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**LESBIAN COACHES: PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES ON BEING OUT**

**BY**

**ELISSA COHEN**

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This all started one afternoon in Halifax Nova Scotia. Four women sat around a conference room table wondering how we were going to make this thesis happen. The first woman asked what the purpose of the study would be, the second woman asked how it would be different from the last study, the third woman asked who we could affect with the study, while the fourth and youngest woman sitting at the table simply stared in amazement at the brilliant, strong, outspoken feminists that sat before her. I'd like to thank the women who came before me. Thank you to the fearless feminists who are united and speak out against societal apathy towards the necessity of the feminist movement for equity and equality.

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“If I have to I can face anything. I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman”

- Helen Reddy, 1972.

## ABSTRACT

This research project attempted to identify and describe the essence of the experience of being an out lesbian in elite coaching. Through the use of a feminist epistemology, a phenomenological methodology, and in-depth interviews with eight high performance coaches who identify as lesbian, it was possible to identify and describe the essence of their experiences being out lesbians in elite coaching. The data were analyzed using an inductive phenomenological analysis procedure. The six themes that emerged from the data were: sexism, lesbophobia, the old boys' club, acknowledgement and positive reinforcement, the supportive feminist network, and the nature of the job. Sport was identified as a domain rife with sexism, lesbophobia, and dominated by the old boys' club all of which negatively impacted the lesbian coaches' experiences and career advancement. However, with positive reinforcement of their lesbian identity and the supportive feminist network, the participants nevertheless experienced great personal and professional success.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in sport has historically been met with discrimination, stereotyping, and homonegativism. Wellman and Blinde (1997) suggest that the reason for this hostile climate is that "sport has traditionally been defined as a male activity, and women who enter the competitive sport context are assumed to violate gender norms established for women" (Wellman & Blinde, p. 64). Sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and the lesbian label are forms of discrimination that have affected all female athletes; these social pressures discourage women's sport participation and discredit their performances when they dare to enter the androcentric realm of sport (Griffin, 1998; Hall, 2002). According to Kauer and Krane (2006) female athletes are aware of the stereotypes that ensue as a result of their lack of conformity to hegemonic femininity. Athletes were found to often over accentuate their femininity and conceal their athletic identities in an attempt to negate discrimination, most commonly in the form of the lesbian label (Wellman & Blinde). Griffin describes the lesbian label, which is an act of questioning a woman's sexual orientation, as one of the most effective ways to limit women's sport experiences. It can be argued that the lesbian label affects all women in sport as it makes them defensive about their athleticism and often silences participants who identify as lesbian.

Women coaches struggle with similar pressures and cite homophobia as a significant source of stress (Cohen, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). The literature on women in coaching has focused primarily on three main areas: first, a discussion of the androcentric nature of elite coaching; second, the underrepresentation of women in coaching, and the apparent decline in the number of women coaches; and third,

proposed solutions for all of the abovementioned pressures and issues that women face in the elite sport and coaching context (Mercier & Werthner, 2001; Robertson, 2002). Little research has addressed issues related to lesbian coaches and lesbian identity development (Cohen, Robertson, & Bedingfield, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005).

Specifically, there is an identifiable gap in the literature regarding lesbian coaches' experiences being out within the high performance sport context. The purpose of this study was to explore how high performance coaches, who identify as lesbian, experience being out in high performance sport. This study employed a feminist epistemology, a phenomenological methodology, and utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews to illuminate the experiences of eight lesbian identified women coaches.

## CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sport feminism has been concerned with the experiences of women in sport since its inception in the 1980's, however only recently have women, who identify as lesbian, been mentioned (Griffin, 1992; Krane, 1997b). The sport context has been seen as a microcosm of the greater social world where social pressures such as sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, homonegativity, and the lesbian label are magnified such that they limit women's sport experiences (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Griffin, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Lorber, 2005). Much of the literature has documented female athletes' experiences in sport, however considerably less literature has discussed female coaches' experiences, and even less has looked at the experiences of lesbian elite coaches. The three main topic areas featured within the literature regarding women in coaching are: the male dominated androcentric nature of the coaching environment and sport context, the underrepresentation and declining numbers of women in coaching, and proposed solutions to the abovementioned problems (Demers, 2007; Griffin; Kilty, 2006; Marshall, 2001a; Mercier, 2002; Robertson, 2002; Werthner, 2005). None of these studies have attempted to describe how lesbian elite coaches experience being out within the elite sport coaching context. The most recent studies about lesbianism have focused on lesbian identity development and maintenance within the sport context. A significant piece missing from our understanding is that of the lived experiences of lesbian elite coaches (Cohen et al., 2007; Griffin).

### Social Pressures and Women in Sport

There are few elite female coaches and still fewer out lesbian coaches, and according to Kilty (2006), an exploration of the reasons for this must be explored. Sport

can be seen as a microcosm of our greater society and consequently, societal pressures such as sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativity are perpetuated, magnified, and serve as gate keeping mechanisms for female coaches and athletes (Griffin, 1998; Lorber, 2005). Sport has traditionally been considered a domain where boys were taught to be masculine and become men. Women's participation in sport as athletes, and coaches, is challenging and "diluting the importance and exclusivity of sport as a training ground for learning and accepting traditional male gender roles" (Griffin, p. 17). Female coaches and athletes have been afflicted by a plethora of social consequences because they have pushed the gender boundary of femininity with their involvement in the androcentric, heterosexist world of sport. Some of the painful social consequences experienced by athletic women include social stigmatization, ridicule, emotional or physical violence, and being labelled a lesbian.

Griffin (1998) and Kilty (2006) have documented that the realm of high performance sport and coaching is rife with lesbian discrimination, and one consequence of this is that there are very few coaches who outwardly display their lesbian identity. In order to lay the foundation for the current study, a discussion of sexism, the impact of the 'lesbian label', heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativity will be explained with reference to the context of sport and high performance coaching. In addition, a discussion of lesbian identity development and the factors which enable healthy identity development in high performance coaches will be presented as well as the psychological perspectives regarding lesbian identity development and the coming out process.

### *Sexism in Sport*

Lorber (2005) explains that sexism subordinates women and privileges men based on the strict binary definition of gender, that being femininity vs. masculinity. Sport has historically been cited as a patriarchal institution and male domain where women are seen as trespassers (Cook, 2007). Female athleticism and the traditional definition of femininity are thought to be “mutually exclusive” (Hall, 2002, p. 147). Consequently women who are athletically successful, aggressive, and capable of leadership strongly defy the conventional definition of hegemonic femininity and, as a result, often face painful social consequences (Krane, 2001).

Sexism affects all women in sport, regardless of sexual orientation, because it devalues women, women’s coaching, and the athleticism of women’s sport is often seen as second rate in comparison to their male colleagues (Griffin, 1998). Female high performance coaches are under a great deal of scrutiny because they are, as coaches, responsible for developing aggressive plays and producing strong teams, along with all of the other responsibilities and demands that coaching at an elite level entails. Griffin explains that these coaching abilities and skills have historically been ascribed to men and the very nature of masculinity. Consequently women must still continually prove their skills and abilities.

An example of sexism is the comment “you throw like a girl”, directed at a male athlete when he is not performing very well. It is an insult to both sexes, but it is a comment that is certainly disparaging to girls and women, and that reinforces the perception they are in fact inferior, incompetent, and inadequate within the realm of sport (Griffin, 1998; Hall, 2002). A second example of how sexism discredits female athletic

abilities is that girls, when they are athletically successful, are often called ‘tomboys’ rather than ‘athletes’, because athletic prowess is associated with masculinity.

According to Griffin, when grown women are successful coaches or successful athletes they outwardly challenge the social definition of gender and consequently threaten the benchmarks of masculinity inherent in both sport and society. As a result, the often painful social consequences range from stigmatization to emotional or physical violence, to being labelled a lesbian regardless of their sexual orientation (Griffin; Hall; Kilty, 2006).

### *The Lesbian Label*

Griffin (1998) asserts that the purpose of the ‘lesbian label’ is to question a woman’s femininity and sexual orientation and is also seen as an effective way to potentially limit her sport participation because, regardless of sexual orientation, it results in feelings of defensiveness about her athleticism.

When faced with intolerant sport settings, girls and women can incur low self-esteem and confidence; high stress, depression, and frustration; increased risk of suicide’ and feelings of isolation, being disconnected, or unappreciated. Attempts to escape discrimination can lead to alcohol or drug use. Some athletes, to avoid being labelled as lesbian, will employ unhealthy eating, exercise, and training behaviours (Barber & Krane, 2007, p. 53).

The lesbian label serves three major functions. First, it is used as an insult to heterosexual women, secondly as a social control of women’s sport participation, and finally as a method of reaffirming the status quo that stigmatizes lesbians as social deviants (Kauer & Krane, 2006). The lesbian label negatively impacts both heterosexual and lesbian women in sport and elite coaching because it promotes defensiveness in heterosexual women and silences most lesbians, which discourages bonding among all

athletic women (Griffin, 1998). This divide among women in sport results in the maintenance of the status quo, and Griffin argues that this disables women's abilities to discover the collective power they might have to rectify the sexist and homophobic situation. Succinctly stated:

As long as women's sports are associated with lesbians and lesbians are stigmatized as sexual and social deviants, the lesbian label serves an important social-control function in sport ensuring that only men have access to the benefits of sport participation and the physical and psychological empowerment available in sport (Griffin, p. 20)

The lesbian label serves as a means of patriarchal social control because it discredits and intimidates female athletes and coaches (Griffin). Often lesbian athletes and coaches find themselves doing one of two things to combat the negative connotations of the lesbian label, either attempting to conform to the societal definitions of femininity or dropping out of sport (Kauer & Krane). These two actions simply proliferate and maintain the status quo within sport where "men are men and women are trespassers" (Griffin, p. 15). Lesbians are often forced to follow the "play it don't say it" (Griffin, p. 40) rule because they feel as though being out about their sexual orientation would jeopardize their ability to play or coach sport.

### *Heterosexism*

Krane (1996) describes heterosexism as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community" (p. 237). Heterosexism privileges heterosexuality and denigrates any person or behaviour that is considered to be nonheterosexual. The lesbian label, used as an insult and a method of social control within sport, is supported by heterosexism because it subordinates and stigmatizes all women who do not conform to socially

sanctioned female gender roles (Krane, 1997b). The gender roles of mother, wife, and sister are closely associated with heterosexuality and femininity (Lorber, 2005). Women who participate in or coach sport defy and subvert dominant gender roles and femininity through their athleticism (Griffin, 1998). Lesbian coaches are athletically successful, powerful, and nonheterosexual; therefore, they constantly subvert socially sanctioned gender roles, femininity and, by virtue of their sexual orientation, challenge the status quo of heterosexuality. In an effort to reduce redundancy, a more comprehensive explanation of the impact of heterosexism is provided within the lesbian identity and sport section of this literature review.

### *Homophobia & Homonegativism*

Homophobia is commonly understood to be the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of lesbians and gay men. Although this term has become well known, there has recently been a transition in the scholarly literature to the use of the term homonegativism. The term homonegativism is a more inclusive term according to Krane (1996) because it describes purposeful negative behaviours and attitudes towards nonheterosexuals, rather than the previously held perspective of irrational fear.

Krane (1996) explains two types of homonegativism, the first being external homonegativism which is “reflected in cultural beliefs and actions that sustain and promote negative images of nonheterosexuals” (Krane, p. 238). The second type discussed is internal homonegativism which is described as an individual’s internal reactions to the negative beliefs and actions within the greater social context about nonheterosexual people. For example, internalized homonegativism is when a person feels self hatred due to their sexual orientation.

Within the patriarchal and androcentric institution of sport, negative perceptions about nonheterosexuals serve as gate keeping mechanisms and thereby limit the experiences, participation, and opportunities for women who identify as lesbian or nonheterosexual (Griffin, 1998; Kilty, 2006; Lorber, 2005).

### Women in Coaching

A great deal of the existing research literature documents topics related to female athletes and the more general context of sport (Barber & Krane, 2007; Blinde & Taub, 1992; Hall, 2002; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 1997a, 2001; Krane & Barber, 2003; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002; Lenskyj, 2003; Riemer, 1997; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). However only a handful of researchers have discussed issues specifically related to women in coaching (Demers, 2003, 2006, 2007; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Marshall, 2001b; Mercier, 2000; Mercier & Marshall, 2005; Mercier & Werthner, 2001; Robertson, 2002; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Werthner, 2005). Even fewer authors have endeavoured to research topics related to coaches who identify as lesbian (Cohen et al., 2007; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). For the purpose of this study, a review of the current literature surrounding women in coaching will be presented. Within this literature three major themes of research have emerged. The first theme describes the context of coaching as a male dominated and androcentric arena. The second theme within the literature focuses on the underrepresentation of women in coaching and the current decline in the numbers of women in coaching. The third major theme focuses on suggested solutions for the problems that women coaches face, as well as some suggestions to curb the startling decline in their numbers.

### *The Male Dominated/Androcentric Context of Sport Coaching*

According to a document produced by Sport Canada entitled *Sport Gender Snap Shot*, in 1999, 83% of national coaches in Canada were male. In 2006, men outnumbered women 5:1 with respect to positions as athletic directors in American universities (Kilty, 2006). The reasons for this male dominated context are multiple and far more complex than simply a history of male involvement in sport and physical activity and therefore a discussion of some of the more salient factors which explain this situation will be elaborated upon here (Griffin, 1998; Hall, 1996, 2002).

Androcentrism within the coaching context is supported and perpetuated by stereotypes which devalue women (Demers, 2003; Werthner, 2005). Many coaching models neglect or outwardly ignore the importance of interpersonal skills, and focus more on technical sport skills during the coaching process, an orientation which may further promote androcentrism in coaching. Werthner describes the importance of coaches developing interpersonal and communication skills, as well as the skill of reflection because “technical skills are not enough to be an excellent coach” (p. 6). Mercier and Marshall (2005) describe how women often bring those important communication skills to their coaching styles. The aforementioned two studies present the idea that androcentric models of coaching do not account for women’s often unique coaching skills and styles.

Another concept that is seen as contributing to the male dominated context of sport coaching is the “old boys’ network” or club (Marshall, 2001, p. 2) where “homologous reproduction” (Kilty, 2006, p. 224) and social networking among men solidifies and protects the world of coaching from the entry of women. Homologous

reproduction is known as a subtle method of employment discrimination where athletic directors, who are often male, hire someone similar to themselves (Kilty; Marshall; Sagas et al., 2006). If male athletic directors outnumber female directors 5:1 and the theory of homologous reproduction occurs this is a viable reason for the underrepresentation of women in coaching positions. Social networking among male athletic directors goes hand-in-hand with the practice of homologous reproduction which has been identified as the reason that the percentage of female coaches hired is lower than it is when an athletic director is a woman (Kilty, 2006). Evidence suggests that homologous reproduction is one of the major factors contributing to the underrepresentation of female coaches and as a result solidifies the androcentric context of sport thereby allowing the dominant group to “carefully guard power and privilege” (Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006, p. 503).

The concepts described above explain the factors that enable the male dominated/androcentric context of sport, and coaching in sport, to be maintained and reproduced. However, in an effort to alter the status quo within sport coaching, changes have been made to current coaching programs in order to facilitate specific skill development and social networking among female coaches (Demers, 2003, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Mercier & Werthner, 2001; Werthner, 2005).

Women and men in sport often have different sport experiences. According to Robertson (2006) female division one athletic directors in the United States identified barriers for women’s advancement within sport to be based on “gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotyping, a reluctance to hire and promote women, and the perception that women cannot or should not lead a Division 1 athletic department, a view point that appears to be widely held by male university presidents and hiring personnel”

(Robertson, p. 6). Historically it was thought that women were not as career motivated, aggressive, or ambitious as men and unfortunately this stereotype remains pervasive and still limits women's experiences and opportunities with employment not just as athletic directors, but also as coaches (Kilty, 2006; Mercier & Werthner, 2001). The final and most debilitating stereotype that limits women's experiences and opportunities, while continuing to perpetuate the androcentric nature of sport in general and coaching more specifically, is the idea that women are perceived as less competent regardless of their experience and training in comparison to male coaches (Kilty). Kilty goes on to describe how women coaches often find that they must constantly prove themselves while male coaches are given the benefit of the doubt simply based on their sex regardless of their level of experience or expertise.

Another concept that exists in the feminist literature, as well as within the women and coaching literature, is the "glass ceiling" (Lorber, 2005, p. 325). This concept works in conjunction with the stereotypes described above to limit women's experiences within the realm of coaching and elite sport. The glass ceiling is defined as "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases that prevent qualified women from advancing upward into management positions" (Mercier, 2000, p. 12). Elite coaching is one such context where the glass ceiling has significantly affected women in their attempts to gain positions as head coaches (Mercier). The glass ceiling has become somewhat crystallized due to homologous reproduction, stereotypes about women coaches, and the lack of economically viable positions for women.

Beyond the glass ceiling, androcentric coaching models that neglect communication and interpersonal skills development have further promoted the

exclusivity of the androcentric realm of coaching (Mercier & Werthner, 2001). The need for coaching models that value both female and male methods of coaching have been expressed, and in response, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) has moved to a Competency-Based Education and Training Model (Demers, 2003). The premise of the new model is that “experience does not guarantee expertise” (Demers, p. 6) and thus a new competency-based NCCP focus will make it more difficult for administrators, who for the most part are male, to “turn down the application of a woman coach by claiming that she is certified on paper only and has no experience, because certification will be proof of a specific level of expertise” (p. 6). Not only will this result in well prepared female coaches, but it may filter out the male coaches who are “paper coaches” (p. 6) who have been granted the benefit of the doubt with respect to their experience regardless of their level of expertise or education in sport coaching. The second benefit for women coaches, according to Demers, of the new competency-based NCCP program, is that it values emotions as useful in coaching. Attempting to not perpetuate the androcentric model of coaching, the new program sees the usefulness in, and promotes the importance of, interpersonal communication skills and other “so called ‘softer’ skills” (Werthner, 2005, p. 6) as valuable within the realm of coaching. In summary, the new competency-based NCCP has five core competencies: valuing, interacting, leading, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These competencies and the new program have been identified as a means by which women coaches can potentially improve their chances within the androcentric coaching domain.

*Underrepresentation and Declining Numbers of Women in Coaching*

A number of studies have addressed the lack of representation of women coaches and the trend of a decline in the numbers of women in coaching (Anderson, 2007; Demers, 2003; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Marshall, 2001a; Mercier, 2000; Mercier & Marshall, 2005; Robertson, 2002, 2004; Sagas et al., 2006; Werthner, 2005). In 2005, statistics showed that only 17% of national team coaches in Canada were women (Werthner). For the past three decades less than 2% of men's teams were or are coached by women (Kilty, 2006). Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972 in the United States, the number of women coaching women's sports in the United States has decreased from more than 90% to 42.4% (Kilty). A similar decline in the number of female coaches has been identified in Canada, where the number of female coaches has dropped to 11% in 2000 (Marshall). One reason for this decline appears to be that a greater proportion of women coaches are leaving Canada to pursue more profitable coaching positions in the United States (Anderson). Another reason would appear to be that there are significant difficulties in recruiting and then retaining women coaches (Inglis et al., 1996; Marshall; Mercier, 2001; Robertson, 2002).

Marshall (2001a) identifies the old boys club as one of the reasons that recruitment of female coaches is difficult, and suggests that "coaching is currently not a profession that is attracting the next generation of women" (p. 2). Various authors cite burnout, family conflicts, discrimination, the male dominated nature of the world of sport, the lack of role models and mentors, and the lack of economic incentives for women as reasons for women not choosing to become coaches (Anderson, 2007;

Marshall; Werthner, 2005). The following section will focus on the latter two reasons for the decline and lack of retention of women coaches.

Demers (2007) suggests that one of the most significant reasons for a shortage and/or decline in the number of female coaches is the lack of role models. Her findings state that having a “female coach does indeed encourage some female athletes to become coaches” (Demers, p. 30). According to Demers, when high performance female athletes were asked if they would consider becoming coaches, many stated that they were reluctant because they doubted their abilities and were fearful of the responsibilities of being a coach. It was suggested that perhaps social influences, such as sexism, homonegativism, and homophobia could be partially responsible for the athletes’ fears of failure and fears of being unable to meet expectations (Demers). Athletes and other potential women coaches often see the profession of coaching as a lonely path. According to Kilty (2006), various studies have discussed the necessity of role models or mentors who might be able to provide guidance to potential women coaches, as well as facilitate the networking necessary to negotiate the path towards professional development.

The lack of economically viable opportunities for careers in coaching is another factor in the declining numbers of women coaches. Women coaches have found themselves in a state where they are often attempting to manage two careers, one which makes a living wage and the other as a coach, so it is not surprising that women find themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard-place (Robertson, 2002). Three scenarios are common among women coaches: she may quit coaching due to the potential for burnout from trying to juggle two careers; she may move to the United States where there are more full-time and better paying coaching positions available; or she may settle

for the low paying Canadian coaching job where she will be paid between 75 and 81 cents for every dollar earned by male coaches (Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Mercier, 2000; Werthner, 2005). All of these economic reasons result in the lack of recruitment and retention of women in the field of coaching and according to Anderson (2007) “America’s gain is Canada’s loss” (p. 6).

#### *Suggested Solutions to Remedy the Situation for Women in Coaching*

In an attempt to remedy the current situation surrounding women in coaching three possible solutions have been identified. The first is creating full-time, salaried positions for coaches, the second is the new competency-based NCCP program, which may help develop more women coaches, and the third suggested solution is increasing the number of mentors and role models (Anderson, 2007; Demers, 2003, 2007; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; Mercier & Marshall, 2005; Werthner, 2005). According to Werthner, these solutions, to help correct the underrepresentation and declining numbers of women in coaching are “so simple and yet so seemingly hard to do in Canada” (p. 6).

Increasing the number of full time coaching positions might attract more coaches to the profession, especially because it would be seen as an economically viable career option (Werthner, 2005). Equalizing the existing gender wage gap within coaching would promote the value of women as coaches and remedy the long-standing stereotypes regarding women in the workforce and specifically within the field of sport coaching. Certainly, the more economically viable the career is, the less likely the coach will be required to juggle two careers, reducing coach burnout and drop out (Marshall, 2001; Mercier, 2000; Robertson, 2002). Canadian coaches who have moved to the United States have benefited from full-time salaries and bonuses (Robertson). According to

Shannon Miller, former national and Canadian Olympic women's hockey coach and presently a coach in the US college system, "after living there for two years I now understood the American way, so I renegotiated for a higher salary and performance rewards and a car, things like that... it is public knowledge that I make a base salary of \$80,000 and get a \$10,000 bonus if we win everything" (Robertson, p. 8). Situations like these are rare in Canadian sport and demonstrate why some of Canada's most talented women coaches are moving to the United States. Miller's story also demonstrates the difference salaried positions and personal advocacy has on the career choices that women make.

A second suggested solution to increasing the number of women coaches is based on the changes developed within the new competency-based NCCP program. Coaches will be taught the importance of interpersonal communications, social networking, negotiation skills, and political advocacy, which have all been identified as part of the solution for women's underrepresentation in the field of coaching (Demers, 2003; Marshall, 2001a, 2001b). Political advocacy is a relatively new concept within the literature on women in coaching. Marshall (2001) states that "individually we all have voices, and collectively we can make a difference" (p. 7). The author argues that it is imperative that women coaches attempt to exert their voices at the local, provincial, national, and international level and promote change with respect to women's experiences in coaching and sport. Sport, as a microcosm of the greater society, is a political arena where political advocacy can effect change with respect to policies, salaries, and equity (Marshall). Marshall also suggests that political advocacy along with

negotiation skills, if taught within coach education programs, could enable women coaches to better negotiate their working conditions.

The third proposed solution for the underrepresentation and decline in the numbers of women in coaching is the creation of mentors. Female coaches who are currently working in the sport system often identify the need for guidance and support (Marshall, 2001). Marshall states that mentors can provide friendship, support, reinforcement, and constructive criticism, which in turn can create confident and capable women coaches. She goes on to describe the Coaching Association of Canada's (CAC) newly developed long-term coaching apprenticeship program (LTAP) which provides women with a team of mentors. Demers (2007) found that athletes who have a female coach are often more encouraged to go on to become coaches, although she notes that the impact is subtle. Perhaps, as a result of the increase in the availability of mentors and role models for women in coaching, greater networking will occur and recruitment and retention rates will improve (Marshall).

In summary, the literature to date about women in coaching has focused on three main themes, the male dominated nature of the profession, the underrepresentation and actual recent decline in numbers of women coaches, and proposed solutions to the current problems facing women in coaching. Only one research article has made any mention of the experiences of lesbian elite coaches, with Kilty (2006) briefly citing homophobia, heterosexism, and negative recruitment as barriers for professional advancement and opportunities for women in coaching. She describes the commonly held belief that "if a female is a good coach, she is labelled a lesbian...the assumption is that her performance does not have as much merit because she is 'male-like'" (p. 225). In her discussion, Kilty

cites the work of Griffin (1998), and Krane and Barber (2005) as the only two articles to focus on women who identify as lesbian within the coaching realm.

### *Coaches Who Identify as Lesbian*

Krane and Barber (2005) describe the identity tensions experienced by 13 lesbian intercollegiate coaches who were not out within the sport context. They suggest that “social identity perspective has provided a strong foundation for understanding the experiences of lesbian intercollegiate coaches” (Krane & Barber, p. 81). Social identity perspective is utilized in an attempt to describe the development of social identity as a result of social categorization and self-categorization (Krane & Barber). The concepts of social mobility tactics and social change behaviours are used to demonstrate how the women coaches dealt with their lesbian identities. According to Krane and Barber, social mobility tactics involve hiding one’s sexual orientation while social change behaviours are the outward demonstration of one’s sexual orientation. Self-concept and self-worth are related to a person’s social identity and as a result 12 of the 13 participants in the Krane and Barber study remained silent about their lesbian identity thereby using social mobility tactics in an attempt to increase their social status. Social mobility is thought to “decrease the likelihood that individuals will experience discrimination, but it does not change the social status of the whole group” (Krane & Barber, p. 68). Only one of the participants identified with being out about her lesbian identity and she outwardly engaged in social change behaviours in an “attempt to present their group [lesbians] in a socially desirable manner” (Krane & Barber, p. 68). According to Krane and Barber, 12 of the 13 coaches identified the potential risks for attempting social change activities and being out within the sport context to be too great, as negative recruitment and loss of their

job might ensue. It has however been documented that many psychological consequences are associated with concealing a lesbian identity and attempting social mobility behaviours (Krane & Barber). This research study demonstrates the difficulty that the participants faced while attempting to negotiate between their social identities as a lesbian and as a coach. The proposed study will target a considerably different population of women who outwardly self identify as lesbian. The next section of this review of literature will explore the literature regarding lesbian identity development as well as the small number of studies which describe lesbian identity development within the context of sport.

### Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian Identity

Over the past 35 years homosexual identity development has been a feature within the psychological literature (Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Eliason, 1996; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Kahn, 1991; Levine, 1997; Lewis, 1984; Morris, 1997; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989). Recently researchers have begun to focus on the lesbian perspective of lesbian identity development rather than support the historical androcentric bias and absence of female participants within studies about lesbian identity. Historically the research was simply an extrapolation of gay male or homosexual identity development to lesbians (Bringaze & White, 2001; Cohen, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1996; Riemer, 1997). Lesbian identity is now approached in the literature from a standpoint that does not pathologize lesbianism (Bringaze & White).

Cass (1979) presented the first model that attempted to explain how an individual might acquire a homosexual identity. She suggests that this model was intended to be applicable to both female and male homosexuals (Cass). Cass's model proposes six

stages that an individual must progress through to acquire a homosexual identity that is fully integrated into their overall concept of self. It must be mentioned that at any point within the model if an individual is unable to negotiate and/or resolve the identity incongruence between oneself and the negative societal views of homosexuality, “identity foreclosure” (Cass, p. 220) will occur and a healthy homosexual identity will not be developed.

According to Cass (1979), homosexual identity formation begins first with the Identity Confusion stage where a person first becomes aware that lesbian and gay information has personal meaning and is perhaps relevant to their feelings and behaviours. The second stage, Identity Comparison, occurs when a person begins to feel as though they ‘may be gay or lesbian’. The thought ‘I may be gay/lesbian’ is often associated with the feeling of alienation from society and family members. The third stage, Identity Tolerance, occurs when a person begins to think that they are ‘probably lesbian or gay’ and this is accompanied by a reduction in their own personal confusion. Identity Acceptance is the fourth stage where a person begins to have a private acceptance of their identity as a lesbian or gay person. They may continue to attempt to ‘pass as straight’ thus hiding their sexual identity from heterosexual people while being able to disclose their sexual orientation to other gay and lesbian people. The fifth stage, Identity Pride, occurs when a person begins to negotiate the incongruence between the societal rejection of gays and lesbians and one’s own self-acceptance. At this stage Cass found that a homosexual person will become immersed in a lesbian/gay community and begin to value other gay and lesbian people more than heterosexuals. This immersion fuels a sense of pride. The individual might now believe that disclosing their sexual

orientation is the only viable coping mechanism. In the final stage, Identity Synthesis, a person will still have pride in their sexual identity and displeasure with the greater heterosexual population; however, at this point, they are able to integrate their gay or lesbian identity into their self-identity. At this stage Cass states that the homosexual identity formation process is complete.

This model became the foundation for the majority of research that has been conducted since 1979. Cass (1979) asserts that:

the model is presented as a broad guideline for understanding how an individual comes to adopt a homosexual identity. It is not intended that it should be true in *all* respects for *all* people since individuals and situations are inherently complex. Further, it is expected that over time, changes in societal attitudes and expectations will require change in the model (p. 235)

Cass (1979) was correct in her assumptions that modifications to her linear model of identity development would need to be made in a response to the changes in societal attitudes and expectations. The socio-political context of 2008 is significantly different from that of 1979 and thus the identity development and coming out processes experienced by lesbians and gay men are assumed to be significantly different. In conjunction with Cass's assumptions that her model would need to be modified, Sophie (1986) was among the first to suggest that a stage model for homosexual identity development might not be generalizable to the lesbian experience of sexual identity development. The model Sophie proposed and tested was a compilation of those presented by Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), Raphael (1974), Spaulding (1982), Plummer (1975) and McDonald (1982). Her model has four stages: first awareness, testing and exploration, identity acceptance, and finally identity integration. Sophie described how

the participants developed in unique geographic, socioeconomic, and socio-historical contexts and thus the model was applicable only for some. The diversity of the participants' experiences illustrated that a linear stage model might not be applicable to all participants. Finally, Sophie suggested that flexibility in developmental models, rather than linearity was necessary and that an understanding of a non-fixed identity could potentially lead to the development of a broader reaching model for lesbian identity development and a more complete understanding of that identity development process.

Chapman and Brannock (1987) proposed a model for lesbian identity development that accounted for Sophie's (1986) suggestion of an unfixed and flexible sexual identity. They suggest that lesbian identity existed "prior to a person's recognition of it" (Chapman & Brannock, p. 71). The stage model that was proposed for the achievement of a lesbian identity included five stages: same sex orientation (with no self-labeling), incongruence, self-questioning/exploration, self-identification, and choice of lifestyle. The latter stage suggests a sort of agency involved in maintaining one's lesbian orientation; however, this has not been well received in more recent research due to the nature vs. nurture, sexual orientation vs. sexual preference argument about lesbian identity. Chapman and Brannock address self-labeling as something that happens once an individual notices incongruence between the social norm of heterosexuality and their lesbian sexual orientation. They found that self-labeling as a lesbian seemed to be an event that varied significantly for each participant, especially considering some participants did not identify as lesbian. A percentage of participants in their study did not self-identify as lesbian and this potentially affects the validity of the results of the investigation but unfortunately this was not addressed in the study. Many participants

felt that labeling was required in developing a congruent identity in relation to the non-homosexual environment (Chapman & Brannock).

There has been a movement in more recent sexual identity research that suggests sexual identity can be considered and researched with the assumption that it is “transient and malleable” (D’Augelli, 1994, p. 312). According to D’Augelli, to develop a lesbian or gay identity, an individual will go through two distinct processes. First, they must realize that they are an “ex-heterosexual” (p. 313) and see themselves as separate and perhaps isolated from “the heterosexist essentialism” (p. 313). The second identity development process is the development of a new identity that is oriented and affiliated with the homosexual community (D’Augelli). This study describes sexual identity development as a complex and prolonged process that might be influenced by many social environmental factors. According to D’Augelli, the human development model was employed in the analysis as it is oriented towards developmental plasticity and a continuum of sexual identity development. Throughout the lifespan of an individual, the continuum is suggested to go from a fluid identity to a more crystallized identity. D’Augelli states that lesbians feel a need to proclaim their identity both internally and publicly and due to socio-historical and socio-political pressures, the self definition as lesbian or gay is a significantly stressful part of the identity development process.

Prior to 1987, homosexuality was part of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R). Since 1987 the experience of self-labeling has been significantly different due to current societal beliefs of homosexuality. D’Augelli (1994) suggests that in developing a model for sexual orientation identity development it is imperative to recognize the affects of heterosexism, homophobia, and old perceptions

that homosexuality was a mental illness. He goes further to suggest that a minoritized view of homosexual identity development has been widespread due to the above mentioned social pressures and these perceptions should be countered if a more complete understanding of homosexual identity development is to be possible.

Eliason (1996) developed a comprehensive critique of the existing literature on lesbian, bisexual, and gay identity developmental models, coming out models, and the essentialist vs. social constructionist debate. His critique suggests that rather than linear stage models, interdisciplinary models that focus on a participant's personal account of identity would be more accurate, information rich, and "must make sense to the people whose identities are at issue" (Eliason, p. 57).

Cox and Gallois (1996) suggest that social identity theory would provide a clear picture of the different paths of identity development that people experience because it accounts for the fact that humans do not develop in a social vacuum, and are affected by social influences. Unfortunately, this approach did not distinguish between the female and male experiences of lesbian and gay identity development and therefore did not describe lesbian identity development specifically from a lesbian standpoint (Cox & Gallois). Social identity theory is suggested in order to help leave the minoritized view of homosexual identity development behind, focusing on the process of identity development from a "group-based categorization and comparison" perspective (Cox & Gallois, p. 27).

Levine (1997) recommends that a lesbian specific model and assessment of identity development be created because lesbian identity development is inherently distinct from gay male or homosexual identity development. Unfortunately, the most

recent research still focuses on the generalized homosexual identity therefore demonstrating a gender-blind bias (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Johns & Probst, 2004). Horowitz and Newcomb recommend a multidimensional view of sexual identity and present a brief summary and critique of the older stage models, described previously in this literature review. They describe how previous research generally depicted a common sequence of four to six stages that individuals navigated through when developing their sexual identity, those being: awareness/sensitization, internalization/acceptance, disclosing, and synthesis. They also assert that group membership seems to be significant in the development of a sexual identity because, in agreement with Cox and Gallois (1996), human beings do not develop in a social vacuum (Horowitz & Newcomb).

Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) present a multidimensional viewpoint of sexual identity rather than attempting to settle the essentialist vs. social constructionist debate with respect to identity formation. They discuss the idea that new frameworks for identity development should appreciate different sexualities and support the idea that there is “no endpoint to identity development” (Horowitz & Newcomb, p. 17). They suggest “there is clearly a need for a fluid and comprehensive model of sexual identity that examines the interrelatedness of various aspects of individual identity, as well as the role of sociopolitical and historical context in identity formation” (Horowitz & Newcomb, p. 15).

A recent investigation of lesbian identity by Peterson and Gerrity (2006) examined the relationship between internalized homophobia, self-esteem, and the process of identity development. The authors mention that “an alarming void currently exists”

(Peterson & Gerrity, p. 60) with respect to research about lesbian identity and internalized homophobia. This investigation addresses the psychological distress that lesbians experience due to the internalization of the societal pressures of heterosexism and homophobia. The authors found that lesbians in the earlier stages of identity development are more likely to have internalized homophobia than those women in the later stages of identity development. Lesbians, in the later stages of identity development, had higher self-esteem than those in the earlier stages. Finally, a negative relationship was found between internalized homophobia and self-esteem (Peterson & Gerrity).

### *Coming Out Models*

There are four coming out models that illustrate the process by which lesbian identified women come out (Bringaze & White, 2001; Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Kahn, 1991; Morris, 1997). The coming out process occurs when an individual develops a lesbian identity and then proclaims it to themselves and then outwardly to others, and thereby living out and proud.

For Kahn (1991) the coming out process is not linear or universal. It may only be possible for some women, with certain personal characteristics, to reach the Identity Synthesis stage explained by Cass (1979). Family, societal attitudes towards women, and internalized homophobia, are three factors that were investigated and found to have a significant impact on a lesbian's ability to come out. Participants' fear of intolerance from family and society had a strong influence on suppressing their ability to disclose their lesbian identity. The coming out process was identified as a complex process that is affected by an individual's interactions with internal and external factors. Internalized

homophobia and the effects of homonegativism were identified as disabling factors and it is understood that until these two issues are dealt with a person cannot come out.

Morris (1997) describes the coming out process as a multidimensional process. The four dimensions of coming out are sexual identity formation, disclosure of sexual orientation to others, sexual expression or behavior, and lesbian consciousness (self in relation to the lesbian community). Sexual identity formation was included as the first dimension of the multidimensional coming out process because it was believed that alone, “coming out stage theories are not adequate reflections of lesbians’ actual experiences and do not hold up to empirical scrutiny” (Morris, p. 11). Disclosure of sexual orientation, the second dimension of the coming out process, requires lesbians to continually perform a risk assessment of their social environment, primarily because there might be negative social consequences for disclosing their sexual orientation. Such consequences can range from social disapproval to physical violence. The third dimension, sexual expression or behavior, encompasses relationships as well as sexual experiences with another females. Finally, lesbian consciousness, the fourth dimension of the coming out process, was described as the way in which a lesbian sees herself in relation to the lesbian and gay community as well as the greater social context around herself.

According to Jordan and Deluty (1998) participants reported greater self-esteem, decreased stress, and increases in positive affectivity the more freely they disclosed their sexual orientation. Participants realized that if they were out about their lesbian identity they were more likely to find social support from the lesbian/gay community and were therefore less likely to anonymously socialize. However, Jordan and Deluty questioned

the direction of the relationship that was elucidated within their results. Specifically, they questioned whether women who identified with greater self-esteem, less anxiety, and more positive affect would be more likely to self-disclose, rather than self-disclosure being the instigator causing the increase in self-esteem, decrease in anxiety, and overall positive affect. Another finding suggested that the longer a woman self-labels as a lesbian the more likely and freely she will disclose her sexual orientation and thus come out.

In an attempt to identify what might aid in the coming out process, Bringaze and White (2001) surveyed leaders from *The Gay and Lesbian Address Book* which is a text compiled by Out magazine with the contact information for 3500 gay and lesbian people who are identified as leaders in business, arts, politics, and activism. Five types of coming out support were identified: association, self-help, counselling, religion/spirituality, and family. Association was the act of seeking out other gay and lesbian people in an effort to mitigate feelings of alienation while creating a sense of self-validation (Bringaze & White). Participants felt that self-help resources on the internet and in texts would help with feelings of confusion and alienation about their sexual orientation. Counselling was another method that was suggested to aid in the normalization of homosexual identity and the coming out process. According to Bringaze and White, lesbians are likely to seek psychological therapy two to four times more often than heterosexual people, and gay men and lesbian individuals will seek counselling at some point in their lifetime. Many lesbians who alluded to having a difficult coming out process said they felt significant tension because of their conservative evangelical families and upbringing and consequently very few participants cited religion as a

support factor. Sixty-five percent of participants stated that family acceptance was another source of support during their coming out process. According Bringaze and White, these five support factors were proposed as necessary for the participants to successfully navigate the hostile social environment surrounding lesbian sexual orientation and enabled them to come out.

### *Lesbian Identity Development in the Sport Context*

Four studies have addressed lesbian identity within sport and two studies have focused specifically on lesbian coaches (Cohen, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1996; Riemer, 1997). Griffin found that the hostile environment within sport perpetuates sexism, homonegativity, and heterosexism, all of which have a significant and deleterious effect on lesbian athletes and coaches. Krane found that the negative effects of an individual internalizing homonegativity are seen in their mental states and behaviours, which consequently disables the ability to develop a healthy lesbian identity and live out and proud.

Krane (1996) reviewed the research literature regarding lesbians and applied the findings to the sport context. A framework to promote greater understanding about lesbians, the socialization process, and the sport context was presented. According to Krane, lesbians are socialized within a heterosexist and homonegative society and sport is simply a microcosm of that greater social context. A lesbian must negotiate her own personal reactions to societal homonegativism and heterosexism, as well as the magnified forms which exist in the context of sport (Krane). Negative stereotypes, beliefs, and assumptions about lesbians are constructed, reinforced, and perpetuated by socializing agents such as an individual's peers, family, friends, religious organization, and mass

media. Sport, an androcentric, heterosexist, homonegative, social construction also has its own socialization agents and their accompanying social controls, such as the lesbian label, lesbian coaches being fired or discriminated against in employment situations, the threat or actual loss of sponsorship funding, and the impacts of negative recruitment (Griffin, 1998; Krane).

It is often difficult for lesbians to negotiate the hostile environment, whether it be in sport or not, and avoid internalized homophobia. Some women attempt to 'pass' as heterosexual, choosing to hide their authentic self (Griffin, 1998). According to Krane (1996) the emotional and psychological consequences of hiding one's authentic self in an attempt to avoid external homonegativity, or as a result of internalized homophobia, may result in some or all of the following mental states and behaviours:

depression, feelings of inferiority, self-defeating behaviours, decreases in self-esteem, under or over achievement, physical or mental health problems, alcohol or drug abuse, distrust, loneliness, self-hatred, shame, anger, and development of defensive strategies...tolerance of discrimination against lesbians, discomfort with obvious or open lesbians, and possessing negative images of lesbians (p. 242)

In the most extreme cases of internalized homophobia suicide may occur. The social and psychological consequences listed above occur as a result of continual exposure to homonegativity, and developing a positive and healthy lesbian identity is often a difficult endeavour for most people (Krane). She suggests that in order to counter personal negative reactions to homonegativism and heterosexism an individual needs to be socialized within a positive and supportive environment with the presence of lesbian role models who do not fit negative societal perceptions and stigmatized stereotypes. She asserts that,

currently, this type of sport environment appears to be rare; few examples of positive climates and positive role models for lesbians are seen in competitive sport settings. Rather, traditional sport creates an environment that makes it unlikely that a positive lesbian athletic identity will develop (Krane, p. 244).

In another recent study on lesbian identity, Riemer (1997) interviewed 24 women who identified as lesbian within a recreational softball context. The purpose of the investigation was to identify whether the recreational softball environment provided social support and promoted a woman's ability to be out about her sexual orientation within that specific sport context. A five stage lesbian identity formation model was proposed, and the stages were preconformist, conformist, post conformist, lesbian conformist, and lesbian post conformist (Riemer). Importantly, this investigation demonstrated and supported Krane's (1996) assertions that a positive lesbian identity could develop within a supportive context and in conjunction with visible lesbian role models and social support. Participants in the investigation stated that the softball environment was a comfortable environment where they could be out and "be themselves" (Riemer, p. 105). The recreational softball context has been deemed "the single greatest organizing force in lesbian society" (Riemer, 1997, p. 89). This historical relationship between lesbians and softball began as a result of the post-war 1950's trend where lesbians continued to play baseball and softball even after their heterosexual teammates returned to their domestic gender roles, as wives and mothers.

One year after Riemer (1997), Griffin (1998) proposed a model for lesbian coaches' identity management strategies. This model describes a continuum of strategies that ranged from a coach being completely closeted to being publically out about their lesbian identity. The six points on the continuum were being completely closeted,

passing as a heterosexual, covering lesbian identity, implicitly out, explicitly out, and finally publically out.

Many women coaches find that they cannot come out because it is too high risk within the homonegative environment of sport. According to Griffin (1998), one woman said that “being a coach was too important for me, and I did not want to forfeit the opportunity to do the work I love” (p. 134). This statement illustrates that many coaches will stay in the closet and not disclose their lesbian identity because they love their profession and could not imagine their lives without it. The questions that coaches ask themselves with respect to coming out within the sport context are “how much of myself do I need to hide and with whom?” (p. 135) and “what are the consequences of people knowing I’m a lesbian” (p. 135).

Griffin (1998) describes lesbian coaches’ identity management strategies as existing on a continuum and within significantly different stages. She describes the first stage or point on the spectrum to be when a lesbian coach is ‘completely closeted’, concealing their lesbian identity from everyone in the sport context. At the next stage, ‘passing as a heterosexual’, a coach will intentionally portray a heterosexual image so that people perceive her as a heterosexual. The third stage, ‘covering lesbian identity’ occurs when a coach decides to stop outwardly promoting a false heterosexual image in an attempt to sway other’s perceptions. Often coaches in this stage will avoid speaking about their partners or personal relationships so that others do not see evidence of their lesbianism. The fourth stage on the identity management continuum model is being ‘implicitly out’. At this stage a lesbian coach does not label herself outwardly as a lesbian but rather assumes that others are aware of her identity. A coach will not hide her

identity or partner, but she will refrain from explicitly calling herself a lesbian. The fifth stage, being 'explicitly out', occurs when a coach tells a select few people within the sport context that she is a lesbian. This is often a turning point because coming out explicitly carries the threat of substantial consequences. At the point when a coach has selected a few people whom she will tell about her authentic self they are often also lesbian. The final stage on the identity management strategy continuum is being 'publically out'. This occurs when a coach reveals her lesbian identity to everyone in the sport context. At this point the coach feel entitled to live her life as she pleases, thus 'out and proud'.

Griffin's (1998) model describes the different degrees to which some coaches feel they are able to be out about their lesbian identity within the sport context. This model has made a significant contribution to the literature surrounding lesbian coaches and sport because it presents a succinct description of how some coaches have been able to cope with the homonegative hostile social climate in sport.

A study by Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield (2007) focused on identifying and describing the enabling factors of healthy lesbian identity in high performance coaches. It was based on the Krane (1996), Riemer (1997), and Griffin (1998) models described above. The three enabling factors that emerged were: social support from sources outside of the context of sport, factors within the sport context itself, and the coaches' employment environment (Cohen et al.).

According to Cohen et. al (2007) social support came in the form of being emotionally supported by friends, family, partners, and role models and was identified as being influential in developing self-esteem and negating internalized homophobia. The

context of sport was described as an enabling factor for healthy lesbian identity development because it provided a context for the participants to develop self-confidence and self-efficacy, as a result of their athletic success and in concert with supportive interactions with athletes, coaches, and lesbian role models. The women explained how they were proactive about creating an employment environment that was supportive and celebrated their lesbian identity and as such they made their sexual orientation part of the job interview process. All of the participants stated that they were confident enough in their coaching abilities that if an employment environment was not supportive enough or did not accept their sexual orientation openly, they would seek employment elsewhere rather than conceal their lesbian identity. According to the findings these three enabling factors allowed the participants to develop healthy lesbian identities. This study demonstrated that it was possible for six lesbian high performance coaches to negotiate the heterosexist, sexist, and homonegative context of sport and develop healthy lesbian identities rather than internalized homophobia.

#### Summary

Sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativism have been described as disabling factors for lesbian identity development and coming out processes (Krane, 1996). The context of sport is rife with many disabling factors for women coaches (Griffin, 1997; Lorber, 2005). Despite this and according to one study a small group of high performance coaches, who identify as lesbian, have been able to negotiate these barriers, develop a healthy lesbian identity, and outwardly present their authentic self within the context of sport (Cohen, et.al). The aim of the present study was to develop an

in-depth understanding of how, in the homophobic environment of sport, high performance coaches, who identify as lesbian, experience being out.

### CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

The purpose of the current study was to identify and describe the essence of the experience of being an out lesbian in elite coaching. Consistent with the tradition of phenomenology this investigation attempted to describe in depth the essence of that experience as described by eight high performance coaches, who outwardly present their lesbian identity. The following research question was the focus of the current study: what is the essence of the experience of being an out lesbian in elite coaching? This project met the ethical standards of the Tri-council policy statement and as such, the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board approved the current project on June 6, 2008.

#### Participants

Eight participants were selected via a criterion base purposeful sampling method followed by snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). The criteria were as follows: first, participants had to self-identify as a woman who outwardly presents her healthy lesbian identity in all aspects of her life, and second she must coach or have coached high performance sport within the past 5 years. All of the participants had come out as lesbian prior to entering the field of elite coaching and were out while coaching at the elite level. A healthy lesbian identity was defined as containing six commonly experienced but uniquely dynamic features: self-esteem, pride in one's sexual orientation, pride in one's partner and/or relationships, self-confidence, maturity, and self-efficacy (Cohen, 2007). High performance sport was defined as ranging from varsity level to national level sport.

The eight participants in this study were all certified at a minimum of Level 3 in the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). The youngest coach was 30 years

old while the oldest was 43 years old. The mean age of the participants was 37. At the time of being interviewed, four of the eight women were coaching while four had left coaching. The eight participants coached the sports of soccer, rugby, volleyball, basketball, and hockey at the varsity and national level. Five of the participants coached full-time, and three of the participants coached part-time, holding down a second job outside of coaching as their main source of income. Of the participants interviewed, three were national and Olympic level coaches while the remaining five were varsity level coaches.

### Epistemology

The questions of who can be a knower and what can be known have evolved since the emergence of sport feminism in the 1970's and 1980's, changing the direction and type of research being done with and about women. These changes have transpired due to the issues of gender and women's experiences being placed as the central focus of research, and an adoption of the "understanding that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups" (Hall, 2005, p. 50). In the case of sport, the powerful groups are white, heterosexual men; therefore, women's experiences have historically been excluded. As a result of consciousness raising during the 1970's and 1980's, scholarly research was exposed as being 'gender blind' and androcentric, which means that men's experiences were explored and documented, and women were not included as subjects of study or producers of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). As a result, feminist epistemology developed, and it will be elaborated upon as it was employed in the current investigation. It must be mentioned however that the researcher has opted to be true to

the “original interventionist distinctness of academic sport feminism” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 201) and believes in the “original emancipatory politics” (Hargreaves, p. 191) of the feminist epistemology wherein it provides a voice to women in an effort to facilitate social change. As a result, the researcher outwardly rejects what Hall (2005) calls post-feminist and anti-feminist sentiments as well as the post-modern approach which has been seen as the reason for “an observable loosening of links between theory and praxis” (Hargreaves, p. 190).

A great deal of the psychological research according to Hall (2005) done ‘on’ and ‘about’ heterosexual women and lesbians in the realm of sport has been performed by gender blind researchers and research methodologies. The researcher of the current investigation identifies as a feminist and brings that orientation to the study in an effort to accurately present women’s experiences as high performance coaches who are out about their lesbian identity. The researcher ascribes to a feminist epistemology that values women as knowers of their own unique experiences in and through sport as well as creators of knowledge about those experiences. A feminist epistemology and feminist theoretical orientation served as the platform upon which the phenomenological methodology and semi-structured interview method was based. This epistemological orientation also informs the lens with which the researcher interacted with the participants of the investigation, as well as the approach that was taken to analyse the interview data. In an effort not to promote or reproduce the patriarchal and androcentric hierarchy that has historically and traditionally been seen in the research process and described as the researcher vs. ‘object of research’ hierarchy, the researcher worked with

her participants to develop an in-depth understanding of the essence of their experiences as out lesbian coaches.

Feminist epistemology is divided into two major streams of thought. The first and more historical position asserts that only female researchers with their distinct female consciousness could perform feminist research utilizing a feminist epistemology (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). The second stream of thought allows any researcher to employ a feminist epistemology as long as they bring a feminist orientation and devout dedication to promoting equity and equality for women and other marginalized groups to their research. Sport researchers employing this modern feminist epistemology must strive to reduce the inequalities and inequities within sport and the greater social context based on gender, sex, sexual orientation, and other social categories and identities. It is also understood that women's experiences and voices must be placed at the center and forefront of each investigation so that social change that may occur can benefit women (Lorber, 2005). Hall (2005) warns that:

unless feminist sport scholars (of both the second and third wave) find better ways to contribute to feminist scholarship in general and women's studies in particular, and at the same time influence the practitioners and policy makers of women's sport, we and our work are in danger of becoming irrelevant (p. 58).

The purpose of feminist epistemology and feminist research is to promote social change to better the status of women and to present relevant research about women and for women. For these reasons, a feminist epistemology was employed for the current investigation.

## Methodology

In an attempt to describe how high performance coaches who identify as lesbian experienced being out in the sport context a phenomenological framework was employed. Phenomenology allowed the researcher to describe and understand the essence of a phenomenon from “the actor’s own perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 68) and as gathered from the participants’ retrospective accounts.

To effectively produce this phenomenology, the researcher allowed the retrospective accounts of the participants to speak for themselves. Therefore, the researcher had to bracket her preconceived notions of the phenomenon to the best of her abilities and state her biases (Crotty, 2006). Succinctly, phenomenology requires that a researcher put aside her preconceived notions of a phenomenon and allow the participants to describe their experiences in such a way that the researcher is experiencing, understanding, and rediscovering the phenomenon through the retrospective accounts provided by the participants (Crotty, 2006). Setting aside one’s biases, conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews that utilize open-ended questions, and finally using external coders to protect the trustworthiness of data analysis process are some of the features which were undertaken to ensure that the principle investigator adequately bracketed her preconceptions and biases

### Method of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews that utilized open-ended questions followed by probing questions were used to create a dialogue between the researcher and the participants (refer to Appendix A). The interviews took place at a time and location that was comfortable and convenient for the participants. A pilot interview was conducted so

that the interview questions could be tested and the researcher's interview techniques could be critiqued prior to actual data collection. One interview was conducted with each participant. With the permission of the participants the interviews were tape-recorded and then later transcribed verbatim.

The interview questions were developed based on the literature about women in coaching, lesbian identity development, and the socio-historical and socio-political pressures that affect lesbians in high performance sport (Barber & Krane, 2007; Cohen, 2007; Cook, 2007; Demers, 2006; Griffin, 1998; Krane 1996; Krane & Barber 2005; Lenskyj, 2003; Riemer, 1997). The interviews began with open-ended questions about previous sport experiences and other more general questions which were used to develop a rapport with the participants. The primary question that was then asked of the participants was "how do you experience being an out lesbian coach in the high performance sport?"

This style of data collection allowed the participants to reveal the salient points about their retrospective experiences as coaches who outwardly present a healthy lesbian identity. Throughout the interview the researcher asked the participants whether they had any additional comments to add that might not have been prompted by the open-ended questions. This process allowed the participants to share any other information that they felt was relevant to the discussion of coaching as a woman and a lesbian.

#### Data Analysis

All of the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were then distributed to two external coders who were experienced in qualitative data analysis as well as knowledgeable about the world of women and sport. The researcher utilized the

help of these external coders to ensure and protect the trustworthiness of the data analysis process. The data were analyzed and coded using descriptive and interpretive codes. Descriptive codes are words or quotations which are taken directly from the transcript and interpretive codes are words ascribed by the researcher and external coders to the thoughts, meanings, and feelings that are revealed within the transcripts (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995).

Once the data had been coded all of the codes were entered into an MS-excel spread sheet. Both interpretive and descriptive codes were then combined with their accompanying quotation page reference numbers. From the MS-excel spread sheet it was possible to inductively develop themes based on the 760 codes. The codes were then grouped with similar topics, ideas, and experiences shared by the participants and captured within the transcripts and this resulted in the elucidation of the six major themes.

### The Researcher as the Instrument

It is important for researchers to state their biases and present themselves as transparent so that the data can speak for itself. Phenomenology strives to allow the essence of the participants' experiences with a certain phenomenon to be exposed without great interference by researcher biases (Patton, 2002). One cannot completely eliminate one's biases but in an attempt to be transparent it will be useful for you, the reader, to know a little about me, the researcher. I the researcher, the instrument, performed the inductive phenomenological data analysis process and I identify as: a radical feminist, a womyn, a lesbian, an activist, a partner, a daughter, a sister, an athlete, a coach, a medical student. I am passionate about feminism and strive to promote equity and equality for all

people. To this research I bring these orientations, these world views and their accompanying biases. With the help of my supervisor and mentors I have been able to conduct this research using a semi-structured interview guide and general probing questions such as “tell me a bit more about your experience” and thus protect the trustworthiness of the data collection process. It was imperative that external coders be involved in the data coding and analysis process to ensure its trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

The data were organized under six themes: sexism, lesbophobia, the old boys' club in sport, acknowledgement and positive reinforcement, the supportive feminist network, and the nature of the job. Within each of the six themes were multiple sub-themes that illustrated the essence of the participants' experiences being out lesbians in elite coaching.

### Sexism

Within the first major theme of sexism four sub-themes emerged those being: lack of respect for women's sports, economic inequality, maleness as an advantage in the male sport world, and the underestimation and resentment of female coaches based on their sex. All of the women coaches used similar language when they discussed the discrimination that they experienced on a daily basis and they perceived this as being a significant barrier to professional advancement.

#### *Lack of Respect for Women's Sports*

Each of the women coaches also stated that they were exposed to sexist language and experienced many situations where their athletic directors and/or members of their athletic departments belittled women's sports and relegated it to the arena of being superfluous in comparison to male sports. Often women's teams would be called "girls hockey" or "girls rugby" when in fact the athletes were national level adult female teams. All of the participants said such language demeaned the athleticism and status of female athletes. The coaches also said they regularly experienced situations where either their athletic director or members of their athletic department put down women's sports and stated, often explicitly, that they were less important than male athletics.

Debbie described a time in her coaching career when she was attempting to build a women's hockey program "from the ground up" and found herself without any support because her athletic director believed that women's sports were unimportant and as such he assumed it would not bring in enough revenue to be sustainable. Debbie's reply was "okay, well women are used to paying to play and they are going to continue to pay to play then because I want to start a women's hockey program". Debbie believed that every institution in Canada should be able to offer women's hockey. Despite her athletic director, Debbie did not give up and went on to develop a program although her athletes had to pay to play. Similar scenarios were experienced by the other seven coaches in this study where they found themselves battling for women's sport to be seen as legitimate.

#### *Economic Inequality*

Whenever the coaches in this study won a battle to have their teams seen as legitimate members of their institution's athletic department, they still experienced significant economic inequality, both for their athletic teams and themselves as coaches. The coaches said there were often little or no financial resources allocated to their team and their athletes were not awarded athletic scholarships equal to that of their male counterparts. All of the eight coaches spoke of the severe lack of funding for their teams while they watched their male colleagues purchase new uniforms, supplies, and providing scholarships for their teams on a yearly basis. They said that it often appeared that there was simply no money left over to be spent on their teams after the men's teams had been funded.

For the eight coaches in this study, a significant wage gap existed between themselves and their male colleagues who, they said, often held equal or lesser

qualifications and level of NCCP coach certifications. It was evident that the coaches often had to struggle financially to live out their dream of being a full-time coach in Canada. For example, Jill had been coaching for a number of years and then realized one day that “the assistant football coach, who was a physical education student, was making the same salary” as she was, although she was a certified, trained, and experienced full-time coach. When she brought the issue up with her athletic director she then discovered that there were athletic bursaries at her institution which were supposed to be spread equally amongst the varsity teams for the purpose of recruiting athletes. In a complete state of frustration, Jill stated that she “found out that \$25,000 went to hockey, \$25,000 went to football, \$15,000 went to men’s basketball, \$5,000 went to women’s basketball, and then her team received \$500.00”. She wrote numerous letters in an effort to expose the economic inequality that was occurring at her institution, and made it public “because it was supposed to be public knowledge.” Unfortunately, she received no response from her institution.

All of the coaches discussed how their first coaching jobs were unpaid volunteer positions and according to Jane “there were few jobs and not too many where you get paid to coach full time”. As a direct result of this economic inequality, Annie took a coaching job in the United States. In Canada she had held two jobs in order to support her love of coaching and that simply became too difficult. She stated “I wanted to coach and yet I had to have a full time job so that I could live”. She went on to say:

Title IX in the United States insured that men and women’s athletic programs get treated equally, more or less, at academic universities, so I ended up moving to the US so I could coach hockey for a living and not have to hold down two jobs.

*Maleness as an Advantage in the Male Sport World*

The women coaches described how being male would have provided them with a great deal more advantages in the sport world which they identified as being male dominated. All eight of the women coaches stated that their sex and gender presented a barrier to professional advancement at multiple points in their careers.

Five of the coaches commented on the sexist hiring process that went on, with males frequently being chosen over women even when they had the same qualifications and certifications. Laurie described some of the challenges she faced because she was a woman coach:

It was a very male dominated field so it was hard to break in at that level as a female coach and I remember there were a lot of challenges. There were the male coaches who decided who got to do level three coaching courses. They really wanted someone like themselves ... like attracts like and that was what happened...men selecting men.

She went on to tell a story about how one of her male colleagues was chosen for a particular coaching course and she was overlooked even though she had the same qualifications. "I guess in my mind, his maleness and being one of the boys gave him an advantage and in a way, he got credit for being a man".

*Underestimated and Resented*

The eight participants in this study felt that they were underestimated and resented because they were female. Being underestimated meant that the participants were not seen as knowledgeable with respect to sport and coaching. As a result they felt they needed to constantly be proving themselves as capable varsity and national level coaches. Often when the coaches did speak up and present what they did in fact know about coaching and sport they were verbally accosted and consequently resented by their male

colleagues. The participants felt as though their male colleagues resented their knowledge because the male coaches would either outwardly “talk down and insult female coaches on the whole” or ignore and isolate them.

Jane spoke about how “you need a very thick skin to be a coach to deal with that [being constantly underestimated]. You have to be a special individual to want to coach and then continue coaching. You will get rewarded, but you will also get shit on by others in sport”. She said that she often felt the comments and discriminatory remarks were fuelled by resentment, particularly when her team was doing well, because the male coaches would feel threatened by her success. When her team was not doing well, she said “they will be like ‘oh, she doesn’t know what she’s doing’ but if it with a male coach it would be the players’ fault not the coach”.

Gwen, who coached a male volleyball team, explained that “at the first athletics department meeting one of the men stood up and said, ‘the women’s meeting is down the hall’ and I said, ‘well actually I am here because I am coaching men’s volleyball”. Gwen went on to give an example of the type of interactions she had with the male volleyball coaches in her division:

When they realized that we were a serious team and were beating all of their teams then all of a sudden they started making excuses for the fact that we would beat them...excuses as to why a team lead by a woman could beat a team lead by a man.

Not only was she underestimated and made to feel like an outsider because of her sex but her male peers blatantly resented her because she was knowledgeable and successful.

In terms of coach education and coaching clinics, the women coaches found they were often the only women, unless they had the opportunity to attend a women’s only

coaching clinic or the National Coaching School for Women. Debbie remembers one of her experiences in a formal coach education setting:

At one of the coaching clinics that I went to I was the only woman sitting in a room full of guys and a lot of guys would not even allow me to present the idea that I had for a drill. Actually a pro hockey player's dad was one of the first people that stood up for me and said 'hang on a second here, we are going to ask Debbie what her thoughts are on this' He actually brought it back to me because another guy kept cutting me off. And I was taking my intermediate coaching level at the clinic so I did know what I was talking about.

In summary, sexism presented itself on a global level in the lives of the eight coaches and negatively impacted their experiences in coaching. The participants experienced a severe lack of respect for women's sports, economic inequality, while they saw maleness as an advantage in the sport world, and were underestimated and resented by their male colleagues.

### Lesbophobia

The second major theme that emerged from the data was lesbophobia which was characterized by two sub-themes, social perceptions of lesbians and the coach's defence against lesbophobia. Lesbophobia is the term given to homophobia specifically directed at lesbians rather than male homosexuals. The participants felt that they were affected by negative societal perceptions of lesbians and found themselves being labelled as "social deviants" which resulted in feelings of being dehumanized. The coaches discussed how they wished people would just "get to know you as a person rather than as your sexuality or just as the lesbian coach". The participants also discussed how they had to defend themselves against homophobic and more specifically lesbophobic people in their lives such as athletic directors, athletes, athletes' parents, and their community. They also had to contend with multiple forms of lesbophobic discrimination such as negative

recruitment, being presented by the media in a negative light, and having to defend their relationships with their partners who were often rejected as legitimate partners because of the heterosexist societal beliefs that they encountered.

### *Social Perceptions of Lesbians*

All of the coaches in this study stated that they believed athletes, coaches, and many individuals inside and outside of sport suffered from a severe lack of exposure to lesbian people and one coach said that this often resulted in “closed minded athletes and parents which in turn resulted in homophobic attitudes”. They each spoke vividly of how they felt dehumanized, and, as lesbians, treated as social deviants. Annie explained what it was like being an out lesbian coach in elite sport:

My entire life is, on a day to day basis, like hunting season. I am like a deer running through the woods during hunting season. That is the best example I can give you. When your team wins you are a target. When you are a strong woman, and you win, then you are an even bigger target. When you are a strong woman that wins and you are an out lesbian then you are one of the biggest targets that you can be in the sporting world. I put up with a tremendous amount of abuse from people, other coaches specifically, as well as parents that are opposed to a gay woman who is coaching young women. Not the parents of the kids on my team but the other parents that are in the stands – they yell very rude things at me while I’m coaching.

She went on to explain that many parents are opposed to her coaching young girls because they believe that being a lesbian makes her unfit to do so. Several of the participants explained that there is a widely held belief that lesbians are sexual predators, and, as a result, all eight coaches expressed a fear that they might be accused of being inappropriate with their athletes. As a result they consciously avoided their athletes’ locker-rooms unless all of their athletes were dressed. If they needed to get something from the locker-room they would knock on the door and have an athlete pass it to them

while they stood outside. Six of the eight coaches used similar phrasing when they described how they had to protect themselves from wrongful accusations, sexual assault accusations, and other sorts of accusations that seemed to go along with societal perceptions of lesbians. Jane joked about how she would never allow herself to be alone with any of their athletes “firstly for liability reasons, and secondly because I did not have an office.” Debbie explained her point of view with a more serious tone:

I forbid my staff to date athletes and of course I am very, very, very cautious about things, for example if I have to go into the dressing-room then somebody else is going to go with me. It is never me in the room alone with them. This is common sense.

Jill spoke about how she wished that the athletes, coaches, and the athletic director at her institution would simply get to know her as a person first rather than relegate her “to nothing more than just a lesbian or a social deviant.” She described how coming out as lesbian “was just like an awareness of who I was and am as a person and as a human in this world”. She felt that the lesbophobia that she experienced from the people around her was an attempt to take that “human part away from me”.

Laurie expressed a similar experience and described how terrible it felt when she was called in to her athletic director’s office to deal with a complaint letter against her, which was based solely on her being a lesbian and fuelled by lesbophobia. She told the story of “getting a letter from the director after the season was over saying that there were complaints. The complaint had centered on athletes complaining that I brought my ‘partner’, in quotation marks, on the road trips and she spent the night in my room”. Laurie knew that it was common practice for coaches to bring their partners, wives, husbands on the road with them, and considered this a normal event to bring her partner. She believed that it was because she was a lesbian that they made an issue out of it. Her

athletic director did not support her when she spoke with the athletes about the complaints that they had made. She described how she had a very positive experience coaching elsewhere when she was single and the “only difference with the current position was that I now had a partner.” Being an out lesbian had a negative impact on her coaching experience and she believed it was because of the lesbophobic societal views and opinions that were shared by those around her. Societal perceptions about lesbians impacted these coaches in a negative manner and each participant had multiple stories about lesbophobic events in their lives within the context of sport coaching.

#### *Defending against lesbophobia*

The participants identified multiple situations where they needed to defend themselves against lesbophobic athletes, athletic directors, parents, and community members. They often experienced what they called negative recruitment where a coach from another team would recruit athletes by saying disparaging things related to their sexual orientation. The participants also discussed situations where the media would often ask inappropriate and insulting questions and make lesbophobic comments. Finally, heterosexism forced the participants to continually defend the legitimacy of their relationship with their partners.

Six of the eight women coaches said that they had significant trouble with athletes on their team being lesbophobic. One of the coaches described how some of her athletes were extremely lesbophobic with one another. She stated that her “athletes will not shower in front of each other... we had an issue a couple of years ago when there were out lesbian athletes on the team and one of the girls objected to rooming with them”. Jane

went on to describe how she handled the situation. She said she had to defend herself and her lesbian athletes:

We did talk and I said don't flatter yourself. Just because she is gay doesn't mean that she wants to sleep with you or that she is even attracted to you. I can tell you right now, she is not.

She said it was an opportunity to discuss discrimination with her athletes and in doing so found out that many of the athletes had homophobic and lesbophobic parents. She wondered whether "the athletes internalized their parent's lesbophobic perceptions?"

One of the participants described a situation that occurred prior to a public national sport event where the head of her national sport organization told her to "wear a skirt and bring a male escort". She said, at the time, "I did agree to not take my partner, which now, ten years later, I would never agree to". Annie went on to say "there is a point where you are not willing to sell your soul to have that volunteer job". She spoke up, wore pants, and decided to be extremely out regardless of the negative consequences. As a result, the media engaged in a full-blown lesbophobic attack, printing comments saying "Annie the dyke is coaching a national team and some people do not want an out lesbian in her position". Annie also stated:

The sickest part of all this was that the media would ask me if I was sleeping with any of my players or if I was in the locker-room with them while they were showering... I kept saying to them 'well I'm coaching against all men coaches so are you asking them if they are sleeping with their players or if they are in the locker-room when their female athletes are showering... I bet you are not' and they did say 'no we are not'.

She was not the only coach to have had difficulties with the media. Four of the other women coaches said they experienced a battle with the media. They found themselves having to hold media conferences to counter the comments made by the media regarding their image as talented coaches and good citizens. Some of the coaches even had to bring

in letters of reference to vouch for their abilities and moral principles because the media portrayed them as sexual predators unfit to coach women's athletic teams. They added that they received little help from their athletic directors in dealing with the negative media.

All of the participants stated that they were married or in a long term relationship with their partners and described a specific form of lesbophobia which resulted in their partners being rejected as a legitimate significant other. The participants described how their colleagues, directors, and other members of the athletic community often ignored their partners, did not recognize them as a legitimate spouse, or outwardly rejected their presence at certain events. Annie defended herself against the lesbophobic response she received from her national sport organization's director when she announced she was getting married to her partner.

I walked into his office and told him that I was getting married. I said, "I just want you to know". I knew that it was going to get out and so I told him. "I am just letting you know that I am going to Canada to get married". He almost passed out and the only thing that came out of his mouth was, "are you having a press conference?"... Are you kidding me, he was asking if I was having a press conference to announce that I was getting married to another woman and I laughed and I said, "no, I am not having a press conference thank you very much". I then left his office because he was so white and looked like he was going to pass out.

In summary, lesbophobia is a societal pressure that negatively impacted the participants' experiences of being out lesbian coaches. The women coaches in this study described how they were portrayed as sexual deviants, made to feel dehumanized, and often relegated to nothing more than a sexual orientation.

### The Old Boys' Club in Sport

The third major theme that emerged from the data was the old boys' club which is characterized by a group of men and boys who are automatically members of an exclusive club based on their sex. The three sub-themes within this theme were: homologous reproduction, male masculinity threatened by outspoken women coaches, and women being purposefully excluded, isolated, and having their power undermined by men within the domain of sport.

#### *Homologous Reproduction*

The participants described how being female resulted in being overlooked for job opportunities, professional advancement, and coach education clinics whereas their male peers were more likely to be selected by male athletic director. Four of the eight participants specifically used the term homologous reproduction when they spoke about how men would choose to develop the coaching skills of other men and foster their professional development rather than that of women coaches. The participants also described how their unique and perhaps more collaborative coaching styles limited their professional advancement because their male athletic directors would choose a more "male authoritative coaching style" as Erin stated. The participants described how, from their experiences, men were more likely to hire other men into decision making positions in sport and thus limit the number of opportunities for women coaches.

All eight of the coaches said that their male colleagues were invited more often to coach education sessions and professional development conferences. One of the coaches explained how coaching "is a very male dominated field and it was hard to break into it as a woman". She went on to describe how she felt being a woman impeded her

professional development because male coaches and the athletic director at her university selected young men to attend the coaching clinics rather than young women:

What they really wanted was men like themselves... like attracts like and that was what happened there ... and I knew I wasn't going to get that support as long as there was an alternative that was like *them*, male

A number of the coaches also discussed how they were "passed up for coaching positions" citing male athletic directors recruiting male coaches regardless of whether there were qualified women coaches who applied for the positions. Penny said "being a woman in an all boys' club in an all boys' world, you know what I mean, is already difficult, but I think that being a lesbian made it even more scary". She said "I was never invited to the departmental coach meetings and was never called and told that I would not be continuing as the assistant women's varsity coach". Penny was an assistant coach at the time and the man who had been coaching the team for the past 15 years had been fired. Penny laughed as she said "oh well, it would have been nice to have been told by the athletic director that there was a position opening for head coach" but instead the athletic director went ahead and hired a male coach.

Penny's story is just one of the many examples that were provided by the participants where they felt that men would often decide to hire other men rather than look to the available and qualified women coaches to fill head coaching positions. Homologous reproduction had a negative impact on the participants' experiences being out lesbian coaches because they found that men were more interested in developing other men from a coach education/professional development standpoint as well as hiring them into coaching positions instead of looking to eligible women.

The coaches also noted that the norm with respect to coaching styles was a “male authoritative coaching style” rather than a collaborative holistic style. Several of the coaches said this limited their ability to gain access to opportunities for professional advancement within their departments and sport organizations. The coaches in this study spoke about how they believed women coached differently than men. Erin explained that not only was she not male, which excluded her from many professional advancement opportunities, but her coaching style was ‘different’ which further isolated her from the homologous reproduction process that was occurring in her athletics department. Erin remembered an athlete who came up to her prior to her leaving the athletics department:

I saw the kid after school and she came up to me and she said, ‘I didn’t realize what kind of coach you were until I had a different coach and then I realized that it had become more about the game and it became less about us.

Erin went on to describe how she felt badly leaving the women’s rugby team because “when I had to leave, or rather when they replaced me with a male coach, he took over and I do think that it is different for a male coach...they may not have the same sensitivities to what is needed”. She explained how the athletes were devastated and felt like complete failures at the end of that season when they had lost. A year before that, when Erin had been coaching and the team had lost a game or did not perform well they did not feel like complete failures because there was more to their sport experience than winning which was not the case with the new coach. Erin called the new coach’s style the “win at all costs style and philosophy”.

Jill described a coaching style that was similar to Erin’s however she said she found it exceedingly difficult to find different styles of coaching beyond the “emotionless authoritative” so-called male style of coaching. Jill stated that she “expected a lot from

my athletes, poor little things” and that she used a more collaborative style of coaching which focused on problem solving and facilitating intrinsic motivation within her athletes. She said that having this style impeded her from being selected for coach education and professional development opportunities because her athletic director selected male coaches with more ‘traditional’ or authoritative styles. Annie explained her coaching style by saying that “of course I am about excellence, but I am not about winning at all costs”. She states that “it is very different, if you are about excellence it does not mean the same thing as winning at all costs. I am very much into the holistic approach to coaching and human development”. The participants identified that without the win at all costs authoritative coaching style they were often not selected by their athletic directors to attend coaching clinics or they were not taken seriously at the coaching clinics that they did manage to attend.

#### *Outspoken Women Threaten Male Masculinity and Power*

The coaches in this study identified themselves as outspoken women and felt that this quality often got them into trouble with their male colleagues. One of the coaches suggested that this was because when they were outspoken and stood up for themselves, “the men felt as though their masculinity and power were being challenged”. Jane said:

I know for a fact that they will give me a technical foul more often than they would give a male coach a foul”. If a female is strong and voices her opinion then she is a bitch right? Same thing with how the officials feel about me. If I raise my voice then I am a bitch and she is challenging me, whereas I know the other male coaches stand there and yell and yell at the ref but he never says anything to them. There is one referee in particular who I think is a real chauvinist and doesn’t like to be yelled at by a woman.

Annie explained, “I would like to tell you that all officials are fair and that they are out there doing the best job they can but they are human beings and they are not always fair.

The last eight or nine years it has been really bad out there and it is just starting to get better now". Annie said that being outspoken around men had severe consequences for herself and her teams:

My team was playing a team that was our equal and we were winning. Then we get three penalties in a row so the other team scores on a power play and it is these arrogant male officials who are obviously homophobic and probably sexist and it is their way of showing that they have power over me. And it is hard because they take it out on my players and it is my team that pays the price- this has been going on for years.

The coaches also had difficulties with their athletic directors as a result of being outspoken. Jill, Laurie, and Erin explicitly described experiences where their athletic directors would team up with other male coaches from their institutions and contact the media to spread awful rumours. These rumours ranged from a claim that one of the coach was being inappropriate with an athlete to a comment such as "that coach doesn't know what she's doing". The women coaches felt this was an effort to "make sure we were put in our place".

#### *Isolated, Excluded, and Undermined*

The final sub-theme to characterize the old boys' club in sport was women coaches being isolated, excluded, and having their power undermined by men from their institutions. The coaches stated that being the only woman in their athletic department or at coaching clinics often resulted in them feeling isolated. Some of the coaches stated that they were the only coach not given an office within their athletic department. Others described how they were not invited to athletic department meetings or other important decision making meetings.

One of the coaches talked about how she "felt completely disconnected from all of the other coaches" in her athletic department. She said that the department made it

clear that “nobody cared about the women’s rugby team” and as such she was given poor gym times and unsuitable facilities, which were located far away from where the rest of the varsity teams were practicing. Debbie described how she would be the only woman at hockey coaching clinics and none of the men would allow her to speak and present her ideas.

Being isolated went hand-in-hand with being excluded which seemed to be a common experience among the participants. Penny said “I kind of thought I would be a part of all the decision making meetings with the athletic directors but I wasn’t”. She went on to explain that it might have been because she was a woman, because she was the coach of a women’s team, or because she was a lesbian, but regardless she was excluded. Jill explained how the National Coaching School for Women helped her acquire the words to explain how she felt she was being purposefully excluded as a result of the old boys’ club. Jill said that once she understood why it was happening she wanted to change the sport environment and she “became a representative at the university level and attended all of those meetings. All of that helped me learn about the issues of isolation, exclusion in sport, gender issues, and sport equity”.

Erin and Laurie described almost identical experiences of having their athletic directors and male colleagues undermine their power by spreading rumours to the media about how their lesbian identity was a negative influence on their female athletes. For both these coaches, it resulted in their athletes losing faith in their coaching abilities and undermining their authority and power as coaches. Laurie reflected on losing her coaching job:

It was my being female, being different [lesbian], and the politics of coaching all blended into one. Homophobia I’m sure was what made it all

possible. No one investigated, no one even came out to a single practice to see what was really going on - they just undermined my power and took away my team.

In summary, this third major theme, the old boys' club, was characterized by homologous reproduction where men were more likely to support other men in professional advancement, development, and coach education. All of the participants were negatively impacted by the old boys' club in sport because it isolated them, excluded them, and usurped their authority and power.

#### Acknowledgement and Positive Reinforcement

All of the women coaches stated that it was important for them to feel accepted and to have their lesbian identities acknowledged and positively reinforced by others in their lives. Within this theme there were four sub-themes that emerged, a lesbian-positive employment environment, lesbian-positive athletes and parents, colleagues who are out, and lesbian-positive social support outside of the sport context.

##### *Lesbian-Positive Employment Environment*

A lesbian-positive work environment allowed the coaches to feel free to be their authentic selves at work and to be open about their partners. The coaches described how some of their athletic directors and athletics departments were outwardly accepting and embraced their lesbian identity and acknowledged their partners. Although these environments were rare, each of the participants stated that they had experienced, at one point or another in their careers, an environment that acknowledged and positively reinforced their authentic selves, their lesbian identity.

Laurie described sentiments that were shared by all of the participants when she said "it depends, each department is a different case, and who is in the leadership role

makes a big difference to your experience”. She explained how acknowledgement and positive reinforcement occurred at one of the universities that she had coached at because there was a female athletic director who spoke out against lesbophobia, sexism, and all forms of discrimination at that university. Her athletic director was able to facilitate an open and accepting environment where diversity was embraced and celebrated. Laurie said that having a lesbian-positive work environment allowed her “to feel comfortable being me, I didn’t have to pretend, I didn’t have to worry, I could just be me... I had no problems being an out lesbian coaching in that environment and that was because my administration was amazing”.

Each of the coaches talked about how they would bring their partners to games and team functions and how they appreciated it when their partners were invited to department functions by their colleagues or athletic directors. This simple action of inviting their partner allowed them to feel comfortable being out about their partner at work. Jill explained that one of the universities that she coached at made her partner feel welcome because, “I think that they respected my relationship with my partner.” All of the participants described how they had experienced positive reinforcement, with certain athletic departments, which allowed them to feel free to be their authentic selves. Annie succinctly explained that she appreciates it “when I interact with my colleagues and when my partner comes along with me there is an awareness that she is there and a respect that is given to her presence.” The participants stated that they enjoyed working in environments where they felt that their lesbian identity was embraced and celebrated by their colleagues and athletic directors. Debbie remarked “I am very lucky to have those

kinds of supportive people in my life” referring to how supportive her athletic department was as well as her current athletes.

### *Lesbian-Positive Athletes and Parents*

The coaches explained how wonderful it felt to have their lesbian identity acknowledged and positively reinforced by the parents of their athletes as well as their athletes. Each of the women described a time in their coaching careers when they were accepted by the parent’s of their athletes and they realized how important that positive reinforcement was to their comfort being out while coaching. Jane described how the parent’s of her athletes “have every confidence in us [she and her partner] to be the surrogate parents” for their daughters when they are away at university playing sport under her supervision. Annie described how her “partner travels with us everywhere we go and every parent and every kid on my team absolutely loves her and embraces our relationship”. Annie said that when she returned with her partner after being married, parents as well as athletes would come up to her and say “Can I see your ring...congratulations on getting married”. She explained how that kind of positive reinforcement and acknowledgement of her lesbian identity allowed her to feel comfortable and free to be her authentic self with parents and athletes alike and had an overall positive impact on her experience being an out lesbian coach.

Debbie recounted a time when “a couple of my athletes put little rainbows up in their stalls” to show their support and to create a lesbian-positive environment. Jane said that her “athletes felt more comfortable talking to me about some of their issues because I wasn’t hiding anything by being out”. She went on to illustrate how when she had just come out, her athletes were like “so are you going to introduce us to you girlfriend or

not!” She explained how wonderful it felt to have her athletes feel so comfortable with her partner and her sexual orientation and as a result she felt more comfortable being her authentic self.

### *Colleagues Who Are Out*

The coaches also identified a queer community within their athletic departments which had a positive impact on their experiences being out lesbian coaches. Several of the coaches noted that “there would be some closeted people who would not want to associate with us for fear of been *outed*” but for the most part the coaches experienced, at some point in their careers in coaching where they had the social support system of other out coaches who identified as lesbian within their departments.

Having a community within the work environment allowed the participants to feel “strength in numbers” and thus they felt less isolated. Laurie said that “because there was a lesbian coach prior to me it helped my experience...the athletes were comfortable and it was normal [being a lesbian]...who cares if you’re a lesbian we’re paying you to be an awesome coach”. She said that because she was not the only out lesbian she had social support and was accepted because her peers and everyone in her department had already been exposed to other lesbian coaches so it was normalized prior to her joining the department.

### *Lesbian-positive social support outside of the sport context*

The coaches spoke of individuals outside of the sport domain, such as their parents, role models, and partners, who embraced and celebrated their lesbian identity and had a positive impact on their experience being out. The participants described situations in their lives where, without social support outside of the context of sport it

would have been very difficult for them to be out about their sexual orientation in sport and continue coaching. When the coaches had lesbophobic experiences, they relied on these supportive people to help them get through the emotionally difficult times.

For example, Debbie described how her parents were extremely supportive in all of her career aspirations and supported her being an out lesbian. “I remember my mother taking me aside and saying, what people do in their bedroom is their business, they are just people trying to live their lives.” Debbie said her mother “had incredible insight at that point and it was a great thing for me”. Another coach, Gwen, found herself going to her parents for emotional support when she experienced a difficult break-up with her girlfriend.

Jill and Laurie both noted that supportive role models and mentors outside of the sport context were important, particularly when they experienced significant difficulties with their athletic directors being lesbophobic. Jill spoke about her mentor who was a professor at her university and she said “I became very close to her and she is my mentor for life. She had the greatest impact on me in both personally and career wise”. Jill described how this professor and her husband allowed Jill to become part of their family. She saw her mentor as a strong woman who embraced her lesbian identity and made her feel supported and accepted. When Jill was attacked by several male athletes from her institution, her mentor came to her aid, stood up for her, and helped her contact the authorities about the incident.

All eight women coaches used similar words to explain how their partners spoke up on their behalf and supported them in being out in sport even though the environment was often lesbophobic. Jane explained that when she was thinking about quitting

coaching her partner helped her see past the lesbophobic environment and recapture her passion for coaching and sport.

The participants described how acknowledgement and positive reinforcement had a significant impact on their experiences being out lesbian coaches. This theme was characterized by the participants having lesbian-positive heterosexual colleagues, athletes, athletes' parents, role models and mentors, as well as having other colleagues who are out about their lesbian identity and celebrate and acknowledge the participants' lesbian identities. According to the participants, having lesbian-positive people in their lives allowed them to feel comfortable outwardly presenting their authentic selves and their lesbian identities.

#### Supportive Feminist Network

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was the impact of a supportive feminist network. All eight of the women coaches stated that they were involved in a network of supportive feminist women who helped them learn how to coach and supported their dreams and aspirations. This theme is characterized by three sub-themes: role models and mentors who identify as feminists, female athletic directors and networking as the key to opening professional doors, and other supportive women in the coaches' lives. The supportive feminist network is distinct from the previous theme of acknowledgement and positive reinforcement in that all of the women who were part of the supportive network for the participants in the current study subscribed to a feminist identity and outwardly expressed their beliefs about gender equity and equality.

*Feminist role models and mentors*

Each of the eight coaches spoke of lesbian and heterosexual mentors who outwardly expressed feminist identities and supported and guided them with respect to their professional and career endeavours, as well as their dreams and aspirations to become elite coaches. Debbie described an experience when she was a young girl:

The young women on that ball team allowed me to be their bat girl. I got to hang around with some real incredible female athletes and learned a little bit about what it takes to win and what it takes to be part of a successful team...I also learned that you develop lifelong friendships through sport and having the role models around me, and watching how they interacted with each other was a valuable experience.

She said that the women that she met on that softball team became her mentors and she was able to call them when she had questions about team related issues. She also found herself going to those same women for guidance with respect to personal issues such as her lesbian identity. She said that there had been many women who “took me under their wing and as older women they really made sure that I was taken care of and on track”.

Annie said that her “female coaches in high school were awesome ... they were women that I saw as strong, confident women and I looked up to them...they were women I watched and tried to learn from”. Laurie talked about Jill, one of the participants in this study, as being a significant mentor and role model in her life, who supported her in her coaching dreams as well as being an out lesbian. Jill said that it was her responsibility to be a mentor to Laurie and other women because she had been supported “by a feminist mentor”. All of the participants described situations where they felt that their mentors and role models supported, encouraged, and cared about them and expressed feminist values. The participants also said that they had a responsibility to be

mentors and role models to other young women and facilitate the feminist network that enabled their development as people and professionals.

*The Key to Opening Professional Doors: Female Athletic Directors and Networking*

Female athletic directors and networking among powerful women in decision making positions enabled the women coaches in this study to experience elite level coach education opportunities and advance professionally. The participants had very different experiences being out in the sport environment when the athletic director or chancellor of their university was female as opposed to male. Networking with these women provided professional opportunities in a job market where there are very few paid coaching positions.

All of the participants said that they learned a great deal about coaching from other women who took an interest in helping them develop professionally. Many of the coaches said that the National Coaching School for Women and women's only coaching clinics were unique opportunities for learning and, when they occurred, had a major impact on their career development. Laurie explained:

I was at the Coaching School for Women and I would say that it probably had the greatest impact on me as a coach. It was all women coaches there. They were all there for the same reason. They wanted to become better coaches and we wanted to work with other women coaches and share experiences and just kind of get to the next level... Going to that coaching school and being around the instructors from across Canada, the connections I made were incredible, and some of the women became mentors for me. Wendy Bedingfield was there, she probably does not remember me but I remember her. She was so powerful...it is important to see women like that.

Laurie explained how she had been looking to develop a different style of coaching and she had difficulties finding individuals who were interested in helping her develop her

style. However, once she attended “the school” she found that she had other women to share ideas with and learn from:

At first I wasn't sure about it, it was the first one they had [the National Coaching School for Women] but now when I look back on it, it was awesome for the contacts that I made and they proved to be what contributed to and gave me my success and it is still ongoing. The women coaches at the school gave me the ability to explore those ideas that I had because where I was at that time there was only one way to coach and in a lot of ways, it's still the same. At the school, it was networking and skills that I learned. I had never looked at feminist concepts before...and I remember I was drinking it all in, it was great being with all those female coaches - it was multi-sport as well. I met some amazing people who became incredible contacts for me later in life.

All of the coaches described how attending women's only functions enabled them to make contacts which have lasted their entire careers and into their retirement. Laurie went on to say, just as the other participants did, that as she progressed in her career so did the mentors that she met at “the school”. The mentors then invited her to other coach education clinics and conferences which enabled her to progress and continue networking within the realm of elite coaching. Annie remarked at how “the experience itself was great and I learned that there is so much more to the science of coaching, there is so much stuff behind it, like the biomechanics and the physical training and the psychological side”. Through these mentors and the National Coaching School for Women a supportive feminist network was created and maintained.

Another important aspect of the supportive feminist network is the impact that female athletic directors and university chancellors had on the participants' experiences being out lesbian coaches. Laurie said that her experience being out as coach “depended on who was in a leadership role because it makes a big difference to your experience”. The participants who had female athletic directors agreed that their directors dealt with

issues related to sexism, homophobia, lesbophobia, and other forms of discrimination whereas in most other cases, when they had a male athletic director, they had to handle it themselves.

Annie agreed that having a female athletic director could have a significant impact on one's experience being out but she spoke of her relationship with the female chancellor at her university. She described how she and the chancellor interacted:

The chancellor of the university is a very strong feminist woman and when they offered me the job I said to them, "I want you to know that I am an out lesbian coach before I accept this position and I will remain out or I will not take the job. The chancellor welcomed my strength and my honesty... The chancellor and I have dinner about once a month and we talk about life outside of sport. She is a very strong woman. I have received probably five or six top job opportunities at bigger schools but she does everything she can to keep me here because honestly I am the most successful coach that has ever gone through this institution...she wants me because I am a strong, successful woman who is out and she thinks that the people in this community need to have it in front of their face or otherwise people are not going to evolve.

#### *Other Supportive Women in Her Life*

The participants described how within their support network there were other women who taught them about feminism, equity, equality, and facilitated their personal and professional development. According to the participants this network of supportive feminists expanded beyond female athletic directors and chancellors to include the participants' mothers and their own partners. Debbie described how her mother taught her to embrace diversity and to strive to do her best. Annie said that she admired her mother and her mother provided her with great strength. She explained:

My mother was this remarkable woman with a great inner strength, great ability to be strong when she had to be strong, but also a great ability to be sensitive and soft when she needed to be. I learned a lot subconsciously from being raised by her. She was a very nurturing person, very positive

person, but she is also very strong. She always does the right thing no matter how hard it is. You do not meet very many people like that.

All eight of the women said that having women in their lives who held strong feminist values had an impact on how they developed as people and how they interacted with others. They also felt that they had the privilege and responsibility to be a feminist role model to others, and that it was their responsibility to support and network with young women so that others can experience the benefits of the network of supportive feminists.

The final source of support within the feminist network which was mentioned by the coaches was the impact of their partners. Jane explained that when she was having a difficult time with her team and her athletic director it was her partner who encouraged her to use her voice and think pragmatically rather than simply quitting and running away from the difficult situation. Jane explained how “it was awful and I was ready to quit and I thought I was going to give it up...and then Sarah [her partner] said that she would support me regardless of my decision, but she thought that it might be a good idea to have a plan first because you cannot just quit without a plan”. Jane decided to stick it out another year and she recruited new players and tried a different coaching strategy and she said that she had a terrific year with her new team. She went on to say that “if I had left last year on a sour note, I probably would never have returned to coaching” but with the support of her partner she continued coaching and rebuilt her program.

The supportive feminist network for the coaches in this study was comprised of many different people who believed in supporting women in achieving their professional and personal goals. The network was comprised of heterosexual and lesbian mentors and role models, powerful women in decision making positions such as athletic directors and

chancellors, as well as the participants' mothers and partners, all of whom expressed feminist values. This network enabled the coaches to achieve professional and personal success and they believed that it was also their responsibility to give back by supporting other women such as their athletes and aspiring coaches while teaching feminist values of equity and equality.

### The Nature of the Job

The eight participants in this study stated that much of their identity was wrapped up in coaching and that their job as a coach was complex and encompassed much more than only skill development and game preparation of their athletes. In addition, being a woman and being a lesbian necessitated a whole host of other requirements within and between the margins of their job; however, for the most part the nature of the job describes the 'every-day' responsibilities and roles that sport coaching demands of coaches. This theme presented itself as three sub-themes: the coaches' perceptions of the job, their multiple roles as a coach, and their learning as coaches.

#### *Perceptions of the Job*

The participants described coaching as a demanding career where one's personal life outside of sport could often be strained. They also found coaching to be poorly funded and plagued by little administrative support. Despite those difficulties the coaches also identified points in their careers where it was both exhilarating and satisfying. All of the participants expressed similar sentiments regarding the lifestyle of an elite coach. For example, Jane stated that:

We either have practice from 5 to 7 or 7 to 9 everyday, which means I am not home for supper most nights, and you are away on weekends and if you do have the weekend off, you are scouting and if you aren't

scouting you're planning practices, watching videos, and meeting with athletes.

Coaching was described by the participants as a "24/7 kind of job" where it absorbed every aspect of their lives. Erin explained:

Any good coach puts a lot of dedication and time into practices, and so if you work a 9 to 5 job then you are putting at least two hours in, at least four times a week minimum and when the season starts you are playing two or three games a week plus practicing three times a week between games... I don't know if I could balance as well if I had children.

She went on to say that "if you have other huge commitments in your life then becoming a good coach is hard to do" because it is a demanding profession. The eight women all remarked on how it was often a challenge to find a balance between their coaching responsibilities and their personal life outside of coaching, but they noted that what helped was having partners that were flexible with respect to personal time spent together.

All eight of the coaches stated that despite the difficult and emotionally trying aspects that accompanied their coaching jobs, there were also wonderful experiences. The participants described how marvellous it felt when their athletes were getting along with one another, working hard, and enjoying themselves. Seven of the eight coaches used the phrase "coaching made me feel alive" in their description of their profession. For all of them it was a dream come true to have been able to coach at a varsity or national level. They were talented, passionate coaches who each experienced great successes at different points in their coaching careers.

### *Multiple Roles as a Coach*

Being a woman, a lesbian, and a coach seemed to add complexity to the already numerous roles required of a career in coaching. Gwen explained that being a woman

truly added an extra layer of complexity to her position as assistant coach when she began coaching with a male head coach. She stated that “being a woman allowed her to get to know the girls because the other coach was male and had a harder time connecting with the girls”. She explained:

I don't know why that was. He could deal with certain issues with them but not all as they did not... well feel comfortable... I just found that girls do not connect as well with male coaches; well the one's that I have worked with, in my experience anyway.

Being a woman coach, according to the participants, allowed them to have a special bond and connection with their athletes.

All eight of the coaches said that being a lesbian did in fact have an impact on their role as varsity and national team coaches. Annie described how being a woman and being a lesbian impacted her roles as a coach because she felt as though she was always under scrutiny:

I think it impacts it a great deal. I think that it is easy to think that it does not impact it at all, but the truth is it does. I am under a microscope far more than any other coach that I coach against, by the parents of the kids that I am recruiting, my own boss, and just by people watching. I feel like I am in a fish bowl all the time.

The participants also discussed their many roles as a coach. Several spoke of “developing a program from scratch” along with the typical responsibilities such as technical skill development with their athletes and the creation of strategic plays.

According to the participants a great majority of the women's sport clubs and programs were underdeveloped or simply emerging when they began their careers and as such they were responsible for building the entire program from its inception. What that meant was the coaches had to recruit a new group of athletes, develop new strategic plays, and create a group that might develop into a team and a sound program. Penny found herself in

charge of developing a varsity rugby team for the first time in her career, with no assistants or previous experience beyond assisting with a recreational rugby club. She explained that the development of the program required her to take on roles beyond those typically ascribed to coaches, such as field maintenance and security issues at games.

Certainly one part of coaching that all the women coaches spoke of was the development of new drills and new skills. They each felt that skill development was an integral part of being successful as a coach. Jill stated:

I was a role model, teacher, and supporter. When I say teacher I mean that skill development is just key. For these girls at this level - national team - I did not have to motivate them much, they had so much within themselves but I did need to teach them skills.

All of the coaches described how personal development and wellbeing were two integral pieces to achieving success with their athletes. They found that they needed to be a social support system for their athletes as well as a model of a healthy lifestyle. Jane felt that she had to take on many roles as a varsity coach and described her roles as follows:

I am a surrogate parent. Certainly that is part of my role and anyone that thinks otherwise is crazy. I mean the kids are here and if anything happens to them personally they will come to the coach...I will help them get the answers and find the support that they need. I am a surrogate parent, I am a role model, and part of it is trying to be a confident woman around these young female so that they can see that it is ok and that they should be confident strong women.

All of the participants used terms such as parental support and surrogate parent to describe their roles as support providers for their athletes. They discussed how they felt it was important to model a healthy lifestyle so that their athletes could see the benefits of being fit, eating well, being self confident, and being in a healthy relationship regardless of whether it was heterosexual or lesbian. All eight of the women coaches were in long-

term relationships with their partners and, as a result, felt it was important to be open about it and normalize what it is to be a lesbian. In doing so, the women coaches said they were creating an environment where their athletes could be comfortable to be themselves and respect one another.

Being a social activist was identified as another one of the many roles that these women coaches felt that they had to take on. Promoting a comfortable and accepting environment closely aligned with the coaches' desire to stand up for their athletes. At many points in their careers these coaches found themselves battling on behalf of their athletes. These activist endeavours ranged from issues surrounding funding, better gym times, and the promotion of women's sport as relevant and important. Both Jill and Laurie discussed how they would attend numerous athletics department meetings in an effort to get more funding for their athletes' travel expenses and new uniforms. All of the coaches found it was difficult to get funding because women's sports were often not taken seriously and were frequently seen as a superfluous expense within their athletic department. All eight women coaches stated that being a lesbian and being a woman made them more conscious of discrimination and the importance of being a social activist and advocate for equity and equality. Jill, Laurie, Penny, and Debbie discussed how, on a regular basis, they were given "bad practice times and locations and that it was always a fight". Penny described how she was not given an office nor was she given a regular practice location for her varsity rugby team. Often her team had to do their fitness practice using the stairs in the hockey arena rather than on the rugby pitch. After a great deal of effort she finally persuaded the athletic director of her institution that this was not acceptable treatment for a varsity team. Laurie described a similar experience when her

varsity team was given a poorly maintained rocky field to practice on when a recreational men's soccer club was given the main campus university pitch to play on. After speaking repeatedly with her athletic director the women's team got to practice on the competition pitch and the recreational team was moved to the recreational field. These are but a few of the examples that the participants shared that demonstrated their roles as activists and advocates for their athletes as well as women's sport in general. In summary, the participants described the nature of their job as necessitating them to engage in multiple roles.

### *Learning as a coach*

Within the theme, the nature of the job, the third sub-theme that emerged was the participants' discussion of how they learned their craft. All eight of the coaches said that coach education played an integral role in their lives because it allowed them to live out their dream goal of being an elite coach. Debbie said that "it was really a dream come true to be able to be a full time hockey coach in this country". She went on to say that it was the educational training, as well as role models that made this possible for her. All eight coaches believed that it was imperative that they were trained, certified, and mentored by other female coaches in the elite field.

All of the coaches discussed how taking part in both the national certification programs (NCCP) as well as the National Coaching School for Women, which existed for a number of years in the 1980s impacted their entire coaching careers beyond learning the basic skills of coaching. Seven of the eight coaches attended the coaching school for women and felt it had significantly impacted their careers as coaches. They said the coaching school for women allowed them to build upon the knowledge that they had

gained from “trial and error”, experiences, and coaching manuals and it enabled them to network with other female coaches and share ideas. Laurie said she developed her coaching style and learned about coaching by:

Reading a lot and talking to people at the coaching courses. And a lot of sitting down and chatting with female coaches because they were a lot more sharing than the males. While there weren't many women coaches out there at this level, the ones I encountered were fabulous. When I went to the National Coaching School for Women - I think that was in 1986-87 - it was awesome for the contacts that I made and it allowed me to explore different ideas...it was great being with all those female coaches...I met some amazing people who became incredible contacts for me later in life.

The National Coaching School for Women provided an educational venue for women to get together and discuss coaching strategies, issues they had within the realm of elite varsity and national coaching as a result of their sex, and help one another develop as certified coaches. The one coach who did not attend the National Coaching School for Women discussed how she had also felt supported by several female coaches and learned from watching them. She said she was fortunate to be able to attend a number of female only coaching clinics that were offered in her region which enabled her to learn from other female coaches.

The coaches also described how part of their learning relied on the use of creativity and what they described as ‘a trial and error’ method. They felt a need to be innovative because they did not see a plethora of styles which appealed to their athletes’ specific needs. For example, Annie described how she was and continues to be “on the cutting edge for men or women coaching women’s hockey with regard to my technical knowledge of the game”. She said that her knowledge often came from the coach education she had taken, but her innovation came from her personal experiences and her

observations of other coaches and athletes. Based on those observations and experiences she then made decisions about what to incorporate into her coaching style.

All eight of the participants spoke about admiring the coaches that they saw around them and as Penny stated “I just kind of mixed all of their coaching styles and came up with my own”. The reason that Laurie gave for needing to develop her own style was similar to that of the rest of the participants, “the normal and accepted methods [of coaching] were authoritarian and male...where as mine was more of a fun, collaborative, energetic approach based on problem solving”.

In summary, within the theme, nature of the job, the three sub-themes that emerged were the participants’ perceptions of the job, their multiple roles as a coach, and learning as a coach. Being a woman and being a lesbian seemed to have added a level of complexity to the already complex profession of coaching.

#### Summary

In summary, six themes emerged from the data which richly described the essence of the experience of being an out lesbian coach. The six themes were sexism, lesbophobia, the old boys’ club, acknowledgement and positive reinforcement, the supportive feminist network, and the nature of the job. The first major theme, sexism, described the lack of respect for women sports, economic inequality, maleness as an advantage, and the underestimation and resentment that the participants experienced from men in the sport domain. The second major theme, lesbophobia, identified the societal perceptions of lesbians as well as situations where the coaches felt that they needed to defend themselves from lesbophobic individuals and institutions. The third major theme described the old boys’ club which was characterized by: homologous reproduction,

strong women challenging male masculinity, and women coaches being excluded and having their power undermined. The fourth major theme of acknowledgement and positive reinforcement described how, despite the many difficulties encountered, the participants had supportive people in their lives that celebrated and embraced their lesbian identities. The fifth theme that emerged was the supportive feminist network which encompassed a network of feminists who enabled the participants to achieve professional advancement and personal success in the sport domain. The final theme, the nature of the job described the participants' perceptions of their job, their roles as coaches, and how they learned their craft.

## CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the essence of how eight high performance coaches who identify as lesbian experience being out within the sport context. The participants described coaching as both a rewarding and demanding job. The six themes that emerged from the data illustrated the essence of the participants' experiences being out lesbian elite national and varsity level coaches. The eight women coaches described how they were negatively affected by sexism, lesbophobia, and the old boys' club while they were positively affected by the acknowledgement and positive reinforcement of their lesbian identities and a supportive feminist network.

According to Lorber (2005) many individuals say that feminism "has been proclaimed dead, irrelevant, a movement whose goal of equality for women has been achieved" (p. 303). The findings of this study suggest that feminism is still necessary because equality and equity have clearly not been achieved. The participants' experiences being out lesbian elite coaches were rife with sexism, lesbophobia, and the negative impact of the old boys' club. The metaphor "three strikes and you're out" illustrates the experiences of these eight coaches who identify as lesbian. Many women coaches find themselves unable to contend with these enormously negative pressures and inevitably quit coaching. At the time of being interviewed, four of the women coaches in the present study were actively coaching at the varsity and national level and four of the coaches had left coaching. All eight of the participants described two positive features within their experiences being out lesbian coaches, acknowledgement and positive reinforcement of their lesbian identities and a supportive feminist network, which enabled them to pursue their dreams of coaching at the national and varsity level. These two positive features,

according to the participants, countered the negative impact of the three strikes present within sport.

Numerous researchers have described sport as a sexist, lesbophobic domain dominated by the old boys' club (Griffin, 1998; Hall, 1996; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 2003; Lorber, 2005; Mercier & Werthner, 2001). The experiences of the women coaches who were part of the present study certainly support those findings. Sexism for these women presented itself as a lack of respect for women's sports, economic inequality, maleness as an advantage in the male sport world, and the underestimation and resentment of female coaches based on their sex. The coaches' experiences with sexism parallel the definition provided by Griffin where sexism is "a system of male privilege and female subordination which is based on the acceptance of particular definitions of gender and gender roles" (p. 17). Griffin goes on to describe what she calls "the lesbian bogeywoman in sport" (p. 55) which, for the most part, accurately describes the lesbophobia that the coaches in this study experienced at the hands of their athletic directors, the media, their peers, and athletes and their parents. The findings of the current study also parallel the statement of Geiger, Harwood, and Hummert (2006) where "homophobia towards lesbians may indeed be widespread" (p. 180). Homophobia specifically targeted at lesbians is labelled lesbophobia because women's experiences with discrimination based on their sexual orientation is distinct from homophobia as it is experienced by male homosexuals (Griffin). The third and final strike is the old boys' club in sport. The old boys' club was described by the participants as a domain where homologous reproduction occurred, outspoken women were thought of as challenging male masculinity, and where women coaches were excluded, isolated, and had their

power undermined by men in sport. These issues are supported by and discussed in much of the literature (Kilty, 2006; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004).

Sexism has been defined by Griffin (1998) as “a system of male privilege and female subordination which is based on the acceptance of particular definitions of gender and gender roles” (p. 17). The literature identifies a significant decline in the already low numbers of women in coaching positions at all levels in educational institutions (Kilty, 2006). The women coaches in the present study experienced sexism in a number of different situations. They felt a lack of respect for themselves and for women’s sports in general and this is certainly not a new phenomenon, as sport has been considered a domain where “men are men and women are trespassers” (Griffin, 1998, p. 15).

Women’s sport and athletic pursuits are seen as a lesser form of male sport and are often “trivialized and marginalized as an inferior version of the ‘real thing’” (Griffin, p. 17).

The women coaches also experienced economic inequality, receiving less direct financial support for both themselves, in the form of salaries, and for their teams, in terms of equipment, uniforms, and playing facilities. In 1998, Sport Canada, the federal department responsible for sport in Canada, produced a document which stated “it appears that salaries are higher for men than women coaching for comparable responsibilities and certification levels and further information needs to be collected in order to more clearly understand these differences, and reasons for them” (*Sport gender snap shot* 1998, p. 2).

Lorber (2005) has stated that women workers tend to be paid less than men workers throughout the world regardless of the field within which they work. Coaching does not appear to be the exception to this rule and the experiences shared by the eight

women coaches in the present study support the previous research (Mercier, 2000; Robertson, 2002; Werthner, 2005).

The coaches identified being male and in their own words “maleness” as an advantage in the elite sport context because they felt as though they had to constantly prove their skills and abilities while their male colleagues were often given the “benefit of the doubt”. This is another example of how sexism negatively impacted the women’s experiences as coaches. Kilty (2006) has explained how many women experience sexism in the form of “unequal assumption of competence” (p. 224), and says that women are often underestimated while male coaches are “automatically assumed to be more competent than a female coach” (p. 224). Sadly, the women also spoke of experiencing resentment, in addition to the underestimation of their skills, when they did in fact prove their competence. The resentment that the participants experienced often came in the form of misogynistic lesbophobic comments.

Lesbophobia, a term that defines the fear, hatred, and discrimination of lesbian identified women, was a second strike against the women coaches. Griffin (1998) has written that all lesbian athletes and coaches are “subjected to social prejudice and discrimination in sport” (Griffin, p. 53) and she explains that the “lesbian bogeywoman haunts all women, [because she] scares young women athletes and their parents, discourages solidarity among women in sport, and keeps women’s sport advocates on the defensive” (Griffin, p. 53). The women coaches in the present study spoke of how lesbophobia negatively affected them with false accusations aimed at them, rumours spread of being inappropriate with athletes, and in one case experiencing a physical attack perpetrated by male athletes. Kilty (2006) has explained how the lesbian label not

only controls women's experiences in sport but questions and discredits their successes as well. Krane (1996) is in agreement with Kilty regarding the purpose of the lesbian label and elaborates upon that point by saying that "the lesbian label is tantamount to discrediting all women's sport, insinuating that successful athletic performances are due to 'unnatural advantages' i.e. 'real' women cannot be good athletes" (p. 240) or coaches. The heterosexist status quo within sport fuels the negative power of the lesbian label in that "if a female is a good coach, she is labelled a lesbian and the assumption is that her performance does not have as much merit because she is male-like" (Kilty, p. 225).

The old boys' club, the third strike, was characterized by homologous reproduction, men lashing out at the coaches because they felt that their masculinity and power were threatened by outspoken women coaches, and by being excluded and isolated while their power was undermined. In the case of the women coaches, homologous reproduction occurred in the hiring process where male athletic directors and national sport organization presidents would only hire men in head coaching positions rather than equally qualified women coaches. Sagas et al. (2006) has suggested that homologous reproduction is a major cause of the under-representation of women coaches. The women coaches in this study discussed how they found themselves being passed up for job opportunities and professional advancement opportunities when male coaches of equal or lesser experience and qualifications were being hired.

While exceptional, four of the women coaches in this study were fortunate to have female athletic directors or a female university chancellor, which had a direct and positive impact on their professional advancement and their coach education opportunities. We know from an American study by Sagas et al. (2006) that when a

varsity athletic director is female 63.4% of head coaches are women whereas only 44% are female when a male athletic director is present.

All of the coaches described themselves as outspoken and confident women and they felt that because of that, they experienced a negative backlash from men in the sport context who felt that their masculinity and power were being challenged. Outspoken women challenge hegemonic femininity and society's sanctioned gender roles for women because women are supposed to be quiet, weak, and powerless (Griffin, 1998).

Another means by which the old boys' club negatively affected the eight women coaches was when they were purposefully excluded, isolated, and had their power undermined. Several of the women coaches said that they were the only coach in their entire athletic department to not be given an office space even though they were full-time, and negative rumours were often circulated to undermine their authority with their athletes.

These three 'strikes' not only created negative experiences for both coaching and life in a broader sense, but also made it exceedingly difficult for the coaches to advance professionally. This is a concept that the literature describes as the glass ceiling. Mercier (2000) has defined the glass ceiling as the "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases that prevent qualified women from advancing upward into management [and decision making] positions" (p. 12). Mercier goes on to list all of the different beliefs and biases which prevent and limit women coaches from achieving success and more often their professional advancement aspirations. The glass ceiling in Canadian sport has been attributed to negative stereotypes, negative perceptions about women coaches, male employers' reluctance to hire women for coaching positions,

exclusion, and “counterproductive behaviour from male colleagues” (Mercier, p. 12).

These features are produced and supported by sexism, lesbophobia, and the old boys’ club which together have created a hostile climate for these women coaches.

Despite the powerful ‘three strikes’, the women coaches in this study still managed to find and experience some positive aspects in coaching. One might ask how this was possible given such powerful and pervasive sexism, lesbophobia, and the power amassed by the old boys’ club? The women coaches spoke of two sources of support, which allowed them to stay in sport as coaches, at least for a period of time: acknowledgement and positive reinforcement of their lesbian identities and a supportive feminist network. Their support came from various sources - from supportive employers, who were often women, from supportive athletes and their parents, from their own partners and their own parents, and from other women coaches. When they were able to have this support, it often enabled the women to continue their career in coaching. As Griffin (1998) has written, many women coaches find the hostile climate in sport to be too much to bear and as such, they quit coaching.

The women coaches explained that having their lesbian identity acknowledged and positively reinforced by those around them had an extremely positive effect on them. One example of acknowledgement and positive reinforcement, according to the participants, was when they felt their partners were accepted, recognized, and were invited to athletic department social events. This created a positive environment for the participants to be out because their peers, athletic director, athletes, and other members of their athletic community recognized and celebrated their sexual orientation which allowed the women coaches to feel comfortable being their authentic selves.

The participants spoke about how important it was to have a lesbian positive employment environment and how much that environment enabled them to be their authentic selves and simply focus on issues related to coaching rather than continually feeling attacked by lesbophobia. According to Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield (2007) a lesbian positive employment environment is an enabling factor for healthy lesbian identity development and maintenance. The findings of the current study support Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield because the women coaches in this study each specifically stated how important it was for them to feel accepted and supported at work. In addition, the participants also explained how it was important for them to have lesbian positive athletes and parents who acknowledged and positively reinforced their lesbian identity as well as a community of peers in sport who were out. These findings are also supported by the work of Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield.

The final source of acknowledgement and positive reinforcement which the participants discussed as having a positive impact on the essence of their experiences as out lesbian elite coaches was the social support they had from people outside of the sport context. All of the participants discussed their partners and mothers as being supportive and consequently this support enabled them to be out lesbians in elite coaching. Cohen et al., (2007) found that in order to maintain an out lesbian identity, social support from outside of the context of sport was necessary.

All eight women coaches also spoke at great length of the positive impact that a supportive feminist network had on their experiences being out lesbian coaches and in continuing in coaching as a career. This network was described by the women coaches as comprised of feminist role models and mentors, supportive athletic directors, and other

supportive women in their lives who believed in the importance of equity and equality for women and aided them in personal and professional advancement. They stated that without the support of this feminist network they would never have been able to achieve success or enjoy their coaching careers.

Role models and mentors played an integral role in the supportive feminist network. The women coaches stated that a lesbian role model or mentor helped them develop their lesbian identity while learning how to negotiate the lesbophobic terrain within sport. Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield (2007) identified role models and mentors as an integral factor in healthy lesbian identity maintenance and in enabling lesbian coaches to feel comfortable being their authentic selves. Unfortunately, the literature has also stated that there is a shortage of women role models for female coaches (Demers, 2007; Kilty, 2006; Krane, 1996; Marshall, 2001a, 2001b; Mercier, 2001; Mercier & Marshall, 2005; Mercier & Werthner, 2001, 2002; Robertson, 2002; Werthner, 2003, 2005). The women coaches in this study stated that without women role models and mentors it would have been difficult to see themselves in head coach positions. The women coaches also realized that their role models and mentors formulated a network of women, who would discuss issues in sport as well as help young women coaches gain access to positions in sport which they would not have otherwise been exposed to. The women coaches spoke of the importance of seeing other women in powerful decision making positions, which helped them see themselves in those positions.

One of the most influential experiences in seven of the eight women coaches' lives was their attendance at The National Coaching School for Women, which was a women's only coach education program that ran for a very short time beginning in 1987.

It was here that many of the coaches met their role models who eventually became their mentors. According to Brenning and McDonald (1995), Betty Baxter, the woman coach who created the National Coaching School was “the driving visionary who recognized the need for women coaches to develop stronger technical expertise, better self-esteem and confidence, and more effective career strategies in order to coach at the national level” (p. 106). At the school the women coaches said they learned both about the science of coaching and the context of sport, from a feminist perspective. Much of the current literature identifies coach education for women as a key factor in correcting the under-representation of women in coaching as well the negative stereotypes associated with women and coaching (Kilty, 2006). The participants in this study felt it increased their self confidence as coaches, as well as their technical skills and provided an introduction to concepts such as sexism and the glass ceiling.

The participants described how the mentors they met at the coaching school helped facilitate their professional advancement through a network of women coaches across Canada. In some cases, it helped with job opportunities that they might not have otherwise been aware of. These findings are supported by Kilty (2006), which stated that female mentors could provide guidance and facilitate networking and possibly job opportunities for women coaches. The women coaches discussed how beyond the positive impact of the role models and mentors that became available to them at the school, it was the venue that allowed them to learn and develop because it was a women’s only environment.

The eight women coaches identified supportive women from outside of the context of sport as an important feature in their supportive feminist network. They stated

that their mothers and partners helped teach them feminist values of equity and equality which, enabled the women coaches to speak up for themselves and others. Although these women were from outside of the context of sport they had an impact on the coaches' experiences within sport. The participants' mothers and partners encouraged them to speak up about discriminatory practices and many other issues that negatively impacted the coaches' experiences being out. Cohen, Robertson, and Bedingfield (2007) identified mothers and partners as part of a social support network which facilitated lesbian identity maintenance and thus the ability for a woman coach to be out about her lesbian identity. Krane (1996) explained that having positive social support can help mitigate the negative impact that lesbophobia and thus supporting the positive impact that partners and mothers had on the eight women coaches' experiences being out. The supportive feminist network as identified in the present study is comprised of many different people who believe in and promote feminist values of equity and equality which, according to the participants in the present study, has had an extremely positive impact on their experiences being out.

The coaches' role models, mentors, female athletic directors, partners, and mothers seemed to have been able to network among one another which demonstrates the breadth of the supportive feminist networks' reach. It was identified that this supportive feminist network had great strength in that it enabled the women to achieve professional advancement into positions that would have otherwise been out of reach because of the glass ceiling. The National Coaching School for Women presented the women coaches with role models and mentors, enhanced their coaching skills, taught them how to negotiate and speak out against sexism, lesbophobia, and the negative impacts of the old

boys' club and because of that, these women experienced great success. The National Coaching School for Women seemed to be the beginning of the feminist network for many of the women coaches. All of the women stated that it was important for them to be role models and mentors to younger women because they recognize the positive impact that it had on them and they feel that it is important to pass that along to the next generation of women coaches. The findings of the present study support earlier research stating that networking, mentoring, and role models do indeed lead to success and professional advancement for women coaches (Brenning & McDonald, 1995; Cohen et al., 2007; Demers, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Kilty, 2006; Krane & Barber, 2003; Marshall, 2001a, 2001b; Mercier, 2002; Mercier & Werthner, 2002). According to the participants, the supportive feminist network was an extremely positive and rewarding feature of being an out lesbian coach. This network allowed the women to develop an understanding of the sport environment and develop skills to successfully navigate institutional barriers that had previously been limiting their advancement in coaching.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study support earlier research in the area of women and coaching, where the three strikes, sexism, lesbophobia, and the old boys' club, contributed negatively to the essence of the participants experiences being out lesbian coaches (Brenning & McDonald, 1995; Cohen et al., 2007; Demers, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Kilty, 2006; Krane, 1996). According to Demers (2006) very few studies have endeavoured to examine the experience of being an out lesbian in coaching. She goes on to explain that "being a lesbian dramatically limits career options and adversely affects hiring opportunities" (p. 2) and often results in negative recruitment where athletes are

lured away from teams with known or assumed lesbian coaches. Sport has historically and, according to the participants in the present study, continues to be dominated by the old boys' club where women coaches have an exceedingly difficult time advancing within the field.

Many people believe that equity and equality have already been achieved and thus see no reason for further feminist movement endeavours (Lorber, 2005). However, this is unfortunately an oversight because, according to the findings in this study, equity and equality are not yet a reality within sport. The essence of the experience of being an out lesbian in elite coaching was, in fact, both a negative and positive experience. Three strikes were identified as negatively impacting the coaches' experiences being out and yet fortunately, each of the coaches in this study were also positively affected by a variety of supportive individuals, many of whom were feminists.

#### Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study was the small number of coaches who were interviewed. Each woman's experience of being an out lesbian coach is unique and with only eight participants it is important not to generalize too broadly. It should be highlighted that elite coaches are a very small subset of the coaching population in Canada and females coaches at the recreational level might provide a different picture of the essence of the experience of being an out lesbian in recreational sport coaching. Another limitation was that only one interview was conducted with each participant and perhaps an even greater depth of understanding could have been achieved with multiple interviews. The final limitation that must be acknowledged is that all of the participants in the present study coached team sports, and the experiences of coaches of individual

athletes might again provide a different picture of the essence of being an out lesbian in elite coaching. It is suggested that future research should build upon these findings, perhaps exploring, in more depth, the relevance of the supportive feminist network.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your life as a woman, and as a coach.
  - a. Did you participate/compete in sport?
  - b. When did you start coaching?
  - c. What sports do/did you coach? At what levels?
  - d. Why did you choose to coach and what brought you to coaching?
  - e. How would you define your role as a coach?
  - f. Did you have a role model or mentor as a young coach?
2. Tell me about being out as a high performance/elite coach?/What is it like being an out lesbian in elite coaching?
  - a. How would you define being out?
  - b. How long have you been out?
  - c. To what extent does your lesbian identity impact your role as a coach?
    - i. **If not**- why doesn't it impact your role as a coach?
  - d. Did you or do you have a lesbian role model or mentor in the realm of coaching?
  - e. Are you in a long-term relationship (partner, girlfriend, wife... etc?)
    - **If yes** - do you think being in a relationship affects how you interact with your athletes, colleagues, and peers?
      - Does being in a relationship affect the way others perceive you as a coach?

- **If no** –does not being in a relationship affect how you interact with your athletes, colleagues, and peers?
  - How do you think it affects the way people perceive you as a coach?
  
- f. What are your perceptions about the sport environment you work in?
  - Is it a lesbian positive environment?
  - How do you experience being out in different social environments?
    - **If you do not feel different-** why not?
    - **If you do feel different-** why?
      - with athletes in the locker room
      - with athletes on the court/field/ice/pitch
      - with athletes in your office
      - with your colleagues
      - with your family
      - in social environments outside of work  
(coaching)
      - other situations?
  
- g. To what extent do you care about what others' think about your sexual orientation?
  
- h. Could you speak about any advantages or disadvantages of being an out lesbian coach?

i. Within the context of high performance sport, have you ever experienced the following (if so could you please give me an example):

i. Sexism

ii. Heterosexism

iii. Homophobia

iv. Have you experienced any other form of discrimination that I have not mentioned?

3. In an ideal world, what would your life be like?

4. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me, that might help me better understand what it's like being an out lesbian in elite coaching?

## **APPENDIX B**

### Definitions

Sexism- A system that subordinates women based on the social construction of gender and its binary categories of femininity and masculinity. This system privileges male masculinity as superior in comparison to female femininity (Griffin, 1998; Lorber, 2005).

Lesbian- A sexual orientation that is characterized by a female who is emotionally, physically, and sexually attracted to someone of her same sex (Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1996).

Internalized homophobia - Internalized homophobia is also known as internal homonegativity which is the feeling of self-hatred because of one's homosexual orientation (Krane, 1996).

Homophobia- An irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (Demers, 2006).

Homonegativity- A more recent term, thought to be more inclusive because it illustrates purposeful rather than irrational negative behaviours and attitude towards homosexual people (Krane, 1996).

Heterosexism- A system that privileges, rewards, and values heterosexuality as the norm or status quo therefore suggesting that it is the only acceptable form of sexual expression (Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 2003).

## APPENDIX C

### Ethics Approval



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Centre de services de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

June 6, 2008

Fanny Werthner  
School of Human Kinetics  
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125 University, Room 376  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Elissa Cohen  
908-1000 Castle Hill Cres.  
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**RE: Lesbian Coaches: Personal Perspectives on Being Out (H 03-08-04)**

Dear Doctor Werthner and Ms. Cohen,

You will find enclosed the Health Sciences and Science REB ethical clearance for the abovementioned study.

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms may not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must also promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

This certificate of ethical clearance is valid until June 6, 2009. Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer in June 2009 to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:

[http://web9.uottawa.ca/services/gesrd/ethics/application\\_dwn.asp](http://web9.uottawa.ca/services/gesrd/ethics/application_dwn.asp)

A copy of this approval will be sent to research services, if necessary.

If you have any questions, you may contact the undersigned at the number (613) 562-3387.

Sincerely yours,

Germain Zongo  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Dr. Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Health Sciences and Science REB



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et d'innovation Research Grants and Ethics Services

## HEALTH SCIENCES AND SCIENCE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical approval of the research project entitled **Lesbian Coaches: Personal Perspectives on Being Out (H 03-03-04)** submitted by Peany Werthner of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa and her master's student Ms. Elissa Cohen.

The Board found that this research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave it a Category 1a (approval). This certification is valid one year from the date indicated below.

---

Germain Zongo  
 Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
 For Dr. Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the  
 Health Sciences and Science REB

June 6, 2008

Date

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