

# ADULT SWIMMERS' REPORTS OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH HAVING A MASTERS SWIM COACH



Scott Rathwell<sup>1</sup>, Bettina Callary<sup>2</sup>, & Bradley W. Young<sup>1</sup>

University of Ottawa<sup>1</sup>  
Cape Breton University<sup>2</sup>



## Introduction

Over 70% of serious minded Masters athletes report having a coach (Young & Medic 2011).

Masters athletes who have coaches report more self-determined motives for sport (Medic, Young, Starkes, & Weir, 2012).

Coaches influence many technical and performance aspects in Masters sport (Rathwell, Callary, Ambrogio, & Young, 2014), and may also impact different outcomes relating to personal and social development.

Recently, the case has been made for a relationship between Masters sport participation and older adults' positive development (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010), yet how athletes see the role of their coach in this relationship and developmental processes remains unclear.

## Purpose

To explore Masters swimmers' perceptions of personal and social developmental benefits associated with having a swim coach.

## Methods

Data were collected using a semi-structured open-ended interview (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews were explored using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 2010).

## Participants

**Sample:** 10 coached competitive Masters swimmers

**Gender:** 5 male and 5 female

**Age:** Mean = 52.9, Range: 45–65

**Weekly Training hours:** Mean = 4, Range: 2.5–7

## Results

### Coach has positive influence on personal development

Some swimmers felt coaches helped develop their personal confidence, feelings of competence in swimming, and commitment to learning.

#### **Confidence:**

*"Well it's the feeling that I have somebody almost rooting for me. My coach's support is critical to me. That he believes that I can do it. It makes me believe that I can do it. So it's worth paying a little bit of money for that. I just truly enjoy it."* (P1)

#### **Competence :**

*"Everything I'm doing in swimming is getting better, faster and longer with my coach. Those are measurable improvements. I had six placements in the top ten in the country last year and a couple of bronzes. I couldn't do that before."* (P4)

#### **Commitment to learning:**

*"My resolve to keep swimming has a lot to do with the workouts my coach puts on the board. I mean, occasionally we'll have almost an entire evening devoted to kick sets, which are my least favourite part of swimming. Within the last little while, I've begun to realize how important they are. So I have made a commitment to get better at them instead of complain about it."* (P6)

#### **Coach facilitates opportunities for social development**

Swimmers also described how coaches facilitated opportunities for community involvement, leadership, and social exchanges.

#### **Community involvement:**

*"The coach has a website and he sends out e-mails to let us know what the kids are doing and how we can participate. In fact, a requirement of being a member of this Masters club is that so many times a year we have to help out with events for the children of the club. We can donate food, we can go and do some time volunteering. We can also go in and swim with them, because he likes the children and the parents to see that you can still swim when you're old."* (P3)

#### **Leadership:**

*"The coach asked us to volunteer for certain leadership positions on the team, and there's an annual general meeting where the executive gets elected and people agree to take on different roles. Somebody takes on the role as the social convener, there's an executive, there's a president and a rep. There's also somebody on the executive who takes on the role of organizing competitions and encouraging people to come to competitions."* (P1)

#### **Social exchanges:**

*"An important part of the club is how it comes together socially. My coach is good about that. He makes a point of hosting a Christmas party, an end of the year party, and different social events like that. He also encourages friendship amongst the swimmers."* (P9)

#### **Coach has no influence on development**

Some swimmers noted their coaches' roles had limits and felt coaches were only responsible for athletic development:

*"I mean my coaches are nice guys. I started working with them when I was fifty but I don't know if there's been a huge difference in my life. It's a bit different from my youth coaches when I was young. I had a swim coach for one summer and it made quite a huge impression in my life when I was twelve. It's different now."* (P8)

*"Having a coach, has it influenced my life outside of sport? [pause] I'd have to think about that. I don't- I mean, how? I can't think of, you know has my coach given me a life lesson that I can take and use elsewhere? I'd probably say no. I mean, if you actually asked somebody who was younger; possibly. But at this point in time, I would say no."* (P10)

#### **Conflicted views on coaches' influence**

Some swimmers initially disclaimed the coaches' role, yet subsequently articulated developmental outcomes attributed to their coach:

*"The coach has had an impact on me to a small degree. I've always set goals and tried to achieve them. So from that perspective it hasn't really changed. However, I just feel much healthier now that I'm swimming on a regular basis, which has to do with having a coach. So from an overall health perspective, absolutely the coach has had an impact"* (P9)

*"The coach has had an impact on me indirectly. I'm a happier person because I swim, and having a coach makes me swim more. I think I'm healthier, you know, for all the reasons that one does a sport. I think that has a positive impact on me so indirectly, that would affect me outside of actually being in the pool. But otherwise, I mean, is he a motivational speaker that changed my life? No. I would say no, there's not a lot of impact that it would have outside of my life outside of the actual swimming."* (P7)

## Discussion

Baker et al. (2010) proposed that sport might facilitate adult sportspersons' development of the 5 Cs: *competence, character, connection, confidence, caring/compassion* described by Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000). The current data offer partial support for these claims whereby some swimmers felt their coaches helped develop their personal *confidence*, feelings of *competence*, and social exchanges (i.e., *connection*).

Some swimmers also described how coaches facilitated opportunities for community involvement and leadership, which highlights unique developmental outcomes and experiences for adult athletes (Baker et al., 2010).

Lerner et al. (2000) describe that by developing the 5 C's, a sixth C will be developed (i.e., *contribution*). The current swimmers were encouraged and often required to get involved with and to give back to their swimming communities (i.e., volunteering at youth events), which may not be consistent with contribution notions articulated in youth development literature.

## Conclusions

The current results suggest that coaches have unique roles in developing personal and social outcomes when coaching Masters athletes. Further, although partial support was found, the current results suggest youth models may not fully explain Masters athletes' development.

Some athletes felt their coaches had a direct influence on their personal and social development. Others noted coaches had an indirect influence, or that coaches influence was restricted to athletic development. Future investigation could examine coaches' direct and indirect influences on Masters athletes' personal and social development and whether they are a function of individual athletes' differences in preferences, needs and interests.