

# Perceptions of National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Female Athletic Trainers on Motherhood and Work-Life Balance: Individual- and Sociocultural-Level Factors

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**Context:** A multilevel model of work-life balance (WLB) has been established in the sports management literature to explain interactions among organizational/structural, individual, and sociocultural factors and their effects on individual responses and attitudes toward WLB. These factors influence experiences and outcomes related to WLB.

**Objective:** To examine individual and sociocultural factors that may influence perceptions of female athletic trainers (ATs) employed in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I setting, particularly any sex-specific influences.

**Design:** Qualitative study.

**Setting:** National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I.

**Patients or Other Participants:** A total of 27 women (14 single with no children, 6 married with no children, 7 married with children) currently employed as full-time ATs in the Division I setting participated.

**Data Collection and Analysis:** Participants responded to a series of open-ended questions via reflective journaling. Data were examined using a general inductive approach. Trustworthiness was established by multiple-analyst triangulation, member interpretive review, and peer review.

**Results:** Participants recognized that their sex played a role in assessing WLB and a long-term career as an AT. In addition, they identified various individual- and sociocultural-level factors that affected their perceptions of WLB and attitudes toward a career goal.

**Conclusions:** Our data suggested that female ATs may hold traditional sex ideologies of parenting and family roles, which may influence their potential for career longevity.

**Key Words:** sex influence, quality of life, retention, attrition

## Key Points

- A traditional sex ideology of parenting and family roles may contribute to the persistence and departure of female athletic trainers in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I setting.
- Female athletic trainers preferred an adaptive lifestyle, but personal preferences and sociocultural factors also influenced their career decisions.
- Work-life balance is multifaceted, with various factors leading to experiences of conflict.

Work-life balance (WLB) concerns have been identified as having an important effect on the experiences and retention of female athletic trainers (ATs).<sup>1–4</sup> The field of athletic training, for the most part, is unique because these health care professionals work within sport settings. As are coaches<sup>5,6</sup> and physicians,<sup>7</sup> ATs are susceptible to struggling with WLB because of a myriad of factors related to the organizational demands placed on them. Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> suggested, however, that WLB is influenced not only by organizational factors but also by individual and sociocultural factors. Traditionally, authors of the WLB literature have examined the construct unidimensionally, looking at it from the organizational, individual, or sociocultural perspective only. However, Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> argued that individual responses and attitudes toward WLB can influence organizational culture and climate from the bottom up. Thus, they presented a multilevel model that integrates 3 factors to illustrate the complexity of the topic: organizational/structural, individual, and sociocultural.

Organizational/structural factors, particularly in the sport industry, have been linked fundamentally to experiences of WLB.<sup>1,8,9</sup> The model that Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> developed and examined showcases the experiences of female coaches at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level and has application to ATs and other health care professionals who have long ( $\geq 8$  h) work days. Long and irregular work hours, travel, and time spent at work (ie, “face time” in the office) have been reported as major challenges to WLB for the coach,<sup>8</sup> with comparable antecedents for physicians<sup>7</sup> and ATs.<sup>2,9</sup> In fact, long work hours negatively affect the professional commitment of female ATs, who often change employment settings or leave the profession to achieve WLB.<sup>3,10,11</sup>

Researchers<sup>12–14</sup> have indicated that individuals differ in their experiences of WLB and abilities to cope because of differences in individual characteristics in a given context. These individual characteristics include values, personality, coping skills, support systems, and sex. Often, the negative effects of work-life imbalance stem from internal feelings

of conflict. Individual-level differences can be particularly noticeable when examining people in the same or similar occupations. For example, athletic training jobs can be similar in the types of role strain employees face (lack of control over schedules, hours, and travel; perceived inadequate compensations; and overall job demands), but in a recent study, Naugle et al<sup>15</sup> demonstrated that women reported a higher incidence of burnout than their male counterparts even though the male ATs worked more hours on average than the female ATs. Researchers<sup>3,4,9,10</sup> examining retention and WLB in female ATs have identified the time commitment of the profession, particularly in the collegiate setting, as problematic, especially for ATs trying to balance motherhood and athletic training.

An extension of the individual-level factors described in the Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> model can include the work of Hakim.<sup>16</sup> She theorized that female positions in the workforce and in the family reflect the preferences of women and not social constraints.<sup>16</sup> Her *preference theory* contends that a woman's preference is based on her personal needs and goals, which are likely independent of other factors, such as societal contentions or organizational views. Preference theory states that women can be classified broadly into 3 groups: adaptive, work centered, and home centered. Adaptive women prefer to combine family and careers without giving a fixed priority to either, essentially desiring to enjoy the best of both worlds. Work-centered women fit their family lives around their work, with many remaining childless even when married. Home-centered women prefer to give priority to their families after they marry.

The inclusion of sociocultural factors in the Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> model highlights additional important dynamics in the perception of work-life imbalance and gives credence to many who argue that preference alone does not dictate female career trajectories. Sociocultural-level factors, which are not considered in preference theory, examine norms and values associated with work and family. Given existing sex norms, women typically have a more difficult time maintaining both work and family responsibilities and report that they must constantly "prove their worthiness."<sup>17</sup> In addition, regardless of marital status, women who have children and work outside the home frequently experience feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and degradation because they feel aberrant.<sup>18,19</sup> Women more often than men interrupt their careers to have children, work part time, or leave work to take care of sick children. These choices slow their career progress and are potentially detrimental to their earning potential.<sup>20</sup> Social norms not only make women believe that they have to choose work or family but also impart a negative social connotation in choosing work over family.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, based on the divergent nature of preference theory and the multilevel model of WLB, the purpose of our study was to examine if individual and sociocultural factors, as described first by Dixon and Bruening,<sup>5</sup> are evident in female ATs employed in the NCAA Division I setting. Specifically, we focused on the following research questions while acknowledging that both research questions focus on sex-specific influences: (1) Are individual and sociocultural factors evident in the perceptions of female ATs employed in the NCAA Division I setting regarding WLB? (2) Is any evidence available to suggest that female

ATs employed at the Division I setting exhibit tendencies consistent with preference theory?

## METHODS

### Participants

Twenty-seven female ATs (14 single with no children, 6 married with no children, and 7 married with children) participated in our study. They ranged in age from 26 to 57 years, with an average age of 34 years and a mode of 30 years. The average tenure as an AT was 11 years (range, 3–35 years). They were all full-time employees in the Division I setting and represented 7 medical coverage assignments and 6 of the 10 National Athletic Trainers' Association districts. As the highest earned degree, 25 participants had master's degrees, 1 had her bachelor's degree, and 1 participant had her doctorate (Table 1).

Twenty-one of the ATs had 12-month contracts, 5 had 11-month contracts, and 1 had a 10-month contract. The ATs worked  $58 \pm 19$  hours each week (range, 40–75 h/wk). Typically, they traveled  $10 \pm 6$  days per month (range, 0–16 d/mo).

Descriptive statistics indicated that the ATs who were married with children were slightly older and possessed more Division I work experience than the single and married ATs with no children (Table 2). The average number of children for the 7 mothers was  $2 \pm 1$  (range, 1–3). The 6 married ATs with no children were discussing the future and the desire to have children in the near future. Of the 14 single ATs, 8 had plans to marry and have children in the future.

Informed consent was implied when participants completed the Web-based questionnaire, and the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Connecticut–Storrs.

### Data-Collection Procedures

We purposefully recruited our volunteers using a snowball-sampling procedure to gain access to potential participants. We contacted potential participants fitting the criterion of being a woman employed in the Division I setting; we also asked participants who completed the study to identify any additional individuals meeting our criteria. We contacted 35 female ATs in our recruitment. All participants responded to a series of open-ended questions that addressed WLB, retention, and motherhood in athletic training. The interview guide was developed using a blend of previous research<sup>9,11,21</sup> and the theoretical framework of the study. Our study was exploratory, and we are the first to examine the topic of individual and sociocultural factors in athletic training related to WLB. Questions were intended to gain a holistic impression of participant experiences. Before our pilot study and data collection, 2 female ATs (C.M.E. and one who was not an author) reviewed the interview guide to establish content validity. They were independent from the pilot study and had clinical experience at the Division I setting, with one serving as an educator and researcher and the other in current practice.

For our qualitative study, we used Web-based, asynchronous, in-depth interviewing, specifically using journaling, which was done with QuestionPro (QuestionPro Inc, Seattle, WA), as the primary method to collect data. Appendices 1

**Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information**

Participant Pseudonym	Life Stage	Age, y	Experience as an Athletic Trainer, y	Time in Current Position, y	Highest Degree Earned
Annie	Single, no children	35	13	4	Master's
Beth	Married with children	49	4	4	Master's
Caitlin	Married, no children	29	7	5	Master's
Carol	Single, no children	27	3	2	Master's
Claire	Married with children	30	7	5	Master's
Danielle	Married with children	46	25	24	Master's
Hailey	Married with children	34	11	7	Master's
Hannah	Single, no children	28	7	2	Master's
Jamie	Single, no children	32	10	4	Master's
Jane	Single, no children	27	5	2	Master's
Jess	Single, no children	29	6	3	Master's
Julie	Married, no children	33	12	1	Master's
Katie	Single, no children	31	9	6	Master's
Kristen	Married, no children	26	4	2	Master's
Laura	Single, no children	48	26	20	Master's
Mary	Single, no children	32	9	9	Master's
Molly	Single, no children	30	8	5	Master's
Nancy	Married, no children	30	8	5	Master's
Paula	Married with children	41	19	9	Master's
Samantha	Married, no children	31	10	4	Master's
Sarah	Single, no children	30	8	6	Master's
Shelly	Married with children	54	31	29	Doctorate
Susan	Single, no children	28	6	2	Bachelor's
Tammy	Married, no children	57	35	30	Master's
Tara	Single, no children	35	13	3	Master's
Yuri	Single, no children	31	8	6	Master's
Yvonne	Married with children	33	6	3	Master's

and 2 list all questions posed to our participants. The questions were piloted before data collection by 3 female ATs who were not authors in the Division I setting. No changes were made to the questions; thus, all responses were analyzed. We used the pilot study to establish consistency and flow of the interview sessions and to identify if any additional questions might arise during the interviews.

The benefits of the asynchronous interview included cost-effectiveness, efficiency in scheduling interviews, and confidentiality.<sup>22</sup> In addition, this method allowed our participants flexibility to complete the interview questions at their leisure. Whereas participant and researcher interactions are absent, Web-based communication can still produce rich, insightful data because of the participants' sense of time and confidentiality to reflect on questions posed instead of the immediate responses required in one-on-one interviews.<sup>22</sup> Data were transferred from the Web-based survey database to a Word (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA) document for data analysis.

### Data Credibility and Analysis

Data credibility was established by using member checks, peer review, and multiple-analyst triangulation. We selected these 3 methods to meet the criterion of trustworthiness. We instructed 1 woman from each subgroup (single with no children, married with no children, and married with

children) to complete a brief follow-up interview (Appendix 2).<sup>23</sup> The purpose of our member check, or stakeholder verification,<sup>24</sup> was to present the initial findings from data analysis to the participants for their confirmation. We purposefully selected this method of member checking because of the Web-based data-collection procedures, which reduce interactions among researchers, even when follow-up could be necessary.<sup>22</sup> Our members helped clarify their experience and opinions and ultimately confirmed our findings and analysis procedures. An athletic training scholar who was not an author completed the peer review. She had experience in qualitative methods, strong knowledge of WLB and retention of ATs, full-time athletic training experience as a woman in the collegiate setting, and educational training in qualitative methodologies. Our peer helped establish credibility by reviewing all data-collection procedures and final themes. Both authors independently completed the data-collection procedures as outlined to establish multiple-analyst triangulation. We were trained in qualitative analysis and, before the independent coding, discussed the steps in the process.

Before data analysis began, a list and description of topic codes were created based on the definitions provided by the Hakim<sup>16</sup> preference theory and the Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> multilevel model (Table 3). We used a general inductive process as described by Creswell<sup>23</sup> and Thomas<sup>24</sup> to analyze

**Table 2. Participants' Ages and Experience, Mean ± SD (Range)**

Characteristic, y	All Participants (N = 27)	Single (n = 14)	Married, No Children (n = 6)	Married With Children (n = 7)
Age	35 ± 9 (26–57)	32 ± 5 (27–48)	34 ± 11 (26–57)	41 ± 9 (30–54)
Board of Certification certified	11 ± 8 (3–35)	9 ± 6 (3–26)	13 ± 11 (4–35)	14 ± 10 (4–31)
Division I experience	7 ± 8 (1–30)	5 ± 5 (2–20)	8 ± 11 (1–30)	12 ± 10 (3–29)

**Table 3. Topic Codes and Definitions**

Code Label	Definition
Mixed model	Perceived causes of work-life balance were attributed to 1 or more of the factors in the mixed model
Organizational/structural factors	References to long work hours, travel, and other athletic trainer responsibilities; challenges of working with coaches or other coworkers
Individual factors	Reference to individual characteristics, including values, personality, and coping skills
Sociocultural factors	Reference to traditional sex roles indicates pressure to be a caretaker at home
Preference theory	Perceived causes of work-life balance were attributed to personal preferences (ie, feelings, personal beliefs)
Adaptive	References desire to combine work and family; expresses desire to work but not totally committed to career
Work centered	References work as a main priority; expresses strong commitment to work over other life activities
Home centered	References to family life and children as main priorities; would prefer not to work

the textual data, which consisted of 4 main steps: (1) condensing and cleaning up all raw textual data into brief summary format, (2) reading raw text until the researcher was familiar with the content, (3) establishing links between research objectives and summary findings derived from the raw data and developing a framework of the underlying experiences that were evident in the raw data, and (4) continuing revision and refinement of categories and selecting quotations that conveyed the core theme of a category to reduce the redundancy of the categories. The key purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to develop from the themes innate in raw data without the limitations imposed by other, more structured methods.<sup>24</sup> We completed the data-analysis process autonomously to ensure credibility, and each of us independently coded each transcription. When we had independently coded the transcriptions, we met to discuss which themes could be compressed and which themes needed to be developed. When we had agreed on a coding scheme, we merged our independent files to ascertain the degree to which the codes aligned. We used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants and used direct excerpts from their narratives in the subsequent section to define and illustrate our analysis. We used data saturation as our guide during the analysis procedures to establish accuracy and completeness for our analysis process.

## RESULTS

Our analyses revealed that female ATs employed in the Division I setting perceived that individual and sociocultural factors influenced WLB. The data also indicated that they had an adaptive lifestyle preference, as described by Hakim.<sup>16</sup>

### Individual and Sociocultural Factors

Sex has long been linked to experiences of work-life imbalance.<sup>25,26</sup> In our sample, individual and sociocultural factors emerged as navigating WLB because many of the female ATs valued their roles as domestic caretakers and believed they were obligated or drawn to personal and family commitments over work-related tasks. A recently married female AT said, “I am extremely concerned that I am not going to be able to balance being a good AT and a good mom.” Her comments were in direct relation to the expectations of a Division I AT because of the hours and travel demands placed on her. One AT who was married with children stated simply, “I’m the traditional Mom—primary caregiver, so a sick child or my working a weekend affects the balance more for me.” Many of the unmarried

ATs shared concerns about the future, recognizing the long work hours, travel, and rigid work schedules as problematic, particularly if they wanted to be present and available to raise their children. Consider the comments of a female AT on motherhood:

There is no possible way that I see for me to be a mother and continue to keep the job I currently have. I would not feel comfortable based on the amount of time I travel and the hours I put in during the season allowing someone else to raise my child.

An AT who was married with no children highlighted the individual influence of mothering in her response to finding WLB: “While I am totally confident in my husband’s ability to care for a child, I don’t feel that the responsibility should fall on him for so much.” Another married AT with no children shared her reflections on the role of motherhood: “Being the mom, you are always thought of as the primary caregiver to your children and if you have to miss out on quality time, or events, you feel as if you are not doing your ‘job.’” Her reflections indicated the combination of a personal desire to be present as a mother and the premise that as a woman, she is the primary caregiver.

A different married AT with no children discussed the ideology of sex as a sociocultural factor, as Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> presented in their model: “I think that females generally place more importance on family, so I think the feeling of having strain in balancing work and family life may be higher for me because I am female.” A single AT’s observations of the workplace, sex, and athletic training revealed the influence of sex and finding balance. She commented: “I see my male counterparts with children not having an issue ‘living life’ and having balance, but I feel it is a different story for the female ATs I know [in terms of WLB].”

### Preference Theory

Our participants revealed an adaptive lifestyle preference, one that encompassed balancing work and home/parenting roles. For example, when asked about their personal goals, many participants noted wanting “life balance, marriage, and a healthy lifestyle.” Responses were consistent across the 3 relationship statuses (unmarried, married with no children, and married with children). For example, an unmarried female AT said that her goals were “to get married, have a family, and have a successful career and happiness.” A married female AT with no children said her goals were “to continue working hard; to have a family

(kids) and have a sound work-life balance without compromising one or the other.”

Preference theory suggests that an individual’s lifestyle preferences navigate decisions on career planning and job selection. Several of our participants alluded to this aspect of the theory, as highlighted by the following statements about sex, WLB, and a career in the Division I setting from an unmarried female AT: “Yes [sex is an issue], because I think about how I could not have a family and do this job at the same time.” A married female AT with no children said, “The family aspect plays a huge role in my assessment of my WLB, because I want to spend time with my kids and my mom and many times cannot because of job requirements.” Another married female AT with no children elaborated:

Being recently married and looking to start a family soon, I am extremely concerned that I am not going to be able to balance being a good AT and a good mom. I believe being female plays a huge role. Females are typically the caregivers in the family. I have seen how much work being a mother is by watching my own mother and I worry that I will not be able to live up to that standard [in my current role].

These statements speak to the preference of finding a balance between roles despite the organizational challenges that can be present in the Division I setting. The third statement also highlights the complexity of career selection and decisions to persist in the collegiate setting as an AT.

## DISCUSSION

The topic of WLB has been explored thoroughly in athletic training, linking several organizational factors to experiences of conflict. Among other factors, long work hours, travel, and demands from coaches often are reported as facilitators to an imbalance in the Division I setting. Beyond organizational concerns, other factors, such as personality, family values, and sociocultural norms, can be catalysts to conflict.<sup>12,27–29</sup> Until now, limited information was available on the feelings of female ATs related to WLB and motherhood. Our findings suggested that female ATs value time for parenting; see the challenges that the Division I setting can present in finding a balance; and prefer a lifestyle that allows for a balance among work, personal, and family roles.

### Individual and Sociocultural Factors

Recently, the general matrix of the workplace has changed, whereby both men and women share the breadwinner role; however, it appears that sex-specific responsibilities to family may not have undergone the same shift. We recognize that male ATs exhibit WLB considerations, and some have left the Division I setting as a result, yet female ATs appear to struggle more in comparison. As Clarkberg and Moen<sup>30</sup> discussed, working excessive hours despite need is often viewed as a sign of commitment, motivation, and productivity, and thus becomes expected because of organizational culture, which extends beyond the sport industry into health care.<sup>16,17</sup> Athletic trainers work a minimum of 40 hours per week but often exceed 60 hours per week in the collegiate setting, severely limiting time at home with family.<sup>2,11</sup>

Our participants quickly recognized that their sex plays a role when assessing WLB and a long-term career as an AT, predominantly because of their desire for balance. The idea of *spillover* is common in the work-life interface, where work often affects the ability to attend other events or fulfill other obligations simply because of a lack of time. Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> showed that an individual’s personal values and needs can help alleviate the strain of balancing work, family, and personal needs, which for female ATs may include wanting more time away from the job and more time with family. Individual-level factors in combination with sociocultural-level factors can potentially greatly affect female ATs’ perceptions of WLB, overall job satisfaction, and professional commitment.<sup>13,31,32</sup>

One participant’s assessment about the profession being conducive for a balanced lifestyle further supported that sociocultural norms, as described by the Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> model, affect individuals’ perceptions; she reflected on witnessing men persist and manage because their spouses served as primary caregivers. The reflections of our participants speak to the dichotomy between the abilities of female and male ATs to manage the role of parenthood in the collegiate setting. The contradiction between balancing motherhood and the role of the college AT has been long-standing, as authors<sup>9,11,33</sup> of many editorial reports have cited, and empirical data have shown it to be a primary facilitator to departure from the profession. In fact, Kahanov and Eberman<sup>34</sup> presented data suggesting that female ATs leave the profession by the age of 28, which is the average age at which they begin having children. Whereas the rationale is speculative, the observations of these authors coupled with other data continue to connect work-family conflict as the stimulus. The notion that after beginning a family an AT must change settings or careers has emerged as a concern for female athletic training students.<sup>35</sup> Mazerolle and Gavin<sup>35</sup> reported that they appeared to contemplate which clinical settings can facilitate career persistence, something they viewed as not happening in the Division I setting. Although the students identified mentorship as a weighty retention factor, they themselves had very limited direct mentorship from female ATs with children employed in the collegiate setting. This observation parallels research in the medical literature<sup>36</sup> emphasizing an absence of mentors being identified by women in these professions. Mentoring has become the pinnacle in professional socialization for the AT, and the inability of the profession to retain female ATs who balance motherhood and the role of the collegiate AT appears to negatively affect the athletic training student’s perception that a long-term career is viable if rearing a family is also important.

### Preference Theory

Most women prefer the adaptive lifestyle, in which they want to enjoy the best of both worlds: a workplace or occupation that affords flexibility and time to be at home with family.<sup>37</sup> Adaptive women seek positions that offer WLB and family-friendly employment benefits; in athletic training, the Division I setting is not often called family friendly because of the demands and hours necessary to meet job-related expectations and responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Despite supervisor presence and coworker support,<sup>38</sup> female ATs

may still depart the clinical setting because of the need to be at home to attend to those responsibilities—an indication that they prefer to have the time to be at home. As an individual, the female AT often is drawn to family and supporting the family's needs.<sup>38</sup>

Preference theory suggests that women are in the minority in the work-centered category. It predicts that men dominate this mindset by prioritizing their jobs and are most likely to persist in their careers and become leaders or supervisors in their fields. In a recent study examining female head ATs, Goodman et al<sup>39</sup> reported that a work-centered preference, or at least a mindset that does not include raising a family, may help facilitate promotion to head AT for the female AT. They identified an adaptive lifestyle preference as a potential barrier in the pursuit of the role of head AT in the collegiate setting. Our sample population illustrated that many female ATs prefer positions that allow them to spend equal, if not more, time in their family or personal roles. Despite this finding, several of our female ATs with children were committed to remaining in the collegiate setting and hoped to make it work within their organizational structure. Mazerolle and Goodman<sup>4</sup> suggested that motherhood does not necessarily create a stimulus for departure from the role of collegiate AT and discussed several methods for fulfillment of WLB. Specifically, women working in the collegiate setting require supportive supervisors and colleagues who value WLB and need to job share and create time away from the role of the AT to rejuvenate. In emerging research, investigators have suggested that male ATs also enjoy a workplace environment that favors teamwork and job sharing; these helpful factors improve job satisfaction and fulfillment of WLB.<sup>40</sup> Researchers need to continue examining the individual and sociocultural factors influencing WLB and retention in the profession, as they appear to be critical.

As mentioned, having more women successfully balancing the roles of motherhood and athletic training is necessary. Through professional socialization, a process that helps the professional understand what is expected and what is possible in the role, young female ATs will then witness women successfully balancing these roles. It is interesting that like ATs, female coaches struggle to balance work demands and parenting responsibilities<sup>6,8</sup>; however, many female coaches find a balance, which helps them remain committed and motivated within their positions.<sup>6</sup> One possible reason could center on the support that athletic administrators provide to the coaches, as they are given increased freedom regarding scheduling that allows them to adapt to their families' needs.<sup>6</sup> Whereas ATs receive supervisor support, they cannot dictate the times of practices, games, or conditioning sessions, creating a disadvantage in work scheduling.<sup>2</sup> Positive relationships and open communication between coaches and ATs may

help improve this concern, but again, mentoring and role models may be necessary to help retain more ATs who are mothers.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Our study was limited to female ATs employed within the Division I setting; thus, our findings can be transferred only to female ATs employed in that setting. Work-life balance is a concern for all working professionals, as well as ATs, so it is important to ascertain the lifestyle preferences of male ATs and of female ATs who may fall outside of the demographics of our participants (eg, single mothers), as they may be comparable with the preferences of our sample population. Moreover, despite a lack of evidence supporting differences within the collegiate setting for professional considerations (eg, WLB, job satisfaction), the practice setting can influence the experiences of ATs and their preferences for and fulfillment of WLB.

Currently, the multilevel framework developed by Dixon and Bruening<sup>5</sup> has been examined only within the sport industry, limiting our understanding within health care venues. Researchers should examine the reciprocity with the model within athletic training among all practice settings and between sexes. Preference theory has been discussed only as descriptive of female preferences, but links could be made to men, as anecdotal evidence has suggested a national shift in more men staying home to parent. Future researchers can incorporate the framework into a more comprehensive view of WLB in athletic training. In addition, the organizational reporting structure needs to be examined. We must ask ourselves if reporting to an athletic director is in the best interest of the athletic training staff.

### CONCLUSIONS

Investigators have suggested that long work hours, travel, and inflexible work schedules may contribute to female ATs departing from the Division I setting. Our data supported this suggestion but also indicated that another possible contributor to persistence and departure in the Division I setting may be the traditional sex ideology of parenting and family roles. Whereas our observations illustrated a preference for an adaptive lifestyle, we also noted that the career decisions of female ATs reflect personal preferences and sociocultural factors, such as societal expectations. We continue to recognize that WLB can be viewed as a multilevel model, in which multiple factors are present and lead to experiences of conflict. Concerns regarding WLB in the athletic training profession are multifactorial and are not based solely on a woman's own preferences. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of WLB may stimulate organizational policy change.

## Appendix 1. Background Questionnaire

Directions: Please complete the following demographic information. Type your answers in the space provided.

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Number of years as a BOC-certified AT? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Number of years at your current position? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Are you currently an assistant AT? If other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever worked in other clinical settings in addition to the college setting?
6. Indicate your highest level of education. \_\_\_\_\_
7. How long is your contract (ie, 9 months, 10 months, 12 months)?
8. Do you have summer work hours or expectations? Please explain.
9. Average work week (hours): In-season coverage \_\_\_\_\_
10. Average work week (hours): Out-of-season coverage \_\_\_\_\_
11. Average travel load (days per month): In-season coverage \_\_\_\_\_
12. Average travel load (days per month): Out-of-season coverage \_\_\_\_\_
13. What are your sport coverage assignments during the year?
14. How many full-time staff members do you have at your institution?
15. How many full-time staff members are female?
16. How would you characterize your current family situation (children, no children, number of children)?
17. While at work, who is the primary caregiver for your child?

Abbreviations: AT, athletic trainer; BOC, Board of Certification.

## Appendix 2. Interview Questions: National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Female Athletic Trainers

Directions: Please answer the following open-ended questions according to your marital status (single, married, or married with children).

1. What are your professional goals?<sup>a-c</sup>
2. Have they changed since you started a family? If so, how?<sup>c</sup>
3. What are your personal goals?<sup>a-c</sup>
4. Based upon your goals, do you envision a lifelong career in athletic training?<sup>a-c</sup>
5. Discuss if working in the athletic training profession provides a suitable working environment to achieve a balanced lifestyle.<sup>a-c</sup>
6. What if any organizational policies are in place to help you as a female athletic trainer with children to help maintain a balanced lifestyle?<sup>c</sup>
7. Do you feel that since starting your family you have had to make sacrifices personally and/or professionally? Please describe.<sup>c</sup>
8. Do you feel as though you will be able to persist in your current position with your current job and family responsibilities?<sup>c</sup>
9. What role does your gender play in your response?<sup>b,c</sup>
10. What role does your current marital and family status play in your response?<sup>a-c</sup>
11. What role does your personality play in your response?<sup>a-c</sup>
12. Describe your personality.<sup>c</sup>
13. Have you experienced challenges finding a balance between your personal and professional life? If so, what factors have contributed to the challenge? If not, why haven't you had challenges?<sup>a-c</sup>
14. Has being a female athletic trainer influenced your experiences of work and life balance issues?<sup>a-c</sup>
15. Has being a female with children influenced your experiences of work and life balance issues? If so, how?<sup>c</sup>
16. Discuss how your work/life balance has changed from being a single professional to being a married professional to being married with children. Were the challenges different at each stage for you?<sup>c</sup>
17. Do you have a support system that helps you maintain a healthy balance between your personal and professional life? Please describe your support system.<sup>a-c</sup>
18. What personal strategies do you capitalize on to maintain or promote a balance between your personal and professional life?<sup>a-c</sup>
19. What role does your family play in your ability to find a balanced lifestyle?<sup>a-c</sup>
20. What role does your spouse play in your ability to find a balanced lifestyle?<sup>b</sup>
21. What role do your coworkers play in your ability to find a balanced lifestyle?<sup>a-c</sup>
22. What role does your coaching staff play in your ability to find a balanced lifestyle?<sup>a-c</sup>
23. What role does your supervisor play in your ability to find a balanced lifestyle?<sup>a-c</sup>
24. Is your supervisor male or female?<sup>a-c</sup>
25. Do they have a family of their own?<sup>a-c</sup>
26. Would they be supportive of your family pursuits/needs?<sup>a-c</sup>
27. What personal strategies do you utilize to sustain your professional enthusiasm?<sup>a-c</sup>
28. Will this change once you have a family? If so, how?<sup>a-c</sup>
29. Has this changed since you got married?<sup>b</sup>
30. Will this change based upon your personal goals? If so, how?<sup>a-c</sup>
31. Describe for me how your work setting has influenced your professional commitment.<sup>a-c</sup>
32. Do you believe, once you have a family, that you will have to make sacrifices personally and/or professionally? Please describe.<sup>a-c</sup>
33. As a young female, have you had a role model/mentor who has helped you grow professionally? Please elaborate (why, what role they played, etc).<sup>a-c</sup>
34. Was your role model male or female?<sup>a-c</sup>
35. In your opinion, could having more female role models (those who remain in the profession and who have children) influence retention rates for other female athletic trainers? Please explain.<sup>a-c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Indicates question was posed to single female athletic trainers.

<sup>b</sup> Indicates question was posed to married female athletic trainers with no children.

<sup>c</sup> Indicates question was posed to married female athletic trainers with children.

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