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Work Life Balance Perspectives of NCAA Division I Male Athletic Trainers: Positive and Negative Influences

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Work-Life Balance Perspectives of NCAA Division I Male Athletic Trainers: Positive and Negative Influences

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B.S., University of New Hampshire, 2009

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Masters of Science Thesis

Work-Life Balance Perspectives of NCAA Division I Male Athletic Trainers: Positive and Negative Influences

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Abstract.....	V
II.	Review of the Literature.....	1
	Introduction.....	1
	Antecedents Causing a Negative WLB.....	2
	WLB in Other Healthcare Professions.....	5
	WLB- Gender Differences.....	7
	Impact of WLB: Attrition and Retention.....	11
	Management Strategies to Help Maintain WLB.....	14
	Mitigating WLB Among Organizations.....	19
III.	Introduction.....	26
IV.	Methods.....	29
	Research Design.....	29
	Recruitment and Participants.....	30
	Data Collection.....	31
	Data Analysis and Credibility Procedures.....	31
V.	Results.....	33
	Factors Negatively Impacting WLB.....	33
	Factors Positively Impacting WLB.....	36
	Quantitative Findings.....	39
VI.	Discussion.....	41
VII.	Appendices	
	Appendix A: E-mail Recruitment Letter.....	54
	Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire.....	55
	Appendix C: Likert Scale 1.....	57
	Appendix D: Likert Scale 2.....	58

ABSTRACT

Work-Life Balance Perspectives of NCAA Division I Male Athletic Trainers: Positive and Negative Influences

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Context: Athletic Trainers (ATs) not only have to manage their responsibilities in the workplace, but also those associated with their personal and family lives. This is referred to as work-life balance (WLB). Long work hours, inflexible work schedules, travel, and coaches' expectations have all been found to be major contributors of work-life imbalance especially at the NCAA Division I clinical setting where performance expectations are high. Organizational factors receive much attention in the literature, however other factors such as gender have been suggested as facilitators as well. Demographic data has demonstrated a decline in female ATs after age 28 thus most WLB research in athletic training is centered around females. WLB issues have been found to influence attrition for the male AT in this setting as well, warranting future study.

Objective: Determine factors that negatively affect WLB among male ATs working in the NCAA D-I clinical setting and strategies they use to create a balance in their personal and professional lives? **Design:** Mixed-methods study. **Setting:** NCAA D-I collegiate setting. **Patients or other Participants:** Twenty-two Board of Certification certified male ATs (10 single, 5 married, 7 married with children) working in the Division-I clinical setting with 10.5 ± 7.68 years of experience. **Data collection and Analysis:**

Participants responded to a series of close and open-ended questions on QuestionPro™. Data source, multiple analyst triangulation, and peer review were used to establish data credibility. Data was analyzed following a general inductive approach. Close-ended data consisted of 7-point Likert Scale questions related to finding and maintain WLB.

Results: Two major categories emerged: 1) Positive and 2) Negative influences on WLB. Positive influences were divided into: 1) *time away and personal time*, 2) *separation*, and 3) *support networks*. *Time away* included the utilization of vacation time whereas *separation* highlights the ability to delineate between professional and personal roles essentially leaving work at work. The main *support network* mentioned by participants was administrative/supervisor support. The negative influences on WLB consisted of 1) *time of year*, 2) *spouse and family needs*, and 3) *demands of the profession*. *Time of year* demonstrated challenges faced during different competitive seasons. *Demands of the profession* include hours worked, travel requirements, practice/competition schedule and workload. *Spouse and family needs* demonstrated the challenges males face balancing their personal roles. Likert Scale data revealed work demands interfere with home/personal life and ATs often miss important non-work events due to their job responsibilities. **Conclusion:** Male ATs working in the Division-1 setting are able to identify factors that inhibit work life balance and also factors that help maintain a balance. Identifying the sources of conflict and strategies used to help mitigate imbalance can help create an organizational strategy for a more balanced lifestyle. **Count:** 449

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Working professionals, especially healthcare providers, are confronted with the daunting task of meeting the demands of their profession while maintaining a personal life and associated responsibilities.¹ Definitions and explanations of work-life balance (WLB) vary within current literature but generally can be viewed as the ability to balance one's personal life, with the roles and responsibilities associated with their job or career.^{1,2,3} One established definition of WLB is the satisfactory level of involvement and equilibrium between the multiple roles in a person's life.^{4,5} Personal life varies from individual to individual and is based on many factors such as relationship or marital status, and/or having children. Personal interests, hobbies, activities, family involvement, social events and other factors in one's life outside of work also factor into one's personal life. In recognition that family; which encompasses immediate family, extended family, relationships and children, is not the only important non-work function in an individual's life, the term WLB is more appropriate than the term work-family balance⁴ as the term is more global pertaining to different demographics.

While trying to maintain equilibrium between work and personal life, conflicts often arise that disrupt this balance due to pressure from one role impeding on the other. Work-family conflict (WFC) occurs when the demands of fulfilling professional responsibilities interfere with the demands of one's family life or vice versa.^{6,7} However, as Mazerolle et al.¹ found, these conflicts arise regardless of marital status and/or children therefore the term work-life conflict (WLC) is more appropriate than WFC although the two terms are often transposable. Overall, the WFC or WLC phenomenon is a byproduct of stress caused by the demands and responsibilities of one's work life, which makes it

more difficult to accomplish or meet activities in the home and personal life.⁸ The terms are used interchangeably within the literature but WLB is the most appropriate because it entails people of different demographics including single, married, and married with children.

Antecedents Causing a Negative WLB

According to the literature, high workload pressure, increased working hours, unsupportive management, and lack of job flexibility, are the primary factors that negatively influence WLB.^{9,10} High work demands leave the individual with less energy for their personal life when they leave the workplace thus resulting in lower quality of personal life and family interactions.¹⁰ Increased pressure from work to complete tasks might cause work to spill over into one's personal life in that an individual may need to use personal time at home to complete these tasks. Working hours strongly influence WLB because the more time spent at work leaves less time available for one's personal life.¹⁰ Nelson et al.¹¹ found that individuals who lack choice or input toward setting their work schedules/hours may be more susceptible to conflicts with WLB. This correlates with support from management, as they are the ones who set work schedules. Individuals who work under management systems that are unreceptive of workers' personal (non-work) needs are more likely to struggle with WLB.¹⁰

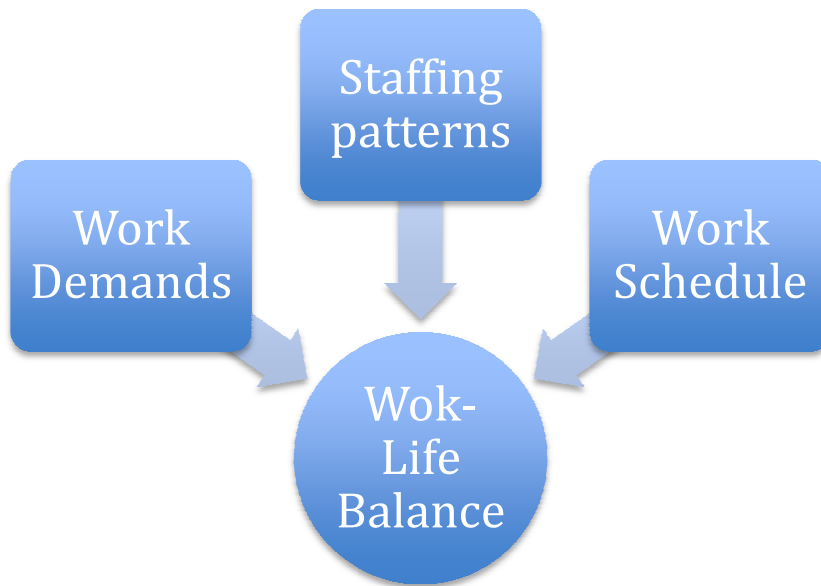


Figure 1: Antecedents of work-life conflict among other health care professionals: nurses and physicians. Adapted from Benligiray S, Sonmez H. Analysis of organizational commitment and work–family conflict in view of doctors and nurses. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 2012;23(18):3890–3905

Antecedents of a Negative WLB in Athletic Training

These factors relating to WLB in the general workforce relate closely to healthcare professionals especially athletic trainers (ATs). Athletic trainers often work long hours including nights, weekends and holidays, and have little to no control of their work schedules^{1,7,12} Their schedules revolve around teams and sports in which they are responsible for providing medical coverage and their schedules can vary on a daily basis depending on game, practice, and strength and conditioning times. Also, ATs working in collegiate or high school clinical settings do not work the typical 9-5, 40 hours per week schedules. Instead 9-10 hour days with 60-70 hr workweeks can be normal, especially when covering sports that are in-season.¹³ This is especially true for ATs working in the collegiate setting, where typically there are a greater number of sports, student-athletes, and higher level of competition than in high schools. Also in the collegiate setting the times of team activities can be widespread throughout the day. In the Division I

collegiate setting, ATs are often assigned exclusively to specific teams and are required to be at all team events for medical coverage including away competitions.

Mazerolle et al.⁷ studied 587 ATs working in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I (NCAA D-I) setting to investigate the occurrence of WFC. The results yielded evidence that long hours, travel, inflexible work schedules, and inadequate staffing patterns were major contributing factors or antecedents of WFC regardless of their marital or family status. Participants discussed how the time commitment associated with being an AT at the NCAA D-I level affects their ability to manage professional and personal responsibilities along with social life or personal time. The time demand can make it hard to visit family, attend holiday or family events, spend time with friends outside of the work place, and enjoy personal interests.^{1,14} Managing personal responsibilities such as taking care of children or doing household chores can also be also affected. Though hours worked and required travel for team events were the most significant contributing factors of WLB in this particular study, staffing patterns and schedule flexibility were secondary factors that emerged within their data.

Team schedules such as practice times and travel, are determined by coaches (and administrators). Coaches can change practice and team schedules for various reasons with or without ample notice and ATs are expected to adjust their schedules accordingly to meet medical coverage needs. Because ATs are not involved in the scheduling, their own schedule can change with little to no control thus impacting their WLB. Staffing patterns can also be a precipitating factor to WLB for ATs because lack of support staff can increase workload due to the number of teams and athletes.^{1,7,15} The more teams, sports, and athletes there are at a particular setting, the more ATs are needed to keep up with the sports medicine responsibilities. With less staff ATs the same job has to be done

and split between the staff members. In the secondary school setting, Pitney et al.¹² found a similar trend that work hours and the lack of schedule flexibility directly correlated with WLB and negatively affected perceived WFC in ATs employed in this setting.

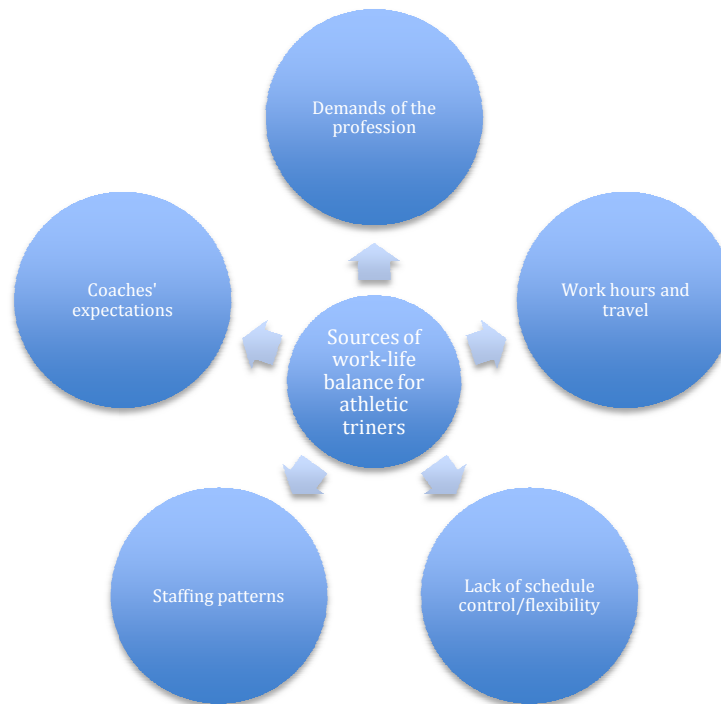


Figure2: Antecedents of work-life balance for athletic trainers. Adapted from Mazerolle SM, Pitney WA, Casa DJ, Pagnotta KD. Assessing strategies to manage work and life balance of athletic trainers working in the national collegiate athletic association division I Setting. *Journal of Athletic Training*. 2011; 46(2):194-205.

WLB in Other Healthcare Professions

Antecedents

Similar to ATs, nurses and physicians are examples of other healthcare professionals that often find difficulty with WLB due to the demands of their career. For nurses the biggest influences of WLB stem from work demands including, long hours, inconsistent work schedule, and staffing patterns.^{16,17} Work shifts and hours vary depending on the

setting, staffing needs, and availability. Nursing staff in an emergency unit may have a harder time with WLB due to work shifts or workload and their incidence of conflict between work and personal life may be higher than that of staff working in outpatient or administrative units.¹⁸ Working late nights, weekends, and rotating shifts can disrupt WLB as it limits the amount of time to spend with family or for personal interests.¹⁸ Also, these long hours and inconsistent shifts can cause the feeling of isolation from family and friends who are not on the same schedule.¹⁹ Adequate staffing patterns impacts nurses because shortages in employees increase individual workload demand to provide patient care and patient needs take priority over employee needs.¹⁸ Staffing shortages can also lead to a nurse being called in on an off day or being asked to work longer.

Physicians are at the top of the healthcare chain and they too have conflicts that cause imbalances in WLB. Similar to nurses, increased demands from job responsibilities and patient care leads to job stress and work role overload, which in itself can negatively impact WLB.²⁰⁻²² For hospital physicians, frequent scheduling and duty changes often interferes with personal plans or vacation time suggesting the need for organizational changes. Physicians going to work despite their own health problems or illness leads to higher perceived problems with WLB as found by Isabelle Fuß et al.²² which has not been found in previous research. They also found that sense of community is the only thing that seems to have a significant positive effect with regard to work and personal life therefore organizational development within hospitals should create a working atmosphere that encourages teamwork.

Hospitals provide healthcare services 24 hours a day 365 days per year, which requires continuous vital duties and responsibilities from doctors and nurses to provide adequate care for their patients. In doing so they are exposed to stressful situations

caused by intensive workload due to personnel shortages, long work hours, and patient needs. They must also develop themselves professionally, conduct academic research, attend training activities and often undertake extra administrative and academic duties. Psychological, physical and social pressures created by job demands can lead to conflict between work and family [or life] roles, which can alter their relationships with the institutions they work for.²⁰

Management strategies

Studies have shown that support from co-workers, family and friends can help positively influence WLB in healthcare professionals.¹⁸⁻²² Colleagues provide a support network which can help reduce pressures of job demands by helping with workload and patient care, while family and friends provide moral support and help with problems that may arise out of the workplace.¹⁸ Wang et al.¹⁸ proposed that organizations need to instill human resource changes such as flexible work time, adequate vacation time, workload sharing, and family assistance planning in order to mitigate working demands and improve WLB.

WLB – Gender differences

Perceived Gender differences and equity continue to be an issue in career and employment opportunities. In some professions career advancement and high-status positions are the same regardless of gender while other professions continue to have perceived gender differences. In general, males tend to be more career goal oriented, are considered to be the “bread winners,” have higher salaries, and work their way up into higher positions (the corporate ladder).²³ The majority of working women seek a larger degree of work-life balance compared to their male counterparts²⁴ and are more likely to ask for shorter work hours or part-time work than to ask for higher pay or promotion²⁵

thus hindering career advancement. Heiligers et al.²⁶ noted that women who reach the position of medical specialist have already broken traditional patterns of gendered work division. Also, women face the societal stereotype of being the primary caregivers of the immediate family and home caretakers. Hakim's²⁷ *preference theory* suggests that women have genuine choices as to how they resolve the conflict between work and family (personal) life, which fall into three main groups; work-centered lifestyle, home-centered lifestyle, and the adaptive lifestyle. Women who prioritize their careers fit into the work-centered lifestyle and often remain childless by choice. On the opposite side of the spectrum, women who fit into the home-centered lifestyle prioritize family life and childcare with little paid work. The adaptive lifestyle combines paid jobs and family responsibilities without giving absolute priority to either aspect, which makes up the majority of women.²⁷

Home Centered	Adaptive	Work Centered
10-30% of women	40-80% of women	10-30% of women
Family life and children are the main life priorities	Strive to combine work and family	Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities (i.e in the public arena) Mostly comprised of childless women
Prefer not to work	Want to work but not completely dedicated to work career	Committed to work career
Qualifications obtained for intellectual dowry	Qualifications obtained with the intention of working	Large investment in qualifications/training for employment
Responsive to social and family policy	Responsive to all policies	Responsive to employment policies

Table 1: Describes the 3 groups of women's lifestyle choices according to Hakim's lifestyle preference theory. Adapted from Hakim, C. *Work-lifestyle choices in the 21st century: preference theory*. 2000;Oxford: Oxford University Press.

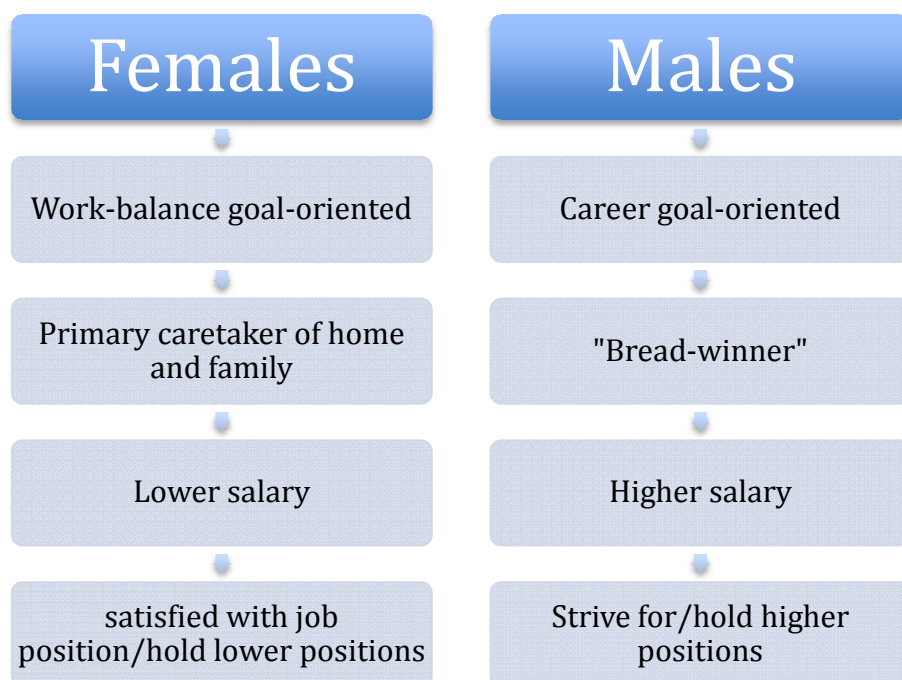


Figure 3: Shows perceived gender differences between males and females

Gender issues in athletic training affecting WLB

Much like national employment trends have increased in the amount of females in the workforce, similar growth patterns have been seen in the profession of athletic training since 1956 when women first entered the field of athletic training.²¹ Men represent about 52% of the athletic training profession while women represent about 48% as reported by the NATA in 2011.²⁸ Specifically at the collegiate or university level, 97.7% of NCAA institutions employ ATs and the number of male and female ATs working in this setting are comparable.²⁹ However, less than one third of NCAA institutions have female head athletic trainers or supervisors.^{28,29} Furthermore leadership positions within the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) are predominantly male despite the fact that females account for more than half of the certified members population and almost half of the workforce.^{28,30,31} In 2010 16.3% of head athletic trainers at the Division I level were female, which was less than a 1% increase from 1995-1996.³² This is

congruent with similar NCAA statistics that males within collegiate sports hold the majority of leadership positions including athletic director, assistant or associate athletic director, and head coaching positions meaning men set the hiring and policy agendas.

These gender differences create gender-bias and gender equity issues within the athletic training workforce.³³ In general women have been considered to be the household and family caretakers while men are associated with being the income providers however these customary roles have been changing as men have assumed more household duties.³⁴ Female ATs face the pressures caused by work demands and stereotypes associated with child bearing and culture issues regarding traditional gender roles, and also perceive greater conflict between professional and family life.³⁵

Male and female ATs have different views regarding opportunities for women in the profession.³⁰ Males in the profession believe opportunities for females are equal, while females perceive that they continue to receive fewer opportunities, such as ascending into leadership positions and working among professional sports, than their male counterparts because of their gender and exclusion from the “good old boys” network.^{36,37} Interestingly some males believed they experienced fewer opportunities than females due to such policies as affirmative action and hiring quotas.³⁰ Compensation and salary is another gender issue. A salary report from the NATA in 2003 showed that female ATs earn about \$6500 less per year than men and also receive less annual bonus³⁸ however this doesn’t reflect setting and number of males versus females in the profession. Current research would have to break down genders and setting differences and compare that to salary in order to reflect more accurate numbers.

As previously discussed, organizational factors such as work scheduling and job demands receive much attention in the literature as antecedents of WLB. However, other

factors such as gender, personal values, and societal expectations³⁹ have also been suggested as facilitators for imbalance between work and life (work-life imbalance). Due to the demands of motherhood, females tend to report higher levels of work-life imbalance as compared to males, which has precipitated departure for females from the workplace because the time demands of work limit the time to meet parenting responsibilities.^{14,28} These factors have lead scholars to spend more time focusing on females, rather than both genders regarding WLB research. Despite a strong focus on female ATs' experiences with work-life imbalance, research has not identified gender differences⁷ suggesting males struggle balancing their roles as well.

Impact of WLB: Attrition and Retention

Responsibilities and stressors associated with being an athletic trainer, including; traveling, fluctuating work schedule and the numerous work hours, have been identified as the biggest catalysts for WLB issues among this group of professionals and are also found in the literature to be related to job dissatisfaction and burnout thus leading to attrition and retention issues. In an early investigation of attrition among AT's, Capel found that time commitment, low salary, limited advancement, and conflicts with coaches and administrators were all factors related to low job satisfaction and primary reasons for leaving the profession. Kania et al.⁴¹ defined burnout as a psychological condition consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (negative attitude), and reduced sense of personal accomplishment, which is becoming popular topic among healthcare professionals. They identified personal and environmental characteristics that may lead to burnout among athletic trainers working within NCAA institutions. High levels of stress and lack of leisure time were identified as personal characteristics. Environmental characteristics include pressure from coaches to medically clear an athlete after injury,

injury type and frequency, number of sports covered by ATs, and number of athletes ATs are responsible for providing healthcare for. Milazzo et al.⁴² and Mazerolle et al.⁴³ found that as ATs' feelings of negative WLB increased so did the level of perceived burnout. The constant struggle to find time to meet personal obligations or needs due to work-related responsibilities negatively affects ATs' perceptions regarding their current positions, and as they continue to work in those stressful environments, they experience burnout.⁴⁴

Role conflict and overload also play a role in attrition and retention issues. Role conflict involves incompatible or inconsistent expectations such as the affect of NCAA Division I bureaucracy and pressure to win.⁴⁵ Athletic trainers have the responsibility of providing safe and adequate treatments and rehabilitation programs and they also have the authority to return injured athletes to competition when health and safety will not be compromised. Their responsibilities may come with increased pressures from coaches when key players are injured, important games are on the horizon, or post-season is under way. Role overload occurs with increase in coverage needs especially due to the lack of a traditional off season (mostly at the collegiate level), which used to be valuable time for ATs to refocus on balancing work and life demands.¹¹ Combined with the physical demands of the profession ATs strive to meet the high expectations from coaches, athletes and administrators while often placing team and player needs in front of their own therefore creating a struggle between work and personal life.

Many studies have examined the cause and effects WLB, which could lead to setting changes or ATs leaving the profession altogether. Female ATs are often the center of attention due to perceived gender roles, Goodman et al.¹⁴ studied female ATs working in the NCAA South East Conference and found that struggling to balance work

and life was a major attrition factor for this group. Single female ATs without children struggled with personal time whereas married or partnered female ATs experienced more conflicts between work and family roles. Reasons for females wanting to persist at this level (NCAA D-I FBS) included help with kinship responsibility, enjoyment of the Division I setting, increased social support and increased autonomy. The decision to leave the profession included kinship responsibility, role conflict and overload, decreased autonomy, supervisor and coaching conflict and life balance issues. Mazerolle et al.⁷ found similar results studying both male and female ATs in the NCAA Division I setting but noted that sex and marital or family status had no affect on work-family conflict. Work family conflicts of male and Female NCAA Division I ATs were correlated with lack of job satisfaction, burnout, and intent to leave the profession.⁴³ Kahanov et al.²⁸ found different trends between sexes for both occupational setting and age. The general trend was that female ATs tend to leave the profession around age 28 and male ATs tend to shift into the secondary school setting in their 40's. They also noticed a general decline of ATs in the workforce occurred after age 30. The shift for women might be explained by gender differences and expectations as explained earlier however the shift among males is less understood and warrants further investigation to draw sound conclusions. Mazerolle et al.⁴⁶ found that male ATs decide to leave the profession (particularly the NCAA Division-I setting) because of role transition, low salaries, and limited chances for promotion within the collegiate setting. Male ATs working in the NCAA Division I setting that choose to stay enjoy working in their positions because of the competitive atmosphere, desire to work with other individuals who share similar personality traits, and support from their supervisors.⁴⁶

Management Strategies to help maintain WLB

Finding a balance between work and personal life is challenging for most ATs across all employment settings due to the demands of the profession. A systematic review by Mazerolle et al.⁴⁷ identified strategies utilized by ATs across all settings (including college, secondary school, and rehabilitation clinic or outreach) and others that are setting specific, which points out that all strategies are not universal. In other words, strategies that help with WLB in one setting may not necessarily work in another but there are similarities across clinical settings. In their review, they identified establishing boundaries, creating personal time, support networks, and separation between work and home as effective strategies used by ATs across all settings to promote a balanced lifestyle. In the traditional collegiate and secondary school settings they found integration to be a unique strategy while in the clinical rehabilitation setting having a stable work schedule was unique.

Boundaries refer to trying to create a more controlled work schedule and hours by implementing established treatment times for athletes, controlling off-season medical coverage, and saying “no” to coaches, athletes, or additional work responsibilities.⁴⁷ Setting boundaries lets coaches and athletes know what an ATs availability is outside of practice and when it is acceptable and unacceptable to contact the AT outside of their available hours.¹ This also helps ATs determine if and when they might have down time during the workday. Saying “no” is a good method to establish boundaries but should be used cautiously and perhaps only when WLB is directly affected. In a study examining role strain among dual-position athletic trainers, those who were able to decline added responsibilities experienced less role strain than those who had difficulty saying no.⁴⁸ Before taking on an added responsibility, one should consider the implications on their

personal life (i.e family and personal interests) and then make a decision whether or not to take on that responsibility. By creating boundaries between work and life ATs can help satisfy responsibilities within each domain more effectively, thus creating more time for both.⁴⁷

Setting aside time during the day for non work-related activities and to accomplish personal tasks or obligations is another common tactic used by many ATs to help achieve a healthy WLB.¹ This personal time should be an outlet or escape from the work setting. Exercising is an example of a personal activity many ATs make time for during their workday to maintain a healthy lifestyle, promote physical self-improvement and/or provide a means of stress relief. A participant in a study by Mazerolle et al.¹ explained that working out is something she “does every day that is completely and utterly for [her].” Other activities may include meeting up with a friend, spouse, or family member, running errands, attending to personal matters, or simply just leaving the office for a period of time to break up the workday. Managing, protecting, and prioritizing personal time is a key factor for maintaining a balanced lifestyle as reported by Kahanov et al.⁴⁹ and Mazerolle et al.¹

The theory of separation describes work and personal life as two different elements in which individuals attempt to create a distinct barrier between the two by focusing on one aspect of their lives at a time and preventing spill over of responsibilities from one realm into the other.^{1,37} When leaving the workplace it is important for ATs to leave behind the stressors and pressures of the work environment keeping them separate from the home environment. Individuals should deliberate their focus and energy on personal interests, leisure activities, domestic care obligations, personal relationships or time spent with family rather than on work issues or additional responsibilities, which can often wait

until the next day.^{1,50} Separation allows for personal rejuvenation, which has been established as a necessary factor that allows time away from the professional role to fulfill personal interests and participation in hobbies as well as the opportunity to be with family.^{47,51} Ultimately, each person defines a balanced lifestyle differently and once a balance is achieved, contentment or personal satisfaction will hopefully follow.

Support networks such as family, friends, co-workers and/or supervisors are essential factors for ATs to be successful in their different life roles such as clinician, friend, parent, or spouse and are especially important for female ATs to find a successful balance between motherhood and professional accomplishments.⁴⁷ Family and friends can provide support in various ways such as moral support, encouragement, and providing an outlet for someone to talk to. They are also flexible and understanding regarding the nature of the ATs professional demands and responsibilities.⁵⁰ One aspect of co-worker support entails sharing work-related duties and responsibilities or helping with coverage assignments. For example a colleague may offer to cover an event, practice, athletic training room duty, or other responsibility for a fellow AT to allow him/her to meet family needs or time for personal endeavors (or interests). These favors are often reciprocated, which creates a positive team atmosphere. In the non-traditional setting (i.e patient clinic or industrial), the concept of job sharing allows AT schedule flexibility for healthcare providers, which can be especially important for clinicians with childcare responsibilities. In a study by Mazerolle et al.¹ ATs discussed the need for all members of the staff to share the same vision and philosophy regarding work and life balance. Another aspect of co-worker support for ATs involves camaraderie or social support because peers can discuss personal and professional success, struggles, and insight with others who share similar experiences.⁵¹ Supervisor support is another key

factor reported by many ATs that helps them achieve WLB. Having a supervisor who shares the same family, work, and personal values as their AT staff members helps with WLB because they are more likely to understand and be more empathetic toward schedule demands and time to meet family responsibilities.^{1,12} Regardless of the clinical setting, supervisors (including athletic directors, administrators, and head athletic trainers) need to be sensitive to high work demand and hours put in by their ATs to fulfill their professional responsibilities thus they should implement strategies whenever possible to help their staff manage a personal and professional life. Simple strategies such as supervisors telling ATs they can go home if it is not imperative for them to be at work can make WLB more manageable.

Integration is a WLB management strategy unique to ATs in the traditional setting (collegiate and secondary school) that involves combining work and family or personal domains that influence one another into the workday.^{1,47} Integration includes prioritizing and utilizing free blocks of times during the day for personal matters such as running errands, working out, or meeting up with family or friends as previously discussed. This management technique can help the athletic trainer to overcome the adverse effects of long work hours. Integration has been known as “family-friendly” policy as it may involve family members, such as children or spouse, coming to the workplace to interact, but it can also be used by single athletic trainers to increase the time available for non-work obligations or personal interests.⁴⁷ Many ATs have reported that in general their supervisors and coaches are accommodating to family needs thus encouraging ATs to bring their children into the workplace. Childcare is one reason to incorporate children into the workplace and is the most common throughout the literature. Another reason might be just to spend time with them. At the NCAA division I level some ATs have

reported that their teams will pay for their family members (spouse, children, or both) to travel to away competitions that are multi-day trips. As with prioritizing personal time, using integration to offset lulls or changes in schedules can help an AT achieve WLB.¹

Having a stable work schedule with established work hours and the flexibility to schedule patient care is an important for ATs in the clinical rehabilitation setting to maintain WLB. Most athletic trainers in this setting work typical 40 hour weeks and are not accustomed to unanticipated schedule changes on short notice (like those frequently encountered in the traditional setting) therefore they value having a work schedule that is stable, which facilitates planning for personal and family obligations.⁴⁷

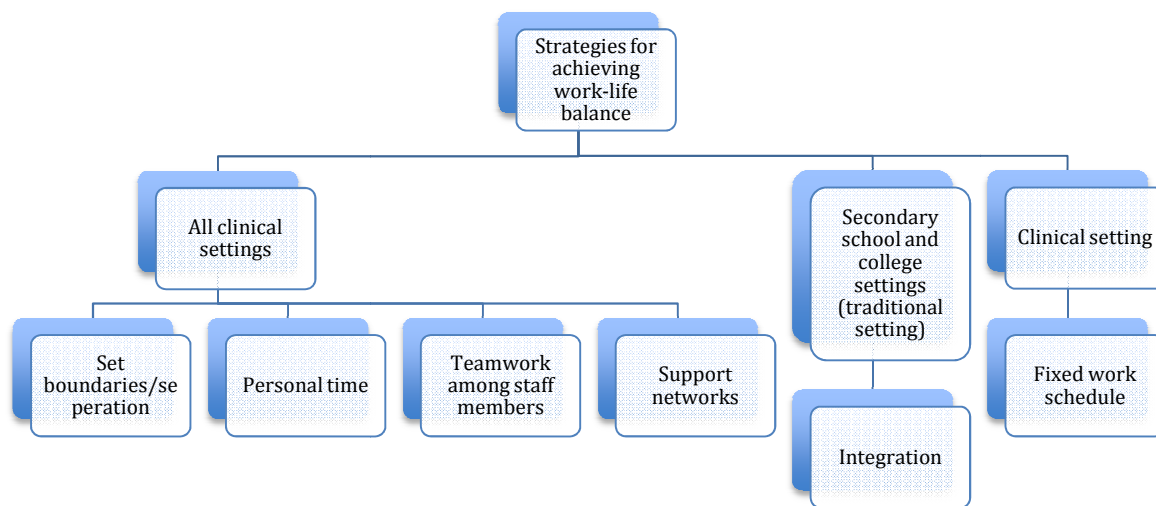


Figure 4: Strategies used by ATS to achieve WLB specific to the setting they work in. Adapted from Mazerolle SM, Pitney W, Goodman A. Strategies for athletic trainers to find a balanced lifestyle across clinical settings. *International Journal of Athletic Therapy & Training*. 2012;17(3):7-14.

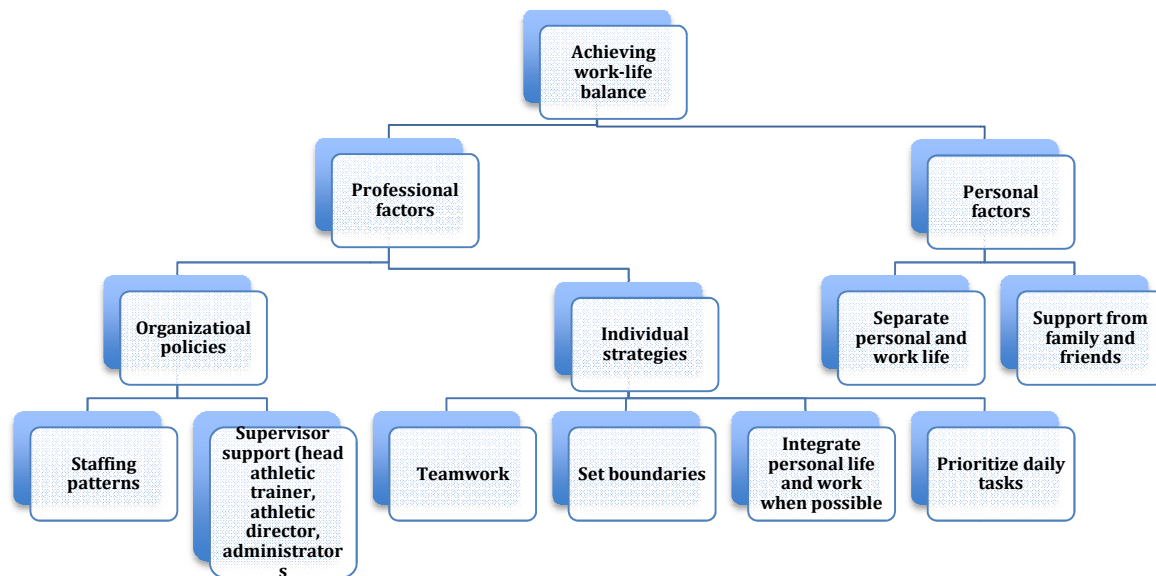


Figure 5: Strategies used by athletic trainers working in the NCAA Division I setting to promote WLB. Adapted from Mazerolle SM, Pitney WA, Casa DJ, Pagnotta KD. Assessing Strategies to Manage Work and Life Balance of Athletic Trainers Working in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Setting. *Journal of Athletic Training*. 2011; 46(2): 194-205

Mitigating WLB among organizations: General workforce and Athletic Training

Basic strategies to help foster life balance needs of working professionals in the general workforce include schedule flexibility, timing and work location. The Association of Specialty Professors task force produced a consensus statement promoting work flexibility and part-time work, encouraging short-term and extended time off, and addressing discrimination against employees with family responsibilities will help create a better WLB.⁵² Unfortunately organizational policies that work in other professions do not work in the athletic training world.

The highly intense work culture and pressure to succeed in college athletics creates

an environment where standard policies and programs to promote WLB are not often applicable.⁵³ Instead of acting as liaisons between institutional policy makers and their employees, athletic administrators tend to rely on individuals to come forward as WLB issues present themselves and then cases are handled on a case-by-case basis or cope with these issues on their own.⁴⁷ The NCAA's Task Force on Life and Work Balance in Intercollegiate Athletics' recognizes that WLB is not simply an individual issue, or an institutional issue, it has also become a NCAA membership issue (NCAA Work-Life Task Force, 2007). Though the NCAA recognizes this problem, policies are lacking to help make improvements in WLB especially for ATs. Putting a limit on the number of practice hours per week and requiring 1 day off in every 7 is one policy of the NCAA but this is more beneficial to the athletes than to ATs because ATs are often expected (or required) to come in on off days to provide treatments for athletes.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) has taken some initiatives to help make the lives of its members more manageable and rewarding. Increasing members' personal and professional satisfaction was one area of focus as part of a strategic plan to enhance the profession and organization in which the issue of WLB was addressed.⁵⁴ At the 2003 national convention keynote speakers reflected on this issue pointing out that ATs need to recognize what is important in life for themselves and care for themselves as they do for those they provide care for others.⁵⁴ The Women in Athletic Training Committee has focused on quality-of-life issues for both men and women and their web page contains a list of numerous life balancing resources. Also the NATA has news articles and workshops that address time and stress management.⁵⁴ Other areas of focus for the strategic plan include enhancing professional stature, strengthening credibility, and ensuring financial stability for the organization. The

NATAs role for future improvements includes enforcement of recommendations (and guidelines) for appropriate medical coverage within intercollegiate athletics, position or consensus statements for WLB, and funding continued research on the issue of WLB.

The issue of WLB, especially among ATs, has been a heavily researched topic. As discussed the biggest culprits of imbalance are work demands, inflexible or inconsistent schedules, and organizational factors such as staffing patterns. Basic strategies to mitigate imbalance include personal time, support networks, and separation from work and home life. Most of the WLB literature is from the female perspective or mixed models comparing males and females together. Future research should focus on WLB from the perspective of male ATs especially at the NCAA D-I level where imbalances are the highest.

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Introduction

Working professionals, especially healthcare providers, are confronted with the formidable task of meeting the demands of their profession while simultaneously trying to manage responsibilities outside the workplace.¹ Definitions and explanations of work-life balance (WLB) vary within current literature but generally can be viewed as the ability to create harmony between work, home, and overall life.^{1,2,3} Although creation of balance insinuates equity, it simply is the satisfactory level of involvement between the multiple roles in a person's life.^{4,5} Work-family balance is the perspective that the relationship between work and personal roles are achievable and maintained. Conversely, work-life conflict describes the negative relationship that can occur between the two roles, and as described in the role conflict theory,⁶ conflict is likely due to incompatible expectations and time demands associated with individual roles.

Examination of the relationship between work and home life is not new, and traditionally the literature has described the occurrence as one dependent upon life stage of the worker, most notably the married with children employee.⁷ However, in athletic training it appears as though conflict arises independent of life stage. Mazerolle et al.¹ reported conflicts arise regardless of marital status and/or children, and suggested the term work-life conflict is more appropriate than work-family conflict; despite the interchangeability of the terms. Personal life varies from individual to individual and is based on many factors such as relationship or marital status, and/or having children. Personal interests, hobbies, activities, family involvement, social events and other factors in one's life outside of work also factor into one's personal life. In recognition that family; which encompasses immediate family, extended family, relationships and children, is not the only important non-work function in an individual's life, the term

WLB is more appropriate than the term work-family balance⁴ as the term is more global pertaining to different demographics and therefore our paper utilizes this new term.

Working professionals must manage their responsibilities in the workplace and those associated with their personal and family lives, which can bring about a struggle for them to maintain a balance between these two roles. Conflicts may arise due to the fact that these roles require time and resources that may not be compatible. The conflict that arises is often referred to as work-family or work-life imbalance, which for the working professional can be attributed to many factors. For athletic trainers (ATs) long work hours, inflexible work schedules, travel, and coaches' expectations are major contributors¹ to work-life imbalance especially at the NCAA Division I (D-I) clinical setting. This clinical setting is unique mostly because of the demands placed upon the athletes and coaches to succeed and perform at a high level, which indirectly influences the demands placed upon the AT related to patient care and practice/competition scheduling. Consequently, many researchers have focused on this clinical setting.^{1,8,9}

Organizational factors such as work scheduling and job demands receive copious attention in the literature as antecedents of work-life imbalance, however other factors such as gender, personal values, and societal expectations¹⁰ have been suggested as facilitators for work-life imbalance. Traditionally speaking, females report higher levels of work-life imbalance as compared to males, primarily due to the demands of motherhood.⁷ Life imbalance has precipitated departure for the female from the workplace, especially in athletic training, because the time demands are too much, limiting time to meet parenting responsibilities.^{9,11} Again, these factors have driven scholars to spend more time focusing on females, rather than both sexes. A recent investigation of factors pertaining to retention and attrition in the athletic training setting

reveals work-life balance as a concern and departure factor in the collegiate setting¹² a comparable finding for female ATs.⁹ Despite a strong focus on female ATs' experiences with work-life imbalance, research has not identified gender differences⁸ suggesting males struggle balancing their roles as well.

With lack of research focusing specifically on WLB among male ATs, the purpose of our study was to learn more about factors that negatively influence WLB and the strategies used by male ATs to promote WLB while working in the NCAA D-I collegiate setting. Our research was focused around two questions: 1) What factors contribute to issues with balancing the responsibilities of work and home/personal life? and 2) How do male ATs create a balance in their personal and professional lives?

Methods

Research Design

Our qualitative study utilized online asynchronous in-depth interviewing to gain insight regarding antecedents that influence WLB and management strategies to maintain WLB among NCAA D-I male ATs. Online interviewing, particularly journaling, has become a popular interviewing technique as it allows the researcher to provide potential participants with a convenient, confidential means to partake in a research study.¹³ The advantages of the asynchronous interview include cost effectiveness, efficiency with scheduling interviews, and confidentiality and primary reasons for selection of our data collection procedures.^{1,13,14} Additionally, this medium allowed our participants flexibility to complete the interview questions at their leisure; an important option for a population whose time is limited. Though lacking in participant and researcher interactions, online communication can still produce rich, insightful data due to the participants' sense of confidentiality and time to reflect upon questions posed as opposed to immediate responses required in one-on-one interviews.¹⁴

Along with the open-ended responses and background demographic data, we included a 7-point Likert scale, which was the same scale used and validated by Mazerolle and peers⁸ in their work-family conflict study. The Likert scale included questions about work demands and influence on home and family life. This was defined as having a partner, spouse, or children and encompassing all outside, non-work interests and responsibilities. We also included a 5-point Likert scale which consisted of questions about fulfilling work-responsibilities while managing roles and responsibilities in their personal life. The Likert scale questions were compared to the qualitative responses for common findings and help validate participants' responses.

Recruitment and Participants

Participants had to meet the following criteria for recruitment: 1) male, 2) full-time employment as a certified athletic trainer within the NCAA D-I clinical setting. Exclusion criteria included: 1) graduate assistantship or intern positions, and 2) employment outside of NCAA D-I setting. We used a purposeful, criterion recruitment technique, in which participants meeting the aforementioned criteria were identified for voluntary participation and we capitalized on professional relationships with participants meeting the criteria to help facilitate the recruitment process.¹⁵

All potential male athletic trainers were contacted via email (need to put this in appendices). Contained within the email was information about the study including purpose and data collection procedures along with the link to the online questions. If necessary, participants already enrolled in the study will be asked for the contact information of additional participants serving in the same role.¹⁶

Responses from 22 participants (n=22) were used for our study; 10 single, 5 married without children, and 7 married with children. Our Sample included head ATs (n=2), assistant head ATs (n=2), senior ATs (n=1), associate ATs (n= 2), assistant ATs (n=14), and athletic training coordinators (n=1) many of whom have other work-related duties on top of their day-to-day responsibilities of providing healthcare for their athletes. Some of those additional duties include overseeing the sports medicine staff (head ATs), clinical instructor for students, supervisor of graduate assistant ATs, and administrative duties (i.e. clinical coordinator, inventory management, ordering supplies, and budgeting). Sport coverage assignments included football (n=6), basketball (n=4), ice hockey (n=3), baseball (n=2), soccer (n=2), cross-country (n=1), track and field (n=1), swimming and diving (n=1) tennis (n=2), volleyball (1), golf (n=1), cheerleading (n=4),

and dancing (n=2). Many ATs had multiple sport assignments (mean=1.91) and traveled with at least 1 sport. Four out of 22 participants traveled with 2 sports. The average years of experience as a Certified Athletic Trainer among our participants was 10.5 ± 7.68 years.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted via an online survey using Question Pro,TM which is a secure data tracking website designed for research purposes. All instructions for completion were located on the data tracking website and consent was implied upon completion of the survey. The first set of questions were demographic in nature and the remainder were related to their experiences and personal views on work-life balance. The open-ended questions were derived from previous literature on work-life balance and organizational commitment and retention.^{1,8,17-19} and was similar to an interview guide used by Mazerolle et al. 2011.¹ The instrument was peer reviewed for clarity, content, and flow. One email reminder was sent to all participants to help facilitate completion of the study [email included]. We collected over the course of a six-month time span and stopped recruitment when we reached our saturation goal of 18-25 participants. Also, our goal was to have equality between three demographic groups; single, married, and married with children.

Data Analysis and Credibility Procedures

General inductive analysis was utilized in order to uncover the most dominant themes from the data, specifically looking for causes of work-life imbalance and strategies used to reduce work-life imbalance. The principles were borrowed from Thomas.²⁰ All transcripts were read thoroughly, prior to analysis, to gain a sense of the data. Then on the second read, field notes were taken by the researchers, which allowed

the researchers to highlight trends in the data. Subsequent readings consisted of grouping and organizing the data into themes. Data analysis was on-going throughout data collection and stopped at 22 participants as we reached our saturation goal.

Multiple analyst triangulation and peer review were included as steps to establish data credibility. Each researcher followed the specific steps of the general inductive process independently. Once each researcher completed the analysis process, they met to discuss their findings. During this meeting the authors discussed the emergent themes, which included the label assigned and data supporting the emergent theme. Researchers were in agreement with the analysis process before moving to the peer review process. The peer review was used to confirm the findings from the multiple analyst data analysis. The peer was supplied with the transcripts, schematics related to analysis, and an initial draft of the results section. Draft of the results section prevented researcher bias.

Table 2: Participant demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	NATA District	Years Certified	Position	Years in current position	Number of sports covered	Number of spots traveled with	Marital Status	Children
Andy	2	9.5	Asc. AT	3	2*	1	Single	0
Brian	1	4	Ast. AT	7	1	1	Single	0
Caleb	9	6.5	Sr. AT	3.5	2	1	Single	0
David	1	14	Ast. AT	7	1*	1	Single	0
Eric	3	4	Ast. AT	1	2*	2	Single	0
Fred	2	3	Ast. AT	1	2	1	Single	0
Greg	1	4	Ast. AT	1	2	2	Single	0
Henry	1	5	Ast. AT	3	2	2	Single	0
Isaac	9	12	Asc. AT	1	3	1	Single	0
Jerry	3	4	Ast. AT	1	2	1	Single	0
Kevin	1	6	Ast. AT	3	1	1	Married	0
Luke	1	8	Ast. Director Sports Med AT	1	1	1	Married	0
Matt	3	12	AT	8	3	1	Married	0
Nate	3	9	Ast. AT	6	2	1	Married	0
Oscar	1	4	Ast. AT	.5	2*	1	Married	0
Patrick	5	4.5	Ast. AT	4.5	1	1	Married	1
Quinn	4	2	Ast. AT	2	4*	1	Married	1
Roger	3	28	AT Coordinator	22	2	1	Married	2
Steve	9	15	Ast. Director	9	1	1	Married	2
Tom	1	12	AT	7	3	1	Married	1
Upton	9	20	Ast. AD, Director Sports Med	13	1	1	Married	1
Victor	1	32	Director Sorts Med	27	2	2	Married	2

Ast= Assistant, Asc = Associate.

*If AT covered both men's and women's teams of the same sport it was considered 1 sport.

Results

Defining Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is often viewed as the relationship between the amount of time and effort an individual allocates to work and to other aspects of one's life including hobbies, personal time parenting, and family time. Natural tendency is to assume everyone views the concept of WLB as spending and exerting the same amount of effort and time within each aspect of life. For our study, the male ATs described their views of WLB with two key words: priorities and balance. Brian, for example shared "WLB is prioritizing work (job, school or an ambition) with life (health, family, friends, and spiritual pursuits)." Greg had a simple view sharing, "it's the ability to balance your roles and responsibilities at your job and your personal life." Oscar touched upon work, family and personal interests explaining, "WLB is the ability to appropriately spend the necessary amount of time between work and personal life. This includes the capability for completing proper team coverage, medical care, and paperwork while also being available for your own personal life and family necessities." Though participants defined WLB in slightly different ways, the same idea of delineating between work and personal life was expressed frequently.

Factors Negatively Impacting WLB

We identified several factors that negatively impacted WLB of our male participants; 1) time of year, 2) spouse and family needs, and 3) the demands of the profession dominated the discussions regarding factors that negatively impacted WLB for the male AT.

Time of Year

Several male ATs (n=7) pointed to in-season versus out-of season schedule of their sports teams as a major contributor to fulfillment of WLB. Specifically, in-season coverage is more challenging to find WLB due to the grind of the in-season team schedule. Talking about factors that affect WLB Brian shared, “if I am in-season or not [with my team]. When I am out of season I try to take more time for myself but when I am in-season I will work as much as the team needs me to, which impacts my WLB.” Likewise, David said, “... in season hours are much longer as usual for our profession.” In-season is classified as the traditional competition season of the sport whereas off-season is considered to be the time from the last game of the season to the start of the next pre-season training. The concept of “time of year” was problematic for WLB because of the lack of “off-season” for many teams, which extend throughout the academic and in some cases into the summer season. For example, Luke shared a “potential problem is the amount of coverage amongst all sports that we are responsible for providing medical care. Every team is in-season the entire school year, even if they are not competing.” Similar to what Luke said, Caleb commented, “New Summer workout rules make the hours in June and July the exact same as they are November-April.”

Non-work Influences

Non-work influences, such as spouse and family needs were identified as common factors, which influence WLB for male ATs who are married with children and married without children (n=5). When asked about factors that influence WLB Patrick’s main issue was his responsibility to his wife and child encompassing his definition of family. In his response to the question he stated factors that influence WLB are [his],

“family responsibilities and their health and well-being (i.e if my wife is sick, I will leave work to take care of the baby). Family comes first in most situations.” From a family standpoint, Luke had a similar point of view. He answered, “My wife and family are the biggest factors that affect my balance.” Although spouse and family needs were common themes among the married group of male ATs, 3 of the participants from the single group talked about family, friends, significant others and or loved ones, which can also fit into the category of “family” based on our functional definition. Jerry, who is a single male AT, mentioned “kids and or significant others” as factors that affect WLB in his response about factors that influence WLB. Finding time to spend with close friends, loved ones, and/or family can be challenging, which can in turn negatively affect WLB for those who value this in their personal life. Caleb listed “...personal relationships outside of work, friends, [his] girlfriend, and demands of the job” as factors that influence his WLB. Factors that influence WLB for Henry are, “being able to spend time with loved ones.” He also added “I always make sure that I have time for my loved ones without allowing my job responsibilities to suffer.”

Demands of the Profession

The demands of the profession were summarized by participants as the hours worked (n=3), travel required with medical coverage (n=4), practice and competition schedule (n=3), and workload/job responsibilities (n=4). Of the 22 total participants, 14 ATs commented on these demands. Isaac stated, “work takes up most of the day... during season travel takes priority as well as daily practices and games thus there is not a lot of time for leisure activities.” Eric discussed the daily challenges he faces trying to find time to balance his role as an AT and his outside responsibilities. He shared, “time demands due to work schedule and travel [while also] working 7 days a week a large part of the

year” are obstacles of his current position. Quinn highlighted the NCAA D-I workplace as demanding, mostly because of the “urgency and requirements [associated with a position in] a Division-I setting.” Roger’s comments highlighted the complexity of the workload for an AT saying, “Time (is a challenge/obstacle), even all of the administrative work is difficult with sport coverage.” This comment was a reflection of the factors that impede his ability to find WLB as an AT. Although many individual factors can negatively impact WLB as described by our participants, Oscar best illustrated the relationship between many of the aforementioned factors saying “several factors influence WLB, [for me] including the time of year (in-season versus out-of season), amount of injuries (that occur during the year), paperwork, and practice/competition times.” Professional obligations can negatively impact one’s home life as these responsibilities often require much time and energy. Victor stated, “work demands an enormous amount of time and effort, so home is often very difficult to stay connected with.”

Factors Positively Impacting WLB

Our analysis revealed three main factors that positively influenced WLB for the male AT working in the NCAA D-I setting: 1) time away from work and personal time, 2) separation, and 3) support networks

Time away and Personal Time.

Time away from work included utilizing vacation time and taking advantage of opportunities to leave work early, come in later, or take a day off depending on the AT’s schedule. For example, Fred answered, “I just try to capitalize on the time I have off...[and]I find it is important to take advantage of the days you do have off or get out early.” One of the strategies for Isaac was utilizing vacation time in which he said, “I

have for the first time in my career been trying to take a vacation yearly. So far I have done this 2 years in a row.” Personal time was categorized as time with family or friends, exercise, and time for personal activities and/or interests. Brian’s response reflected this theme. “Even though I work long hours I try to take time out of my day just for me, it could be going out to lunch with friends or working out during lunch but this helps me recharge my batteries on the long days.” Greg simply stated, “ there are certain things that are important to me in my personal life and I make a point to make time for those every week.” David had a unique perspective of “work hard play hard” while incorporating other techniques to maintain a positive WLB. He stated “...I do tend to play as hard during the off-season as I work during the season. I am very close to my family and I make a point of using all of my vacation every year.

Separation

Separation is classified as delineating between professional life and personal life, keeping them separate from one another. In order to maintain an adequate WLB several male ATs used this strategy of separation. Leaving work related tasks at work is one way to separate work and home. Asking about strategies to promote WLB Greg replied, “do not bring work home. If you cannot finish what you need to get done at work then you need to accept that and not bring it home with you. When I am at home I try not to answer my phone for athletes unless it is an emergency.” Disconnecting from the workplace, including coaches, athletes, and daily duties is another technique used to create separation. David commented “... I am very good at and I do make a point of disconnecting from work when I am on my own time. That is relative considering we are on call, and the calls do come occasionally.”

Support networks

Supervisor support was found to be helpful among participants to help maintain a positive WLB. Out of 22 participants, 17 described their supervisor's philosophy of WLB in a positive manner. Allowing for a flexible schedule was one way supervisors are found to be supportive. When asked about his supervisor's philosophy Tom commented, "He is a parent too...we get the days off our team has unless it's over the weekend and you need to do treatments. We have 2 days a week to have mornings off (and) our schedule is flexible. If we have a late practice or event we just come in later." Frank had similar comments regarding his supervisor's philosophy. He stated, "(My supervisor) encourages each ATC to take full advantage of the days your team is given off. He also will tell employees that if they have a later practice (i.e. 7 or 8pm) to not come in until 2 or 3 in the afternoon. I definitely think this is out of the norm in Division I athletic training, but it seems to work pretty well here"

Luke talked about his supervisor's philosophy of having a good personal life outside of work and allowing for ATs to attend important events that may come up. Luke Stated "My supervisor believes that you need a good life outside of work in order to be successful at our job. He makes sure that all of us are not at the office all the time. He also allows us to go to family events that come up such as weddings, sick family members, graduations, and other important family event." Greg has a supervisor with similar views; "I am very lucky. This is the 1st supervisor I have worked under that requires each staff have 1 day off a week. He creates a strong sports medicine team so that we can all cover for each other if need be.

Our results indicate that there are 3 specific factors that can positively influence WLB for the male AT, and although they are presented individually they as illustrated by

our next quote, can be multi-factorial, and require a combination of practices to help create balance. Tom shared his personal philosophy and practices regarding WLB:

"1. Saying 'No' to extra things. 2. Taking every minute of allowed vacation time in the summer 3. Including my family in as many work related things as possible...i.e.- road trips. 4. Plan hobbies around family time...i.e. - fishing in the early morning or after my daughter's bedtime...not ideal but works. 5. Lots of communication with my spouse about possible schedule changes and conflict..."

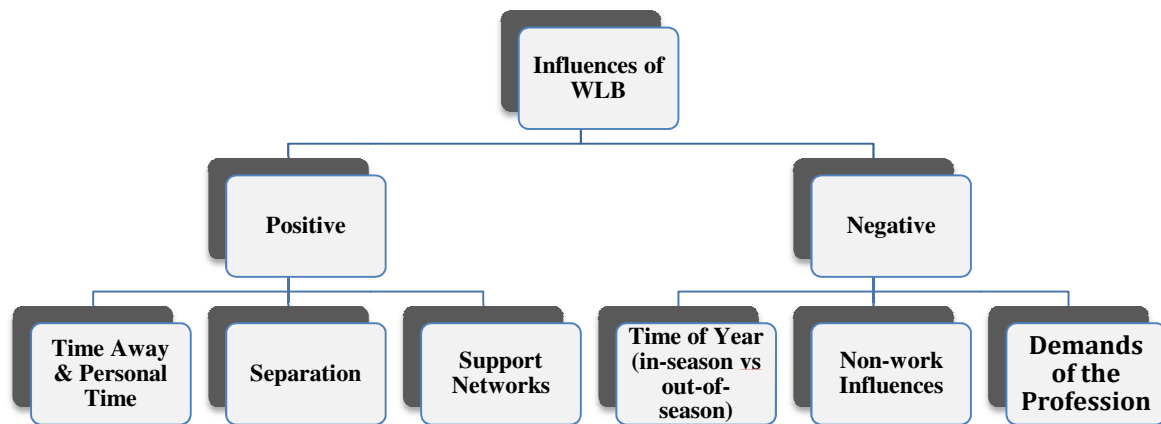
Quantitative Findings

All participants were asked to complete the 5-item WFC questionnaire, as previously validated by Netemeyer²¹ and Mazerolle and peers.⁸ We present the results in Tables 1 and 2. Our participants report an overall mean WFC score of 23.5 ± 7.3 and identify conflict with work obligations interfering with home and family life (5.3 ± 1.0) as well as having to miss important non-work activities (5.2 ± 1.6). Participants also completed a separate set of Likert scaled questions evaluating their confidence in their abilities to manage WFC (Table 2). The overall mean score for all responses was 3.34 ± 1.20 . The overall mean scores for each of the 4 questions were similar ranging from 3.1-3.5 with the highest ratings on questions 3) How confident are you that you could fulfill your family role effectively after a long and demanding day at work? and 4) How confident are you that you could manage unexpected events in which work life interferes with family life?

For question 3 the overall mean score for the 3 demographic groups was 3.5 ± 1.1 . Also, when looking at the mean scores of the groups individually the means were similar across the board ranging from 3.4-3.7. Question 4) had an overall mean score of 3.5 ± 1.2 . The *married with children* group had a higher mean score (4 ± 1) than the *single* (3.2

± 1.2) and *married without children* groups (3.2 ± 1.5) thus indicating a higher level of confidence to manage professional and personal life.

Figure 6: Outline of our results for positive and negative influences on WLB



Discussion

The purpose of our study was to investigate the positive and negative factors that influence WLB among male ATs working full-time in the NCAA D-I setting. Unlike previous research which focuses predominantly on the female perspective of WLB in the athletic training literature^{1-5,8,10,12} our study focused strictly on the male AT. The stimulus for our specific focus was to build upon the work of Mazerolle and colleagues, but also to give a voice to male ATs and their experiences within collegiate athletics and managing WLB. Kahanov et al.¹¹ found that while the presence of female ATs in the profession drastically decrease between ages 28 and 35, the proportion of males remains more consistent between ages 27 and 42 and eventually dissipate across occupational life span; suggesting that WLB may not negatively impact male ATs as drastically as female ATs. Despite this connection to occupational setting changes, WLB has been documented as a concern for male ATs as it relates to retention in the collegiate setting²², which provides support for our inquiry.

Male responses to work and family responsibilities over an employment life span are less understood with respect to athletic training, and in the working professional overall, as it is often viewed as a “women’s issue.”^{23,24} Traditionally, women have been typically viewed as the primary caretakers of the family while men have been perceived as the “breadwinners.” However, as more women have entered and remained in the workforce this perspective has evolved. Traditional gender roles are now changing as males are taking on more household responsibilities thus adding more reason for the need to study male ATs.²⁵ Overall, our results showed that NCAA D-I male ATs do at times experience difficulties balancing their professional and personal lives, due to conflicts in

either role, and they utilize a variety of techniques to help maintain that balance. In fact, our results indicate the male ATs experience comparable levels of conflict in comparison to female ATs working in the same setting including the collegiate level,^{8,19,26} and secondary school setting.²⁷ Moreover, sources of conflict for male ATs mirror those of female ATs and those working in the collegiate setting, suggesting organizational factors as described by the multi-level model developed by Dixon and Bruening¹⁰ holds true, regardless of gender. Uniquely, however, is that our participant scores reflect above moderate confidence in managing unexpected events in which work life interferes with family life. This finding may suggest that, although WLB and family time is important to the male AT, their spouses still take a primary role in managing domestic care and household needs. It may also suggest that the male AT is more at ease with management strategies, as compared to females, highlighting the individual factors presented the multi-factorial model of Dixon and Bruening.¹⁰

Factors that Inhibit WLB

Time of year (meaning in-season or out-of-season), professional demands, and non-work influences, such as the needs of their families, were factors that negatively influenced WLB for our male ATs. These antecedents are not unique to the previous literature within athletic training^{1,8,27} or the sport industry¹⁰ but continue to illustrate the impact work schedules can have on WLB. Mazerolle et al. (2011) identified demands of the profession, long working hours, required travel, inadequate staffing, and lack of control over work schedules as sources of conflict on WLB among ATs in the NCAA D-I setting regardless of sex, marital or family status. Due to the expectations placed upon the ATs in the collegiate setting they struggle, at times, to find sufficient time for themselves and their non-work obligations, which leads to an imbalance.¹ Simply, the structural

factors of the collegiate setting (as depicted by the multi-factorial model of Dixon and Bruening) are problematic and will likely remain a central issue for WLB in the profession.

The impact that in-season versus out-of season team schedule can have on WLB was identified as one of the negative factors for our participants, which until this study was only anecdotally linked to WLB. A team's in-season schedule is more demanding than out-of-season schedule due to practice, strength and conditioning, and competition times. In-season schedule also consists of frequent travel and time away from home, both of which are predictors of conflict between work and personal life.⁸ Moreover, NCAA regulations on team's participation and preparation now allow longer in-seasons, longer nontraditional seasons, voluntary workouts- and an emphasis on year-round conditioning.²⁸ Schedules can also change for a variety of reasons (i.e. coaches change the time, facility availability, weather, etc.) with or without advanced notice. Coaches' control over practice schedules has been discussed as an impediment to WLB for ATs working at the D-I level¹ and relates to our participants responses.

Two other factors that negatively influenced WLB for our male ATs were non-work influences and professional demands. Participants discussed spouse and family responsibilities as non-work influences of WLB identifying that "family comes first." Spouse and family needs was a contributing factor of influencing WLB among our participants who were married with or without children. The importance of providing for their families would fall into the traditional gender role of males being the providers or "breadwinners."^{29,30} Other male ATs mentioned time to dedicate to their spouse and/or children indicating they take on more of a family role. Single participants wanted more time to spend time with family, loved ones and friends. Responses were similar to

Mazerolle et al.¹⁹ in which male and female participants reflected upon difficulties to meet immediate family obligations, such as spending time with the spouse, attending sporting events or family outings, and even performing household chores.¹⁹ These responses could suggest that some male ATs have characteristic of being adaptive, which according to Hakim's Preference Theory³¹, suggests they prioritize both home and work thus look for ways to manage both. Though this theory was focused on women, future research could investigate possibilities of these characteristics in males.

A long standing thought was that married working professionals are more likely to experience conflict, due to the time demands associated with maintaining family needs and obligations in conjunction with professional ones.^{7,32} Interestingly, our participants who were married with children were more confident in their abilities to manage their roles as parent, spouse, and AT as compared to the unmarried or married without children. Plausibly, these male ATs, may rely on their spouse to juggle more of the domestic and caregiving, which boosts their confidence. Spousal support has been identified previously as a means to promote WLB, thus providing context to their responses regarding confidence in management.

Negative influences of an ATs professional role on WLB, such as work hours, travel, team schedule, and job responsibilities/workload have also been identified as sources of job dissatisfaction among Division I-A ATs.¹⁹ Mazerolle et al.¹⁹ demonstrated that the work-family conflicts of male and female NCAA D-I ATs were negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with burnout and intent to leave the profession. This relationship suggests that for this group of ATs, the struggle to find a balance between work and personal life can significantly affect their level of burnout and how they assess their level of satisfaction with their employment. Similarly to the

findings of Pitney³³ and Capel,³⁴ the number of hours worked was a major contributing factor to burnout for ATs. Pitney showed that NCAA D-I ATs were concerned about high levels of work volume and subsequent diminished quality of life.³³

Strategies to Promote WLB

The male ATs in our study expressed various strategies they utilized to promote WLB including time away from work and personal time, separating work life from personal life, and utilizing support networks, all practices mentioned previously in the literature as effective in the athletic training profession.^{1,27,35} Despite no major differences found within our sample, the findings help provide substance to the recommendations and practices used by ATs to find WLB.

Many of our participants mentioned the importance of utilizing opportunities to come into work later, leave early, or capitalize on a team off day whenever possible to create more personal time and break up the day-to-day grind. This is especially important during the in-season schedule, as days are often long. Our findings were similar to Mazerolle et al.³⁵ finding that time to get away from the athletic training professional role is an important attribute to create a healthy WLB for male and female ATs across all clinical settings. Utilization of vacation time was a unique discovery in our results, as this has not been mentioned by male or female ATs in other WLB research. The concept of time away, has been reported previously^{1,12,18} and those who participated in the research likely implied the use of vacation time as personal time, however our participants were the first to identify vacation days directly.

Personal time included time with family or friends, and time for personal interests or activities such as exercising. Among our participants a majority of the single male ATs devoted time for personal interests or friends, while the majority of married male

ATs with and without children devoted time to their families to help with WLB. Exercise has been found to be a stress reduction strategy³⁶ and utilized by ATs in the collegiate setting to create WLB. Similarly, many of our male ATs, regardless of demographics mentioned finding time to exercise or “get a work-out in” as one of their personal strategies to manage their WLB. These findings match the results from a study by Mazerolle et al.³⁷ looking at WLB specifically among female ATs working in the Division-I setting. However, in their study time to “work out” was a theme predominantly among their single category of female ATs. Utilizing free blocks of time during the day or the lunch break to run errands, perform a workout, or attend to other personal matters can help the athletic trainer to overcome the adverse effects of long work hours,³⁵ This personal time to can serve as an essential tactic for stress relief and decrease of role strain brought on by long hours, road trips, high pressure to win, supervision of student ATs, infrequent days off, number of student athletes to provide care for, and extended competitive seasons face by ATs employed in the Division I setting.³⁸⁻³⁹

Demands and responsibilities of the profession, especially at the Division I level, can often be hard to keep up with. Many ATs are “on-call” for their student-athletes outside of their normal working hours thus it can be very challenging to not bring work responsibilities home.^{1,8,19} A common theme among our male ATs was the importance of maintaining separation between work life and home life in which they prioritize leaving work issues at work and home issues at home. This indicated conscious effort is being made to separate the demands of their professional role with those in their personal lives. Previous research within the literature studying female ATs discovered that making a clear distinction between work and home life leads to greater satisfaction within each

role.⁴⁰ Also, Mazerolle and colleagues³⁵ discovered that finding time to get away from the athletic training professional role was an important attribute to create WLB.

Previous research indicates that conflicts between work and home or work and family can be reduced in the presence of supportive management.^{8,9,19,41-42} Recent studies by Mazerolle and colleagues⁴³ found Head ATs play a critical role in creating as well as enforcing WLB for ATs. Likewise, the male ATs in our study found their supervisors' support was a positive factor to help them maintain WLB by allowing flexible schedules to come in late, leave early, or have a day off (when possible). They were also supportive of family needs and the importance of attending personal events that may come up during the season (i.e wedding, graduation, family function). Interestingly this was the only support network that came through as a theme. In the female WLB literature, Kahanov et al.⁴¹ looked at perspectives/stages of parenthood and working female ATs and discovered that both parents and non-parents identified the presence of an adequate support system as a significant factor in maintaining work and family life. Our results coincide with previous athletic training literature^{1,12,35} and found that this support system is an important element in achieving WLB. Supervisors can influence and give emphasis to their support possessing personal WLB strategies and visibly implementing them into their daily lives.^{12,43}

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Our study only presents the opinions of the male AT regarding WLB and finding a balance within the NCAA Division I setting, thus application to other settings or to females is limited. We structured our study as compared to others examining WLB and used data saturation as our guide, however we recognize difference can be possible. Future research needs to expand to the other levels (i.e Division II and III) within the

collegiate setting to ascertain whether level has any impact of WLB. Moreover, although the female perspective has been studied, expansion is necessary regarding the presence of gender differences in experiences of WLB. We used online interviewing as a means to provide flexibility and ample time for reflection, this however limited our ability to ask follow-up questions or have the participants elaborate on their responses. Despite piloting the instrument and having a peer review, the participants in our study may not have completely or fully answered the questions being asked or complete the question at all. Future studies that use interviewing may employ both online interviewing and phone interviews to allow more dialogue.

Similar to previous research, we chose to exclude intern and graduate assistant positions due to their temporary employment status. Future research may include this subgroup population as a means to fully capture the experiences within the setting. This will allow researchers to identify additional themes and potential differences that may exist between gender and demographics associated with WLB in the field of athletic training. Identifying these differences among all athletic trainers can help us come up with better management strategies to maintain a balanced life improving job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and retention in the profession.

Due to our small population sample, the Likert Scale results were only used for comparison to the participants' open-ended responses and to help validate the themes we found. Between group and within group statistics were not analyzed. Further research could gather a larger sample of participants and take a more quantitative approach by focusing on the Likert Scale questions alone. Having a larger population will provide enough statistical power to analyze the data on a deeper level.

Conclusion

The purpose of our study was to gain an understanding of male ATs' perceptions on WLB in the D-I setting and to recognize the strategies they use for achieving their desired WLB. The contributing factors that influence WLB for Male ATs include managing in-season versus out-of-season work schedule, non-work influences, such as spouse and family needs, and demands of the profession including, travel, workload, and hours. Our study showed that a combination of these factors leads to negative perceptions of WLB. Overall, the importance of time away from work, vacation time, time for personal activities such as exercise, the ability to separate work responsibilities from personal life, and supervisor support were positive influences for male ATs to create a sense of WLB. With lack of research looking specifically at male ATs and WLB, our study provides insight into this literature gap.

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Appendix A

E-mail recruitment letter to NCAA Division I Male Athletic Trainers:

Hello,

You are invited to participate in a research study examining work-life balance in the collegiate setting. You have been contacted because you are currently employed in the collegiate setting and are a male athletic trainer. This study is being conducted by Stephanie Mazerolle, Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut, Walter Trisdale graduate student at the University of Connecticut, and Ashley Goodman, Assistant Professor at Appalachian State University.

Employment in the collegiate setting can be rewarding, yet challenging. The athletic trainer is often juggling multiple roles in the workplace including patient care, administrative duties, and possibly clinical supervision and education. Beyond managing workplace roles, the athletic trainer also must navigate non-work obligations and responsibilities, which may compete or conflict with the job demands. Work-life issues have been documented in athletic training, however the literature is often dominated by the female perspective, despite limited empirical data supporting gender differences. The aim of this study is, therefore, to learn more about the experiences of male athletic trainers regarding work-life balance.

If you are interested in participating, you will need to complete a series of open-ended questions that inquire about your professional experiences, specifically as it relates to finding a balance between work and personal/family roles on QuestionPro™. Participation will only take approximately 30 minutes. Consent will be indicated by completion of the study. The completed questions will be stored on the researchers password protected computers and all paper copies will not reveal the participants name or identifying markers. They will be shredded upon completion of data analysis. There are no identifiers and you will be referred to by an assumed name to protect your confidentiality. After data analysis, all transcripts will then be shredded.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; however it is very important for us to learn your opinions. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you may skip them or you may withdraw from the survey at any point.

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey at your earliest convenience by clicking on the Continue button below. Thank you.

I would like to thank you in advance for your responses as this is for my Master's Degree Thesis. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have or problems you may encounter.

[Start Survey](#)

Sincerely,

Walter Trisdale

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire:

Part I: Background Information

1. Position Title
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. What division of NCAA competition does your school compete in?
4. Have you worked in any other clinical settings (If so, what setting ex. D2, D3, or High School)?
5. NATA District
6. Level of Education [highest level]
7. Total years of AT experience
8. How many sports do you oversee (please include the specific sports you cover)?
9. How many sports do you travel with?
10. Do you have any children? If yes, how many? (regarding children)
11. Age of children?
12. Childcare provider [i.e.; daycare, spouse, family, etc]

Part II: Please answer the following questions

13. In your own words, please define work-life balance.
14. Describe your current role as an athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.
15. What are your career goals?
16. What is your personal work-life balancing philosophy?
17. What factors influence work-life balance for you?
18. What strategies do you use personally to promote a balanced life?
19. What do you enjoy most about your current position?
20. What potential obstacles/challenges do you come across in your current position and how do you negotiate them?
21. What is your supervisor's philosophy regarding work-life balance?
22. Describe your administration's support of the athletic training staff. Does it help/hinder fulfillment of work-life balance?
23. Describe your working relationships with the coaches you work with. What role do they play in the fulfillment of work life balance for you and your staff?
24. What would you do to improve your work-life balance if anything?
25. Reflect upon your thoughts of maintaining a balance when you first entered the profession. How does it compare to now? Has it changed? If so, how?
26. Has parenthood changed your views on work-life balance? If you do not have children, yet, do you feel it will?

27. Does the collegiate setting provide an environment that allows for balance between the role of the athletic trainer and outside roles (spouse, father, friend, son, etc.)?
28. If a new athletic trainer was just about to enter this work setting, what advice would you give him/her to help them maintain a balanced life?

Appendix C

Likert Scale 1:

	Single		Married		Married with Children		Overall	
	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD
1. The demands of my job interfere with my home and family life	10	5.3 \pm 1.1	5	5.2 \pm 0.4	7	5.4 \pm 1.4	22	5.3 \pm 1.0
2. Because of my job I can't involve myself as much as I would like in maintaining close relationships with my family	10	4.8 \pm 1.6	5	4.8 \pm 1.6	7	3.7 \pm 1.8	22	4.5 \pm 1.7
3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands of my job	10	4.2 \pm 1.5	5	4.6 \pm 1.1	7	5.1 \pm 1.7	22	4.6 \pm 1.5
4. I often have to miss important non-work activities (family, personal, etc.) because of my job	10	5.6 \pm 1.2	5	5.6 \pm 0.9	7	4.3 \pm 2.1	22	5.2 \pm 1.6
5. There is a conflict between my job and the commitment and responsibilities I have to my family	10	3.1 \pm 1.3	5	3.6 \pm 1.1	7	3.3 \pm 1.4	22	3.9 \pm 1.5

- a) Family was defined as: encompassing all outside, non-work interests and responsibilities including friends, parents. Etc. Family was also defined as: having a partner, spouse or children
- b) Likert Scale- Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree
- c) High score = 7 indicating strongest level of agreement, Medium score = 4 indicating neutral between strongly agree and strongly disagree, Low Score = 1 indicating strongest level of disagreement

Appendix D

Likert Scale 2:

	Single		Married		Married with Children		Overall	
	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD	n	Mean \pm SD
1. How Confident are you that you could fulfill your job responsibilities without letting it interfere with you family responsibilities	10	3.1 \pm 1.3	5	3.2 \pm 1.1	7	3.3 \pm 1.4	22	3.3 \pm 1.2
2. How confident are you that you could attend to your family obligations without affecting your ability to complete pressing tasks at work	10	3.2 \pm 1.5	5	2.8 \pm 0.8	7	3.1 \pm 1.2	22	3.1 \pm 1.2
3. How confident are you that you could fulfill your family role effectively after a long and demanding day at work	10	3.7 \pm 1.4	5	3.4 \pm 0.9	7	3.4 \pm 1.0	22	3.5 \pm 1.1
4. How confident are you that you could manage unexpected events in which work life interferes with family life	10	3.2 \pm 1.2	5	3.2 \pm 1.5	7	4 \pm 1	22	3.5 \pm 1.2

a) Family was defined as: encompassing all outside, non-work interests and responsibilities including friends, parents. Etc. Family is also defined as: having a partner, spouse or children.

b) Likert Scale- No confidence, minimal confidence, moderate confidence, reasonable confidence, high level of confidence.

c) High Score = 5 indicating the most confidence, Medium score = 3 indicating moderate confidence, Low Score = 1 indicating no confidence.