Shaping the Way Five Women Coaches Develop: Their Primary and Secondary Socialization

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Abstract

Using Jarvis’ (2006) psychosocial perspective of human learning, we explore how the career choices and the subsequent coaching approaches of five Canadian women coaches have been influenced by their primary and secondary socialization. A content analysis was performed to identify how coaches learned in their primary socialization with their family, and in their secondary socialization at school and in their sport experiences. The findings indicate that the learning situations in their primary and secondary socialization influence the coaches’ career choices and their subsequent coaching approaches. These findings have implications for coaching education, enabling course developers and facilitators to understand (a) the importance of creating environments where coaches are able to critically reflect, and (b) how coaching approaches can be influenced by early life experiences.

Key Words: coach development, learning, family, school, athletic experiences
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Introduction

Research on coaches’ development indicates that coaches engage in formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities, although the usefulness of these situations varies between individuals (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009). Research also indicates that a coach’s previous experience as an athlete is an important way that coaches learn how to coach because these experiences help them learn about the subculture of the sport, enabling them to interact with others involved in the sport, such as athletes, coaches, and parents (Cushion et al. 2003; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009; Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007). For Cushion and colleagues (2003), athletic experiences influenced future coaches’ familiarity with coaching, collective understandings, and shared meanings and “such formative experiences carry far into a coach's career and provide a continuing influence over perspectives, beliefs, and behaviours,” (p. 218). Thus, even before individuals start coaching, they are learning from their sport experiences that may subsequently influence how they coach.

In further exploring research on athletic experiences, it is suggested that parents play an important role in children’s sport participation. Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) discussed the role that parents play in children’s sport development and included parental support, modeling, and expectations as key influences. MacPhail and Kirk (2006) found that parents helped to initiate their child’s involvement in sport, and continued encouragements from parents helped athletes become further involved. Parental support also helped athletes specialize in their sport. Some parents supported a teacher’s suggestion that their child begin to play sport, and teachers’ encouragements helped foster athletes’ sport participation. Support from athletes’ schools also helped them specialize in their sport (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006).

The research suggests that athletes’ parents and school experiences can influence their sport participation either positively or negatively and that sport participation influences coaching approaches. However, the link between learning from family and school experiences, and how this influences future coaching approaches is unclear. Nonetheless, all these factors contribute to socialization, as Coakley (2001) has reminded us:

Socialization is a complex, interactive process through which people form ideas about who they are and how they are connected to the world around them. This process occurs in connection with sports as well as with other activities and experiences in people’s lives (p. 106).
Therefore, we should expand our research to examine not only how athletic experiences influence coaching approaches, but also how other early experiences influence coaches and their lifelong learning process (Werthner & Trudel, 2009; Trudel, Gilbert, & Werthner, 2010).

Jarvis (2006, 2009) examined the process of human learning from a psychosocial perspective over the course of a lifetime and therefore presented learning as a process of becoming. For example, a person will become a coach through many learning experiences. Learning is based on his or her perceptions of experiences and is a lifelong process that involves all the seemingly separate parts of his or her life (2006). Learned experiences are part of our socialization and these experiences influence directly or indirectly our actions, thoughts, and emotions in future situations (Jarvis, 2006, 2009). Jarvis’ work on human learning can be used to provide an understanding of the influence of early socialization (child / adolescent) on coaches’ career choices and their subsequent approaches to coaching.

Jarvis (2009) explained that socialization is a series of learning processes. Much of what a person learns in childhood comes from what Jarvis (2006) has called “primary socialization.” Primary socialization involves the initial interactions that children have, usually with their primary caregivers and/or family members. Much of what is learned in early years stays with individuals throughout their lives. This gives children ways of coping so that as they grow and have new experiences, they gain confidence in responding to situations by using what they have learned (Jarvis, 2009). Jarvis (2006) noted that primary socialization is significant in an individual’s development and should not be underestimated in lifelong learning.

As individuals grow and develop, they interact with a greater variety of people and learn in other sub-groupings aside from primary caregivers, and so they go through a process of secondary socialization (Jarvis, 2006, 2009). In these sub-groupings, such as being a student or an athlete, individuals learn and interact with others in specific roles that are ever changing depending on with whom they are interacting. Indeed, they are also exposed to media that provide a global view early on in life (Jarvis, 2009). Secondary socialization occurs for the rest of our lives in informal, non-formal, and formal learning situations in becoming a member of different organizations such as school and sport groups (Jarvis, 2009).

For Jarvis (2006), learning is a lifelong process and any life experience is influenced by previous experiences and will thus influence future experiences. Based on this assumption, a coach’s career and coaching approach will be influenced by experiences that she or he had as a child and adolescent. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that there may be a connection between what children learn in primary and secondary socialization and their future coaching development. Perhaps it is short-sighted to deduce that only parents and coaches play a role in the socialization of athletes and coaches since Coakley (2001) has noted that any number of people and situations may influence what an individual learns. Indeed, primary socialization and
secondary socialization occur in many situations and it is impossible to document all of them (Jarvis, 2006). Such socialization is not easy to study because much of it happens in informal situations in which individuals learn as part of everyday living and so it is often difficult for individuals to articulate how they learned (Jarvis, 2006). For this reason, it is less frequently studied than other ways of learning, but yet is an important source of learning (Jarvis, 2006).

Perhaps the difficulty in becoming aware of and articulating how an individual has learned knowledge through previous socialization in informal situations is a root concern for coaching education programs. Cassidy, Jones, and Potrac (2009) suggested that coaching education programs have separated theory from practice so that coaches fail to connect what they learn in their courses to their everyday coaching experiences. Indeed, coaching education programs have been criticized for lacking depth and relevance (Armour, 2010). This criticism may stem from the idea that coaches come to coaching courses with often quite different biographies that influence what they deem to be important or unimportant in a course and subsequently what they choose to learn (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Indeed, Jarvis (2006) has explained that what is learned and integrated into one’s biography will influence how one perceives and learns from new situations. Armour (2010) noted that in coaching education courses it is important to give coaches the opportunity to reflect on their existing understandings and arouse their curiosity in learning new information. Exploring primary and secondary socialization in understanding coaches’ development may therefore be considered a worthwhile endeavour.

It must also be noted that women are under-represented in coaching. Indeed, according to various studies in Canada, the United States, and the UK, it appears that approximately 25% of the coaching population is female (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Kerr, Marshall, Sharp, & Stirling, 2006; Norman, 2008; Reade et al. 2009). Studies on female coaches are also scarce (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). For this reason, it is important to explore female coaches’ learning situations to understand their development. The purpose of the present article is to explore how the career choices and the subsequent coaching approaches of five Canadian women coaches have been influenced by their primary and secondary socialization. Such an investigation can help coaching course facilitators and developers to understand why reflection on previous experiences (and not limited to athletic experience) is such an important tool in helping coaches further develop their awareness and comprehension of their coaching approaches.

Methodology

Participants

Following Polkinghorne’s (2005) recommendations for selecting few participants for intensive study who fit the topic while also having participant variety, purposive sampling was used to seek out women coaches with a long history of coaching as a career, but from a variety of sports. Specifically, female coaches were sought to shed light on the learning situations of an
under-represented population within the coaching community in order to better understand their processes of becoming coaches. Patton (1990) stated that information-rich cases should be chosen in order to learn as much as possible about the issues of the research. All the coaches’ primary and secondary socialization influenced their subsequent coaching approaches and the varied sports helped to provide different situations from which the women learned so that we could explore a variety of different experiences within such socialization.

The participants were five Canadian women coaches between the ages of 42-51 years old, with 17-33 years of coaching experience. Four of five coaches coached full time as their only job, and the fifth coach spent a number of years coaching full time. One coach had completed her Canadian National Coaching Certification Program level four (there are five levels in all), three coaches were working towards their level four, and the fifth coach had her level three. Two women coached figure skating, one coached ice hockey, one coached canoe/kayak, and one coached alpine skiing. The coaches had worked with athletes from the grassroots level to the international level. In terms of early experiences, four of the women coaches were raised in two-parent families, while one coach was raised by only her mother. Two coaches had considerably older siblings and three coaches had siblings close in age. Three coaches began engaging in the sport that they coach at a very young age (i.e., five years old), while two coaches began engaging in their sport as teenagers (i.e., between 11 and 15 years old). The trustworthiness of the research is established by having chosen participants who, due to their extensive experiences as coaches, could provide a deep understanding of the process of lifelong learning (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Procedure

After receiving ethical clearance to conduct the study through the university’s board of ethics and receiving consent from the participants, the first author met with each participant on four separate occasions, over the course of three months, to discuss the events of her life and her learning. As Jarvis (2006) has noted, much of what is learned in primary and secondary socialization in informal learning situations is not initially seen as “learning” opportunities. Given that exploring an individual’s learning situations over the course of a lifetime is a difficult task, a series of interviews with these coaches was necessary to genuinely understand their processes of becoming coaches. Polkinghorne (2005) strongly advocated that it is important to engage in several interviews with participants and that a sequence of three interviews is ideal to collect data rich in depth and breadth. The interviews were semi-structured. In the first interview, all participants were asked the same broad questions about their life experiences, such as “Tell me about yourself,” “How did you start coaching,” and “Tell me about your current coaching experiences.” Probing questions were asked to personalize each interview based on the participants’ responses. In line with Patton’s (2002) recommendations, the second, third, and fourth interviews were largely guided by information provided in the previous interview. In these interviews, questions delved further into each participant’s personal life experiences to better
understand how she learned, for example “Can you explain what you meant and/or what you learned when you said in the last interview that…” The interviews were transcribed verbatim and resulted in a total of 600 pages of double-spaced text. Murray (2008) suggested that the participants become aware of the purpose of the study so that they answer questions in line with the research topic. The participants were reminded of the purpose of the study before each interview and they understood the discussion was about the various ways they had learned throughout their lifetime. After each interview, the participants were able to member check their transcripts since a copy of the conversation was sent to the respective participant so she had an opportunity to comment on the content as well as clarify any comments.

This article is part of a larger dissertation research project. The first author conducted all the interviews with the participants. The interview guides were created based on Jarvis’ theory of human learning and the three authors’ discussions about what to ask to gain a full and in-depth understanding of how the women coaches learned throughout their lives and how this influenced their coaching approach. The first author engaged in a bracketing interview to explore her biases prior to conducting interviews, and this exercise allowed her to develop sound interview questions based on the purpose of the study as well as ensure that her own assumptions were not interfering with the research methodology. Furthermore, the first author was trained through courses at the master’s and doctoral level to perform qualitative interviewing. Additionally, she has experience in conducting interviews in previous and on-going research. After the interviews, the three authors convened to discuss the data analysis on an on-going basis.

A content analysis was performed on the interview transcripts (Patton, 2002; Smith & Sparkes, 2005). As recommended by Smith and Sparkes (2005), after thorough immersion in the data, links were made between the data and Jarvis’ framework. Following Denzin’s (1989) procedural steps for gathering data on participants’ biographies, the data were coded in life stages, including: (a) childhood (from participants’ first memories to 12 years old), (b) adolescence (12 to 19 years old), (c) early coaching experiences (approximately the first 10 years of coaching), and (d) later coaching experiences. For each participant, the codes relevant to primary socialization (i.e., family environment) and secondary socialization (i.e., school and athletic experiences) were then examined to understand what the participant said she learned as a result of her experiences. For each participant, the data were then examined to find the participants’ coaching approach (stated behaviours, thoughts, and emotions) that corresponded to the learned material from the coded primary and secondary socialization. As a result of this analysis, we could identify experiences in primary and secondary socialization prior to beginning coaching, what the participants learned in their experiences, and how their coaching subsequently developed.
Results

From the vast amount of data compiled and analyzed from the four interviews for each coach, it became clear that the coaches learned throughout their primary socialization within their family environment. This influenced their secondary socialization in school and sport experiences, from which they also learned. All these situations influenced their choice of a career in coaching and their subsequent coaching approach. It is the participants’ perceptions of situations that created their experiences from which they learned (Jarvis, 2006). Therefore, throughout the results, their perceptions of the way others’ influenced what they learned are key to understanding how they learned.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline’s father was in the military and so she grew up travelling back and forth between a military base in Germany and a city in Canada. She described her years in Germany as “key developmental years” and spoke of a very strict upbringing. Jacqueline’s father told her to work hard at school and on the skating rink, go to the gym, and do mental training, while her mother, who was a nurse, emphasized eating and sleeping well. Jacqueline listened to her parents and learned a strong work ethic.

“I realized that my parents have had a huge influence on me, and the decisions that I make – on my values and views. I had a very strict military upbringing. I carry that over into my expectations of my athletes – I’m clear and precise, and I think that’s because my parents were like that with me. I like that and I think it works.”

Jacqueline believed that her parents supported her interest in skating. They drove her to training and paid for her to fly to Canada during the summers to continue her training since she did not receive much coaching instruction in Germany. During the school year, Jacqueline and a friend from skating would read rule-books and watch skating on TV to learn patterns and dances on their own. On the ice, Jacqueline was strict with herself and would not waste time. Her love of the sport and of teaching grew from these experiences: “I loved figure skating and I was doing well at it… Once I started to skate, I always said that I wanted to coach”.

At her school on the Canadian base in Germany, Jacqueline made friends easily. All the students moved regularly with their families and therefore she found it easy to make new friends since there were always many new students. Her school was strict and regimented.

“At the military school in Germany, everywhere I went, I had to have ID and the gates would open and people were there with machine guns. It was a very strict upbringing...
In contrast, when Jacqueline moved back to Canada as an adolescent, and attended a public high school, most of the students had been together for many years and it proved much harder to fit into the social circles. As a result, Jacqueline turned her attention to competitive skating.

As a child and adolescent, Jacqueline was heavily involved in figure skating and knew she wanted to coach. As a beginner coach, Jacqueline took a rather strict approach with her athletes and expected them to acquiesce to her authority and expertise, just as she had done as a child and young adult. Five years into her coaching career, Jacqueline began to shift to a more lenient coaching approach when she noticed that skaters needed ‘to be coddled in order to keep up their morale.’ At that time, she felt she had to ‘sugar coat’ her feedback and be extremely positive and encouraging. However, after five years using this approach, she spoke of coming to the realization that she was not being authentic to herself, and that in fact, the athletes trained and performed better with more structure and discipline, so she returned to a more strict coaching approach. Each of these shifts in her coaching approach were preceded by much critical thought, but were certainly influenced by her primary and secondary socialization.

**Olivia**

Olivia was raised by her parents on a remote outfitting ranch in the Canadian North. Her mother taught Olivia to alpine ski. She learned to be independent in this wild and remote environment. The following quote describes how Olivia learned from her environment in which she was brought up:

“The ranch was a vast area and I spent a lot of time on my own. Most of the time my parents had no idea where I was. I was either out with the horses somewhere or out in a canoe on the lake – I was always out exploring. There was no limit to my independence, and not a lot of social support... I think other people see being alone as being lonely. I never felt that way... I always kept my brain busy and I was always doing things. I think that has continued.”

Olivia was mostly home-schooled. Therefore, as a child and adolescent she had few social connections and learned to be self-directed and to think, as she said, “outside of the box.”

“Being home schooled taught me to be more self-directed and it is a terrific asset in coaching. It is very applicable to keeping me two steps ahead of the game, for trouble shooting, for having back up plans, and for helping me manage athletes without them knowing that they’re being managed.”
As a teenage athlete in alpine skiing, Olivia said that she encountered a woman high-performance coach, and that initiated her thoughts about the possibilities of coaching as a career.

“The exposure to this woman coach was an “ah-ha” moment: “There’s a woman coaching this camp!”... Having only exposure to men as coaches - it was not yet formed in my mind that coaching could be an avenue for me, until I got injured... lying in my hospital bed, I started thinking about coaching ski racing and that’s when I remembered this woman who had obviously had a bigger impact on my life than I had realized at that time... That’s when I started thinking about how cool it would be to be a coach.”

Olivia learned from her primary and secondary socialization and this influenced her coaching practice. As one of very few high performance woman coaches in her sport, Olivia needed to be comfortable in what she felt was an isolated environment.

“I think the acceptance of being alone is critical for the success of women in this sport. I feel that it makes the men around me a little bit more appreciative that I have recognized that I am not “one of the guys”. For sure I missed out on a lot of fun, but I don’t really think I was entitled to share in that type of fun because I’m not a guy, and I don’t want to be a guy. I like being a female coach – I feel I have something different to offer in terms of approach and philosophy, which is in part due to being a woman.”

Furthermore, the reflective skills in planning and management that she learned when she was home-schooled were useful when she became a coach. Olivia used these skills as the head coach of a provincial men’s alpine ski team, where she felt that the athletes would sometimes challenge her ideas.

“I had to have a strategy for everything and yet be ready to go with whatever happened... I had to play out these scenarios in my mind to know how I was going to react to make sure they didn’t lose their confidence in me and I wouldn’t lose their respect... I had to imagine what I was getting into, to think of possibilities, to prepare and be ready to act.”

It is apparent that Olivia’s experiences growing up with her family on a ranch, being home-schooled, and skiing all influenced how she coached.

Christine

Christine, a women’s hockey coach, felt that she grew up with a lot of family support inside and outside of sport. She and her brother were always in friendly competition with one another.
“If my brother climbed a tree across the street, I would see if I could do it quicker or further. We always had a bit of a competitive spirit between the two of us. That was a pretty good learning opportunity for me. I have always been determined to try to find a way to get things done.”

Christine also watched her mother and aunt’s friendly competitive jabbing, and developed a competitive drive to win. However, this competitiveness was always tempered by the importance of effort. Christine noticed that her parents would point out to her how hard other athletes worked and she felt that her parents encouraged her to put effort into what she wanted to accomplish. Thus, as a coach, Christine looked for effort and determination when recruiting players to her team.

“That is very much part of how I coach, and I would say I learned that from my parents. It’s more about effort than just skill. It has helped me be a better coach.”

In high school, Christine noted that her school principal seemed to see her interest in helping younger children in sports and created opportunities for her to help the elementary physical education teachers teach their classes during her spare time. Christine admitted that these opportunities gave her confidence and “really fuelled an interest for me to get into teaching and coaching.”

Christine was the only girl that played on her pee-wee hockey team and therefore, she was well-known within her small town and surrounding communities. She felt the support she received from her family and community helped to build her self-confidence, although in the larger culture of hockey, not everyone was supportive of girls playing hockey. When Christine attended the provincial championships she discovered that she could not play because the sport organization would not recognize her as a player because she was a girl.

Christine’s experiences both in being accepted as a hockey player by her family and community, and in being rejected as a hockey player by the organization, helped her learn the importance of fighting for women’s place in the sport.

“I think that experience was the first opportunity for me to realize that everything in life isn’t fair and that if you want something to change, then you have to get involved and be
part of the change and part of the solution and not part of the problem... People around me who had supported me through that taught me that it was a good thing to play hockey and that if you want something enough, and you're passionate about it, then you can gain support of people to help you through it. Since then, I've had many great opportunities to play with the women. Now I'm coaching in the women’s game. It’s about believing there is a way, and sticking with your guns – this is who I am.”

These early experiences put Christine on the path to coaching women’s hockey and an active role in promoting women’s sport.

Mary

Mary, a figure skating coach, felt her parents helped her to develop a sense of confidence and independence by allowing her time for active play by herself outside of the family home and at the cottage. Mary could play and learn from her experiences without being controlled. “My parents instilled confidence in me because they allowed me to make errors. By instilling independence in me, I was free to make mistakes and learn from my mistakes.” When she was eight years old, her family moved across the city and she was faced with making new friends. She started recreationally figure skating soon after and made friends easily within the club. In this process, she discovered that the bonds with the other skaters were part of her love for skating. Mary started competing in figure skating late, only as a teenager, and she did not have a long competitive career. Additionally, she felt her first coach did not adequately teach her the basics of skating, and as a result Mary thought that she was not very successful as a competitive skater. However, she loved to help the younger skaters and while still an athlete, Mary’s coach asked her to help teach the younger club skaters. This enticed Mary into coaching, as she enjoyed this new role very much: “Once I started into the competitive side of skating, I got into helping the younger kids, and I knew I wanted to coach.”

As a coach, Mary’s primary socialization with her family and secondary socialization in her athletic experiences influence her coaching approach. Due to her learned confidence and independence from her upbringing, she trusts her own decisions and has confidence in her coaching abilities. This confidence translated to an openness to learn throughout her coaching career. Consequently, Mary explained that she has improved exponentially as a coach throughout her career and is proud of her development.

“Confidence in coaching, I think, is a big part of how I do learn. If you have the confidence, you will challenge yourself to do more. If you don’t have confidence in what you are doing, then you are going to stick to the same things that have worked in the past... To be a better coach, you’re constantly pushing the borders, and you’re constantly trying to find new and better ways of doing things.”
Because Mary thought she had received poor coaching, she was determined to ensure that her athletes knew the basics before moving on to harder skills.

“I had an absolute passion for the sport, but I never had good coaches who taught me the basics when I was starting out... and I was a late starter, so those two things combined didn’t help me... I think that’s why I am so into teaching the basics. I want to give my skaters a good foundation. It is so important to me.”

Furthermore, Mary had learned the importance of social connections in sport from her own athletic experiences. As a coach, Mary consciously recognizes that friendships help keep the children involved in skating, and that skating is an important social connection between individuals: “With kids, the social aspect of skating is so important. I think that’s why you build a love of something, not just for the sport, but the social aspect.” She created group training sessions as well as group activities outside of skating for her young athletes. Mary’s experiences with her family and friends in skating helped shape who she became as a coach.

Samantha

Samantha is a flat-water canoe/kayak coach. Her father passed away when she was a baby and her mother raised three children alone, including Samantha’s brother who had difficult learning disabilities and who therefore never finished high school. Samantha did not engage in sport as a child because she recognized her mother could not afford the enrolment and equipment fees. Her mother worked full-time as the director of human resources at a hospital, and Samantha remembered seeing how hard her mother worked and how much she cared about the employees. She felt her mother had great leadership skills.

“I saw my mom put in the extra time and hours at work. Now, when I coach, I’m on 24/7. I am the athletes’ mom, their technician, their teacher... I think I saw my mom working in a leadership position and thought that was pretty cool and thought that if someday I had that opportunity, I’ll do it.”

Samantha developed a deep care and concern for others even as a young child. From living with her brother who had learning disabilities, Samantha learned to give children chances to succeed in life. She said, “From my brother, I learned patience and that we can all work through things - that has had a big impact on my coaching.” Samantha currently works with able-bodied and disabled paddlers to give them opportunities to experience sport.
Some of the information that Samantha was taught in high school seemed quite irrelevant at the time. She explained that she has, since that time, come to understand how applicable some of the information that she learned in school has become to her coaching.

“I loved science in high school so that was a good thing, but thinking about it, I never really listened. I learned the Creb’s cycle but it never really applied to anything I wanted to do at the time. Now it is relevant to my coaching.”

In Samantha’s high school social network, she knew her friends were a rough crowd of teenagers who did not engage in any school activities and preferred to smoke and get into trouble. However, a different high school acquaintance encouraged her to try paddling during the summer. When she returned to school in the fall, Samantha joined many school sports teams and stopped involving herself with her former friends. She determined that because of her increasing commitment and passion for school sports, she was invited to go to leadership camp with the school council and she stated that it was the first time that she had a chance to be a leader and she felt it changed her life.

“I probably was not really living up to the potential that I had. But I didn’t really know I had that potential until the leadership portion came out in high school through sport when I got selected to go to the leadership camp. I thought, “wow, maybe I do have the ability.” It was about gaining confidence.”

When Samantha started paddling, she was a member at a canoe club founded and run by a couple in the community. She found them to be hardworking, dedicated, and passionate about the sport. As a coach, Samantha noted that others seemed to compare her to the wife in that couple because she has now founded and runs her own club and displays similar values of hard work and dedication.

“I watched them work really hard and they were so passionate about what they were doing… I thought about them along the way, subconsciously, because I knew other people had done it before me, so why couldn’t I do it?”

Samantha was also taught by another coach, where she learned that coaches were honest and caring.

“I liked his honesty. He cared. He talked to us and he met with us one on one. He did a lot of work on goals, and as a coach I do a lot of goal setting too… I didn’t have goals when I first started paddling, and that was one of my problems.”

Samantha thought that this coach helped her to set realistic and attainable goals by being honest with her as to what she could accomplish.
“There were quite a few things that he displayed in his coaching that I picked up. As an athlete I tried them out, and as a coach I continue using them with my athletes... I’m pretty honest with the kids. That’s one thing I will not do is lie to them or their parents about where they’re at or where they’re going.”

At a training camp, she met a woman coach and realized that coaching was a possibility for women.

“I remember seeing her there with her two kids. I was in awe. I thought, ‘how can this lady do this? That’s kind of cool.’ When I started coaching, in the back of my mind I had learned that I could do anything even if I had kids. I think some females think that they will have to shut down and stay home when they have kids. But I never had that experience in my life because my Mom was always working, so I never saw anybody do that. Then when I saw this woman coaching, I thought, ‘this lady is incredible, this can be done.’”

From her sport experiences, Samantha developed the idea to become a coach, and the values that she had learned as a child from her family upbringing, and that had been reinforced at school and through her coaches, helped her to take on a leadership position as a coach.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this article was to explore how the career choices and the subsequent coaching approaches of five Canadian women coaches have been influenced by their primary and secondary socialization. The results indicate that what the five women coaches learned from their family upbringing and the social context of their childhood and adolescence, including their school and their athletic experiences, influenced their interest in pursuing coaching as a career and the ways they chose to coach. By exploring in depth the primary and secondary socialization of five women coaches and their subsequent coaching approaches, it is apparent that coaches have different socialization experiences not limited to their sport participation from which they learn to coach. For this reason, a one-size-fits-all approach to coaching education courses may not reach all coaches in a relevant and credible fashion (Duffy et al. 2011; Lyle & Cushion, 2010). Based on these results, we make recommendations for coaching education programs on the importance of including a component of reflection on previous socialization. Such reflection could help coaches become aware of how their own informal experiences in many aspects of their lives have influenced their coaching approaches and they can begin to work with their existing knowledge base.
Each of the coaches in this study had considerably different experiences in their family. One grew up with a close-knit family in rural Canada where sport was a regular part of her daily life. Another lived on a strict military base in Europe and perceived that she received a great deal of support from her parents to engage in organized sport. A third grew up with a great deal of freedom on a rural ranch where physical activity was a part of her everyday life. A fourth coach was very much city-bound but felt that her parents encouraged her to be physically active and to play. The fifth coach perceived that she had very little family support to engage in sport, and thus only began to participate in sport in high school. Despite these differences, it is apparent that their families did provide each of these coaches with a primary socialization that influenced their early biographies and shaped who they became as coaches. Several of these women coaches had not deeply reflected on their early experiences and, in many cases, what they had learned from these experiences. Through the conversations with the primary researcher, they became aware of how they had taken for granted much of the learning attributable to their early years, such as how profoundly Jacqueline’s parents had influenced her values, which in turn seemed to influence how she coached. Research exploring maternal-child relationships and parental support in sport participation construe that family is an important primary socialization agent that continues to contribute to emerging adult behaviour (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006; McNamara Barry et al. 2008). Therefore, facilitators in coaching education should be encouraged to ask coaches questions about their family life, what they have learned from their families, and in general on their primary socialization to help them become aware of how they have learned early in life and how this has influenced them personally.

For four out of the five coaches, school experiences seemed to influence their interest in sport participation, pursuing a coaching career and/or their coaching approach, albeit in very different ways. Coakley (2001) argued that high school sport is a tool for positive youth development. Lacroix, Camiré, and Trudel (2008) found that high school coaches believed that school sport activities helped individuals develop positive self-esteem, become engaged in school and feel a sense of belonging, and develop a healthy and active lifestyle. Samantha, who had not played sport as a child, started to play sport in high school and was then invited to attend a school leadership camp. From these school experiences, she developed an interest in sport and a sense of self-confidence. She later reflected on how much school sport and leadership opportunities changed her personally and helped her on the path to becoming a coach. Like Samantha, Christine’s school experiences advanced her interest in becoming a coach. Christine’s school principal helped her become involved in assisting the physical education teachers, thereby helping her to develop her abilities to teach sport. Research has shown that support and encouragement from teachers and individuals at school help individuals begin participating in sport and continue to foster their sport development (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006).

In contrast, Jacqueline did not easily fit into school social groups that had been formed before she arrived at her Canadian high school and she chose instead to “belong” to the skating
club’s social network. In a different way, Jacqueline’s influence from school pushed her further into her sport of figure skating. For Olivia, since she was mostly home-schooled, she learned to be comfortable being alone, which she attributes as “critical” for the success of women coaches in alpine skiing. This is a belief that she upholds in not “being one of the guys” when she is coaching and not socializing with the male coaches. For Olivia, it was the lack of social experiences in her socialization at school that influenced her coaching approach. These four very different experiences in high school nonetheless greatly influenced the coaches’ sport participation, their interest in becoming a coach, and their coaching approaches.

Jarvis (2006) has stated that we may take for granted the experiences that we have because our cultural upbringing (primary socialization) is shared by others with whom we interact in our secondary socialization. Therefore, it is possible that no particular individual in a secondary socialization situation (i.e., school) stands out as being an important learning source. We may presume that we already know or we may not consider the learning situation (Jarvis, 2006). For example, Mary’s school experiences did not seem to influence her. She stated, “I really can’t think of a teacher or school coach who influenced me… I was really self-motivated in my pursuit of a coaching career.” Instead, in Mary’s sport experiences, she learned through experimentation that social bonds and technical and tactical basics were important elements in learning to skate, and so she included these elements into her own coaching approach. Through her athletic experiences, this coach became familiar with coaching customs. Therefore, it is important for facilitators to understand that all coaches may not have had meaningful experiences in every learning situation.

Certainly for facilitators in coaching education courses, it is important to acknowledge that coaches will have different perceptions on their experiences, and they should not assume that all coaches enjoyed or learned from their school and/or sport activities. Many coaching education courses are not considered meaningful for coaches’ learning and so often coaches seek out self-directed learning experiences or they rely on their past athletic experiences, their own coaching experiences, or observations and interactions with other coaches (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert, Coté, & Mallett, 2006; Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008; Wright, Trudel, & Culver, 2007). However, if coaching courses provided a venue for coaches to reflect on their own perceptions, experiences, and decisions that they deemed important and significant to their learning, coaches may not resist these educational opportunities and may seek them out because of their integration with context-specific and real life experiences. Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, and Nevill (2001) found that reflective workshops helped university student-coaches take time to critically reflect on their practice, and that the coaches acknowledged that written reflection and peer discussions were important. However, outside of the courses, such reflection was rare because coaches did not necessarily know how to reflect (Knowles et al. 2001). Therefore, courses in which facilitators display empathy and active listening skills, provide questions and topics on which to reflect, and give the time for coaches to reflect could be considered very
useful learning situations (Knowles et al. 2001). We suggest that the starting point for these reflections begin with the coaches’ earliest memories in childhood, including their experiences with their families, at school, and in their sport participation. These reflections could then progress to explore how early experiences influenced their current coaching approach, whether or not they want to continue to coach in that manner, and how to proceed in the future based on what they know.

While this study was the first to link childhood experiences outside of sport (i.e., family and school) with learned coaching approaches, the results also concur with a number of findings from other studies on how coaches learn through their athletic experiences (Cushion et al. 2003; Demers, 2004; Lemyre et al. 2007; Wright et al. 2007). Smoll, Smith, and Cumming (2007) found that the behaviors of coaches influence their athletes’ attitudes and perceptions towards their coaches, themselves, and their sport experiences. In this study, the participants’ coaches influenced their commitment to sport coaching. Olivia, Christine, and Mary credited their coaches with giving them the idea to become coaches. Samantha further stated that her coaches helped teach her values of hard work and honesty among other things that she brought into her own coaching approach. In courses, facilitators could help coaches to remember their own coaches and the influence they had on their sporting experiences. This could allow coaches to become aware of what they value in other coaches, and what they want to include in their own approaches.

Sometimes what was learned in primary socialization contradicted what the coaches learned in secondary socialization. This may especially be the case for women who participate in sport whose primary socialization may be different from the cultural norms in secondary socialization, where gender equity does not exist in many sport programs (Coakley, 2001). Jarvis (2006) stated that we are affected by the way in which our culture regards gender and therefore we do not have perfect freedom to do and learn what we want. However, Jarvis (2006) also stated that we do not need to accept the values that we learn through cultural practices. In this study, Christine grew up in a family immersed in sports, where she learned that sport, and more specifically ice hockey, was a natural activity for a girl to pursue. However, other social institutions did not have the same views. When she was not allowed to play hockey with the boys, “the first thing I learned was that ‘it doesn’t make sense.’ I could play and I could shoot. I didn’t understand why girls couldn’t play.” In Christine’s case, the values that she perceived her parents held regarding hockey as a sport for girls as well as boys ran counter to what she learned as she explored sport competitively. Because of Christine’s strong influence of her family through primary socialization, this experience became an opportunity for her to learn about injustice, and drove her later as a coach to provide all the opportunities she could for young women hockey players. In courses, if coaches are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, and if other female coaches (and perhaps male coaches) remember experiences in which they have learned conflicting information, facilitators can foster discussions in which reflections are
explored to help coaches determine their beliefs, and to allow them to understand their actions if such experiences reoccur. This could provide a rich forum for discussion on relevant coaching experiences for all coaches involved in the course.

Conclusion

Trudel and colleagues (2010) noted the importance of including the learner’s perspective in coaching education programs by taking a lifelong learning approach. Trudel et al. (2010) suggested that coaches “are the owners of their development” (p. 149) and that “it is important to find ways to recognise the learning that occurs in informal situations” (p. 144). For this reason, including time for individual reflections and group discussions on previous experiences in coaching courses can help coaches understand their knowledge, interests, and role. In this study, the coaches learned from a variety of different learning situations, different family contexts, different athletic experiences, and different schooling experiences. All these situations shaped who they are as adults and as coaches. We have shown that what we learn during primary and secondary socialization in and out of sporting experiences, and particularly with significant others such as parents, is influential. Coach education courses can teach sport specific skills and game strategies in a few hours but this may not be enough time to create changes in coaching philosophies and approaches that originate in coaches’ upbringings (Cushion & Lyle, 2010). Coaching course developers and facilitators can understand and respect that it is difficult to change these ingrained approaches and can be supportive in their delivery. The contribution to coach education that we make in this article overall is to help facilitators understand that coaches will come to a course with different biographies influenced by their primary and secondary socialization, and so the strategy should be to create an environment where the coaches are able to critically reflect on their coaching approaches. Gilbert and colleagues (2006) have stated that the coaching context should be considered when examining coach development, and so the aforementioned recommendations for topics in reflections and discussions in coaching courses could help facilitators better explore coach learning and development in a context specific and relevant way. We will never fully understand or be able to explain all human learning because of its complexity (Jarvis, 2006). However, through this article, we urge readers to consider learning as multi-faceted, unique to each coach, and that starts very early in life.

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References


