

## Coaching Continuity: Sustaining a 30+ Year Career as a Female Collegiate Coach

Michelle Moosbrugger  
Springfield College

### Abstract

A case study design was implemented to examine how a female coach has sustained her career. A collegiate field hockey coach with over 30 years of experience and two of her former athletes, both of whom returned to serve as assistant coaches, were interviewed. Following evaluation of higher order themes emerging from the data, the manner in which the coach sustained a lengthy coaching career was found to be analogous to a field hockey player performing in the sport. Much like an athlete who has honed her individual skills, surrounded herself with talented teammates, allowed teammates to assist, used variety in implementing skills, and maintained balance in life, the coach has crafted a successful coaching career. Her internal attributes and maintenance of support, the discovery of an inclusive work environment, seeking variety over time, and achieving balance aided her continuity. The experiences of the coach illuminate the importance of creating favorable working conditions and employing coping strategies in order to sustain a lengthy coaching career.



## Coaching Continuity: Sustaining a 30+ Year Career as a Female Collegiate Coach

With the objective of providing optimal experiences for sport participants, preserving proficient coaches is becoming increasingly critical. Coaching, however, can be demanding and stressful, which may lead to withdrawal from the profession (Frey, 2007; Kelley, Eklund, & Ritter-Taylor, 1999). A greater percentage of women than men have indicated intent to withdraw from coaching before the age of 55 (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003a) and 65 (Knoppers, Meyer, Ewing, & Forrest, 1991). When women leave the profession, positions are typically filled by men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002). Over 90% of new head coaching jobs were awarded to men from 2000-2002. Attrition, combined with fewer females entering the profession, has resulted in an astonishing decline in the percentage of female coaches since 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). To reduce turnover and enhance experiences of participants and coaches, reasons why some females remain in the profession must be explored (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003b), and methods of retaining coaches must be developed (Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996; Kamphoff & Gill, 2008).

In order to comprehend why some females leave the profession while others remain, the work experiences of coaches must be investigated. Inglis et al. (1996) developed a model depicting factors that influence retention of athletic department employees. When employees perceive fulfillment within the three retention factors of work balance and conditions, recognition and collegial support, and inclusivity, the researchers theorized that the individuals would be retained. Work balance and conditions reflect perceptions of personal and work demands. Recognition and collegial support involve job prestige and acknowledgement for contributions. Inclusivity reflects an environment accepting of individual differences.

Cunningham and Sagas (2003a) investigated the work environment of athletics within the framework of the retention model (Inglis et al. 1996). National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I assistant coaches who perceived their work environment to be inclusive were more likely to plan to coach past the age of 55 (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003a). Since Pastore, Inglis, and Danylchuk (1996) had previously identified that inclusivity was more important to women than men, determining whether women perceive work environments to be inclusive is essential.

Pastore, Danylchuk, and Inglis (1999) completed a confirmatory factor analysis on the previously developed model of retention factors. Mediocre support for the three factors was found, indicating that additional factors may exist. Drake and Hebert (2002) explored the experiences of two female high school teacher-coaches and identified techniques used related to retention. The teacher-coaches employed coping strategies (e.g., expanding organizational skills) to reduce stress and sustain their careers. Frey (2007) examined stress and coping strategies among collegiate coaches, and recognized numerous environmental and demographic factors that influence experiences. The coaches' perceptions of stress and coping resources may ultimately impact retention. Expansion of the retention factor model may occur through investigation of strategies employed to reduce stress and examination of specific issues faced by females (Drake & Hebert, 2002; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore,



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2000). Identifying additional factors for the model will enhance understanding of retention of coaches, potentially halting the decline in the percentage of female coaches.

Coach burnout, a predictor of withdrawal (Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, & Soliday, 1992), should be considered as a factor influencing retention. Male and female coaches experience burnout differently, with women exhibiting higher levels of burnout than men (Kelley, 1994; Vealey et al. 1992). Female coaches who perceived greater stress in life and coaching, possessed low hardiness, lacked social support (Kelley et al. 1999), were relatively unhealthy, and were dissatisfied with their jobs (Pease, Xapalac, & Lee, 2003) were more likely to experience higher levels of burnout. With burnout serving as a predictor of withdrawal, women are at higher risk to leave the profession than men. Factors other than burnout also influence the decision to leave the profession. Female coaches may perceive a lack of support for working while balancing family life (Kilty, 2006), opportunity in pay and advancement (Knoppers et al. 1991), competence (Barber, 1998), and self-efficacy (Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003), which may decrease the likelihood of retention. Methods used to manage stress (Frey, 2007), combat burnout, and adjust or cope with specific perceptions may support retention.

Cunningham and Sagas (2003b) recommended exploring retention among NCAA Division II or III coaches, as previous researchers examined high school or NCAA Division I coaches. With environmental factors such as inclusivity theorized to impact retention (Inglis et al. 1996), the Division III setting is particularly attractive. Females comprise a larger percentage of the coaching ranks in Division III than Division I and II (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Further, a greater percentage of females are employed as coaches of field hockey than any other sport except for synchronized swimming. Possibly conflicting with the inclusive nature of coaching Division III field hockey is the potential lack of power and resources associated with the position (Knoppers, Meyer, Ewing, & Forrest, 1990). Exploring the experiences of a female coach of a non-revenue sport in a relatively inclusive setting through a case study approach may help to illuminate the process by which the environment and other factors interact to influence retention.

A qualitative case study design was employed to examine how an experienced Division III field hockey coach sustained her career. Data collection and analyses were driven by the model of retention factors (Inglis et al. 1996) and the work of Drake and Hebert (2002) and Frey (2007) on stress and coping strategies. The following research questions were explored: (a) How can a woman be successful in sustaining a coaching career? and, (b) What strategies does a female coach employ to continue coaching?

## Method

### *Participants*

The experiences of a female collegiate coach were explored through a case study design with the coach and two additional participants. Pseudonyms were used for names of people, locations, and institutions to protect participants. At the time of data collection, Leslie Jones was a head field hockey coach in the final year of a



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more than 30-year career at Calder College. Colleagues described Leslie as “competitive,” and “very, very hard on [her athletes],” characteristics which have at times concealed her “hilarious sense of humor” and the belief that, “she puts the betterment of everybody and the [field hockey] program above herself.” In addition to coaching, her responsibilities at Calder College included teaching physical education courses. Julie Walsh is a high school teacher who competed as an athlete for Leslie in the early 1980s and now serves as an assistant coach for Leslie. Like Julie, Sue Samuel also competed as an athlete for Leslie, albeit in the late 1990s, and returned as an assistant coach.

## *Setting*

Calder College is a small, private NCAA Division III institution serving approximately 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students. With over 25 varsity athletic teams, the Calder College athletic program is prominent, and facilities are expansive. The college boasts an artificial turf field on which the field hockey team practices and competes, sharing time with the football and lacrosse teams.

## *Procedure*

The case study design (Merriam, 1988) will provide an in-depth examination of the experiences of a long-tenured head coach. Given the lack of previous qualitative exploration of continuity from the perspective of female coaches and the desire to learn from a unique case, the design was deemed appropriate. Selection of information-rich participants is critical to qualitative inquiry, in particular to case study designs (Patton, 2002). Leslie was selected for the study due to her involvement in Division III field hockey and the fact that, with over 30 years of experience, she was one of the longest tenured female collegiate coaches in the nation.

After meeting with Leslie to inquire of her interest in participating in the study, the researcher supplied Leslie with an informed consent form. Once Leslie submitted informed consent, Julie and Sue were selected to participate based on their ability to provide specific information regarding Leslie’s ability to sustain a lengthy career. The informed consent process was then followed with Julie and Sue.

Participants engaged in 60-75-minute semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002). Primary questions were drawn from an interview guide while probing questions were used to follow the path of the participant, provided the topics were related to the research questions (Patton, 2002). Separate interview guides were designed for each participant to gain three perspectives on the topic of Leslie’s continuity. Interview questions were constructed based on the model of retention factors (Inglis et al. 1996) and the idea that coping strategies are employed to reduce stress and continue coaching (Drake & Hebert, 2002; Frey, 2007). Topics explored in the interviews included early experiences, career highlights, personality, women in coaching, workplace environment, supervisors, co-workers, student-athletes, personal life, stress, coping strategies, and burnout.



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An expert in qualitative research design and two current female college coaches reviewed potential interview questions. As a result of their feedback, the phrasing of questions was changed to allow greater flexibility in responses. The sequence of questions was altered to develop rapport by discussing positive experiences before advancing to more exigent topics, such as stress. A final question was added to allow participants to summarize their thoughts and mention other ideas related to retention.

Participants were asked to select the location of the interviews to enhance comfort and build rapport. Leslie and Julie chose their offices as interview sites, while Sue elected to meet in a quiet conference room. Rapport was also developed through use of empathic neutrality, as the researcher expressed genuine interest in the perceptions of the participants while remaining nonjudgmental (Patton, 2002). Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, as suggested by Merriam (1988).

## *Trustworthiness*

The data collection and analysis process was designed to build credibility for the findings through the use of strategies such as triangulation (Denzin, 1978), member checking, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By obtaining multiple sources of data via the head coach and two assistant coaches, data triangulation was employed (Denzin, 1978). Though Sue was less forthcoming than Leslie and Julie, perceptions of how Leslie was able to sustain her career were similar across data sources.

Participants engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), each receiving a copy of their transcribed interview. Participants were asked to notify the researcher if inaccuracies were present. One participant requested the addition of a pseudonym for a location. No further discrepancies were identified. A peer debriefer with knowledge of qualitative methodology and experience conducting qualitative research was selected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer met weekly with the researcher during the data analysis process. The coding of raw data was discussed, as was the development of the taxonomic analysis. Suggestions from the peer debriefer were incorporated when reducing data and identifying common themes and relationships between themes.

## *Data Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed verbatim within 48 hours of the completion of each interview. Inductive analysis ensued through the data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The raw data were reduced through reading and re-reading the transcripts, while using open coding and searching for common themes related to research questions. A constant comparison method was employed by reading, applying open coding, and analyzing the themes of one transcript before advancing to the next transcript, and then assessing previous codes in light of new data (Strauss, 1986). A total of 22 common



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themes were identified and named with either indigenous terminology – the precise words of the participants – or analyst-constructed terminology – the words of the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Data display was completed through taxonomic analysis, an organized depiction of the relationship between the research question and the common themes identified within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1979). Connections between themes were recognized and further data reduction occurred through combining common themes into broader categories. Ultimately, data were reduced from 22 common themes to five higher order themes. Relationships between each of the common themes and higher order themes, and relationships between higher order themes and the research question are illustrated in the taxonomic analysis presented in Figure 1.

The final stage of the analytic process involved drawing conclusions based on the emergent themes and relationships depicted in the displayed data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Conclusions were extracted and then assessed by comparing raw data to the common themes and higher order themes.

## Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of a long-tenured female coach to determine how she has endured a lengthy career. In evaluating the five higher order themes emerging from the data, the method in which Leslie sustained her career was identified to be analogous to performing successfully in the sport that Leslie coaches. Playing field hockey requires an athlete to be individually skilled, but know when to involve teammates in a play. To achieve success, the environment in which one plays must be optimal. Everyone involved in the game must use variety to deceive opponents by varying their dribbling, passing, and shooting. Outside influences can affect one's play, so one must also attain success outside of sport by maintaining balance between sport and other responsibilities.

Coach Leslie Jones has, in essence, crafted her career in the likeness of a field hockey player. She is individually skilled, with characteristics well suited for the position. She has involved "teammates," as a network of support. Leslie perceives the environment of Calder College to be optimal. To implement variety in their "play," Leslie and Calder College have sought new challenges. Within and outside of her coaching career, Leslie has created balance, finding enjoyment in many realms.

### *Individual Skills*

Leslie's internal attributes, which were perceptible even in her first years of coaching, have assisted her in sustaining a lengthy career. Upon arrival at Calder College, Leslie was assigned to coach basketball in addition to field hockey. After five years of the supplementary duty, though, she displayed her strong-willed nature and told the director of athletics, "You've got to find somebody else because I'm out!" Able to focus on coaching field hockey and teaching classes, Leslie relished the chance to influence the growth of women's sports at the college and within the sport of field hockey. Leslie again demonstrated assertiveness by seeking opportunities,



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serving on early NCAA committees for her sport, wishing to “be on the ground floor to hopefully make it right, and not fall into some of the pitfalls that the men had done.” Assertiveness has been commonly perceived to be lacking in female coaches, potentially serving as a barrier to retention and professional development (Kilty, 2006). Without assertiveness, coaches may be assigned to superfluous duties or may forego potential opportunities, both of which may lead to distress. Perhaps demonstrations of assertiveness are one reason that Leslie persisted in the field while others have not.

On the field, Leslie displayed similar qualities of determination and persistence. As an athlete, Julie remembered Leslie always asking players to repeat a drill, “just one more time.” Leslie was “always trying to push the limit to see how far (she) can push (her) players.” With high expectations for players, Leslie also demands much of herself, saying, “I always feel I haven’t done enough. It hasn’t been good enough. I could’ve done more, I could’ve done more, I could’ve done more.” Sue believes that Leslie’s high expectations led the coach to continue learning throughout her career. Sue stated, “All that knowledge she gained . . . she really opened her mind up to get as much knowledge as she could. . . . She worked very hard on knowing the game.” If Leslie always expected more of herself and strived to increase her knowledge base, the fact that she returned to the field every year for more than 30 years is no surprise.

Along with assertiveness, dedication, and a strong knowledge base, Leslie’s organizational skills have contributed to her longevity. Sue and Julie both attested to the degree of organization with which Leslie managed practices, recruited, and traveled with teams. Consistent with the findings of Drake and Hebert (2002), Leslie developed organizational skills to complete necessary tasks in a timely manner and reduce stress.

Another characteristic that has driven Leslie is her view on life and the sport of field hockey. Leslie stated, “I have a very positive outlook on life. I have zest for life. I have loved what I’ve been doing.” Similar to the findings of Drake and Hebert (2002) and Frey (2007), Leslie has attempted to reduce job-related stress by altering her perspective on life and her career. Leslie’s outlook and love for life have tempered her competitive nature, as she has thought to herself, “It might have been better today just to climb a mountain together. You know, how important is this game that we might have gotten more out of it just being together on a mountain.” With the personal attributes of assertiveness and determination, strong organizational skills, and a genuinely positive outlook, Leslie’s career has been long and prosperous.

## *Involving Teammates*

Though Leslie’s personal qualities seem tailored to coaching, her career has included challenges. As Julie pointed out, “I’ve seen her tired.” Recognizing her copious responsibilities, Leslie admitted, “We (coaches) are burned out in that respect. We are. I have to say. The teaching, the coaching, the recruiting . . . I think that’s where the burnout comes in.” When Leslie senses the fatigue associated with burnout, she knows it’s time to “pass the ball” to a “teammate.” As noted by Kelley and Gill (1993), social support is a strong predictor of perceived stress among coaches. Support from others has enabled Leslie to reduce job-related stress and sustain a lengthy career.



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Support from her husband, Joe, has been influential on Leslie's ability to continue coaching. Leslie tells a story which illustrates her husband's level of support:

"I was traveling all over the country, and I said to him, 'If you want to be with me, you need to retire.' So, I got him to retire much earlier than I'm retiring. . . . He went everywhere with me: Colorado, Indianapolis. . . . He was just fantastic. He was the photographer. He planned all our meals. The kids absolutely loved him. . . . I spent the first number of anniversaries that we had, I was always at camp. I mean, he'd pick me up, and we'd go to (a restaurant), he'd bring me a rose."

Joe's support did not go unnoticed by others. Julie recognized, "He was always at practice, always there at games, always giving words of encouragement." Sue thought that Leslie's "husband's love for sport was awesome in really motivating her to be successful."

Support from a spouse has been recognized as an integral factor impacting the ability to battle professional barriers often perceived by female coaches (Kilty, 2006).

Joe was not alone in lending support during Leslie's career. Through involvement with youth programs, camps, and working at Calder College, Leslie stated, "there was a time that I had coached every Division I coach in the country. . . . I just have a great relationship with all these people and that's special." Sue added, "she can't really go anywhere in the field hockey world without anybody knowing who she is." Additionally, Leslie has dealt with the challenges of coaching through the support of assistant coaches. Leslie and her assistant coaches take occasional breaks from work-related thoughts to play board games, a strategy supported by Drake and Hebert (2002) and Frey (2007). With the support of her husband, the field hockey community, and assistant coaches, Leslie was able to endure the challenges of coaching.

## *Optimal Environment*

In addition to the support of others, Leslie also benefited from working in what she referred to as, "a great atmosphere." The well-defined philosophy of Calder College, which guides faculty members in athletics and academics, helped Leslie develop as a professional. As Sue mentioned, Leslie embraced the school's philosophy of:

"... developing the whole person. . . . She really encompassed what Calder was all about, in being well-rounded and being involved in a lot of things. . . . I think she really has used Calder's background of being a school that is rich in history and tradition and knowledge to really focus after her teams." Having the opportunity to work at an institution in which she believes enhanced Leslie's ability to sustain her career. Julie summarized this notion nicely, saying, "She found a place that would support that passion. You know, how lucky is she that she found Calder College, and they were smart enough to find her."

The environment of Calder College has also been bolstered by the proficiency and shared interests of Leslie's colleagues, an essential characteristic of the retention model developed by Inglis et al. (1996). Leslie noted that,



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“You all want to do such a good job with everything you’re doing, that if a student comes in, you’re going to spend time with them. That doesn’t happen at some schools.” Sue noticed the staff’s “willingness to help if anybody had a problem,” which aligned with Leslie’s ideals.

The supportive nature of the work environment is further demonstrated through the sharing of athletic facilities among Calder College men’s and women’s teams. Leslie noted, “I don’t think there’s another institution where a football coach is going to wait on the outside of a fence with 90 guys until I’m getting off because I’ve lost track of time.” Such inclusive working conditions may not be typical, as recognized by Leslie and verified by Knoppers et al. (1990) and Kamphoff and Gill (2008). Female coaches may experience discrimination, and coaches of women’s sports often face a lack of power and resources rather than equity. The working conditions of Calder College may be considered unique and inclusive, and have contributed to Leslie’s continuity.

Though collegial support abounded, participants of the current study denied that support from Calder College in the form of monetary rewards was a reason for Leslie’s continuity. Leslie remarked, “Our salaries, you might think they’re great . . . but they’re not. They’re very low.” Julie also acknowledged that, “I don’t think you do what you do because of the money. You do it because you really like what you’re doing.” Kamphoff and Gill (2008) also noted that low salary was not a deterrent for males or females considering entering the coaching profession. Clearly, for Leslie, love of the sport was more influential to her retention than was recognition.

To balance lack of monetary recognition, Leslie was reinforced in other realms, including collegiality. Leslie stated that she felt great pride in fulfilling her responsibilities alongside co-workers in alignment with the college philosophy. As supported by Inglis et al. (1996), knowing that her colleagues were striving to reach common goals strengthened Leslie’s resolve to continue coaching.

## *Implementing Variety*

To remain fresh and provide challenges, Leslie has worked with Calder College to implement variety in her “play.” When administrators decided to shift from NCAA Division I/II to Division III, Leslie viewed the move as a new challenge, saying, “I knew the level of Division III was really high.” Competing previously at the Division I/II level involved “not going out trying to win, but trying not to lose.” Leslie recognized that the change would provide the team with the opportunity to participate in a conference and play “the most competitive schedule in Division III,” at times “going out of region,” to play strong non-conference opponents. Julie cited other ways Leslie has found variety within her career:

“It’s never, ever the same, I think that’s part of [her retention] because it’s never, ever the same. There’s always going to be different players that come in, and players that leave, and circumstances that happen, an injury or this or that, that it becomes a challenge to be able to figure out, ‘How do I make sure this works?’”

In addition, Julie noted that “there’s always changes in society that may continue to offer a freshness every year.” With “freshness” each year, Leslie found the variety that was the spice of her life in coaching.



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Because Calder College has provided Leslie with varying opportunities, including competing at different levels and traveling, Leslie perceived her working conditions to be favorable. As identified by Inglis et al. (1996), provision of desired opportunities is essential to enhance satisfaction. Leslie further augmented her work experiences on her own accord by seeking variety and maintaining a positive perception regarding the diversity of responsibilities and interactions with others.

## *Maintaining Balance*

Even though Leslie stated, “I have thoroughly enjoyed my coaching opportunities,” Inglis et al. (1996) noted that a sense of balance in life must be maintained to sustain a career. Just as a successful field hockey player must be more than an athlete, Leslie is more than a coach. She has been involved in a wealth of personal endeavors. Throughout her time with her husband, Leslie enjoyed many leisure pursuits. Sue mentioned the pair skiing together, while Leslie fondly remembered camping with her husband. Sue also noted, “She didn’t have any children (biologically) . . . but even though Joe has passed on, his sons and their grandkids are still a very, very big part of her life.” Leslie stated that balance was essential to her career:

“When I go to meetings, there were some people that were totally consumed in field hockey. And some people could look at me and say I was consumed with field hockey, but I had a complete life. For some, that’s all they have, is that, whether it be field hockey, or a business, and a guy’s in a business, and that’s all he’s thinking about is his business, not his family or whatever. And, I feel that I was able to balance all of that, which I think for me was just very healthy.”

In feeling comfortable dividing time among work and personal activities, Leslie provided evidence that she is content with the balance in her life, a key factor in the retention model of Inglis et al. (1996). Leslie spends time with her family in order to perceive her life as complete, similar to the teacher-coaches studied by Drake and Hebert (2002). Balancing work and personal life has enabled Leslie to extend her career.

## **Conclusions**

Leslie is the epitome of a woman who has sustained a lengthy coaching career. Much like a field hockey player who has developed her skills in a favorable environment, Leslie has enjoyed a successful coaching career. Her personal qualities and strategies of maintaining support, discovering a positive work environment, seeking variety, and achieving balance aided her in sustaining a career that spanned over 30 years.

The retention factors of work balance and conditions, recognition and collegial support, and inclusivity (Inglis et al. 1996) were fulfilled in Leslie’s experiences. At Calder College, Leslie was able to find balance between job and personal responsibilities, gain support from colleagues, and thrive without concern of gender discrimination. The selection of a Division III field hockey coach provided insight on a relatively inclusive context for women. Leslie had plentiful opportunities at Calder College and in serving on national committees. These experiences nourished her retention – and enabled her to contribute to molding an environment



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supportive of women. With the knowledge that women regard inclusivity as highly important, but tend to feel less comfortable than men in the male-dominated realm of athletics (Pastore et al. 1996), further study of experiences of coaches in less inclusive environments is warranted.

Outside of the retention factors identified by Inglis et al. (1996), Leslie employed coping strategies that were recognized by Drake and Hebert (2002) and Frey (2007) as helpful in reducing stress and sustaining a career. By utilizing family members in times of need, developing organizational skills, and pursuing variety, Leslie was able to reduce perceived stress and continue to coach. In addition, personal attributes, including assertiveness and positive outlook, which have not been thoroughly investigated as retention factors, were instrumental in Leslie's continuity. Expanding the model of retention factors beyond organizational issues to include personal strategies and characteristics may provide a more comprehensive depiction of why some coaches remain in their positions. With greater understanding of how some women continue their careers, programs can be implemented at the individual and institutional levels to support current and future coaches in attaining similar success.

Because the current study involved an in-depth examination of how one female coach has sustained a career, generalizations to the larger population may not be appropriate. Leslie is atypical in the number of years she has been employed as a collegiate coach. In addition, the working environment of Calder College has greatly influenced her career. In alternate environments, coaches may not be able to implement similar strategies and may not benefit from comparable support.

Coach educators, administrators, and women desiring to prolong their coaching careers can, however, learn from veteran coaches such as Leslie. With the present concern of attrition, the mission of the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education, which is to ensure the provision of quality athletic experiences by augmenting the number and/or quality of coaches through education programs, becomes exceedingly relevant. The responsibility of training and retaining competent coaches as defined within the National Standards for Sport Coaches (National Association of Sport and Physical Education, 2006) lies with educators, employers, and coaches. Coach educators may encourage refinement of a coaching philosophy and incorporate instruction on specific coping strategies, including organizational skills and cognitive restructuring, in order to support acquisition and maintenance of a position. Once coaches complete accredited education programs and begin careers in the field, retention of such qualified individuals is highly desirable. Retention can reduce costs associated with turnover, including advertising openings and training new employees (Inglis et al. 1996). By cultivating inclusive environments, administrators could enhance retention efforts. Coaches must also be actively engaged in the utilization of coping strategies to extend their careers. When coach educators, employers, and coaches collaborate to train and retain coaches, a high-quality athletic environment can be preserved.

Some women may view Leslie and other experienced female coaches as sources of inspiration, which may lead to augmented self-efficacy and empowerment (Inglis et al. 2000). Self-efficacy, the belief that one can complete a task successfully, can be enhanced through vicarious experience (Bandura, 1977; Carruthers, 2006). Females



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who identify long-tenured coaches as role models may garner such vicarious experience. As self-efficacy increases, individuals are more likely to put forth effort (Bandura & Cervone, 1983) and persist in a challenging task (Schunk, 1981). With the finding that women have lower levels of self-efficacy in coaching than males (Marback, Short, Short, & Sullivan, 2005), concern is heightened. Low levels of self-efficacy may prevent female coaches from persisting in their profession or influence females to leave their current positions (Kent & Sullivan, 2003). By advocating for women (Kilty, 2006) and disseminating stories of cases such as Leslie, the concept that female coaches can endure lengthy careers may provide for positive vicarious experience, thus supporting self-efficacy and increasing the likelihood of retention.

The mission of the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education is to ensure the provision of quality experiences to athletes by augmenting the number and/or quality of coaches through education programs. The responsibility of training and retaining competent coaches as defined within the National Standards for Sport Coaches (National Association of Sport and Physical Education, 2006) lies with coach educators, coaches, and employers. Once coaches complete accredited education programs and begin careers in the field, retention of such qualified coaches is desirable for institutions as well as coaches and athletes. Retention of current coaches would reduce costs associated with turnover, including advertising positions and training new employees (Inglis et al. 1996). Further, when institutions retain coaches, the athletic department and athletes themselves can experience a consistent, dependable environment.

Further research is needed on the topic of coaching continuity among females given the astounding decline in percentage of female coaches since 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Since the working environment was influential in Leslie's career, the experiences of women in a variety of settings should be explored. Personal attributes and coping with stress were also vital to Leslie's continuity; researchers may wish to delineate whether such factors can be developed within prospective coaches. Coach educators may then construct programming to best equip future coaches with suitable resources. Recognizing the specific needs of women due to psychosocial and cultural factors is essential for researchers and educators alike. By more fully understanding the nature of coaching continuity, women can enter the profession with greater knowledge of how to sustain a lengthy, enjoyable career.



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Figure 1. Taxonomic analysis: How has a female coach endured a lengthy career?

How can a woman be successful in sustaining a long coaching career?

