

Managing Domestic Work and Careers: The Experiences of Women in Coaching

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the careers of women coaches in Canada. Data are taken from interviews with 49 women. The analysis considers their experiences in light of features of the work and the occupational structure that condition women's mobility. The discussion emphasizes the connections between domestic and career concerns. A comparison of women with ambitions for mobility and those who were coaching at the highest levels of sport provides particular insight into the challenges for women of making a career in coaching.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans l'article suivant, on examine la carrière des entraîneuses au Canada. Les données sont puisées à des entrevues avec 49 femmes. L'analyse porte sur leurs expériences à la lumière des caractéristiques de l'emploi et de la structure professionnelle dont la mobilité des femmes dépend. La discussion met l'accent sur les liens entre les préoccupations domestiques et professionnelles. Une comparaison entre des femmes ayant des ambitions de mobilité et des entraîneuses travaillant dans les rangs les plus élevés du sport donne un aperçu particulier des défis que doivent relever les femmes qui font carrière dans le domaine de l'entraînement sportif.

RECENT RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND WORK stresses the connections between structural and personal considerations in determining life histories.¹ These analyses make clear that few women make careers of their own choosing and few follow a life history based on a well planned model or "dream." Rather, careers and lives are worked out in the context of expanding and contracting opportunities, and conflicting and converging aspirations and desires. In addition to demonstrating the interdependence of domestic and paid work, these analyses indicate the power of gender ideologies and the gender structuring of institutions as factors conditioning women's lives. Beliefs about parenting

and children's needs, the availability of childcare, and women's disadvantaged position in the labour force combine to structure women's choices and experiences.

A particularly important aspect of this research is the analysis of women's careers in light of institutional constraints. The research reported here extends this literature by examining the experiences of 49 women coaches in the Canadian amateur sport system. The analysis considers the careers of women coaches in light of features of the work and the occupational structure that condition women's participation. A particular focus is the connections

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the meetings of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, Kingston, Ontario, June 1991. This research was supported by grant #482-85-0033 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The Council's assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

between domestic life and work, the choices women face in managing these connections and their efforts to derive solutions to the challenge of balancing their personal and professional lives.

Coaching in Canada and the Status of Women

Women coaches' experiences are conditioned by some features of the occupation and the condition of women both within coaching and in sport in general. The job market for coaches in Canada is complex and diverse. The sport system stretches over a number of institutional settings, including national and provincial sport associations, the educational system and private clubs.² Coaches often work in more than one setting, as in the case of a university coach who also works with a national team program. In addition, in many sports, coaches often are appointed for short-term assignments such as the Olympics.

Within this structure, the most important feature of the occupation is the limited job market. This condition varies among sports. Sports with an established base in clubs and universities have a more stable job market. Those with a developed infrastructure have an ongoing staff of national team coaches. In general, however, job prospects for coaches in Canada are determined by restricted employment opportunities. The main barrier to the expansion of positions is funding.

Limitations on positions are important contingencies in the careers of both men and women coaches. Two additional sets of factors pose barriers to women's participation specifically. The first is the conditions of work. At the highest levels of sport, coaching typically involves long and irregular hours and extensive travel to training camps and competitions. As well, the coach-athlete relationship is intense and demands a heavy commitment of time and energy. In many sports, there is a common perception that athletes who compete at elite levels have a kind of natural right to their coaches' near full-time availability. For coaches with domestic responsibilities, these demands pose a major challenge.

The second barrier to women's participation in coaching is the masculine ideology of sport. Despite recent increases in women's involvement in sport and in the public recognition of women athletes, sport remains a setting where traditional ideas about gender and the association of masculinity and athleticism are reaffirmed. This has been most extensively documented in studies of media presentations of sport. Accounts of women in sport have moved away from a former preoccupation with the femininity of women athletes (captured in a frequent emphasis on the pert and pretty sports-woman). More commonly, sport is presented as a masculine arena where women are ill suited for full participation.³ Another common theme of media accounts is the inferiority of women's achievements. As one observer has described it, the media today appear to take the position that "women athletes want to be treated the same as men? Well, let's see what they can do."⁴ While failing to recognize the history of exclusion that has limited women's athletic development, commentators concentrate on their performances relative to men's. The outcome of this practice is a reaffirmation of the ideology of masculine superiority in sport.

A related analysis from the research reported here demonstrates how the hierarchy of gender in sport is reproduced in coaching.⁵ Two features of the gendering of sport are central to this process. First is a presumption of men's natural superiority as athletes and because of this, their superiority as coaches. Second is a perception that women's sport is not "real" sport but in some way an inferior version or adaptation of men's sport. These beliefs, separately and together, pose powerful barriers to women coaches' full acceptance and mobility.

Coaching in Canada is male dominated, particularly at the highest levels. In 1988, women were 14 percent of coaches of Canadian national teams.⁶ In 1989-90, in Canadian universities, women were 25 percent of all full-time coaches and 65 percent of full-time coaches in women's programs.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sport has prompted concern among government and sport officials. In 1986, the federal

government agency Sport Canada issued a Policy on Women in Sport. The document indicates that Sport Canada is "committed to changing the status of women in sport" and "intends to bring about change in order to increase the opportunities for women in sport."⁸ Consistent with this commitment, the Women's Program at Fitness and Amateur Sport Canada has initiated a number of efforts to improve the condition of women in coaching and sport administration, including an apprenticeship program that offers advanced training to retired athletes. For the most part, however, these efforts are concerned with improving the qualifications and opportunities for women coaches. Less attention has been directed to improving the climate of acceptance for women coaches and addressing the conflicts between careers and domestic lives that many of these women face. As the following accounts will show, these conditions are important contingencies in the careers of women coaches.

Sample and Data Collection

Data are taken from interviews with 49 women coaches who have experience working at the highest levels of Canadian sport. The primary means of identifying respondents was lists of coaches affiliated with national team programs. These lists were supplemented by a snowballing technique in which respondents were asked to identify other women coaches in their sport. The latter procedure was necessary because of the diffuse structure of the employment market. As well, since many appointments with national programs are short term, lists of coaches at a given time will exclude individuals not currently working with a program who are nonetheless competent and experienced.

The respondents were a diverse group. They worked in 13 sports. The sports included those in which women predominate as coaches and those in which women are a small minority,⁹ individual and team sports, sports organized primarily in private clubs, and others with a strong base in the university system. Of the 49 respondents, 31 were married. Two were divorced. Sixteen had children and one was pregnant with her first child at the time of the interview. They ranged in age from mid-twenties to early sixties, and included women who

were beginning their careers and others with more than thirty years experience.

A word of explanation is in order concerning the discussion of family and domestic responsibilities that follows. During the interviews, care was taken to avoid heterosexist assumptions about respondents' sexuality and their family circumstances. Nonetheless, all of the respondents who had children or spoke about the possibility of having children did so in the context of a heterosexual relationship. Thus the definition of family offered by the respondents was narrow and excluded other family forms such as single parenting or same-sex couples with children.

A preliminary step in the analysis was a classification of respondents according to career goals. This classification provides a framework for the analysis. Sixteen respondents had clear ambitions for upward mobility, usually defined as coaching at a higher level of sport. Eighteen indicated they had no such ambitions. Seven women had left coaching. Another seven were coaching at the highest levels of their sport although in different capacities. Only one woman did not fit in these categories; she was a younger coach who recently had her first child and was uncertain about her goals but unwilling to say that she did not want to coach at a higher level.

The analysis that follows is presented against the backdrop of women's continuing responsibility for domestic labour¹⁰ and the disadvantaged position of women in sport and in coaching. Because the demands of travel and long and irregular hours are central features of elite-level coaching, this discussion pays particular attention to the impact of these conditions on the choices women face in balancing their domestic and work lives.

Making a Career

Women with ambitions for upward mobility. The 16 women in this group were united by one feature that is striking in its uniformity: fifteen were childless and one was, at 39, pregnant with her first child at the time of the interview. All were under 40. Eight were married, seven were single and one was divorced. Their comments made clear that the

absence of children provided a context in which mobility aspirations develop. This was explored in discussions around their plans to have children and their ideas about combining a career in coaching and motherhood.

Most of these women had only vague ideas both about their plans to have children and what it would mean to combine full-time coaching with motherhood. Only four were certain they wanted children and had clear ideas about what this would mean for their careers. On the latter point they were divided. Two said that combining motherhood and a career in coaching is difficult at best and that they planned to resolve the difficulty by delaying having children until they had achieved their career goals and were ready to reduce their professional activity.

Two others said they thought the dual responsibilities could be managed. One of these is the coach who was pregnant at the time of the interview. She had no reservations about the changes that would follow the birth of her child and believed that the key to adjusting was "managing." In her case this meant having full-time help. Well established in her own career and married to a successful businessman, her response was conditioned by her relatively privileged status.

Of the 12 remaining women in this group, four indicated they wanted to have children but had little idea what this would mean for their work. This vagueness was part of a larger picture of uncertainty about their careers. T. worked in a sport where coaching opportunities at the highest levels had just started to expand. She discussed the connection between her personal and professional careers:

I would like to have some kind of set-up where, you know, I'd like to spend a lot of time with my kids. So it's a bit of a dilemma what to do because it's going to be really hard to travel and have kids and I'm going to probably have some kind of restriction on that (the travel)....

You see, the other thing is I don't know where my career will end up. If I don't get a national coaching position — you see, I could work at our club still and I could always bring my kids to the club.... If I get it (the national coaching

position) I might have to relocate or commute to Montreal where the training centre may be.

Q. Could you see commuting?

It depends. It depends what kind of time I would have to spend there. Whether it was a full-time position, part-time, or whatever. I could see commuting if it wasn't a full-time thing.

For another coach in a full-time university position, the connections between having a child and career development looked different. B.'s position was quite secure and, for her, the demands of coaching and the lifestyle were the main considerations. She provided a vivid account of her work:

It's an automatic high. You coach and just keep doing it. You start in September and you finish in March and then you rest. Then you start all over again. It's a cycle. It is draining. Your time is always consumed with it. Sometimes you don't sleep at night.... When the game comes, it's show time. It's a great feeling.

Q. Do you ever wonder if you might want to shift the balance sometime in the future?

Oh sure. I'm not going to do this for the rest of my life. I've always viewed coaching as a temporary thing. You can't make it a career forever and ever.

Q. Why not?

For me personally, it's too demanding. There comes a time when you get burned out. A good coach, I think, if you put your all into it, there's no way you can do it. And I would like a family. It would be hard for me to coach and have a family and put as much time in the game as I'm doing. It would be unfair.

Q. Do you anticipate that when you start a family that you will have pulled back by then or will the two decisions be related?

No, I think that, I don't know that right now. I'm toying with that in my mind. I don't want to have — I'd like to have children soon but I'm not ready to give up coaching. I'm not ready to give up the intensity that I put into it. So maybe by the time I decide to have children; maybe I will have come to a closer understanding of it. Maybe it will still become insane; maybe I'll be just as intense; maybe I will find a way to deal with my family life and my work.

Q. But you don't really know what it will look like?

No. No. It's a fear. It's just women having a fear. You try to do it all, be great at everything.

I believe you can do it, it's just I have to feel good about it in my mind.... One day I'm going to wake up and say maybe I've kind of had it. I hope that's how it's going to work out.

Although both T. and B. aspired to work with the national team, there were some important differences in their career situations. B.'s sport is well developed in the university system and coaching already provided challenging and rewarding opportunities and employment security. T.'s career is progressing along with the development of her sport and she has had fewer opportunities to achieve the "highs" that B. described. Despite the differences in their work histories and career stages, both were keenly aware of the complexities of attempting to integrate career and personal life.

There is a particular poignancy in B.'s account of the "fear" that accompanied her effort to "be great at everything." This has nothing to do with a "fear of failure" posited by some theorists to explain women's career and work histories.¹¹ For B., the fear was a response to her accurate assessment of the competing demands of coaching and parenting. While her analysis was insightful as a description of her situation, it offered little guidance on how to resolve the dilemma of combining elite-level coaching and motherhood.

For eight of the coaches with mobility aspirations, the prospects of parenthood figured vaguely or not at all in their plans for the future. They said they did not want to have children or had not decided if they did. These women were focused on their careers and unwilling or unable to entertain interruptions in the form of additional obligations and commitments. One coach who had experienced several job changes and was in a situation she found challenging, rewarding and held the potential for mobility to the national program described her priorities:

Once I'm here for a little while maybe I'll be able to have a relationship or something with another person. You know — be normal for a change. I can see it maybe shifting but I'm afraid that an involvement, you know, deciding on a family or something like that, it's a commitment that will take me away a bit from (my

sport). If I can find a situation where I don't have to compromise my involvement with (my sport), which would be unusual, that would be ideal.

Q. What if you found yourself in a situation where your commitments would involve making a choice maybe to downscale your involvement in your sport?

No, I can't now. No way.... It would have to be after a point where I've really felt that I'd gone as far as I can go. Or I'd have to be so bitter and frustrated with the whole thing that I'd downscale it. Some people have done that.... You know, it's not something that bothers me. I don't wish to be married and at this point in time I don't wish to have a family. It doesn't — I got a puppy instead.

The majority of women with mobility aspirations and uncertainty about whether they wished to have children were also vague when asked what they thought it would be like to combine a career in coaching with motherhood. Five of the eight indicated they did not really know what it would be like. Two who were more certain said it was possible, while one disagreed and suggested the demands of her work probably explained her being single and childless.

The vagueness of these women's ideas about managing careers and childcare responsibilities is not unique to this group of coaches. In *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild comments on a similar uncertainty among young women she worked with at a U.S. university. Like B. quoted above, Hochschild attributes this uncertainty to fear. "At the actual problems of holding down a demanding job and raising young children, they don't dare look. I don't believe they don't know the problems. These are intelligent, inquiring women. I think they are avoiding a close look because it scares them."¹² This group of coaches with career ambitions is older than the Berkeley seniors Hochschild discusses. However, many of the coaches shared with the university students a sense of distance from the real condition of managing dual responsibilities. It was clear from their comments that, for many, making a career was both so paramount and consuming a task that they avoided consideration of challenges to this goal.

Coaches with no mobility aspirations. As a rule, the 18 women in this group were older than the coaches who had ambitions for mobility. Their assessment of their career development was located in a complex of concerns about work, domestic life and the connections between the two.

Seven women in this group had children. All were over 40, married and "veterans" with at least ten years experience in coaching. For the most part, these women believed they had managed the challenge of having a satisfying and rewarding career and a family. Their stories, however, indicated the difficulties and, in many cases, the limitations imposed by their domestic situations. Five of the seven indicated that they had restricted their aspirations for mobility because of family commitments. Two concerns were mentioned specifically. One was the impossibility of managing family responsibilities and the extensive travel. Second, because their husbands' careers were given primacy over theirs, they were unable to relocate to accept job opportunities.

Childcare posed a particular challenge to these coaches. Only one respondent had a shared arrangement with her husband. Another relied extensively on her parents and her husband's parents. One coach got her daughter involved in her sport in part to eliminate the need for a baby sitter. Another employed a high school student who slept at her home and took care of her child in the early morning while the coach went to practice. In discussing the connections between their careers and domestic lives, the majority of these coaches again indicated little dissatisfaction. They understood that their role as primary caregivers had limited their career development but did not question this arrangement. For these women, there were few options and little choice in managing the balance between domestic and work lives.

Eleven women in this group were childless. Of these, four indicated that their career ambitions had been influenced by plans to have children, and three were already adjusting their work lives for this reason. These three women presented telling

contrasts in their career and mobility prospects. Two worked in figure skating, a sport with a large employment base and varied employment possibilities. These women enjoyed comparatively greater flexibility and choice in structuring their careers.

The third worked in a sport with a much smaller employment base and less flexibility in work opportunities. National team positions are limited and hiring is based on a cycle around Olympic years. Among members of her sport community, it was commonly agreed that there would be no turnover in the national team staff before the next Olympics and prospects for openings after that would be limited. Interviewed shortly before the 1988 Games, this respondent had recently taken a job that combined coaching and administration. She described her reasons for the change:

I just realigned my goals basically into more of an administrative maybe technical stream. At first I thought I wanted to be a national team coach but I don't know; the positions are all full until after '88 anyway. I felt I don't want to hang around and do nothing so I changed my goals.

Q. Was it really a matter of doing nothing?

Yes for me. I see myself as an achiever ... and I just thought that wasn't motivating enough for me.

Another woman in the same sport had also realigned her career goals because of limited opportunities for advancement. Although she had not decided if she wanted children, she felt it would be possible to combine elite-level coaching with parenthood "if I wanted to." However, because of her frustration at the dim prospects for mobility, she was pursuing career possibilities outside sport. The revised priorities of these two women show how blocked mobility provides a context in which career possibilities are constructed.

The remaining six women in this group were childless. All identified the difficult lifestyle, particularly the travel, long and irregular hours, and intensity of the work as factors influencing changes in their career aspirations. In most cases, however,

dissatisfaction with the lifestyle was conditioned by other features of the work. This is evident in the following two accounts.

C., a successful university coach who was giving some thought to leaving coaching, said she was "tired."

...of spending every weekend and every evening in a gym. A complete lack of normal functioning in society. I call it my coaching cocoon. I used to joke about it and now I don't joke any more. I literally say to my friends I'm going back to school, classes start in September, coaching starts next week, I'll see you in March.

This fatigue, however, was conditioned by some features of her work, specifically her view of athletes' attitude and commitment. She explained further:

I'm starting to resent that and certainly in light of the way a lot of players in my personal situation have treated it. Sort of like a "who cares" attitude. We want to win, but wait a second: we don't want to work that hard.

W., another university coach, had a gruelling daily schedule that began at 5 a.m. While her sport is well organized in the universities, its main base is the club system. She discussed the demands of her work and the possibility of moving to a club program:

It's just a lifestyle that I accept until the middle of March and I enjoy or I want to do it enough to be able to do it for that time frame. And I'm teaching and doing all the rest of it as well but I would not put myself into a system that would require me to do that all year.

Again, this reluctance is conditioned by other features of her work. W. was one of the few women in the sample who had a feminist consciousness and analysis of sport and of coaching.¹³ She rejected the possibility of working in the more competitive club setting. It is, she said, "one authoritarian system out there that I know of and I think is horrible. I don't want the system; I don't want the hours; I don't want the lifestyle."

Most of the women who rejected ambitions for mobility cited career- and work-related concerns in accounting for their career goals. These included the opportunities for advancement, demands of the lifestyle and features of the work environment such as the commitment of athletes. Their accounts highlight the limitations on the careers of some women coaches that are imposed by the demands of the work and the position of women in sport. For several women, these concerns interacted with domestic responsibilities, and women who had children faced additional challenges in managing careers and the double work day. The following discussion of women who have left coaching gives further insight on the connection between domestic concerns and career aspirations and mobility.

Women who have left coaching. All but one of the seven women in this group have coached at the highest levels, either with successful university programs, national team programs or as the personal coach of nationally ranked athletes. Three were working outside sport, three were working in other jobs in sport and one was retired. Three had children and one planned to have children. All four indicated that their career decisions were significantly affected by family concerns. In some cases, the demands of coaching were simply incompatible with respondents' responsibilities as primary caregivers in their families. This clash is dramatically evident in the following account. B. coached in a sport with particularly extensive travel commitments for training camps and competitions. When she had her first child, she found it impossible to continue working with the national team. She discussed her situation:

(The problem was) not so much the working hours 'cause you could work around that. I work around it now, I get sitters to come in. But the main thing is the time away.... Because of all the competitions in Europe, you're basically gone from the month of May and through most of the summer.

This difficulty was compounded by the definition of the coach-athlete relationship, which was experienced differently by women coaches who have childcare responsibilities and their male colleagues. B. explained:

One year one of our coaches took her daughter to a training camp with her, was going to arrange for a sitter down there but could not, and ended up taking the child with her to watch. The reaction of the athletes and, I think, naturally so, was that they did not feel they had her full attention; that her attention was certainly divided between them and the kid. When you go to a training camp situation, they (the athletes) have to feel they have your full attention....

The other fellow who coaches is a male, took his family to Florida for a month. And his wife looked after the kids. He was coaching. And that didn't seem to happen — didn't seem to be any problem....

I found in coaching it's full time and total time, from the athletes' perspective. They want to know they can call on you anytime, day or night, and they have your attention. As opposed to, well, I'll see you when I'm available kind of thing. So I don't think it's fair to the athletes.

B.'s statement that athletes have a right to their coaches' undivided attention was echoed by another woman in the same sport who also had left coaching. The latter respondent indicated that athletes have a right to expect "100 percent" and "I realized I didn't have the ability to do that." "I just know that if I had young children I wouldn't want to be away from them for three months of the year." In this sport, the expectation of coaches' "100 percent" commitment to athletes for extensive periods of the year posed an insurmountable barrier for women with childcare responsibilities.

Another woman left a position in the national team program and was working in an administrative job in sport. When asked to discuss the move, she initially ascribed it to the difficulties of combining coaching with motherhood. As her child grew older "it really wasn't worth it." Further discussion, however, suggested that the conditions surrounding her departure from coaching were more complex.

I think it was just a combination of a lot of things. The support service not being in place and the level of athletes being really sort of questionable, not thinking the kids wanted as much as I had (wanted), or dealing with kids

that thought they were committed but they weren't really committed.

Another factor in this woman's decision to leave coaching was a norm of dependence between athletes and coaches. She remarked:

I know there are those times when you have to go away to Europe for 6 weeks and it's not a good situation to take your husband and child. But I think you can organize your time throughout a year where you can take that time off to be with your family knowing that, if you leave a workout or a series of things for the athletes to do, you know they will do them and they can carry them out.

The contradiction between this coach's belief that it was possible to be successful while fostering athletes' independence and the expectations that prevailed in her sport were yet another source of dissatisfaction that contributed to her leaving coaching. In the end, the move was prompted by a variety of factors. Her statement that it "really wasn't worth it" appears to relate to a wider set of conditions than domestic responsibilities.

The three remaining women who had left coaching were childless. One retired after a lengthy and largely satisfying career. The other two left under difficult circumstances and, in both cases, their careers were beset by handicaps that mark women's disadvantaged status in coaching and in sport. One had worked in a series of part-time appointments that were either poorly paid or voluntary. She had nonetheless achieved notable success and one of her athletes was a national champion. After several unsuccessful efforts to gain secure employment in coaching, she had recently taken a nonsport job and given up coaching. Her accounts of her efforts to secure a job in coaching made clear that her exclusion from the network of coaches and officials who controlled her sport was a major handicap.

The second woman, also very successful, left coaching for a job in sport administration when her working conditions became difficult. Her authority and credibility were undermined by a male col-

league who was supported by their superiors. The respondent felt her working conditions were unacceptable and irresolvable, and arranged a move to a different position.

These accounts show that women who have left coaching did so for a number of reasons. For some, career decisions were conditioned by difficult working conditions or blocked mobility. For respondents with children, domestic responsibilities often proved incompatible with continued involvement in coaching. Faced with primary responsibility for childcare and the demands of their work, including, in some cases, athletes' expectation of "total commitment," women coaches were forced to make a choice between their careers and domestic responsibilities.

Women at the top. Seven women in the sample were coaching at the highest levels of their sport. Some were national team coaches while others were the personal coaches of athletes on the national team. The group included women working in the more developed sports, and others in sports with limited coaching opportunities and no permanent national team staff. In the latter instance, coaches were appointed for specific competitions such as the Olympics.

Five of the women in this group have children and another plans to have children. A first conclusion, then, from these coaches' histories, is that elite-level coaching and motherhood are by no means incompatible. This observation, however, requires elaboration. Of the seven, three coached in women's sports (i.e., sports that have historically been organized separately from men's programs) and have been spared the difficulties that most women coaches face as minorities or tokens.¹⁴ One worked in a sport with a limited national team staff. Another worked with her husband. Apart from the last coach whose situation is special because of the spousal arrangement, only two of the women in this group worked in sports with a developed national team program where women are a minority. Since male-dominated national team staffs are the norm, the success of most women in this group had taken place under atypical circumstances.

Two of the women in this group were having major problems managing their work and domestic responsibilities. For one coach with an eight-year-old child, the problem was the extensive time she travels. She was attempting to deal with this by including her daughter on some of her trips and had no plans to make major changes in her work life.

Another coach had three children under the age of 5. She was married but her husband took little responsibility for childcare. A coached several athletes on an individual basis, including one who was a national champion. She wished to obtain permanent employment, either part or full time, and had a demonstrated record. So far, however, the difficulties of finding a position where she could manage the combination of professional and domestic obligations had been insurmountable.

Like the other women in the sample who had children, the elite-level coaches who were mothers worked out a variety of responses to the problem of managing their dual careers. One coach had full-time live-in help. Two relied on extended families. A had yet to find a satisfactory solution to this problem and it threatened her continued involvement in coaching. For these women as for all the coaches, the extensive time commitments of their work posed a major challenge.

One woman in this elite group was childless and planning to have children. Like the women who have career ambitions and are planning to have children, she was unclear about the impact of motherhood on her career. A difference between her and those in the first group was that she had risen to the top and was beginning to feel worn down by the demands of her job. She saw a connection between a job move and a change in her personal situation:

I would say for me the amount of travel — being away for six to eight, 10 weeks — I don't know. I may try it once I do have a child but I think it would be really tough to be away from home that long if I had a baby or a two-year-old.... I don't know how, we really haven't discussed how my husband would cope with it because the type of job he has he's not really tied

down in one place. It may work out, I don't know.

Q. Can you see yourself giving up this job because of the demands of parenting?

I'd say it's possible, not only because of parenting but also because of something like burnout or stress. It is a very stressful job — I have a lot of responsibility.... It's fun and you travel a lot but it is a lot of responsibility and it's fairly stressful, so it could be that I just get tired of coaching.

Conclusion

This article examined the careers and work of women coaches in Canada. A particular focus was the manner in which women coaches define the choices available to them and make decisions about their careers and personal lives. The discussion emphasized the connections between career and domestic responsibilities, and the limitations on some women's careers that arise from the difficulty of reconciling these concerns.

Women coaches' careers are conditioned by features of the work, the structure of employment opportunities and the climate of acceptance for women coaches. Features of the work include expectations about coaches' availability to athletes, long and irregular hours, extensive travel, and the intense or "draining" nature of coaching. Perhaps the most significant aspect of these features is that they are largely taken for granted by both coaches and sport administrators. Among coaches, several who experienced conflict between their work and domestic responsibilities felt their only choices were to leave coaching or revise their career aspirations to eliminate the problems. One instance of questioning came from one of the most successful coaches who indicated that a change she had made since having a child is more careful monitoring of her travel. "Now," she said, "I only go to a meeting or clinic if it will make me a better coach." This coach was exceptional as one of the few respondents who felt she had any power to control the circumstances of her work and, specifically, her travel. Even with this adjustment, travel to training camps and competitions was still required.

Evidence of a similar perception of limited choice is found in a recent survey of officials in national sport associations.¹⁵ Many officials, both male and female, recognized that family constraints limited women's career mobility. Male respondents, however, more often saw the "problem" of women in sport as an individual concern wherein some women, including those with domestic responsibilities, do not fit into the sport system. (It is significant to note here that the majority of senior national sport administrators are male.¹⁶) There was little recognition of structural barriers to women's full participation and the need for change in sport to better accommodate the reality of women's lives. Such change might include the provision of child-care at training and competition sites, and revisions in the expectation of a coach's near full-time availability to athletes. In the absence of change in sport and so long as women maintain the burden of the double work day, women coaches' mobility to elite levels will be restricted. Although affirmative action and other promotional efforts may increase the pool of qualified women coaches, these measures will have little impact on barriers to women's mobility arising from the conditions of their work.

The conditions of work also affected women coaches' careers by providing a context in which choices are defined and decisions are made. Most respondents viewed the enjoyment, satisfaction and excitement of coaching to be the primary rewards of their work. The other side of the intensity, however, was that it is "draining." This feature of coaching is likely one that would emerge in discussions with men coaches. While no systematic data exist on this, there is concern in Canadian sport over the frequency of "burnout" among coaches. For women, the demands of the work and the possibility of burnout provide a setting in which they consider their careers and futures, including plans to have children.

Differences among sports in the availability and security of positions and the possibility for advancement are also part of the context in which women define their careers and lives. For women working in sports with limited career opportunities

or sports that have been particularly resistant to the entry of women, the struggle to make a career is fraught with uncertainty. Blocked mobility is one among a number of factors that prompt women coaches to re-evaluate their career aspirations.¹⁷

For all these reasons the occupational world of coaching poses a myriad of challenges to women's involvement and their mobility. Coaches' responses to these challenges varied on the basis of their career aspirations and their ideas about parenting and childcare. Among those who had or planned to have children, some wished to be primary caregivers to their children and this was the determining factor in their career goals and decisions. These women, however, were a minority. Others who wished to maintain their involvement in coaching had limited their careers or, in a few cases, withdrawn completely because of the impossibility of arriving at a satisfactory balance between career and domestic responsibilities.

The stories of the women who are at the top of the coaching world and those who wish to be mo-

bile provide an interesting contrast. While a majority of the first group were mothers, with the exception of one woman who was pregnant, all in the second group were childless. Moreover, many of the "ambitious" coaches had only vague ideas about the challenge of combining coaching and parenting. Earlier it was suggested that these women had some fear about facing the future and were reluctant to entertain interruptions or challenges to their ambitions. The experiences of the women at the top provide some lessons in what the future will look like for elite-level coaches who are mothers. These lessons are that the challenge is demanding; that solutions to problems of obtaining childcare and managing the double work day are varied and involve assistance from extended families, creative scheduling and, in a minority of cases, shared parenting; and importantly, that it can be and is done by some women. Indeed, a main conclusion from the analysis here is that the challenge of making a career in coaching is daunting for all women and particularly so for those with childcare responsibilities, but that it is done and done successfully, albeit in a variety of ways.

NOTES

1. Duffy, A., Mandell, N. & Pupo, N. (1989). *Few choices: Women, work and family*. Toronto: Garamond; Gerson, K. (1985). *Hard choices: How women decide about work, career and motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
2. This description refers to the job market for paid coaches. In addition, there are thousands of unpaid volunteer coaches working throughout amateur sport and especially at the local level.
3. Willis, P. (1982). Women in sport in ideology. In J. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Sport, culture and ideology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
4. The statement is paraphrased from Messner, M. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 206.
5. Theberge, N. *Coaching and the construction of gender: Male dominance, masculine superiority and the naturalization of difference*. Unpublished manuscript.
6. Sport Canada. (1989). *Women in leadership: An issue for sport*. Ottawa: Fitness and Amateur Sport.
7. Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union. (1989-90). *Relative opportunities for women in the CIAU, update, 1989-90*. Ottawa: Author.
8. Sport Canada. (1986). *Policy on women in sport*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, p. 15.
9. Among Canadian national sport organizations, only women's field hockey and synchronized swimming have a majority of women coaches. Since women are a minority of coaches in most sports, respondents are not identified by sport in order to protect anonymity.
10. Michelson, W. (1985). *From sun to sun: Daily obligations and community structures in the lives of employed women and their families*. New Jersey: Rowman and Allenheld; Hochschild, A. (1989). *The second shift*. New York: Avon Books.
11. See Gerson's *Hard choices*, p. 96, for a discussion of structural versus psychological interpretations of women's "fears" about their careers and work.
12. Hochschild, *The second shift*, pp. 264-265.
13. An analysis of the difficulties of realizing a feminist alternative to the dominant definition of coaching practice is provided in Theberge, N. Gender, work and power: The case of women in coaching. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 15, 59-75.
14. The classic discussion of the condition of minorities and tokens in work organizations is Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
15. Hall, M.A., Cullen, D. & Slack, T. (1990). *The gender structure of national sport organizations*. Ottawa: Sport Canada Occasional Paper, Vol. 2 (1).
16. Sport Canada. (1989). *Women in leadership*.
17. For further discussion of the relationship between blocked mobility and changes in women's career aspirations, see Gerson's *Hard choices*, p. 194.