a different field is how she makes her living. Further, as one of the youngest coaches in this study she was able to identify several female role models in her sport whom she looks up to, many of whom she observed as an athlete and continues to do so as she establishes herself as a coach.

**Cheryl:** Cheryl’s coaching career spans over forty years. In that time, she has coached all ages and levels but for the last 10 years she has been heavily involved with
establishing Athletics Canada’s Run Jump Throw program, which teaches kids basic track and field skills. She is presently employed as a part-time assistant coach to act as a coordinator with the national team for all long distance endurance events including cross country, marathon running, road races, and mountain running. However, she began coaching for the club she trained with and within the school system as a physical education teacher before she retired from competing as an Olympian. She was one of the first recipients of the Women in Coaching grant in the 1980s. When she received the grant, there was no formal mentorship program. Although the funds were presented as a matching system to support her as the head coach of a university team, in reality she was required to do extra work, such as teaching courses in the faculty to receive the support. She noted how, in many ways, things have changed drastically for women in coaching since she started her career and explained that the difficulties she hears about today with women in coaching do not compare to her experiences. In particular, she discussed how difficult it was for her to give up on her dream of coaching full time on a few occasions because she wanted to have a family and there was no viable alternative available. Further, she recounted her experience of walking into a technical meeting as a young female team manager of Canada’s men’s world cross country team in the 1980s and being asked several times where was the leader for the men’s team. Each time she explained that she was the leader for both teams. She also explained that her presence put event organizers and male coaches in quite a few awkward situations because they had to invite her to all of the functions, such as luncheons featuring drinks and cigars and dinners at burlesque clubs, which today would not likely be acceptable functions.
3.3. Data Collection

Data collection in phenomenological studies typically involves long in-depth interviews with several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Therefore, the primary data collection method used in this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

3.3.1. In-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Interviewing has been described “as a conversation with a purpose”, that of gathering information (Berg, 2009, p. 101). In-depth interviews are the most common research tool used in qualitative studies (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Van den Hooanaard (2012) suggests, “the purpose of in-depth interviews is to allow people to explain their experiences, attitudes, feelings and definitions of the situation in their own terms and in ways that are meaningful to them” (p. 78). This statement parallels Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) view that in-depth qualitative interviews share three common characteristics. First, researchers using this method look for “rich and detailed information” and specific examples of experience, rather than simple yes-or-no answers (p. 29). Second, interviewers use open-ended questions to allow interviewees to elaborate on answers, disagree with the question and raise new points of discussion. Third, the order and wording of questions are flexible allowing the interviewer the opportunity to skip, revise and add new questions when necessary as they gather new insight. The present study featured a semi-structured interview approach typical of in-depth interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I created an interview guide (see Appendix A and section 3.4.2 for further details) to outline the questions and determine the approximate order in which they are to be covered (Patton, 2002; van den Hooanaard, 2012). This set of questions helped to show
that I was prepared, competent and in control of the interview while providing me with the flexibility to follow any leads that arose during the interviews (Bernard, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Additionally, following an interview guide provided the benefits of “reliable, comparable qualitative data” (Bernard, 1994, p. 210).

Face-to-face and telephone interview techniques were used given the time constraints and limited budget associated with a master’s project. My target participants lived in many different communities across Canada, each had a busy schedule and limited time to meet with me. I planned to conduct face-to-face interviews with those participants who lived close enough for me to reasonably travel to meet with (i.e., < 250 km) and reasoned that conducting telephone interviews was an affordable alternative for the participants who lived further away. However, only one face-to-face interview took place since all remaining participants resided outside of the travel parameters. Furthermore, using telephone interviews provided the opportunity to meet with all participants for a follow up interview at whatever time and place was most convenient to them, and made it easy to re-schedule when it was necessary.

Finally, Fontana and Frey (2000) suggest there are some basic elements one needs to consider when conducting interviews. These include accessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondents, deciding how to present one’s self, locating an informant, gaining trust, and establishing rapport. Self-disclosure is a tactic used when trying to establish “a sense of collaboration and build a rapport” (Josselson, 2007, p. 547). As noted above, I already had contact with someone who was a part of the national and CIS track and field community. I have been involved in track and field for long enough now that I was comfortable with the culture and terminology.
used within the sport. Throughout this project I presented myself primarily as a researcher; however, I believe my experiences as an athlete and personal interest in coaching aided my attempts to gain trust and build rapport with my participants.

3.4. Research Procedure

In this section, I discuss ethical considerations and procedures used in this study, present a timeline of events, and describe specific research protocols used throughout the project. Further, as a novice researcher, I felt it was appropriate to included a brief discussion of the minor changes which were made to the research procedure after the formal proposal took place, challenges I encountered during the study and reflections on how these procedures might be improved if I, or others, were to conduct a similar study.

3.4.1. Ethics.

An ethics application was submitted to, and approved by, the University of Regina Research Ethics Board outlining the procedure, risks, benefits, and ethical aspects of the proposed research (see Appendix B). Participation in this study was considered minimum risk. One concern, however, was the degree to which participants would be anonymous given that they are part of a small population, and it is possible that they could be identified. Thus, prior to conducting interviews participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix C) that made them aware of this fact and stated that their names would not be disclosed in any publications or presentations pertaining to this study. Further, pseudonyms would be used to disguise defining features (e.g., name, team name, place of employment; Berg, 2009). However, some identifying features (e.g., number of years coached, sport) would be used to establish context. Participants were told that their participation was voluntary, and that they could answer
only questions with which they were comfortable. They had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time, and retract any response or refuse to answer any given question without explanation or penalty of any sort. They were also made aware that should they wish to withdraw from the study, their data would be destroyed and would not be used in any publications or presentations. The right to withdraw was valid until the data has been analyzed. They were also informed that once I completed the study I would send each participant a report outlining my key findings, request their permission to use select quotations which may identify them and provide the opportunity to meet with me to discuss the study. In exchange for their participation, it was my ethical responsibility to listen carefully to their responses and refrain from judging their lives (Josselson, 2007).

3.4.2. Interview protocol.

In January 2011 I conducted a pilot interview with the key informant in an effort to refine, clarify and expand my interview guide (see Appendix A). This interview also served as a guide to determine the approximate length of time necessary to complete the interview with subsequent participants. The initial interview followed a similar format and used some of the same topics explored in Norman’s (2010b) interview guide given that her study explored a similar topic. She examined the career development of elite female coaches in four areas: 1) entry to coaching and early coaching experiences, 2) career challenges and successes, 3) relationships with others in their sport, and 4) development ideas for aspiring national coaches. I extended her work by exploring the experiences of women who coach men given that her sample included only women who coach women. While it could be argued that women coaching men may have the some of
the same experiences as women coaching women, previous research suggests this to be unlikely. Some researchers such as Staurowsky (1990) and Young (2005) argue women coaches face barriers in establishing themselves as leaders of all male teams at the high school level and co-ed teams at the NCAA level among athletes, parents and male peers. Conversely, Kamphoff et al. (2010) found female coaches working in co-ed sports in the NCAA system were more readily accepted because of the tolerant culture of co-ed sports. Yet other researchers like Blom and colleagues (2009) located several examples of female coaches successfully coaching all male teams in a variety of sports at the high school and college level in the United States with strong collegial relationships with male colleagues and mentors. My interview also brought to light some unique programs available to women coaching within the Canadian sport system, whereas Norman’s (2010) study explored the experiences of women coaching in the United Kingdom.

Recruitment of participants took place over a 6-month period. I sent my first email (see Appendix D) in mid May 2011 to a list of 40 CIS coaches who were not necessarily part of the target population, but who might know people who fit the criteria. I sent a second round of personalized emails to select individuals in September 2011. My informant sent her first round of emails in June 2011 to a list of about 60 women who coach with Athletics Canada and personalized emails to her female colleagues with the national team. In October 2011 she sent a second round of personalized emails to select individuals. She provided them with my recruitment email (see Appendix D) and encouraged them to contact me about the study.

The interviews ran between 90 minutes and 120 minutes with an average of 110 minutes. I began each interview with a brief introduction of myself (e.g., my prior
involvement in athletics as a competitive athlete and my current status as a novice coach). I hoped by highlighting my connection to the sport and interest in coaching this would help participants open up to someone whom they had never met before. I emphasized that I wanted them to tell me their story in their own words and explained that it was okay if they answered the interview guide questions out of order or if they choose not to answer some questions. I responded with minimal probes where necessary, to clarify responses or to acquire additional information not disclosed in their original response. Further, additional questions (such as about the participant’s marital/relationship status, whether they had children, their approximate age, and coaching status) were asked at the beginning of an interview to get a not so talkative participant going or used at the end of the interview to fill in any missing demographic information pertinent to the study.

3.4.3 Changes, challenges and reflections.

Although it would have been preferable to have all interviews take place in person, all but one interview were conducted over the phone since most participants resided outside of parameters set in the proposal. If I were to revise any protocol from the study it would be to reformat the consent form so that it could be more easily answered verbally. The most common challenge I encountered in conducting telephone interviews was determining when to ask the next question. Unlike in person face-to-face interviews where both the interviewer and the interviewee can observe facial expressions and body language, each participant in telephone interviews must rely on audio responses alone. I made every effort to give each participant enough time to respond fully but avoid letting them wonder off topic. Although I frequently worried that I would
cut someone off too soon, I made the effort to ask several times throughout the interview if they would like to add anything to their response before we moved onto the next question or section. While this may have made it more difficult for me to conduct the interviews, I believe these challenges were worth the trade off. Not being in the same room as the participant created a sense of anonymity among the participants and myself. Further, it is possible that this distance allowed the participants to open about things that perhaps they would not have disclosed to me if we had been in the same room. In hindsight, it may have been beneficial to create more than one interview guide to more accurately represent one version of a traditional phenomenological approach (Sediman, 2006). In Sediman’s (2006) version of how to conduct a phenomenological approach he advises the use of three open-ended individualized interviews and spending considerable time with each interviewee. The objective of the first interview is to build rapport and aid the researcher in crafting an individualized interview guide for the second interview to investigate their research question in great depth, and the third meeting is designed to discuss, clarify and confirm the findings from the previous two interviews. Other researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2007, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002) provide less concrete steps on how to go about using phenomenology as a research method, focusing more so on the end result instead of the process. However, creating individualized interview guides would have likely made it difficult to make comparisons across interviews. Further, one must consider the participant’s coaching schedules in scheduling their interviews. I had to re-schedule some interviews multiple times in order to accommodate my participants’ schedules. This experience provided me with valuable insight that most participants simply do not have that much spare time to
meet with me on a regular basis. As a result, I adapted my research approach by conducting one long interview rather than multiple interviews and applied the principles of a phenomenological approach. In that I studied the lived experiences of a small group of female coaches in great depth, looking for commonalities and patterns among their experiences to tie them together and using their words to tell their story in the findings.

3.5. Data Management, Analysis and Interpretation

While there are many acceptable ways to manage, analyze and interpret qualitative data, I primarily followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2011) guidelines. Audio files were uploaded to my computer. I transcribed them verbatim and reviewed them for minor editorial errors. All audio files and word document files were organized in separate electronic folders and labeled for easy retrieval.

It is generally accepted that “analysis goes on throughout the life of a qualitative study” (van Den Hoonaaard, 2012, p. 115). As such, I began the early stages of data analysis while I collected my data. I generated ideas about “directions for analysis”, saw “patterns take shape,” and brainstormed possible themes and hypotheses as I completed each interview (Patton, 2002, p. 436). I kept track of these ideas in a reflexive journal as I completed the study. After transcribing the interviews, I performed a formal manual content analysis by engaging in a “careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation” of the text to identify patterns and themes (Berg, 2009, p. 338). Throughout this process I read through the data several times to familiarize myself with the content and to “get a sense of the whole” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). I began by evaluating each interview individually using a within-case type of analysis to provide myself with a detailed description of each case (Creswell, 2007). Then each case was
compared to the others using a cross-case analysis approach (Creswell, 2007). For example, I compared specific codes (such as level of education, credibility, availability of mentors) across participants to look for consistency and differences.

To accomplish these analyses, I followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2011) coding procedure. First, I read through each interview generating open codes to create a codebook (Creswell, 2009; see Appendix E). Next, I compared the codes to one another to create categories. To do this, I wrote out all codes on individual post-it notes, arranging and re-arranging these sticky notes on larger pieces of paper to group the codes into larger conceptual categories and finally assigning them to overarching themes. Then I developed three corresponding subthemes to explain the relationships between them (i.e., axial coding) and connections to the literature (i.e., selective coding), and were used to organize chapter four (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The codebook presented in Appendix E outlines the codes and categories used to develop the final three overarching themes and corresponding subthemes featured in the finding chapter of this study outlined in Appendix F.

For example, codes such as token (described text where women felt isolated and felt their coaching expertise was undervalued as a result of sport context, affirmative action practices, programming and/or policies), non-linear path (described text where women took breaks from coaching for various reasons ranging from family commitments to gendered discrimination) and lack of female role models (described text where women identified a major gap in their coaching development and which impacted others’ perceptions of coaching ideals) were connected to the “gendered experience in sport” category:
Any code that related to gender roles (ideas about how men and women should act/behave and social roles they should fulfill). The gender role impact, consequence or change in behaviour as a result of being female in sport leadership role or coaching context.

This category was used to develop the final theme of “impact of gender ideology”, within this final theme the subthemes of “domestic responsibilities, motherhood and coaching”, “establishing credibility as coaches” and “emphasizing femininity eased acceptance” are used to organize/group common/related responses from participants and illustrate connections to the existing body of research on women in coaching and gender literature. For instance, it was evident female coaches in this study had to negotiate gendered expectations regarding the division of labour and coaching ideals. Consistent with previous research, participants in this study offered many concrete examples where they had to make decisions about how to manage their personal lives and how to present themselves to be viewed as having coaching competency to gain acceptance as sport leaders.

3.5.1. Clarification of research question development, data analysis and findings

This study took an inductive approach to analysis “working back and forth between the themes and the database until” reaching the final set of themes (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). Throughout data analysis, I wrote analytical memos and engaged in reflexivity via journaling, offering insight into how my own experiences and status (e.g., gender, age and athletic involvement) affected my participants’ responses (van Den Hoonoard, 2012), and my interpretation of their responses. I also offered my
interpretations in formal presentations about my preliminary findings and engaged in informal conversations about my research receiving ongoing feedback from others in my field of study, as I completed data analysis, revised my literature review, and began writing my findings.

This is why the findings from this study it becomes apparent that the research questions resemble the final themes and subthemes presented in chapter four. These parallels come as a result of the iterative process common in explorative qualitative research. According to Marshall & Rossman (2011) the purpose of exploratory studies is “to investigate little-understood phenomena; to identify or discover important categories of meaning; [and] …generate hypotheses for future research” (p. 69). They argued the general research questions focus on: “What is happening in the social program? What are the salient themes, patterns, or categories of meaning for the participants? [And] how are these patterns linked with one another?” (p.69). Further, they suggest “one of the unique strengths of [qualitative explorative studies is that they] …accept the value of context and setting and searches for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon under study” (p. 92-93). Thus, it comes as a result of the exploratory nature of the method/approach that that the findings and the discussion themes and sub-themes closely resemble the research questions because the researcher is expected to work back and forth between the raw data and existing literature to develop data analysis and findings which represent the participants lived experiences. This is why the wording of research questions changed over the course of the research project\textsuperscript{11} to more

\textsuperscript{11} The original intent/purpose of the study was to focus on the experiences of women coaching high performance male track and field athletes using the following three research questions: 1) What factors contribute to women establishing successful
accurately represent the thematic findings. For instance over the course of data analysis it became evident that participants did not focus on the differences between coaching males and females was not a significant but did discuss in great depth their experiences with navigating gendered roles and career development strategies used in the context the Canadian sport system.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that it is up to each individual inquirer to seek out and defend whichever criteria best apply to their work. In other words the researcher must demonstrate to the reader that they have a clear understanding of the implications of their study and the strategies employed to enhance trustworthiness (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Evaluation criteria of qualitative studies focus on the accuracy and believability of their representations (e.g., descriptions and analysis) of those being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2011) I drew on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who pioneered a set of criteria (e.g., credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability) to deal with issues of trustworthiness. A number of measures were taken into consideration at the design-stage to ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

To further my knowledge of qualitative research and enhance my credibility as a researcher, I took graduate level research method courses, read relevant books and journal articles on the topic, consulted other qualitative researchers and conducted a pilot study in preparation for this study. I was aware from the onset of the study that my life coaching careers in men’s athletics?; 2) How do female coaches manage the traditionally masculine coaching culture?; and, 3) Is coaching male athletes different than female athletes? In what ways?
experiences as a female athlete and coach, as well what I had read about this topic would influence what topics I pursue, the questions I ask, data analysis and the final conclusions I draw. Therefore it was important to record my thoughts throughout this research project. I kept a reflexive journal to reflect on topics such as the research process, preliminary findings, what I have read in previous studies on the topic, and my experiences in the sport as a novice coach. Having these entries to draw on were useful when attempting to inform my readers of my standpoint, as how I interpreted one participant’s story may be completely different from someone else’s interpretation. Further, how they tell their story to me may differ as to how they would recount their experiences to someone else.

I also completed a bracketing interview as a way to document my expectations for the research and assumptions about the topic prior to interviewing my participants (Creswell, 2007). My graduate studies’ supervisor conducted the bracketing interview. She is knowledgeable in qualitative research methods, gender studies in sport and the person whom I planned to meet with on a regular basis to discuss the research. Therefore, this process was beneficial for both of us since it allowed me to begin engaging in reflexivity about the project and it provided my supervisor with valuable insight into my personal beliefs, from which she could later draw on in our peer debriefing meetings throughout the project (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). My supervisor reviewed all interview transcripts to familiarize herself with their contents. She then coded half of the interviews to check for consistency in findings (e.g., intercoder agreement or cross checking) and propose new codes (Creswell, 2009).
The findings are written using thick rich description to “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 191-192). Researcher interpretations, dialog and descriptions are supported by quotations from the participants. Further, a member check was performed by sending participants a draft of the results chapter to confirm the accuracy of their words, request their comments on the findings, and provide the opportunity for a follow up discussion (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Feedback received has been incorporated into the current version of this document. Comments were based more so on interest in the topic rather than on making radical changes to the existing text.

3.7 Place of the Researcher

I have been involved in the sport of track and field for 13 years. As an athlete I competed in the 60m, 100m and 200m. I began my athletic career in high school, and from there I moved on to compete as a varsity athlete for five years at the University of Regina. Today I remain actively involved in athletics even though my position has changed significantly. In spring 2009 I began coaching athletes between the ages of 12 and 18 with a local club. More recently, I coached at the grassroots level with a rural high school. Taking up the role of a coach has heightened my interest in female coaches’ experiences and opened up opportunities for me to explore gender dynamics in sport. As a researcher, I am actively engaging in praxis. I am continuously linking my actions, observations and interest with theories about women’s underrepresentation in coaching. Thus, one goal of my research was to engage in conversations with successful female coaches as a way to inform these theories and to find new ways to encourage women to enter this field.
Given that my athletic background, gender and interest in coaching is similar to my participants, I hoped they would openly and honestly reflect upon their coaching experiences because of my partial membership to their group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) describe two key challenges of this level of closeness to the group they are studying: 1) There was the possibility that participants would assume I had similar experiences and therefore fail to describe their full experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009); and 2) There is the possibility that the researcher being unable to distinguish between his or her experiences and those of their participants, which may result in interviews and analysis, shaped completely by the researcher’s experiences rather than the participants.

In an attempt to address this challenge, I presented myself as a novice coach seeking their opinions, insight and expertise. I wanted them to tell me their whole story. I believe that my participants were honest, truthful and genuine in their reflections of their lived experiences I sought to explore. Additionally, as I described earlier in this chapter I made several efforts to avoid compromising the findings by documenting my expectations and assumptions about women in coaching in a bracketing interview, journaling, debriefing with my supervisor and performing member checks with my participants to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of my findings. Our conversations brought forth ideas and experiences, which challenged my expectations and extended previous research. For example, I expected to hear that coaching as a profession is challenging with many women dropping out before even getting started, that it continues to be dominated by male leaders and their experiences are plagued by negativity (i.e., sexism, harassment and discrimination). While I learned that these challenges persisted
for some female coaches, I also discovered that not all women experience the same difficulties. Some female coaches had extremely positive experiences within the Canadian sport system, which should not be overlooked and perhaps investigated further.
Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of elite female Canadian coaches in an effort to better understand their career development. In this chapter I present the key findings of this study. Data analysis supported three major themes: (a) impact of gender ideology, (b) the role of Canadian sport system, and (c) personal strategies used to stay in the system. The first theme looks at their experiences at the macro level. Specifically, it explores how gender ideology beliefs shaped female coaches’ careers. In the second theme, their experiences are examined at the meso level. Here, the coaches’ positive and negative experiences with the current opportunities available within the Canadian sport system, with the institutional supports, and with individual sport leaders are discussed. Finally, the third theme explores their coaching experiences at the micro level, with a discussion of the personal strategies participants used to adapt to gender ideology difficulties and make the present system work for them. Participant examples and quotations are used to illustrate each theme described in this chapter.

4.2. Impact of Gender Ideology

As the participants in this study recounted their experiences, it was apparent that the dominant gender ideology impacted their coaching careers. In particular, their careers were influenced by societal expectations regarding domestic responsibilities and motherhood, assumptions about coach credibility, and traditional notions of femininity.
4.2.1. Domestic responsibilities, motherhood, and coaching.

Based on the comments from the participants, it was apparent that the realities of the division of household labour in Canadian society interfered with coaching as a full time occupation. This division of labour is built on the premise that women were in a heterosexual relationship and they were primarily responsible for unpaid maintenance of the couple’s home (i.e., cooking, cleaning) and caring for their children; whereas, men were assumed to be the breadwinner who worked in the paid labour market and supported his family financially (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Tracy reinforced this point when she pointed out:

Most of coaching you know is from three to six right? So that is a key time for someone to be home with kids and feeding and all that [and] when you look at what women do when [the] kids are coming home from school or you know… it’s just [the] natural flow of our society.

This comment made it clear that she believed it was normal for women to encounter difficulties balancing child-rearing (home) and coaching duties (work), which tended to happen at the same time of day (late afternoon). This was also true of Cheryl’s experience. Her greatest barrier to coaching was “being the mother of four children and being married to a husband who is traditional and feels that he would like his dinner on the table at six o’clock at night.” She further reflected that her family was always more important than her career.

So every time I had opportunities [for coaching] I basically had to say no to it because [they came] when my life got too crazy with small kids under the age of six. I [couldn’t] be the head track coach of a university, it just [wasn’t going to] work. And you can say “well my husband is going to be home to make the dinner” but it just doesn’t happen and maybe it does more so now I don’t know. But definitely for me I had so many chances to go ahead but I had to choose to say no to and that was my choice to say so. I don’t regret it but it is frustrating
now I [go] to the university to teach one little course two days a week and to know the guy that is the head track coach is... it was me... and I said no to it you know.

Cheryl was the head coach of a university team on two different occasions but gave it up both times because it conflicted with her family commitments. But she felt that perhaps the trade off was worse, as she stated “I think as a woman you give up more than you do as a man when you choose your career over your family” and “until men have babies [laugh] seriously” nothing will change. In other words, men have the luxury of not having to decide between coaching and family.

Other participants in this study experienced or observed discrimination towards expecting and new mothers by staffing committees of provincial teams. Sarah recounted her disgust and disbelief in the head coach’s reaction to finding out a female coach on staff was pregnant.

She was going have to take a little bit of time off for doctor appointments and he said “… we can’t have a pregnant person on our team on our coaching staff so we will have to let you go.” And I thought you have got to be kidding me… it was clear like it wasn’t done in secret it was in writing… like we all knew.

As a result, Sarah withdrew her application to coach as provincial staff for a summer games event in protest because his actions went against her morals. Lisa, on the other hand, experienced a much more subtle but equally offensive form of gender discrimination early on in her career that almost drove her to quit coaching:

I was on the [Provincial] Team for [the regional] Summer Games and at that time I needed to be with my baby and [the provincial organization] would not allow me to stay in the village with my baby so I had to take my husband. I had to find my own place to rent [and] because I had a baby I drove [so] I had to pay for all of my accommodations. Then I asked if my husband could come into the village to bring me my baby so I could breast feed ‘cause I was breast feeding every three hours at that time and they would not get him accreditation. So he [had to apply to the games to get] accreditation. So now the two of us worked to get into
the village [since] that was the only way that I [could] coach and breast-feed my baby. I was so angry and I got so sick too you know [from] running back and forth. There just wasn’t the support at that time... Yea it was brutal it was really brutal and I had the biggest coaching assignment and not one person in [the provincial organization] helped me not ever like hold the baby like nothing…

Instead of quitting because of this incident, she has made it her personal mission to be an advocate “of women with babies to be on national teams and that their babies can stay in the village and we work around getting accreditations and all that crap!”

4.2.2. Establishing credibility as coaches.

A common type of gender discrimination experienced by the women in this study was a hesitancy or resistance to trust their coaching skills and knowledge, and/or a disbelief that they were qualified to coach male athletes. Many participants spoke about their frustrations with a double standard in terms of how people perceived and treated them as a result of their gender. However, once they had established a level of trust and built a relationship with those individuals gender based doubts related to their credibility as coaches were reduced or vanished altogether.

Several participants discussed how they had encountered these difficulties at the beginning of a relationship with athletes. For many, gaining the respect and trust of new recruits, especially male athletes, was a difficult and long process. Sarah felt that she had to prove herself to the new recruits every year. She stated:

I had that problem a lot with guys [just out of high school] coming into the program thinking they know everything. I’m a female coach they don’t respect females. They don’t trust that I have the knowledge and usually it takes about 3 months of being in my group [before] they go “oh… she knows what she is talking about.”

Mary also found that she frequently needed to educate athletes at the beginning of a season about her own athletic accomplishments and credentials, and sometimes even felt
the need to physically demonstrate her skills as a strategy to get athletes to take her seriously. She reflected that:

…being a female coach especially in throws, strength and power events you are always going to get guys that think you don’t really know what you are talking about… because you’re just a girl (laugh)… and [I] look at them and go “wait a minute guys… I’ve done this for awhile… I also have a degree [and certification] in strength and conditioning”… and then a lot of times it’s almost like you have to physically show them. Sometimes I actually have to step in the middle of a weight training session and actually demonstrate exactly what I am trying to ask them to do. I will pick up the weight that they have or whatever it is you know and I can’t always do it but (laugh) I get in there and say this is how it is done. You almost have to show them to prove to them physically that you’re as strong or as you know whatever to be able to get them to understand you a little bit more to be able to trust you a little bit more… I’m fortunate because I am a bit larger I am stronger… I was a very strong athlete I mean when I used to lift weights I could squat 460 lbs for sets of 4 I could bench press 267 ½ lbs for doubles… I was strong [and] I still look very strong so that helps [with the] perception [part]. [But] not all women have that I mean if I was 5 foot 1 or 2 and 120 lbs I don’t think I’d get the same trust that I do sometimes (laugh) from athletes. A lot of times they just think “oh well you’re a girl what do you know?” or “you’re not that strong” or whatever and sometimes… it’s funny because as I go to recruit athletes they look at me… they [say] “um ah well what did you ever do?” And then I say “well I was a the Olympic games I was 16th I went to worlds championships” and all of a sudden they’re like “oh… well okay yea I guess you know what you’re talking about”… like again because you are a female coach and they are just not sure about what credentials you have or what you’ve done so that all of a sudden when they see it they are like “oh oh okay well yea you must be a good coach.”

While she recognized how her athletic experiences and coaching qualifications enabled her to establish her credibility, she felt the need to prove her coaching competency because she was female.

Some participants needed to establish credibility by gaining respect from other coaches. In Lisa’s experience sometimes words alone were not enough to convince people that she knew what she was talking about. Despite her efforts, she explained:
I’ve had a bit of a problem lately in my new position because I have to mentor other coaches and in the country [the] coaches are very private. But for their athletes to be carded\(^\text{12}\) they have to share [their plans] with me and then I have to make comments and they don’t necessarily really like receiving those comments. So [sometimes when I make a comment, it] needs to be verified by somebody else and [often the person who does is] male. For example I was in Phoenix with [a male pentathlon athlete] and his coach [for a national training camp]… hasn’t been around me very much. The coaches who’ve been around for a while trust me, now we have a great relationship. But I suggested something in the discus throw and he’d kind of disagreed with me and then yet when an older male [throwing] expert says the exact same thing… yea so there is still a little bit of that but it may not necessarily be because I am a woman [but] more that [this] is something new that we are doing in Canada… but it doesn’t help that I’m a woman I’m sure in some situations.

In Lisa’s situation those who asked for a second opinion from other male coaches undermined her knowledge of a throwing technique. Sarah also felt that it took quite some time before her superior was willing to accept that her athletes’ performances came as a result of her coaching. She reflected:

> When my athletes started performing and doing really well I had to fight a lot with the head coach at the university to [get my] throwers on the traveling teams. Like Can West and like having a guy qualify for CIS and my head coach say “well… but 10th” and I went “yea” “well I don’t think we’re going to take him.” And that was really hard, but it was credibility mostly. [But at the time I didn’t] know if it is a credibility thing and I found out a little later… it was not necessarily a distrust in me but that if I said the guy was going to do well I didn’t have the credibility under me… because I [started] coaching immediately at the university level… so that was definitely a barrier. It was tougher at the beginning sort of to get going. But once my career was a little more established it was a lot easier for me to work with people. I’ve never had a problem with parents really or anything like that. I’m lucky… because my athletes were at that level. Like I had 2 or 3 athletes at the national level and then I went with my next group of five year (laugh) where I had to opposite. Like that first year I had to fight for me to go not for my athletes [because] at that point and I had 3 athletes going and they didn’t want to send the coach so it was tough. It took I’d say it took about 3

\(^\text{12}\) The term ‘carded’ refers to the process of being formally identified as high-level athletes. Each sport has unique guidelines for this process.
or 4 years for that credibility to actually be sort of strong enough that there was a trust. But it wasn’t super strong. Now it’s strong. Now it’s 100%. I’d say after 3 or 4 years I’d say it was only about 60%. So it took awhile.

Both of these examples suggest that female coaches needed to prove their credibility as a coach, perhaps more so than their male colleagues.

Further, Tracy discussed how unfair and difficult it is for her and her accomplished male athlete to deal with the repercussions of setting precedence. They continuously fight against the perception that female coaches are not capable of developing a male sprinter to be competitive at the international and Olympic levels simply due to the fact that no woman coach has ever done it before. Further, she commented on how she was being closely watched by those in her field. She was aware that his performances and overall standings in the International Association of Athletics Federation\(^\text{13}\) rankings would be used to judge her coaching abilities regardless of all of the other factors involved in an athlete’s success on the international stage. In Tracy’s experience however, she may not necessarily get the opportunity to meet those individuals who create resistance against her or change their minds. This type of resistance comes as a consequence of the prevailing dominant gender ideology, which has not traditionally depicted sport leadership and coaching male athletes as feminine activities. Further, it would be difficult to change these beliefs with only one success story.

\(^{13}\) IAAF is the international governing body for the sport of athletics.
4.2.3. Emphasizing femininity eased acceptance

Several participants in this study reflected on how traditional gender role expectations had influenced their coaching behaviours, leadership type and physical appearance. It was commonly reported that emulating a feminine physical appearance and acting in feminine appropriate ways, such as a team mom or being an emotional manager and caring person, helped them gain acceptance as sport coaches by parents, athletes and their peers.

Some women discussed how they had purposefully acted or dressed in stereotypical feminine ways, which helped them to be accepted in their coaching role by men in particular. Cheryl remembered a time when she was approached by an athlete’s mother to help her convince the athlete’s father that she was not out to seduce his daughter.

Cheryl: I remember … one mom came to me “Can my husband come and meet you? I want him to meet you” and I thought well sure of course. But she said “but he never comes to parent teacher interviews” but because I was a female coaching females he felt that I was... for whatever reason he thought I was... He had real issue and he thought I was going to be this butch coach that was I don’t know out to steal his daughter or something I don’t know he was very strange.

Interviewer: Okay and what happened when you met him?

Cheryl: Well I made sure I wore a skirt that night…wasn’t dressed like a lady on duty and I don’t remember too much other than I was more nervous. I remember thinking this is the guy that doesn’t like me. But we had a good conversation and maybe I tried to be more feminine than I would normally be I don’t know. But the wife really was thankful afterwards and her young athlete who I coached all through high school she went on did different sports at university and was a member of the athletics council and all these things and we are still good friends you know I mean I haven’t taught her for or coached her for 30 years and she is still a friend.
It is intriguing that emphasizing femininity worked for Cheryl to gain acceptance from a hesitant father. It would be curious to know if a male coach would have to prove his masculinity to the same extent when meeting with a parent or if his sexuality would be assumed because he is coaching a particular sport. It also interesting that while there are several different clothing styles in today’s age, wearing traditional feminine clothing, like skirts, continues to represent heterosexuality for women.

Lisa described a similar experience about emphasizing her femininity while coaching pole vault at the Olympics.

Lisa: One cool thing at major international games especially at Olympic games that I remember coaching the pole vault, which is a male dominated coaching event. So we were all lined up in the front row and there was somebody from Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Hungry, all guys, Ukraine, Russia they were all there and just me in the middle. And when I walked down I looked at the row and I was nervous being at the Olympic games. Then I looked at these guys and they are all in their 60s yea they’ve been around forever and here I come (laugh). I took a look and went whoof and took a big breath. And of course my spot was right in the middle of them and I was like “excuse me excuse me excuse me.” [But] it turns out they loved having me there because it was fun to have a woman (laughter).

Interviewer: It was fun to have a woman in their space?

Lisa: Exactly! (laugh) and really it’s great when I’m walking you know trying to squeeze through. You know somebody picks up my bag. They are very helpful. That age group can be little shits but also respect women... you know like when you walk through the doors first [and they think] a women should never carry their own bag, all of that kind of stuff. But it’s great if you are struggling. They take your bag and you just let them. Just be a woman and let them [help you]. It’s good…I have coached with that group of men now for a few years, they love it and I love it. We help each other out and so on the international scene I’ve never had a problem.
Allowing her male peers to treat her like a woman seemed to ease the acceptance of her in their male domain. Perhaps the strategies used by Cheryl and Lisa worked well because neither of them challenged men’s expectations of women.

Participants also discussed the team mom persona as being someone who demonstrated compassion, support and sincere concern for the health of their athletes. Whether intentional or accidental, these actions eased their acceptance as coaches by athletes, parents and colleagues. Mary supported this idea when she said:

I make sure that I listen to the things [they tell] me and try to give them the best well rounded experience... So I try to be there for them. I also let them know that if anything ever happens I’m there... Sometimes I am the first person they call for things and depending on what it is sometimes I am the last person they tell... because they don’t want to disappoint [me] or whatever. But I let them know that I am there for them and that if they need anything that they can always call me.

Kelly admitted that she intentionally takes on a mother role with her athletes:

I tend to be kind of a mother to everyone. Like they had little nicknames like I’m the mom on the team. The guys used…to call “Oh yea that’s mom talking again.” It’s ‘cause I really look after them. [And] I [would] say, “Are you guys eating right? You look tired are you getting enough sleep?” You know (laughter) just kind of talking to them like I was their mom. I always worried about them and making sure that you know that they [were] rested or “Hey you know you look like you’re injured. Are you favoring your foot… what’s wrong with you know? Your knee looks kinda funny.” Often they would [come] talk to me and they would confide in more than they would the [male] head coach.

Similarly, Sarah reflected that while she rejected the ‘mom’ label, she cared for her athletes:

My own athletes will joke around that I’m a mom. But I’m so not! I definitely care about them. I’ve got lots of athletes not from [the city] so they come to me and they are like staying in apartments or whatever. There is no way I will ever cook them food or anything but I’ll make sure they have food. Like I’ll ask them. So I had a group they just graduated a few years ago that would say, “you are our [the city] mom.” [And I’m] like “no don’t call me that!” So unfortunately yes I think some of them do [think of me that way] and some of their parents are glad
that relationship is there but I consider it more of a friendship piece when it comes down to that level. They don’t come take out my garbage or anything like that.

Additionally, Sarah suggested her being the only female on the team actually helped her male colleagues accept her in a motherly leadership role, filling a void in the leadership team.

At the socials after [a regional conference]… we had athletes that were just completely out of control. It was “Sarah can you just take them home (laugh) and lock them in their rooms” and I was like “I guess so.” but also development because that sort of turned into… you could count on this person to now do this and I appreciated that so that is the difference in being a female coach for me what I experience with my peers I guess in the development piece.

From these findings one might argue that perhaps women who are willing to personify stereotypical feminine ways of acting as relationship and emotional managers can gain acceptance with men in sport, including male athletes, fathers, and male dominated coaching staff.

4.3. The Role of the Canadian Sport System

The participants provided insight into the realities of being a woman coaching in Canada. They described the opportunities available within the sport system and the difficulties of advancing in the system. They commented on the accessibility of coaching initiatives, such as the National Coaching Certification Program and the Women in Coaching Program, and how the programs affected their career development progress. Finally, the participants discussed how the support they had received by sports leaders helped them to establish their careers.
4.3.1. Few full time coaching opportunities for women (and men).

It was evident that while there were many volunteer opportunities to gain coaching experience with high schools, private clubs, at the provincial level and some university teams, there were few full time paid head coaching positions for women or men within the Canadian sport system. Cheryl discussed the reality that most coaches are volunteers. She admitted:

I began coaching because it was part of my job as a teacher. I wasn’t paid to coach. I was never paid to coach in those days. It was part of your job [and] you were expected to do it.

Kelly explained that in her experience:

It’s kind of a joke at the high school [level]. I mean I’m coaching at a private high school and I am making money there but if I were coach at a public high school I’d make no money… no money at all club coaching [unless you were] the head coach. When you are coaching at the club level it’s really for the love of it. You don’t have a day job. This is a passion for people after work. This is a hobby. [To get a] full time coaching [position] you have to get [hired] at a university and you would have to be the head coach because assistant coaches just can’t make a living. There is no way… not in track not unless you are basketball, hockey or football.

As volunteer part time assistant coaches with university, provincial and club athletic teams, Tracy and Sarah received an honorarium for their time. However, both work jobs outside of coaching to earn a living. While Sarah had accepted that coaching would be a hobby for her, the reality of the Canadian coach job market continues to be a source of great frustration for Tracy.

Tracy spoke about the difficulties of advancing, as a coach, in the sport system, even though she has followed the typical steps of career advancement in coaching. She had earned her NCCP 4/5, which is the highest level available, and was instructor for the program. She had also earned two degrees, a bachelor of physical education and a
masters in coaching specializing in athlete development, and had invested several years into coaching as a volunteer in the system with the intention to pursue coaching as a full-time occupation. She reflected that in her experience club and CIS networks were open to anyone interested in coaching at those levels. She had always felt supported by her provincial organization, but suggested that “once you start putting [coaches] on national teams that’s when things get weird.” Tracy had several negative experiences in the past where she had been appointed to national teams and removed at the last minute without being given an explanation and later discovered they had replaced her with a male coach. Further, she had witnessed some strange decisions made by Athletics Canada and commented that she had recently said the following in a survey about the organization:

I said Sport Canada\textsuperscript{14} puts all of this money and time into the NCCP program and then they hire people from out of country. And it’s just bizarre like I just don’t get it! Or like they ignore people that have gone through the training and have developed athletes and done a good job.

She gave the impression that it did not matter how qualified one was, some women were being passed over in these hiring decisions at the national level.

Similarly, Sarah learned the harsh reality of organizational politics when she and a female friend re-applied to be co-head coaches for the provincial team. They went through the interview process as they had done before, only to receive an email saying they had not been selected. It came as a surprise to them when the committee announced they had selected a male individual who had never led a provincial team before. When she inquired as to what she had done wrong she received no explanation, but she later

\textsuperscript{14} As part of the department of Heritage Canada, Sport Canada is responsible for governing and funding Canada’s amateur sport system.
learned about some backroom promises, which had affected the outcome of the committee’s decision.

Further, some participants suggested that the Canadian amateur sport system had a history of devaluing female coaches. For example, although Mary felt that Athletics Canada had done a much better job in recent years of providing women coaching opportunities at the national level, she could not dismiss the fact the organization had a long history of hiring females as team managers and administrative assistants rather than as coaches. From her perspective, these positions were not as prestigious as coaching:

“most of the time [they] end up in a role of a manager…well they coach but they always end up as part of the managing portfolio.” Cheryl held a slightly different position on the issue. She reflected that in her many years of experience:

I’ve been fortunate to been on many teams. I think 20 world cups, cross-country championships as a coach or manager or combination of both sometimes. I was chosen as a manager but because I was female it was great because I could also be an event coach with the girls’ team.

Cheryl felt that being the manager of a team held a level of prestige as part of the coaching staff. However, she found a very different situation when she began her most recent appointment with Athletics Canada as a coordinator for with one of the national training centers. She stated:

They created a new position in 2009 and I got that position to be an assistant working with the lead coach and director of the center. [But] it kind of led me to feel like a second-class citizen and I felt left out that I didn’t really have anything to do and found that my job was more just to do clerical [work]. I was emailed with something to do and expected to do it but there was no input. My expertise was not valued. So just last year they revised my role and took everything to do with the national centre away from me and instead they cut my salary in half again (laugh).
She felt that she had been deceived, having been gradually pushed out of a leadership position and as a result was forced to accept less pay and power to continue being a part of the system. Perhaps this example also demonstrates the consequences of a perceived lack of credibility being played out in a sport organization. Mary had come to the same conclusion regarding her experience with wage inequality. She had recognized that:

My salary is nowhere near what some of my male counterparts are [making] who have [fewer] credentials than I… But then again … I like coaching not because I do it for the money because if I did I would be in totally different occupation for sure.

One might suggest based on these women’s experiences it appears as though they have rationalized their lower wages with their love or passion for coaching. However, some men probably coach for the money in order to fulfill their breadwinner role and perhaps it is just a side benefit as they actually enjoy coaching as well.

4.3.2. The benefit of coach education and issues of accessibility.

One of the benefits of the NCCP, beyond learning coaching techniques and skills, was the opportunity to network with peers. For example, Kelly spoke about how attending NCCP clinics has been crucial to her development as a coach because it has given her the opportunity to speak with other coaches about their experiences. Tracy agreed that “speaking with people who are willing to talk to you” about coaching had been extremely important to her development as a coach. In Cheryl’s opinion “taking a course is great way to revaluate what you are doing as a coach but also to understand [if] what you are doing is right.” She elaborated:

The coaching [program] has developed from being a lecture based assignment [to the] kind of system where you facilitate learning in your group [where you] introduce topics and [everybody] share[s] ideas. [It] is a collaborative process [where] you are bringing the knowledge out of the group instead of telling them things.
Both Tracy and Cheryl liked the fact that this teaching approach acknowledged the wealth of coaching knowledge already present in the group taking the course. Sarah felt that she learned a lot about coach-athlete interactions and how to present herself as a leader because of what the other participants in NCCP clinics shared. She explained that because:

The instructor was one of my old coaches...I had already learned all that I could learn from him. But the other coaches that were there taught me sooo much and I [really] appreciated that. Still to this day I will go to those people and say “remember when we were in Moncton?”

Further, she reflected that the experience was particularly valuable to her development as a coach because it facilitated networking with her peers.

The participants in this study reported varying levels of access to the NCCP in different regions of Canada. For example, Kelly reported experiencing difficulties completing NCCP levels due to limited offerings in her province and a lack of information about such opportunities by her provincial governing body. It also appeared as though lower levels of the certification program were more readily accessible than the higher ones. While this may not be a surprising finding since more individuals require the entry coaching certification levels, the fact that higher levels are not as readily accessible may also explain why some coaches do not continue beyond the entry coaching levels. Sarah needed to travel to another province to get her level three technical because it was not offered in her home province, but it was a required credential to coach with the Canada Games team. However, overall Canadian coaching education was reported as being both geographically and financially accessible to anyone
who was interested and willing to research where the course was going to be offered, register and travel to attend it.

4.3.3. The impact of affirmative action policies on career development.

One outcome of the prevailing gender ideology is that affirmative action policies and programs have been established in the national and international sport systems. In particular, participants discussed the controversial use of gender quotas, the evolution of the Women in Coaching Program and the impact of these practices on their careers.

While gender equity policies established at the CIS and IAAF levels and programs such as the National Team Apprenticeship Program were intended to support women in sport, some participants discussed the problematic nature of them. For example, Cheryl suggested that quota practices actually put women at a disadvantage. She had personally struggled to gain respect in instances where she was labeled the token woman:

Like sitting on an IAAF cross-country committee where there’s now a rule that there has to be two women. So people think that it is because you are a woman on the committee you must be a token woman and you are not really supposed to have an opinion.

She and Mary also questioned whether the Women in Coaching Program did in fact help female coaches gain access to the Canadian sport system. As earlier participants in this program, they had been recruited because of their athletic success. Cheryl suggested that she had been used as a pawn in the sport system to fill the role of the token female coach. She commented on how she thought it was funny that “I wasn’t nominated to go to the clinic until after [I] had won a bronze medal at the Olympics…all of a sudden there was this mad scramble that I should be invited.” Similarly, Mary felt that being associated
with the Women in Coaching Program had altered people’s perceptions of her coaching credibility. She felt that because:

I had won nationals in the shot put [and] in the discus. And then later on in that summer I was part of the Women in Coaching Program. People [were] saying “well you know [its] because of the Women in Coaching Program you got pulled into this.” [But] really I had a coaching degree and coaching portfolio since like 1983. So there [was this] perception that I was a token coach and people really wouldn’t really listen to what I had to say. Then when I got the [head coach position] job [again] people [assumed] “oh well you know this just is another kind of token thing.” But they didn’t see the work that I had done with the program the year before [or] the work that I had been doing with the athletes that I was working with… I mean I went through some you know pre-conceived notions…and of course there is always going to be people that are you know vengeful or… frustrated because they feel like I was given the opportunities that they wanted that they should have gotten.

However, Mary also pointed out that when she did her stint with the Women in Coaching Program it was not nearly as established as it is now. She did not get as much help from Athletics Canada as those who have most recently taken part in the program. In her opinion “they pretty much just put me through the program in name.”

In contrast, more recent participants had the opportunity to participate in more formalized professional development programs, which were tailored to meet their individualized needs. In particular, participants described how the Women in Coaching Program had provided them with opportunities to travel to elite level competitions or training camps, which allowed them to observe coach-athlete interactions and interact with experienced coaches for an extended period of time. For Sarah, the Women in Coaching grants allowed her to attend elite competitions to further her learning in a practical setting at the beginning of her career. The experiences she gained from those trips gave her the confidence to establish herself in her own community and made her
recognize the importance of continual learning. As a result she looked forward to attending these Nationals each year knowing that she would learn something new.

Another benefit of the program was the opportunity to be assigned a mentor. Tracy’s mentor was a paid employee of Athletics Canada and part of his job was to communicate with her regarding coaching concerns. She reflected that he has been a “good sounding board” for her. They had many chats on the phone, and now she emails him every couple of weeks with questions regarding training program and he responds with feedback. While she appreciated all that her mentor has done for her and had previously developed collegial relationships with several male coaches over the course of her career, she admits that “it would be nice to have female [mentor] though.”

Tracy’s experience is indicative of the reality that there is a lack of experienced female coaches currently working in the system available to fulfill mentoring roles.

The Women in Coaching Program was also found to support childcare and connect female coaches with other women in the coaching profession. Lisa explained “with the apprenticeship program and the push to keep women in coaching there are a lot of adjustments made for women with babies to continue” now a days. In fact while taking part in the program they allowed her to use the apprenticeship money to bring a nanny with her on the road. This was extremely important given that she was at a point in her career where she needed to travel to gain experience, but at the same time could not be away from her baby for an extended period of time. With the program paying for her childcare she was able to shadow her mentor and his personal athlete, which allowed her to observe coach-athlete interactions and ask questions informally in a personalized coaching clinic at the elite level. She suggested that the program creates a lifetime
friendship with and network to the other women in the program. She also spoke about how the program presented the opportunity to meet key women who had succeeded in the profession whom she considers mentors and her lifeline. She reflected:

I had two babies at home and a very busy husband. I needed to hook up with people who [had] been there to know that it was possible because some days it seemed impossible so you need to have someone to call when it feels impossible.

Her Women in Coaching mentors shared their experiences and provided her with valuable advice. She noted:

When I got my Athletics Canada contracts [one mentor] took it. She tore it apart. She fixed it. She made suggestions. [Another mentor] re-wrote it. (Laugh) I mean they made me ask for more money. They just helped me to believe in my worth and not be scared to go and ask for it and they were right every time!

Interestingly, she attributes a large piece of her success to having surrounded herself with those women and took all of the support and ideas offered to heart and put them into action. Perhaps having access to insider knowledge and support gained as a result of participating in the Women in Coaching program is part of the reason she has been successful.

4.3.4. The role of sport leaders.

It was evident that women were given opportunities to gain experience and develop as coaches because some male sport leaders were willing to mentor female coaches and accommodate female coaches with young families. It is important to look at both of these issues because there are more men in sport leadership positions than women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Canadian Heritage, 2009; Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013; Kerr et al., 2006). As a result, one might suggest that these positive examples of
change demonstrate a shift in traditional attitudes to accept women as sport leaders and in the coaching profession.

In contrast to the dominant discussions about limited opportunities and organizational politics in the selection of coaches, two participants discussed how volunteering as assistant coaches allowed them to gain experience and meet instrumental sport leaders who played a key role making their coaching careers a reality. Mary explained how:

I was very fortunate to be able to be given an opportunity to coach at the university because when I was hired they really only knew me from the work that I had done as an assistant coach. But I guess that work spoke volumes. First they let me manage the job for the summer and then after that they let me take over and run the whole program and I had never been a CIS coach before... only as an assistant really and as an assistant I didn’t get the chance to go to CIS or nationals or anything like that.

Similarly, Lisa discussed how she began volunteering at the club level with a former coach and together they approached the university about starting a team. She worked as an assistant coach for a couple years with the team before the head coach decided to step down and asked if she would like to take over the position. While it took another couple of years before the program was established enough for her to approach the university about making it a fulltime position it did eventually work out. In both cases it seemed as though by being strategic and persistent in their efforts they were eventually given an opportunity to coach at the university level full time.

Additionally, one area that many participants in this study spoke of in quite a positive manner was their relationships with male mentors. These individuals are established coaches whom they shadowed and corresponded with on a regular basis. The participants in this study felt comfortable going to them for any coaching questions or
concerns they had. Common reflections included that their mentors were a key part of their coaching development and a great source of encouragement, and that they felt fully supported by these individuals. While some participants discussed formal mentoring relationships facilitated through the Women in Coaching program, others described informal relationships, which they had initially formed while attending NCCP clinics and had fostered the relationship while attending track meets and national competitions.

Sarah stated:

I go to the others that I trust…When I was in Moncton during an NCCP course [I met a male coach from a western Canadian university who I have] learned so much from [and] I still do because he’s got a lot of knowledge. He explains things in a way that I understand them and that makes a huge difference. I [also] had [a] run in [with another male coach out of Ontario who I] learned a lot [from]. I learned a lot from both of them. …[I have] never been formally mentored by anybody but I definitely took a lot of positives from them and learned a lot from them… I know that I can go to either of them pretty much at any time… My abilities to coach my athletes definitely have a lot [to do with] what I have learned from them.

Similarly, Tracy explained she met one key informal mentor who “ran an excellent program. I had a very positive experience going through the NCCP [clinics with him]. You could email him with any questions. He was a key person in my whole development” as a coach.

Some Canadian sport leaders have recognized that it is their responsibility to address family responsibilities in an effort to keep women coaching during times of child rearing. Cheryl identified several examples of women who she knew of within the CIS coaching community who currently had flexible options such as job sharing or part-time positions when they decided to start a family, alternatives which did not exist in her day. She also talked about one male university head coach in particular who was very patient
with one female coach who had only been coaching for two years with his team. When she took time off to have her children he gave her the option to return whenever she was ready. In the end she decided to stay home with her family, but it is important to recognize that he held her position for 3 years until she made her final decision. She suggested “you could say ‘well he’s lost those 3 years he invested in her’…you know holding a spot for her. But he’s not. He understands the value to having women coach.”

It has been suggested that women have different life experiences and leadership qualities to offer the field of coaching. As Werthner and Callary (2010) argued, “we need many more women to coach our young female athletes and perhaps even young male athletes” (p. 170-171) because much of the research on gender differences and communication suggest females already possess many of the necessary qualities to succeed as elite level coaches. Further, it is important for young females to see women in leadership roles to encourage them to be the next generation of female leaders. Male and female athletes should be exposed to female leadership to raise awareness of their competency as coaches and to bring greater acceptance of women on a broader scale. As highlighted early in this chapter, those athletes who had the opportunity to be coached by female coaches ultimately valued her expertise.

As discussed earlier, the challenges of managing a work-family life balance is one of the most commonly identified reasons for women leaving the coaching profession (Kamphoff, 2010; Kerr & Ali, 2012; Robertson, 2010). Many participants in this study felt it was crucial for sport administrators to find creative ways to retain female employees who demonstrate an interest in coaching and keep them involved during their parenthood years. These findings are consistent with Lisa’s experiences as a mother of
two. While Lisa was the head coach of a university team she had a very understanding employer. As a volunteer for two and half years she had worked to build up her team from 17 to 96 athletes, with 45 of these athletes being female. When she became pregnant with her first child she approached the dean and said:

We are the biggest team, we have the biggest female team on campus and I’m pregnant. So we have a choice now. Either when I have this baby I’m going back to [my old profession] or I am going to come here full time and you will pay a full time position.

She was given a full time position when she was done her maternity leave. Further, she noted that her athletic director was supportive of her taking her kids on the road and even provided per diems for them. She has since made similar arrangements with her current employers with the national team. Her children can come whenever she needs them to and it will not interfere with her job. She felt quite strongly that “if anybody had come up to me and said ‘you can’t bring this baby with you’ I would have walked away.” She believes that if sport organizations truly want to keep female leaders they need to “think out of the box of how to allow children to be with their mothers as much as possible.”

She provided the example of how a dean adjusted late afternoon practices by switching several classes around and working with professors so that a single mother could coach a CIS basketball team and be home by 3:30 for her three kids. Further, she had noticed that it is also becoming common practice to let women share coaching positions. However despite the fact that several of the women in this study benefited from changing attitudes, it is unlikely that all male sport leaders have changed their attitudes towards female coaches.
4.4. Personal Strategies Used to Stay in the System

Participants described various strategies they used to adapt to the dominant gender ideology present in Canadian society and how they had learned to navigate the coaching system in Canada. Strategies are one of the most valuable findings of this study. They explain how these women continued coaching despite the hardships faced in a male dominated profession while so many other women quit or drop out of coaching. These findings may also assist future generations of female coaches contemplating entering the coaching field to be successful in their careers as well. I will focus on the three most commonly identified personal strategies (passion for coaching, relationships with athletes and building a support system) used to stay in the system for the remainder of this chapter.

4.4.1. Recognizing coaching is a passion.

It was evident that all of the women in this study recognized that coaching was their passion. Sarah indicated, “I have two passions in life [my job] and then coaching.” As noted earlier, Mary explained “I like to coach because I like coaching” not because of the wage she earned while doing it. Tracy took on a part time job so she could support her passion of coaching. Cheryl deliberately took on less paid work so that she could continue coaching while she raised her children. She reflected:

I enjoyed it and in fact I went [to] part time teaching so that I could coach more (laugh). I got a 50% course at school because I was starting a family but it allowed me to coach 3 seasons and coach more times and spend weekends with the kids I coached. But also like I said I was never paid for the coaching.

Kelly was cognizant of the fact that her friends envied her for begin able to indulge in her passion full time.
...I love this stuff and I love doing it. In fact a lot of my friends are just going [on about how] “you are so lucky because you are doing what you love” and I know I have a dream job. It’s great I just wish I [were] being paid for it (laughter). That would be great! If I could make a living doing my dream job that would be amazing! (laugh)

Although Lisa and Mary had the opportunity to transform their passion for coaching into a full time paid occupation, others did not get this same opportunity. Despite countless hours and effort invested in their pursuit of becoming experts in their respective athletics event(s) having sought out formal and informal coach education and coach training opportunities few women in this study coached professionally. Perhaps coaching at the elite level is in fact a form of serious leisure. There is a strong similarity between what these participants do in order to be elite level coaches and Stebbins’ (2007) definition of serious leisure:

Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience. (p. 5)

Stebbins’ research participants commonly used ‘serious’ to describe activities that embody characteristics such as “earnestness, sincerity, importance and carefulness” (Stebbins & Hartel, 2011). Although there are many forms of serious leisure activities, the three main types of serious leisure include “amateurism, volunteering and hobbies” (Hartel, 2014; Stebbins & Hartel, 2011).

It was evident that the participants in this study pursued coaching as a form of serious leisure activity. They dedicated several hours a week coaching practices and traveling to work with athletes in competitions. They invested time and used their personal funds to further their coaching knowledge by taking specialized training. They
traveled to specific events annually to gain experience, network with others in the field, share their coaching knowledge and observe other coaches leadership skills. Further, it was obvious that these women were passionate about giving back to the sport that they enjoyed being a part of as athletes and were genuinely concerned about the continued development and wellbeing of their athletes on the track, as well as in their personal growth outside of athletics. Their passion for coaching is what allowed them come to terms with their pursuit being ‘amateur’ and ‘leisurely’ rather than ‘professional’ and ‘work’ as some men experience in their coaching careers.

4.4.2. Relationship building with athletes.

The coaches felt their relationships with their athletes is what kept them coaching. As one participant, Kelly, so eloquently explained:

The difficulties lie in the relationships with other people…relationships with administration or trying to get funding. That’s where all the static comes in really because otherwise the relationship between the coach and the athlete should be very straightforward. Basically they are there to get better and you are there to help and assist [them].

It was clear the women in this study took great care in developing and maintaining these relationships. Cheryl felt one needed to value athletes’ opinions, in addition to having high expectations and consequences:

You gain respect by being honest, open and consistent with your message. So if you say everybody needs to come to practice and then they don’t there needs to be a consequence. I guess it is the same with asking athletes or saying things you want them to do. If they don’t do it then why should you do anything for them? It’s like asking kids to clean their room (laugh)... I think you have to do it at the beginning of [the relationship] and valuing their opinion as well.

Further, sharing coaching knowledge with their athletes was another commonly identified strategy to gain their support and respect. Tracy explained:
I guess I have some authority [as a coach] but I don’t leap on it. Like I’m a leader, I’m trying to assist them, I’m trying to facilitate, I’m definitely more athlete centered and coach supported, coach driven and I try to educate them as to why they have to do certain things. Why do you have to do physio exercises? Why do I have to do ice baths? (laugh) Why do you have to see the nutritionist? You know all of those things (laugh) this is why you need to do it…

Sarah also felt that it was important to educate her athletes about the coaching knowledge they have acquired as they train with her. Sarah reflected:

I think it’s [important to] identify them early... It’s letting them know that I’m teaching them things that they are going to be able to go and teach other people at some point if they are interested. Then those leaders automatically come help out at every track meet and are helping... [the] little kids at track meets... If I do my job and what I am I feel is important to me as a coach making them good people. I’m giving that encouragement to them and so... it’s not about money it’s… for me about helping other people... And they will say “[Sarah] I hate javelin!” … okay I don’t like javelin either. I’m not a javelin thrower but you know what if somebody one day says to you “Hey can you teach me how to do javelin?” you’re going be able to say “Yes I can!” because I am going to teach you how to teach Javelin that’s just the way it goes. So my first year university students are like “Why do I have to learn this?” I said “Because it is important... if you’re going to be a thrower” and it feels good. And they’ll go on [to do] whatever they do right so I’ve got athletes that… aren’t necessarily coaching on a regular basis… but they have made themselves available to their high schools or their junior highs where they grew up to say “I’ll come out and help” and for me it’s just that giving them that knowledge [is important so they can coach too].

Further, a few coaches said that one of their proudest accomplishments so far as a coach was that they had begun mentoring ex-male athletes in their coaching journey.

One participant, Mary had even gone so far to make her prodigy her co-head coach. She reflected:

I think one of my proudest things as a coach so far in my career...bringing new coaches into the mix. I’ve had a few athletes that competed for me in my first few years at [the university] and they had such a great experience that they wanted to coach. They wanted to give back to the sport and one of those athletes you know he graduated like 5 or 6 years ago now is my assistant coach at the university. He is a teacher. There is no full time job as far as track goes other than mine but I made him my assistant head coach and he has been able to do amazing things...
helped him a little you know with his stuff in his earlier part of his career but I think I became more of a friend and a mentor for him and we’ve you know struck up more of a great friendship. I got to go to his wedding and we have family things together. He has become a definite friend and supporter, a confidant. You know he is a great coach and you know I have been able to mentor him and help further his career. This year he was selected to the coaching staff for the world youth team so you know that is phenomenal because I was on the coaching staff [not that long ago] so it was neat to see one of my assistant coaches now [be] selected.

The fact that all of the coaches in this study had built relationships with athletes demonstrates that the women in this study have begun breaking down some barriers. They have established themselves a sport leaders, which should be acknowledged because it provides hope and suggests that there is room for female sport leadership in the near future. Perhaps the dominant sport culture is slowly changing because of their presence and persistence to be accepted.

4.4.3. Developing a support system.

It was apparent that developing an understanding support system was a key part of their career path success. Similar to Kilty (2006) and Kamphoff et al. (2010) findings several participants discussed the importance of the social support they received from family members, close friends, and colleagues, as these helped them pursue their coaching careers despite difficulties they encountered along the way. Families found ways to share household responsibilities, mentors educated them about important career path decisions and taught them how to succeed in the system, and female colleagues created a support group to constructively vent frustrations, but then have the ability to move on from the set backs, disappointments and failures.

Tracy’s husband was a big part of her support system in understanding her needs:

… a big piece of women in coaching is having support at home because otherwise you never do it. I mean it’s impossible I mean we’re not getting paid
right… I think there has to be support at home and I mean you need to have
support like you can’t just do it on your own for women and men. I think
[because] there is a lot of time, there is so much time needed and you travel. And
if they don’t understand, then the relationships are going to break down and that’s
not what anyone wants.

As previously noted, many participants in this study recognized the importance of
networking as a means to building a support system. Cheryl noted that when she
instructs NCCP courses she advises new coaches to take advantage of any opportunity to
network. She explained:

It’s how you get ahead… I say to the coaches “Take the NCCP levels. Join the
Coaching Association of Canada. Join the provincial coaches association or
whether it is coaches of BC or coaches of Alberta or whatever. Read the
magazines. Find out about the workshops they give. Sign up for them. That’s
how you network”… Wouldn’t you want the head coach of that organization to be
that kind of person? Wouldn’t you have want them to have met with the other
coaches and have gone to workshops?

In Mary’s experience building relationships with her peers and mentors was most
important to her development and continual learning as a coach.

… being able to have time to sit down with other coaches not just female
coaches, but other coaches other colleagues and just able to vent and discuss the
different things that you go through… that you have those people to talk to and
lean on, as far as a resource. It’s great to be able to pick up the phone and talk to
other… female and male coaches alike. You know about different things that we
all go through as coaches. There are some things that happen to coaches
universally.

Lisa identified a different type of relationship with a female colleague who shared
similar experiences, coaching and family responsibilities. She described this relationship
as being a crucial part of her personal support system. She stated:

When we get on the road, we are guaranteed we’ve had one hour of sleep the
night before because we’re getting everything ready at home first. Planning all
the meals, getting the babysitters organized, all that kind stuff. So at one o’clock
in the morning we start packing and [are] ready to go at 4 o’clock in the morning.
Whereas the guys… get on the plane and they are all rested and perky. And I’m
like [exhausted]… So when you leave home it is a little bit different than others.
But when I can sit on the plane and laugh at [her female colleague] ‘cause she
looks as crappy as I do [because] she did exact same thing. Then we can laugh about it and fall asleep on the plane drooling on each other (laughter). So peers are important!

In conclusion, it was clear that developing a support system was essential to pursuing and maintaining a coaching career, whether recreationally or professionally. Although the women in this study described different variations and forms of support systems (e.g. husbands and families, mentors and female colleagues), they all served an important purpose. Each individual’s support system helped her to continue coaching and remain in the sport system.
Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The present study explored the career paths of women coaching Canadian track and field at the university and national levels. Although the topic of women in coaching has been well researched, few studies have explored the experiences of women coaching men and / or co-ed teams, taken into account the experiences of assistant and volunteer coaches or used a phenomenological approach to investigate career paths in the context of elite sport. This study sought a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to female coach career path struggles and successes. Similar to previous studies, findings from this study revealed the impact of gender ideology and the realities of the Canadian sport system on female coaching careers. Unique to the present study were the findings regarding the support they receive from some individual male sport leaders and the personal strategies used by the female coaches to continue coaching. These findings may help explain why some women are driven to pursue a coaching career despite the difficulties and why others are driven away from the profession and leisurely past time altogether.

5.2. Conclusions About Female Coach Career Paths

To understand male dominance in the occupation of coaching, Knoppers (1992) suggested, “we need to explore how the definitions of coach are constructed, challenged, and renegotiated” (p. 224). Findings from this study provide further evidence that coaching has been historically constructed as a masculine role, how women are seeking to change this reality and the slow pace at which cultural change takes to occur. This coaching ideology was clearly shown by the impact of gender ideology on their career
paths, the role the Canadian sport system played in shaping their careers and the personal strategies they developed in order to remain in the system.

5.2.1. Career path comparison.

In comparing the participants from this study to previous research on female coaches in Canada and their career paths (e.g., Kerr, 2010; Reade et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010), participants in this study had several years of experience in the field, most were married and half had children. Yet on the other hand, many of their demographic characteristics were consistent with previous findings from the studies cited above. For instance, all but one participant had competed as an elite athlete. Two individuals had completed their masters in coaching, while three others indicated they had obtained a Bachelor’s degree. Further, four participants were certified at the highest level of the National Coaching Certification Program and two were instructors for the program. All but one participant is currently serving as an assistant coach at the elite level. Although, Lisa and Cheryl have previously held a head coach post at the university level, Mary is the only active CIS head coach in this study. At the national level, Lisa and Cheryl act as liaisons on behalf of the national team in their respective events for carded athletes and their personal coaches. Tracy is an example of a personal coach who is connected to the national team simply because she coaches carded athletes; she is not a paid employee of Athletics Canada like Lisa and Cheryl. Whereas Kelly, Tracy and Sarah are volunteer part-time assistant coaches with university, provincial and club teams. While Kelly is paid per season as the head coach of a private high school team and has the luxury of pursing her passion fulltime, both Tracy and Sarah work jobs outside of coaching to earn a living.
5.2.2. The impact of gender ideology.

Participants in this study agreed that domestic responsibilities and motherhood conflicted with coaching responsibilities. The women shared many of the same views expressed by participants in Kilty’s (2006) and Kamphoff’s (2010) research regarding the difficulty of balancing these responsibilities. Thus, one might conclude the division of labour is such that women are primarily responsible for domestic and child rearing responsibilities as previously suggested by Kerr and Marshall (2007). It was also evident that some women in this study had encountered sport leaders who held beliefs similar to those depicted in Whitson and Macintosh’s (1989) research and felt as though the existing sport system was not inclusive of mothers with young families (Kerr & Marshall, 2007). These beliefs were demonstrated in their negative attitudes towards pregnant women and unwillingness to accommodate those raising young families. As a result, the women in this study with young families had to develop individual strategies to continue coaching, a finding which mimics Kilty’s (2006) research. For example, one woman resorted to a non-linear career in which she periodically left coaching to attend to her family responsibilities. While another woman and her husband renegotiated roles and responsibilities so that she could pursue coaching while they started a family. Both cases confirm Kamphoff and colleagues’ (2010) belief that having a supportive and flexible spouse is essential to balancing home life with coaching. While these solutions may have worked for a select few, four women in this study felt there is a continual need for the sport system to become more supportive of mothers with young families to prevent them from leaving the profession during this critical phase of their lives. In fact two participants in this study discussed at length that they were aware of and/or had
personally benefitted from accommodations and changes to the existing sport system such as adjusting practice times and university courses, job sharing or part-time positions, athletic directors holding a position for an extended maternity leave and supporting her decision to bring her kids on the road. This is not a novel concept and has been identified by several studies in the past (including Kamphoff, 2010; Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Robertson, 2010).

Consistent with the work of Staurowsky (1990), Theberge (1993), Young (2005), and West et al. (2001), the coaches in this study commonly experienced an initial lack of trust, or athletes’ hesitancy to be coached by a woman, which speaks to the fact that coaching is still largely viewed as a man’s role (Bem, 1974; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Goffman, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Similar to Eagly and Karau’s (2002) finding that female leaders are met with resistance for deviating from their gender role, many women in this study felt compelled to prove themselves capable of the role, but once they were able to establish a trusting relationship those initial doubts were diminished. These findings were also reflected in Kilty (2006), Theberge (1993) and Norman’s (2010a, 2010b) work. For example, participants in this study discussed the difficulty with gaining respect from new recruits and colleagues due to their preference for male coaches and beliefs regarding coaching competency. Yet similar to Norman (2010a), Staurowsky (1990) and Young’s (2005) results, as athletes and coaches learned about the coaches’ previous athletic accomplishments, qualifications, coaching record and witnessed her demonstrating skills a sense of credibility and trust was established. However, as was pointed out by a few participants in this study the most difficult sources of resistance came from those who do not know them. Examples discussed in this study
include a father’s assumptions about sexuality and intentions with coaching his daughter, a male coach undermining his female mentor’s knowledge of throwing techniques by asking for a second opinion, and an unwillingness for a head coach to believe an athlete’s performance came as a result of her coaching. Further one woman struggled immensely with the barrier of being judged by those who do not know her and whose opinion she may never get the opportunity to change.

It is intriguing that this study revealed that presenting oneself in feminine dress and behaviour, as well as taking on the role of a team mom, parent or relationship manager, was frequently described as an effective strategy to gain acceptance as a female coach. One participant’s experience in this study of purposefully “dressing like a lady” to convince an athlete’s father she was not after his daughter is similar to Theberge’s (1993) discussion of parental fear of female coaches feminizing male athletes. As highlighted in Kilty’s (2006) discussion of homophobia, people fear the unknown and lash out at people who deviate from what they come to expect as being socially acceptable roles for men and women. This may also explain why the female coaches in Young’s (2005) study felt male athletes accepted them in their role because they saw them as “a ‘teacher’, ‘older sister’ or ‘mother figure’” (p. 113). Yet some women who were willing to adopt feminine stereotypes such as wearing make-up and a skirt, accepting help from men by letting them carrying her bags and taking on a mothering persona are perhaps more successful in the male dominated field of coaching because they do not challenge the norm. Thus similar to Carli’s (2001) findings, one might conclude the potential for resistance was reduced and they were more easily accepted as coaches when the women displayed feminine appearance and qualities. Perhaps there is a
need to deal with these perceptions of female leaders on a larger scale and find ways to counter this initial resistance experienced by female coaches to reduce the number of potential female coaches deterred by this culture/work environment.

Social marketing may be one avenue to consider. The field of health promotion frequently uses social marketing to influence health behaviour by increasing awareness about specific health concerns with the ultimate goal of minimizing health risks (Evans, 2006, 2008). Bell Canada’s “Let’s Talk”¹⁵ and ParticipACTION — Let’s Get Moving¹⁶ are two examples of successful social marketing campaigns in Canada (Bell Canada, 2014; ParticipACTION, 2013). As I have recently learned in my work term as a research officer with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health, the most effective campaigns are tied to larger system strategies for change. Such strategies include the development of best practices documents driven by and involving stakeholders at various levels in the system.

Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm in Canada: Toward a Culture of Moderation— Recommendations for a National Alcohol Strategy is one such document that emulates this model of change approach (National Alcohol Strategy Working Group, 2007). The same principles could be applied in efforts to reduce resistance to female leadership, an idea that I will continue to expand on in the assessments and recommendations section in this chapter.

¹⁵ Bell Canada’s “Let’s Talk” is a mental wellness awareness campaign that works towards reducing the stigma associated with depression, raising funds for community mental health initiatives and increasing access to mental health services across Canada. ¹⁶ ParticipACTION is a Canadian government program that promotes healthy living and physical fitness. It is well known for its television public service announcements and segments including Body Break, a program that aired in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.
5.2.3. The role of the Canadian sport system.

Consistent with previous research (Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kidd, 2013) the women in this study felt that although few full time paid coaching positions exist in the sport system, men continually outnumber women in these positions. Hall and colleagues (1989) and Whitson and Macintosh (1989) found that sport leaders in a position to hire coaches, argued that at the elite levels of Canadian sport women were either not qualified for the position or chose not to apply for the available positions. However, the results from the current study tell a different story. The female coaches had experienced the politics behind staffing provincial and national teams, a finding that supports Theberge’s (1988) results in her study of women’s career paths in the Canadian sport system. They suggested that some unsuccessful applications occurred due to their lack of connection to the hiring committee, as they were qualified for the position, had several years of experience and were previously appointed to the position. Yet, they were given no explanation as to why they were replaced by a male coach whose qualifications and experience did not compare to theirs. These examples give the appearance that perhaps there is a glass ceiling effect occurring in their field of work (Kanter, 1977; Kane & Stangl, 1991; Knoppers, 1989); where some men benefit from having stronger connections with sport leaders than women as previously suggested by Kerr and Marshall (2007). Such findings reinforce the importance of finding opportunities to network with experienced and successful applicants to learn the tricks of the trade. It was evident that participants supported Misener and Danylchuk’s (2009) finding that one way in which the existing sport system supports these types of interactions is through the National Coaching Certification Program. Additionally, while participants had observed
changes in Athletics Canada’s treatment of female coaches, such as in providing legitimate coaching opportunities for women rather than managerial positions, they noted the system is not perfect and felt it was important to not forget how long it has taken to get to this point.

Like Acker (1990), participants in this study provide further evidence that organizations are not gender neutral, having critically assessed their experiences as recipients of Women in Coaching grants, as national team apprentices and being appointed to committees to fill gender quotas. The findings from this study revealed that the one major drawback to these affirmative action programs and policies was the labeling of females coaches as tokens. Some participants explained how their token status affected their reputation as coaches. Tokenism devalued their coaching expertise, resumes and credentials. However, it was also evident that the programs had improved as they became better established. Similar to previous evaluations conducted by Mercier (2011) and Werthner (2005), there were several positive aspects to consider such as access to a female network and mentors, opportunities to travel to elite training camps and competitions to shadow experienced coaches, and support for childcare while gaining experience. Thus, one might conclude that despite the limitations, perhaps affirmative action has had a positive impact on female coaches’ career development in recent years.

While the system certainly has some room for improvement to be more inclusive of women in coaching, it was clear that some women benefitted from the support of male sport leaders. The involvement of male sport leaders is a crucial step in shifting sport culture in Canada “given that they currently hold most positions of power, decision-
making and resource allocation” (Kerr & Marshall, 2007, p. 3). The fact that some men in positions of power made accommodations for the women’s young families, gave them opportunities to gain experience and were willing to mentor them as they established their coaching careers gives us hope. Such findings lead to the conclusion that perhaps things are changing with each new generation of coaches and managers.

5.2.4. Personal strategies used to stay in the system.

The women in this study used personal strategies to legitimize their careers. They enjoyed the environment in which they coached because they had built trusting relationships with their athletes and had established supportive networks in their lives to help them overcome the difficulties they had encountered over the course of their careers. Accepting a career in coaching as a form of serious leisure allowed the female coaches in this study to overlook many of their negative experiences. The shift in the way they viewed their coaching careers from a full time paid occupation with limited opportunity for growth to a leisurely past time seemed to help women come to terms with, more fully appreciate and enjoy the type of coaching career they do have, even if it is not ideal. Although they presently enjoyed working with the athletes and coaches whom they had built strong relationships, similar to previous research (e.g., Norman, 2010a; Staurowsky, 1990; Young, 2005) they had worked hard to prove themselves worthy of this respect. These findings support Cruz’s (2009) finding that women who tend to stay in coaching have the ability to gain a positive outlook on their situation with the help of a supportive network of individuals both in their sport and outside of it (e.g., athletes, peers, family and friends). Many participants in this study recognized the importance in surrounding themselves with the right people who supported them and
encouraged them to pursue their passion rather than dropping out of coaching. While I suspect that all coaches use the personal strategies that were discussed in this study to some degree, they likely have different meanings for coaches of men and women due to how dominant sport culture values men’s sport expertise over women’s. However, the fact that these women were able to change some athletes’ perceptions of them is promising because it is an indication of the potential for the acceptance of female sport leaders on a larger scale. This contradicts Eagly and Karau’s (2002) findings and goes against the existing women in coaching literature, as few existing studies explore female coach successes or focus on positive coaching experiences. Rather much of the literature has focused the challenges or barriers in coaching and negative coaching experiences. As a result many of the existing programs and policies (such as the Women in Coaching grants, the National Team Apprentice Program, token female representation on committees and CIS equity policy) formed to address the lack of women in coaching have tended to focus on addressing specific barriers to coaching for a small group of women in the present system rather than changing the sport system culture and structure (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2005b; Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013; Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kidd, 2013; Robertson, 2010).

5.3. Assessments and Recommendations

In this section I will present my thoughts on the need for a new approach to address the gender gap in coaching, present specific recommendations for individuals in positions of power within the existing sport system, and provide some advice for women considering coaching as a career path and suggestions for the direction of future research.
5.3.1. Addressing the gender gap in coaching.

The underrepresentation of women in coaching is well documented and much is known about career path barriers encountered by female coaches. As explained in the findings chapter, gender ideology is a key part of female coach identity and therefore should be considered when making recommendations to address their underrepresentation in this field of work. In particular, domestic responsibilities and motherhood, as well as the difficulties of establishing coach credibility, were two key career path challenges discussed by the women in this study. Although they had developed strategies to overcome these challenges individually, participants in this study indicated there was a need to address these issues in the sport system. They recommended the development of family friendly practices and policies (such as job sharing, changing practice times, and providing creative child care options) across the Canadian sport system. They also discussed the need to address negative perceptions of female coaches on a wider scale through some form of public education and changing current practices (such as token positions on committees and coaching development programs just for women), which they believed helped to perpetuate and maintain these ideas.

In an effort to understand why women are primarily responsible for raising a family and domestic responsibilities even after women entered the paid workforce Hochschild spent years observing countless American families negotiate the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). From her studies they concluded: “Just as individuals have gender strategies, so do governments, corporations, schools, and factories. How a nation organizes its workforce and day-care centers, how its schools train the young,
reflects the work and family roles it envisions for each sex” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p. 259). Based on the existing women in coaching literature and the findings from this study, the current organization of the Canadian sport system reflects how we as a society would like men and women to behave and this system has established a gender strategy to maintain the status quo. Consequently, the career paths explored in this study reflected gendered roles and challenges specific to women inherent in the present sport system.

As a result, perhaps the time has come to consider a different approach to increase female representation in coaching, and other leadership roles in sport. If we are to successfully address the underrepresentation of women in coaching, we need to develop a strategy for changing sport culture that moves beyond blaming women or men (Werthner, Culver & Mercier, 2009). We need to understand “that organizations are structured through an invisible gender-biased view of reality, and individual solutions will not result in sustainable changes for women in coaching and leadership roles in sport” (Werthner et al., 2009, p. 49). We need to shift our focus away from using band-aid solutions where programs have developed to support the existing system where only a few strong women succeed. We need to challenge organizational strategies that prevent women from becoming merely tokens in a masculine field of work. We need to develop a sport culture, which includes and values both men and women. One way to accomplish this may be to develop a best practices document to guide this process. The document could provide a framework on changing the sport culture. It could identify specific areas for improvement, set tangible goals and chart out plans to achieve them. It should encompass a variety of viewpoints from different levels of the Canadian sport system.
that have the ability to restructure how we bring new coaches into the system and provide career support. A few key organizations/stakeholders that come to mind are Sport Canada, Canadian Interuniversity Sport, Coaching Association of Canada, and provincial sport governing bodies and provincial coaching associations.

The trades are a comparable male dominated field, which have taken this approach to bring more women into trades. As evident in Scullen’s (2008) report, women in trades face many of the same challenges as women in coaching. The report explained: 1) women are underrepresented in the trades in Saskatchewan and progress to change this reality has been slow moving. The findings suggested “laws, policies and regulations are only helpful when complied with, ensuring positions for women and workplaces that are free of discrimination” (p. 4). 2) Additionally, one of the greatest barriers faced by women seeking skilled trades jobs is limited access. It was evident that some progress had been made in recruiting and hiring practices, which previously relied on word of mouth networks and excluded women. However “once on the job, many women face discrimination, harassment, allegations of reverse discrimination (e.g. employment equity policies), lower salaries compared to their male co-workers and other aspects of the male oriented culture that are hostile to women” (p. 4). Further, although “policies are in place to protect against such behaviours, they are not always enforced, resulting in strained working relationships between males and females” (p. 4). 3) When workplaces discovered the primary cause of women’s underrepresentation and implemented effective change strategies they found significant retention rate improvements. Accordingly, Scullen (2008) proposed a number of recommendations (see Appendix F) addressing trades education, workplace and training initiatives for
women, which work towards greater inclusion of women in the workforce that could be adapted to women in coaching.

For example, the idea of promoting coaching profession to young females through a variety of mediums is essential to addressing women’s underrepresentation in this field of work. It could be quite beneficial to work with industry, employers, government and educators to fund a campaign to change the stereotypical image of sport leaders, including coaches to foster the idea that coaching is a field for women. Providing educational institutions and parents with better access to career information, which presents a complete picture of the pay, rewards, challenges, supports available, education and experience needed to pursue a career in coaching. Efforts should also be made to increase the visibility of existing female sport leaders. While there is awareness about the challenges of recruiting and retaining women in coaching, less is known about successful strategies. Perhaps there is value in offering workshops or training sessions to educate employers of such strategies and provide tools to address the common barriers in their organizations. Another way to engage employers may be to involve them in the development of a best practices document. It would be an opportunity to discuss the challenges, share promising strategies and develop standards in employing to female coaches. Further, as evident in this study although some special initiatives for women in coaching do exist there is a need to expand such opportunities to reach a greater mass of females.

5.3.2. Recommendations for sport administrators, coaches and educators.

In a recent study of athletics directors, Kerr and Ali (2012) revealed that their greatest challenge is getting enough qualified female to apply for coaching positions.
They recommended identifying potential female coaches earlier and integrating them into an environment that fosters their development. They suggested the need to develop an “integrated system between universities and the broader Canadian Sport system, including clubs, high schools, and provincial and national sport organizations, geared to the development of coaches” (Kerr & Ali, 2012, p. 6). However, based on my findings about career paths I recommend that sport administrators, coaches and educators work together in implementing programs to aid both male and female athletes in a successful transition into coaching roles at all levels of sport. As noted earlier in this study, exposure to female coaches was key to changing attitudes towards female leaders. Therefore, it is essential for female coaches to start making connections with their male peers as early on in their coaching careers as possible, to have a positive impact on them, gain their respect and to have them advocate for their acceptance by others (e.g. athletes, colleagues and sport leaders) and ultimately impact their work environment. Further, the sport system needs to continue facilitate formal mentoring programs and offer a variety of opportunities for coaches to network (e.g. socials, workshops, conferences).

It was evident that several of the women in this study shared their coaching knowledge with their athletes and encouraged them to pursue coaching once they were finished their competitive careers because a previous coach had encouraged them to do so. Recently, I learned about a male CIS head coach who enables his female athletes by having them complete their NCCP level one and gain experience coaching in summer camps offered by the university for children. As a starting point, I recommend that athletic directors should be encouraging their coaching staff to educate their athletes about the possibility of coaching in the future, encourage them to start taking their NCCP
levels while still in their competitive careers and provide opportunities for their athletes to develop coaching skills and discover their passion for their sport beyond participating as athletes. Beyond this, sport administrators should explore partnerships with the education system to provide further opportunities to gain coaching knowledge, experience and facilitate mentoring relationships. The CIS could be working with kinesiology and physical education programs to develop coaching specializations and opportunities to gain experience and be mentored through co-op experiences, practicums and internships. In addition, athletics departments could sponsor professional development workshops to educate new coaches about what skills and training they require and networks they need to establish to be successful in their careers.

However, one might also ask if having these discussions at the university level is early enough. Few of the women in this study planned to pursue coaching as professional career and previous research (e.g., Cooper, Hunt & O’Bryan, 2007; Demers, 2004; Kamphoff & Gill, 2008) has indicated that most female athletes do not consider coaching professionally. Perhaps there is a need to develop a curriculum to change children’s perceptions about community leaders and work on raising girls’ confidence in their abilities to be leaders in the future. This type of program could be delivered by Canadian Association for Advancement of Women and Sport\textsuperscript{17} in partnership with the Coaches Association of Canada in educating coaches on how to encourage athletes (particularly women) to become sport leaders or as a part of elementary and high school physical education, social studies or career education curriculum. While I realize this

\textsuperscript{17}CAAWS is known for its advocacy work in promoting equal access sport and physical activity for girls and women to engage in Canadian sport and physical activity as active participants and support women in sport leadership roles (Canadian Association for Advancement of Women and Sport, 2013).
recommendation may be a bit controversial, I think it is time to take a different approach to addressing the underrepresentation on women in coaching and leadership positions in sport. In saying this I am not in any way trying to devalue what progress our current methods, programs and strategies have made. I simply wish to add to what we already know and find a practical way to keep this progress going on a much wider scale. I also realize this kind of change will not be easy. It would require support from many different levels and individuals within the existing sport system. These leaders would likely encounter some resistance from those who enjoy their privileged status, but this is reality of what happens when someone proposes a new untested idea. However, given the positive feedback I received by the women in this study regarding their relationships with male colleagues and sport leaders I think there may be enough leaders in the present system to support such a change.

5.3.3. Advice for women considering coaching as a career path.

Werthner and Trudel (2009) recently interviewed some of Canada’s best coaches in the country as determined by their athlete and teams rankings at the Olympic and world level, and identified three key qualities to succeeding as coaches: 1) being open to learning and seeking out mentors or experts in several areas to help them continue to learn; 2) being open to listening to their athletes; and 3) spending considerable time in self reflection (i.e., constantly thinking about their progress and ways to improve their training or competition) and enabling others close to them (i.e. athletes and coaches) to engage in this same form of self reflection. Based on my findings the women in this study were successful in their coaching careers because they did all of these things and more. In particular, the findings from this study reconfirmed the importance of seeking
out mentors and networking to continue developing as a coach over the course of one's career. Finding formal and informal mentors to learn from experienced veterans is an important strategy for coach development. Further, it was clear that it is essential to build relationships with other coaches in the profession to vent frustrations, share insider knowledge and coaching strategies.

5.3.4. Directions for future research.

I recommend further research be conducted to increase our knowledge of coaching career paths to inform sport leaders of the issues that need to be addressed, track the progress being made and develop new practices to improve the Canadian sport system for all coaches.

Previous research (i.e., Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013; Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kidd, 2013) suggested that it is important to continue tracking the number of Canadian women in coaching. Although there have been records of women’s involvement at the national and Olympic levels for quite sometime, until recently, we did not have the same knowledge of these numbers within the university system (CIS, 2005; Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013). This research should be expanded to include women’s involvement within the Canadian education system, and at the grassroots and club levels.

The present study only explored the experiences of women in one sport. Therefore, a similar study should be conducted comparing the coaching career paths of men and women in different sports because the culture of each sport may differ. There may be different models of leadership and levels of acceptance of female coaches within different sports. Also it would be interesting to know if men experience similar difficulties in their coaching careers and what strategies they use to establish and build
their careers. A similar study could also be done comparing women and men in different male dominated occupations such as the natural sciences, engineering, mathematics, or the trades, transport and construction industries to learn about career path enablers and facilitators (Catalyst, 2013; Ferro, 2010).

Previous research on the career paths of women in coaching has typically used case studies and surveys. Although case studies are useful in describing a particular phenomenon in great detail (Berg, 2009) and surveys allow researchers to provide numeric or quantitative descriptions of trends, attitudes and opinions of a sample of a population (Creswell, 2009), neither research approach captures all aspects of women’s coaching careers in the Canadian sport system. For instance, researchers could explore coaching career paths in the Canadian sport system more generally using a collaborative action research approach. The benefit of using an action research model would be “to invoke the voices of the stakeholders to inform the next action steps of research” to actively engage those who would be affected by the change (Beaulieu, 2013, p. 30). Action researchers do not necessarily seek a singular truth or perspective; instead the goal is to capture various stakeholders’ perspectives to develop solutions that accommodate a range of interests (Beaulieu, 2013). Additionally, participatory researchers’ work is grounded in the context or community under study and work with their participants in their search for answers to create change (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). Feminist action research is similar to action research yet it incorporates feminism theories in its understanding of research, context and change (Kirby et al., 2006). As discussed in the recommendations above, if a program could be developed and implemented within the university system to help transition athletes into coaching roles.
Their experiences with the program could be documented and studied over the course of their coaching career paths. Such findings could be used to improve program delivery and recruitment strategies for female candidates of the program.

5.4. Researcher Reflections and Conclusion

“You don’t start at the top if you want to find a story. You start in the middle, because it’s the people in the middle who do the actual work in the world” – Malcolm Gladwell

Previous researchers (Demers, 2004; Kerr & Ali, 2012) have suggested there is a need to ask university female athletes and grassroots coaches why they do not pursue coaching as a full time occupation. As a recently retired female CIS athlete and novice coach, I suppose I would be a good candidate for such a study. As a student-athlete I observed the female head coach of my university team successfully transition from a different profession, start her family, complete her NCCP levels, take part in the Women in Coaching program and rise to the national team level. Yet, I, like many of my female university teammates, failed to seriously consider pursuing coaching as a full time profession. Further, few of the women in this study initially planned to coach full time. As a result, I believe what is needed is a system which fosters female athletes’ transition into sport leadership roles. A career in coaching needs to be on young girls’ radars when they start considering what they would like to do for a living. Without knowledge of what it takes to get into a coaching career how can one plan to take appropriate training throughout university and begin gaining experience while still competing? Clearly there is a need to continue exploring this topic and develop programs to address this issue in order to increase the number of women in coaching overall.

In conclusion, I feel that I learned a lot about the qualitative research process by completing this study and the career paths of women at the elite level in Canada by
talking to them about their experiences. I learned of the impact of gender ideology, in particular how the division of labour, remains a major barrier for women pursing coaching as a career and how establishing oneself as a coach and leader is a difficult process but can be achieved with the right gender strategy. I also learned how the structure of the Canadian Sport system played a key role in their career paths. A limited number of full-time paid coaching opportunities for both men and women have resulted in nonlinear career paths, politics in team selection and the pursuit of serious leisure volunteer coaching careers. The NCCP program is largely viewed as having a positive impact on the development of coaches specifically because it presents the opportunity for coaches to network with experienced coaches. The Women in Coaching program has previously encountered growing pains while trying to overcome the challenges of establishing itself without making its participants tokens. It has also resulted in many positive outcomes for its participants such as, funding travel to elite level competitions and training camps to network and shadow experienced coaches, facilitate mentoring relationships, and support childcare needs for women trying gain coaching experience at the elite level while raising a young family. I also learned of the important impact some male sport leaders have provided formal and informal mentorship, opportunities to gain experience and support family work balance. Further, I learned that the women in this study are resourceful, strategic individuals who found ways to make the current system work for them. Using their passion for coaching as a driving force to continue their involvement despite challenges, developing relationships with athletes, colleagues and build a strong support system. However, what I am left pondering at the conclusion of this study is if more women would stay if they did not have to adapt to the system.
Despite my awareness of these challenges, coaching will always be a part of my life. Although I may not have had as much time to commit to my passion of coaching recently, I am well aware of the fact that a volunteer coach is always in demand. When twenty high school students show up to learn the basics of hurdles at seven in the morning how could you not get excited about that! I will embrace my place as a role model, seek out opportunities to further my coaching knowledge, work to change perceptions of coaching competency, advocate the possibility to coach to student athletes, aspiring female coaches, educate and collaborate with anyone who can make an impact in female coach career development.
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doi:10.1519/JSC.0b013e318199d8c4


Appendix A — Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Why Coaching?

- Tell me about your athletic and coaching backgrounds
  - Why/When did you begin coaching?
  - What coaching appointments have you held?
  - What are some of your career highlights?
  - Have you had mentors throughout your coaching career?
    - If so who are they?

- Please describe yourself as a coach
  - Where does this description from?
  - Do others see you this way or is it your own belief?

Career Development:

- What qualifies you to coach track and field?
  - Where did acquire your coaching knowledge?
    - Experience as an athlete
    - NCCP levels/certification
    - Shadowing an established coach
    - Observing other coaches and athletes at competition
    - Speaking with your peers

- What has been most important to your development as a female coach?
  - Tell me about your experiences with working with a particular team, athlete and/or mentor(s) which you feel have contributed your development
  - Have you received any support from the Coaching Association of Canada for your work as a female coach?
    - Financial grants
    - Have you participated in any women in coaching programs?

Coaching Experiences:

- Tell me about some of positive experiences as a female coach
  - Working with athletes?
  - Competitive successes?
  - Networks?

- Tell me about some of your negative experiences as a female coach
  - What strategies have you employed to overcome these difficulties?
  - Do you have a support system that you go to?
Appendix A — Interview Guide

Relationships:

- I know you have worked with both male and female athletes can you talk about your relationships with them
  - Do you think you coach male versus female athletes differently?
    - Does your coaching strategy change?
    - In your experience do male and female athletes have different coaching needs?
  - Have you ever noticed a difference in the reception of you as a female coach by parents of male athletes versus female athletes?
  - How do you establish your authority and gain your athletes respect?

- Tell me about some of your relationships with your peers (i.e. other coaches, officials, athletic personal)?
  - Have you been a part of any informal networks at the CIS and/or National level?
    - Is there a girls’ network in place?

Concluding comments:

- What issues related to women and coaching would you like to see addressed?

- What do you think can be done to encourage more women (i.e. retiring female high performance athletes) to consider coaching as a potential career?
  - How about to encourage women to coach men?

- Is there anything else you would like to reflect on?
Appendix B — Ethics Approval

DATE: April 14, 2011

TO: Laura Bewcyk
Kinesiology and Health Studies

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Women Who Coach High Performance Male Track and Field Athletes (File #87S1011)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☑ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F), ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Larena Hoeber - Kinesiology and Health Studies

**supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca**

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893
www.uregina.ca/research
Appendix C — Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Women Who Coach High Performance Male Track and Field Athletes: An Exploration of Lived Experiences

Researcher: LAURA BEWCYK, (Graduate Student), FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND HEALTH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF REGINA, 306-536-1561, bewcyk21@uregina.ca

Supervisor: DR. LARENA HOEBER, FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND HEALTH STUDIES, 306-585-4363, Larena.Hoeber@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research: The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women who coached male athletes.

Procedures:

- Your participation in this study will involve two interview sessions with the researcher at a location and time most convenient to you. Each of these sessions will last between 60-90 minutes.
- These sessions will be audio recorded, upon your consent, and saved by the researcher for further analysis.
- You will be provided with a copy of the interview guide prior to the interviews taking place.
- You will also be provided with a summary of the findings and potential quotations. You will have the opportunity to make suggestions and changes to this material. At this point you will be presented with a second consent form concerning how the material collected throughout the interview will be used in the future.
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Funded by: Canada Games Graduate Fellowship in Sport and Recreation Management

Potential Risks: There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research

Potential Benefits: No benefits are guaranteed. However, your participation in this study will contribute to an understudied area of knowledge (women who coach male athletes).

Confidentiality:

- Your identity will be protected. Your name will not be disclosed in any publications or presentations pertaining to this study.
Appendix C — Participant Consent Form

- Upon collection, pseudonyms will be used to disguise defining features (e.g., name, team name, university name).
- Your identity will be protected. Your name will not be disclosed in any publications or presentations pertaining to this study.
- Upon collection, pseudonyms will be used to disguise defining features (e.g., name, team name, university name).
- However, other identifying features (e.g., years coached, sport) may still be used to establish the context.
- Only the researcher (Laura Bewcyk) and her supervisor (Dr. Larena Hoeber) will have access to the original data. Both individuals are aware of their responsibilities concerning privacy and confidentiality.
- **Storage of Data:**
  - All computer files, including digital audio files and interview transcripts, will be saved on a password protected computer and any paper copies will be kept in a locked office in Dr. Hoeber’s lab (Motivation and Active Living Lab) for 3 years at which point files will be deleted and paper documents shall be shredded.

**Right to Withdraw:**
- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Should you wish to withdraw, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in any publications or presentations.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until the data has been analyzed.

**Follow up:** You will be sent a research report containing the results from this study upon its completion.

**Questions or Concerns:**
- If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, please contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the U of R Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at 306-585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca. Out of town participants may call collect.

**Consent:** Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. I consent to be audio-taped. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Researcher</td>
<td>Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*
Appendix D — Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies at the University of Regina. My research involves exploring the experiences of women coaching male athletes. I am contacting you because I am seeking participants for my Master’s research project. Participants for this study must be current female CIS and/or National level Athletic and/or Cross Country coaches who have been working with high performance male athletes for a minimum of 3 years.

Participation in this study would involve one interview lasting 60-90 minutes, with the potential for a follow up interview lasting up to 60 minutes. These sessions would be audio recorded, upon your consent. Participants will also be provided with a copy of the interview guide prior to the first interview.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca]. Out of town participants may call collect.

If you have any questions regarding the research project, please contact myself (306) 536-1561 or via email at bewcyk2l@uregina.ca or my supervisor Dr. Larena Hoeber (306) 585-4363, Larena.Hoeber@uregina.ca

Please contact me regarding your interest in this project and feel free to send this email to anyone you know who fits the participant criteria and who may be interested in taking part in this study. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Laura Bewcyk
Appendix E — Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Open Codes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Category Definitions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Category</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers; token; gender discrimination; discrimination; being female; emotions; communication; demotion; admin assistant/manager; lack of female role models; female representation; be a woman (act like a lady); bragging; children/family; non-linear path; team mom; frustration; sport culture differences</td>
<td>Any code that related to gender roles (ideas about how men and women should act/behave and social roles they should fulfill). The gender role impact, consequence or change in behaviour as a result of being female in sport leadership role or coaching context.</td>
<td>Gendered Experience in Sport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support Network

Coach Development

Credibility

Spouse/family support; Women in Coaching Program; friendship; female network; being positive; change; travel costs; negative experiences; relationships with peers; having someone/people to confide in; sharing knowledge; mentors (male); networking with other coaches; informal learning; learn from nationals; strength/personality; taking a stand; confidence; male coach-male athletes; male dominance; need to seek help

Any code that described the purpose or a benefit of developing support network. Provided an example of a person, group of people who supported them or a place where they could meet up with an informal supportive network in the field. | Support Network |
## Appendix E — Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Category Definitions</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life long learning; opportunity to learn; coaching appointments/assignments; learning from other sports; learning from peers; learning from athletes; relationship with ex-athlete; shadow an experienced coach/athlete; working with other coaches; learning empathy; connecting with people; observing others; educate others; coach education (NCCP, University); be a student of your sport; age/life stages; transition from athlete to coach; ex-athlete → coach; personal experience; knowledge (coaching, technical); coaching qualifications; importance of technique</td>
<td>Any code that explained components of coach development. This included any type of career development, skill development, knowledge gained, and learning experiences related to coaching or sport leadership.</td>
<td>Coach Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach credibility – athlete performance potential; fighting for coach credibility; recruiting athletes; experience as an athlete; credibility as an athlete; athlete success; having to prove herself over again; demonstrate skill; show you know/demonstrate skill; pressure; not valued; questioning; high school boys’ attitude; male attitude (from those who do not know you); adjustment period; resistance initially; lack of respect; basic manners; bad relationship with head coach; credibility/trust/respect/acceptance takes time; being there for your athletes; be a role model</td>
<td>Any code that related to establishing coach credibility. It included common challenges encountered and strategies used to be recognized in a coaching role by athletes, parents, and their peers.</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix E — Code Book

**Note: This table features the additional codes not used as the primary focus on the findings in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Category Definitions</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with athletes; recognition; athlete-coach interactions; individual relationships; open relationships; commonality/relating; leadership; athletes are individuals/people; assertive; consult the athlete; female/male athlete differences; different coaching strategies for female/male athletes; expectations; strategies; game strategy; us versus them mentality; rivalry; training; team cohesiveness; encouragement/cheerleader</td>
<td>Codes that provided examples of how coaches presented themselves as leaders, defined their expectations, managed athletes and ran practices.</td>
<td>Coaching Philosophy/Coaching Styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of coaching; influence athletes; pleasure of watching athletes develop into ‘good people’; good relationships with parents; ambition; goals; passion; interest; pride; motivator; humor; learning to be flexible; morals; honesty; flexible adapting; positive experiences; teaching; giving back; volunteer; responsibilities; honorarium; money</td>
<td>Definitions and characteristics, which were used to describe what it meant to be a coach. Reasons or explanations participants provided for why they coached.</td>
<td>What it means to be a coach/Why coaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash of techniques; personality clash; put downs; trashing; political crap; mystery of staff selection; took a break from coaching</td>
<td>Various types of negatives coaching experiences described by the participants in this study.</td>
<td>Negative coaching experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head coach; assistant coach; roles; hierarchy; supporting head coach; personal (club) coach vs. provincial or national coach; team/group dynamics; team work; competition from other sports; the ways schools teach sport; regional differences &amp; difficulties; provincial sport governing body; isolation (rural communities)</td>
<td>Elements of track and field teams. Barriers the sport of track and field encountered compared to other sports.</td>
<td>Track and field team structure and culture in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered experiences in sport subcategories</td>
<td>Final Themes</td>
<td>Final Subthemes</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Impact of gender ideology</td>
<td>Domestic responsibilities, motherhood, and coaching</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing credibility as coaches</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasizing femininity eased acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Development</td>
<td>The role of the Canadian sport system</td>
<td>Few full time coaching opportunities for women (and men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The benefit of coach education and issues of accessibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The impact of affirmative action policies on career development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Network</td>
<td>Personal strategies used to stay in the system</td>
<td>Recognizing coaching is passion</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Relationship building with athletes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Developing a support system</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G — Women in Male Dominated Trades Example

ES5. Recommendations\(^{18}\)

*Education*

1) Continue to support the efforts of those promoting the skilled trades to young females through conferences, workshops, etc.

2) Encourage industry, employers, the provincial government and educators to fund a province wide campaign to change the stereotypical image of the trades and to foster the idea that the skilled trades are a dynamic field for women.

3) Provide educational institutions and parents better access to career information that gives young girls a real understanding of the pay, rewards and challenges of occupations in the trades, particularly those not traditionally taken up by their gender.

4) Efforts should be made to increase the number of female role models in schools, either by hiring more female industrial arts teachers or by creating other opportunities for tradeswomen to participate in the classroom/shop setting (via demonstrations, guest instructors).

*Workplace*

1) Encourage employers to attend workshops and eventually set up industry committees to help strategize ways to recruit and retain women in the trades.

2) Industry, through the Construction Sector Council or the CAF, should create a tool kit describing specific strategies for effective recruitment and retention.

3) Provide workshops and training sessions for employees that familiarize and sensitize participants to the abilities and cultural differences of women.

4) Ensure that Employment Equity expectations are met by all companies, including the private sector.

5) Assess barriers within organizations and broadcast these findings in order for employers and employees to understand what is not working.

6) Provide incentives to employers who institute policies (e.g. support for child care) that support the integration of women into the skilled trades.

*Training: Special Initiatives for Women*

1) To remedy the static number of women in the skilled trades, efforts should be concentrated into creating more “women-only” pre-apprenticeship training programs across Saskatchewan.

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