

## Work–Family Balance Among Coach-Fathers: A Qualitative Examination of Enrichment, Conflict, and Role Management Strategies

Jeffrey A. Graham  
University of Tennessee

Marlene A. Dixon  
Texas A&M University

Work–family balance in sport has until this point largely been characterized as an issue for women. Current societal trends, however, suggest that men also struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities. Using theoretical frameworks from both conflict and enrichment, this study examined the ways that fathers who are coaches experience and manage the work–life interface. Twenty-four men who are fathers and high school varsity head coaches were interviewed for this study. The respondents discussed the day-to-day challenges and coping strategies they utilized to manage their work–life interface. Ultimately, five themes emerged from the data, including (a) coaching as more than an occupation, (b) experiences of conflict and strain, (c) coping strategies, (d) nonutilization of organizational supports, and (e) experiences of enrichment. These findings suggest that, indeed, men struggle with balancing competing role demands. However, the findings also suggest that men are utilizing diverse and creative approaches for managing their fathering and coaching roles, resulting in meaningful experiences of enrichment stemming from both coaching and fathering.

**Keywords:** coping strategies, family–work conflict, family–work enrichment, fatherhood, masculinity, role management, work–family conflict, work–family enrichment

Recent studies examining the interaction of work and family have argued for the continued need to evaluate the ways individuals manage work and family responsibilities (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Schenewark & Dixon, 2012). Managing these responsibilities well has strong implications for organizational effectiveness and worker retention (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Work–life tensions also impact employee satisfaction, productivity, and longevity in the work role (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, Kutcher, Indovino, & Rosner, 2005; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999). Thus, the work–life interface remains a central issue for both employees and managers.

The sport industry emphasizes commitment, preaches sacrifice, demands long hours, and celebrates

face time as a measure of worker productivity (Dixon & Bruening, 2005). In addition, sport organizations ubiquitously use the family as a metaphor for describing their team and organizational climate (e.g., “We are a family, we have your back”). This metaphor speaks at an affective level to employees, suggesting that if individuals are not physically and emotionally invested in the organization, they are in some way letting the “family” down. Furthermore, there is little job security for coaches in sport, as contracts can and often are terminated mid- or postseason. These pressures produce a culture that encourages employees to give more to the team than is likely prudent or formally required by an employment contract (Graham & Dixon, 2014). They create a work environment that is demanding and inflexible, conditions that make finding balance with family responsibilities challenging at best and incompatible at worst (Allen, 2001; Wayne, Casper, Matthews, & Allen, 2013). As a result, the sport industry provides a rich context for examining the work–family interface.

Sport management scholars have documented the challenges facing women who are mothers in the sport industry as they negotiate the responsibilities of work and family (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Bruening, Dixon,

---

Jeffrey A. Graham is with the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN. Marlene A. Dixon is with the Department of Health and Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. Address author correspondence to Jeffrey A. Graham at jgraha38@utk.edu.

& Eason, 2016; Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). These studies suggest that women in sport face a number of challenges as they strive to be successful mothers and successful employees (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2005). Women who are mothers in sport use a wide variety of coping strategies to manage the work–family interface. One of these strategies includes creating and managing a wide network of friends, family, and coworkers who can be called upon to help carry the load of mothering and coaching responsibilities (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). In addition, this body of research indicates that coaching mothers were more successful at managing the work–family interface when their relationship with athletic administration was open and supportive. This relationship proved critical in allowing the women to have the confidence and autonomy to manage coaching and family in a way that worked for them (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dixon & Sagas, 2007). Furthermore, the coach–administrator relationship for women in sport had important outcomes for work–life satisfaction (Dixon & Sagas, 2007) as well as overall well-being (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). In a broad sense, research in this area suggests that women in sport are more likely to be successful at balancing work and family responsibilities when the following factors are in place: (a) a strong personal support network and (b) a workplace atmosphere and culture that both support the family role and encourage an ethic of autonomy (Bruening *et al.*, 2016).

Less is understood, however, about the ways men who are fathers in the sport industry manage work and family duties (Graham & Dixon, 2014). Scholars have called for a more balanced research agenda in regard to the sport industry in which the phenomena of work–family conflict (WFC) and work–family enrichment (WFE) are examined among men who are fathers (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Schenewark & Dixon, 2012). This study sought to fill this gap by examining the experiences of WFC and WFE and the subsequent coping strategies utilized by fathers who are coaches in the sport industry.

In addition to providing practical implications, this study contributes to sport management theory in work–life balance, human resource management, and organizational behavior. It also extends thinking in the broader work–family literature because of the distinct subculture, assumptions, and changing tensions in the sport context.

## Literature Review

An extensive review of the literature involving the role of fathers in the family, the changing beliefs about masculinity, how sport is a distinct context, how WFC and WFE can benefit or damage individuals and organizations, and how these relate to work–family interface is beyond the scope of this study (but see Graham & Dixon, 2014). However, it is important to discuss key

theoretical concepts underpinning this research so as to provide a framework in which to discuss the current study. As a result, the changing demands of fathering and mothering are presented, followed by a discussion of the constructs of conflict and enrichment along with role theory and scarcity theory as undergirding frameworks.

## Changing Role Expectations for Men

We know something about the ways in which coaches, athletes, and administrators achieve work–family balance or experience WFC. As discussed in the Introduction, empirical study in this area has primarily focused on women in sport (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007). From a historical family perspective, this focus is justified. Traditionally, mothers have fulfilled the role of homemaker, cook, cleaner, and primary childcare provider. This traditional mother role is still supported by research on family systems. Mothers do fulfill the majority of homemaking duties today (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011; Parker & Wang, 2013). Additionally, more and more women are going to school, earning degrees, and joining the professional workforce than in the past (Bauman & Ryan, 2015; Galinsky *et al.*, 2011; Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013)—hence the tension between work and family. Not only are women working more hours professionally, they are also expected to lead the way in familial duties, taking care of children, cooking, and cleaning responsibilities (Galinsky *et al.*, 2011; Parker & Wang, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2013).

As a result, women are beginning to look more frequently to their partners or spouses to provide additional support in the family role, and fathers are responding by contributing more in that role (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Parker & Livingston, 2016). Men report increased levels of childcare duties, cooking, and cleaning than they have in years past (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2014; Bianchi *et al.*, 2006; Galinsky *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, reports show evidence that the increasing familial role for men has not been accompanied by a corresponding decrease in workforce expectations. As a result, men are now beginning to report higher levels of WFC than ever before (Aumann *et al.*, 2014; Galinsky *et al.*, 2011; Harrington, Van Deusen, & Ladage, 2010).

The pressures from work and family have given way to what some scholars term the “new male mystique” (Aumann *et al.*, 2014, p. 1), a condition in which men feel pressure to be not only a successful financial provider but also an involved father and husband. Naturally, people working in a diverse set of professions experience these pressures, which can lead to conflict between work and family. That is, those working in sport are not unique in experiencing tension between work and family. However, because typical sport organizations demand long working hours, expect high job performance, and provide little long-term job security, the sport industry provides an especially rich context in which to study WFC and WFC among men who may

especially be at risk for experiencing strain between work and family roles. That being said, less is understood about the ways in which men experience and cope with these tensions between work and family, especially in the context of sport organizations (Graham & Dixon, 2014). In addition, it is useful to recognize that, although the conflict side of the work–family interface is prominent, the enriching experiences of fathering and working in sport are also less understood. Therefore, this study provides valuable insight into the lived experience of conflict and enrichment for men in sport and provides understanding of coping strategies fathers in the sport industry utilize to manage the work–family interface.

### Role Overlap and Resource Scarcity— Role Strain and Conflict

Organizations are composed of individuals fulfilling various role obligations (Goode, 1960), and the success of an organization in large part rests on the abilities of those individuals to competently complete their assigned roles (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Because individuals fulfill a number of different roles in their lives (e.g., employment, societal, familial), organizational obligations are not always the most pressing for an individual. As a result, an individual's behavior in a certain role becomes a series of role negotiations with important role partners, such as a significant other or an employer (Goode, 1960). In this process of negotiating role obligations with role partners, individuals experience tension or strain between different life roles (Goode, 1960; Kahn *et al.*, 1964). Most often, the study of role strain focuses on work and family roles; however, “work and family are shorthand labels for a myriad of ongoing and spontaneous daily interactions that individuals have with other people” (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007, p. 459). That is, even though the research lens often focuses on work and family roles, individuals must make trade-offs between multiple life roles that extend beyond these two realms.

The felt tension between work and family roles can be characterized in two ways. The first is the incompatibility of the various roles. Kahn *et al.* (1964) noted that “demands from role senders on the job for overtime or take-home work may conflict with pressures from one's [spouse] to give undivided attention to family affairs during evening hours” (p. 20). As certain roles require higher levels of conformity than others, the individual is unable to satisfy all individuals who are a part of their greater role network. In sport, one way this manifests is during in-season play. During the competitive season, the coaching role has a highly inflexible schedule of practices and games that cannot be easily adjusted. Consequently, the family role is forced to conform to the coaching role, and it is likely the coach is unable to satisfy many of the demands the family would normally expect to be fulfilled. As a result, coaches likely experience increased levels of strain and conflict as they try to manage the expectations and responsibilities of both life

roles. In an attempt to reduce this felt role strain, an individual will engage in certain strategic behaviors, or coping mechanisms, such as compartmentalizing roles one from another, delegating role duties to others, eliminating certain role relationships entirely, or even expanding certain roles (Goode, 1960). The clarity and intensity of role sender expectations, the level of receptivity and compliance by the focal individual, and the success or failure of the focal individual's role management behaviors all influence the amount and severity of the role strain or role conflict he or she is likely to experience (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn *et al.*, 1964).

A second characterization of the tension between work and family is focused on the resources a given role demands, and how resource depletion leads to strain and tension in other life roles. This characterization views resources such as time, energy, loyalty, love, and commitment as scarce (Coser, 1974). As a result, it is expected that the organization and the family unit will view each other adversarially as they compete for the finite resources of a focal individual (Coser, 1974). This competition for resources and the choices the individual makes about how to allocate his or her resources among role partners invariably leads to tension between life roles as trade-offs concerning disbursement of finite resources, either internally or during interactions with role partners, are negotiated (Hobfoll, 1989). This type of resource allocation tension is common in sport. For example, a youth basketball player who naturally asks his or her coach for help with skill development after practice will do so without considering the implications of time and energy reductions this might have on the coach's family role responsibilities. The coach in turn experiences a measure of tension, knowing that his or her family would like him or her to spend time at home, but feels obligated to support a player reaching out for help. Consequently, the family may begin to see the coaching role negatively, as family time becomes limited when the parent is asked to give resources to the coaching role.

Recent literature focusing on the work–family interface continues to characterize the tension between work and family in terms of roles and resources (Carlson, Kacmar, Zivnuska, Ferguson, & Whitten, 2011; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Sturges, 2012). This framework provides greater insight into and understanding of the pull and strain coaches face as they seek to succeed in multiple life roles. As an individual manages various life roles as well as life resources, he or she inevitably experiences strain and conflict when work and family roles require undesirable trade-offs.

### Enrichment From Work and Family

The above discussion might suggest that the experience of negotiating demands between work and family is primarily negative. In response to this view, prominent scholars have suggested that managing multiple roles might not always lead to conflict (Greenhaus & Powell,

2006; Marks, 1977; Sieber, 1974). Rather, these scholars argue that role diversity has potential for rewarding and enriching outcomes. Much of the discussion of work–family balance and WFE, therefore, originated in this theoretical vein.

As an individual adopts a diverse role system with multiple roles (e.g., organizational, voluntary, informal, familial), he or she is situated to realize benefits from those roles. Granted, there are some roles in which role obligations exceed the rights that are given by the role, a situation characterized as an “exploitative relationship” (Sieber, 1974, p. 569). But this type of role is not always the case. That is, roles not only take resources from an individual; they also generate them.

Sieber (1974) argued that positive outcomes from multiple role accumulation happen in four ways. First, multiple roles provide individuals with freedoms, rights, social capital, and access to resources that would otherwise be off limits to the individual (i.e., role privileges). Second, multiple roles provide a buffer against failure in any single role (i.e., status security). Third, role accumulation leads to a build-up of tangible and social resources, which are transferrable and thus increase one’s ability to meet the obligations of other roles in the role system (i.e., status enhancement and increased role performance). Finally, multiple roles can lead to a general increase in self-conception and a healthy expansion of personality (i.e., enrichment of the personality).

Modern studies in work and family have also embraced the idea that work and family do not inherently conflict with one another but have the potential to enrich each other (Carlson, Hunter, Ferguson, & Whitten, 2014; Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Greenhaus and Powell’s (2006) foundational model proposes that the work (family) role can positively benefit the family (work) role in instrumental and affective ways. The instrumental path suggests that resources generated in one role (e.g., skills and perspectives, psychological and physical resources, social capital resources, flexibility, and material resources) directly promote higher performance in another role. Second, the affective path posits that when individuals receive desirable resources from a given role, they are positively impacted affectively, which increases their performance in other life roles.

The synergy and enrichment generated between work and family operate distinctly from possible incompatibilities and tensions that exist between roles (Carlson *et al.*, 2006). That is, enrichment between roles and conflict between roles are not zero sum. Rather, individuals might simultaneously experience both conflict and enrichment between work and family roles at different levels. For example, a family might benefit from the financial security and social status that result from the father’s employment (enrichment), yet simultaneously feel strain resulting from the amount of travel required by the work role (conflict).

Given this extensive theoretical and empirical undergirding, it is highly likely that coaching fathers

experience WFC and possibly WFE as well. However, we know very little about the actual experiences of conflict and enrichment for coaching fathers, including the factors that contribute to increased/decreased conflict or enrichment and the coping strategies that coaching fathers utilize to manage their dual roles. For this reason, three research questions guided this study: How do fathers in the sport industry perceive and experience the tension between work and family? How do fathers in the sport industry perceive and experience enrichment between work and family? What coping strategies do they utilize for balancing work and family? Understanding both the enrichment and the conflict experiences of coaching fathers in the sport industry is important for giving a complete view of the work–family interface for these individuals and the organizations in which they work. This understanding not only will aid in developing theory that is applicable to both mothers and fathers in coaching but will provide practical direction for sport organizations in today’s complex and changing work environment.

## Method

This study sought to understand foundational questions about fathers in athletics negotiating their roles of father and coach. Thus, a qualitative descriptive approach (Creswell, 2013; Sandelowski, 2000, 2010) served as a fitting methodology for this purpose. Qualitative descriptive studies, based in a social-constructivist approach, have been used on a range of topics, including child nutrition (Holsten, Deatrick, Kumanyika, Pinto-Martin, & Compher, 2012), stress reduction (Jindani & Khalsa, 2015), nursing (Vaismoradi, Salsali, & Ahmadi, 2011), and sport performance (Saragiotto, Yamato, & Lopes, 2014). As this study was committed to accurately representing the lived experiences of high school varsity head coaches who are fathers—that is, a priori hypotheses were not being tested or measured—a qualitative descriptive approach, with its focus on naturalistic inquiry, proved to be the best methodological fit (Sandelowski, 2000).

## Participants

In order to examine the work–life tensions of coaching fathers, the authors purposefully sought out respondents that fit the following criteria: male, high school varsity head coach, and having at least one child. To recruit respondents, the authors directly e-mailed approximately 650 high school coaches in Texas and invited them to participate in interviews. After garnering appropriate human subjects approvals, ensuring that the respondent fit the study guidelines, and filtering some respondents to enhance maximum variation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Patton, 1990), 24 respondents ultimately participated in the study (see Appendix for a description of the final sample). The final participants for this study were between the ages of 35 and 64, with a mean age of

approximately 46. Six of the 24 men in the study were under the age of 40. Additionally, the average length of total coaching was approximately 22 years, with a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 42 years. In fact, only one of the participants had been in coaching for less than 10 years. Furthermore, the average length of marriage for the men in the study was 18 years, with a maximum of 30 years and a minimum of 1.5 years. Only six of the 24 men in the study had been married for less than 10 years, and only two men had been married for less than 5 years. Conversely, 15 of the coaches in the sample had been married for 15 years or longer.

The participants had children ranging in age from 1 year to 31 years. The average age of the children in the group was approximately 15 years. Additionally, the maximum number of children in a home was four, and the minimum number of children in the home was one, with the average of approximately two children in the home. In all, the fathers in the study had 19 children between the ages of 1–12 years, 16 children between the ages of 13–19 years, and 16 children above the age of 20 years. This sample therefore represents different stages of fatherhood and allows for the exploration of the work–life interface across a wide range of fathering challenges (see Bianchi *et al.*, 2006; Parker & Livingston, 2016).

Characterizing the participants in this quantitative fashion is revealing, as it indicates that the men in this study have developed some kind of routine and process that makes balancing family and work possible, as evidenced by the collective average length of marriage (18 years) and coaching (22 years). To a smaller degree, this study reflects the experiences of younger fathers still trying to find a way to balance work and family for the first time. Six of the 24 coaches had been married for less than 10 years and had children under the age of 10 at the time of interview. In large part, however, the study more fully represents men who have been coaching and fathering for many years and across a variety of childhood stages and have found a way to balance work and family in a manner that has allowed them to maintain their coaching careers in as well as a functional family life.

### Interview Guide and Procedure

The questions for each interview were based on a semistructured interview guide. The questions were derived from relevant masculinity and work–family literature (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2007). In general, the interview protocol consisted of three parts: (a) a discussion of work and family responsibilities, (b) a discussion of conflict and enrichment stemming from those two roles, and (c) the participant’s strategies for managing life roles. Although each participant was asked the same general questions, the semistructured nature of the interview guide allowed investigators to ask additional probing questions to further understand experiences, responsibilities, and points of view the participants shared. A pilot study was conducted, prior to

collecting actual data, in which the principle investigators interviewed eight high school varsity coaches. The pilot study proved useful for modifying the pacing, order, and tone of the interview guide. As a result, the overall interview guide increased in clarity and focus.

Each participant signed a confidentiality agreement and granted permission to the interviewer to digitally audiotape the interview. Once the interviews were completed, they were professionally transcribed so that coding could begin. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 min and had an average length of approximately 50 min.

### Data Analysis

A two-level coding procedure was implemented for analyzing the data (Miles *et al.*, 2013). Level I codes were developed through the use of an inductive descriptive coding process (Miles *et al.*, 2013) in which participant views were used to develop codes. First, once the interviews were transcribed each transcription was verified for accuracy by comparing the text to the audio file. Second, each transcript was reviewed for units of meaning and was labeled with a single descriptive code (Miles *et al.*, 2013). Third, the authors reviewed each transcript again and modified the descriptive codes for precision and developed subcodes when necessary.

During Steps 2 and 3 in the outlined process, a master list of codes and subcodes was recorded and agreed upon as they emerged from the text. This list contained the code, the subcode, and a definition of what that code meant, which resulted in an accurate and consistent coding process from one transcript to the next (Miles *et al.*, 2013). Once an entire interview had been coded in this manner, the next interview was coded in the same three-step process, with new codes created where necessary and added to the master list.

Level II codes were developed utilizing a pattern-coding method (Miles *et al.*, 2013). Pattern coding is useful as it pulls together much material from Level I coding into more meaningful and concise units of analysis (Miles *et al.*, 2013). The investigators jointly identified, discussed, and categorized groups in the Level I codes to create the Level II codes.

Once the categories were created, the primary author began refining theme development. The goal was to focus on identifying patterns and key excerpts from the data that might serve as representative themes describing the essence of what the participants collectively communicated through their interviews (Miles *et al.*, 2013). This process went beyond simply finding commonalities between meaning units and grouping them. Identifying themes required making evaluative decisions about what information was most relevant to the research questions, interpreting these salient portions of the interviews at a low-inference level (Sandelowski, 2000), writing and refining the proposed themes, and selecting representative quotes from the interviews to support these interpretations.

## Confidentiality

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the investigators replaced the name of each participant with a randomly generated letter. Additionally, locations were either omitted or changed to increase confidentiality. Finally, the research team disguised or omitted potentially identifying information such as the names of colleagues or family members.

## Findings

As the respondents discussed their experiences of fulfilling multiple responsibilities as coaches and fathers, a number of themes emerged. In the following sections, themes and subthemes are presented accompanied by representative quotations from study respondents that reveal insights regarding the work–family experiences of these coaching fathers.

### More Than an Occupation

Although the theme of “More Than an Occupation” does not specifically address the ways in which fathers who are high school coaches experience conflict and enrichment, it gives important context about how the men in the sample viewed their role as father and coach. An overwhelming majority of respondents began the discussion of their work or family responsibilities by framing their lives as Coach Q did: “I love what I do so I want to give my students and my players my best. I am blessed to have this opportunity to coach and teach, two things I love and am so passionate about. So I don’t want to shortchange the kids.” Similarly, Coach G said, “Coaching is a calling. I was just led to it.” As a result, any meaningful analysis of the ways in which coaches who are fathers manage work and family requires a baseline understanding of what being a coach means to the respondents. The following three subthemes address the life view of the coaches in the study.

**Desire to impact lives.** In each interview, respondents discussed their goal to positively impact the lives of the youth in their athletic programs. Coach W represented the views of many of the respondents when he said, “My focus now is directed towards the individual success of the kids off the football field.” Many of the respondents felt that life lessons could be learned from participating in sport and that the coach was the influence for learning those life lessons. Coach W continued, “I want those kids to be able to look back and say that some of the things they’ve equipped themselves [with] as a person came from the football program and my coaching.” This desire to have a positive impact on the lives of their players influenced how the coaches prioritized and approached their coaching responsibilities.

**Father figures.** In addition to wanting to impact lives, many of the respondents discussed how they felt they were in many ways a father figure for their athletes.

Coach A captured this mindset when he said, “There’s a lot of kids that you might be the first person of significance in their life that cares or that is there.” Coach S agreed with this notion: “I’m raising, or not raising but helping out a lot with a hundred and fifty kids.” Coach I made the connection to filling this father figure role even more explicitly: “There’s an influence there. I’m a dad to everybody that I teach, and everybody I coach.” As a result, the coaches felt the weight of their coaching responsibilities. The respondents expressed a powerful association with their coaching role, feeling nearly as passionate about it as they did about their fatherly role.

**Passion for coaching.** Perhaps because the coaches wanted to make a positive impact and felt that they were filling the role of father figure, many expressed a deep passion for coaching. Coach Q expressed it in this way: “[Coaching] is a passion. It’s something that I do that I believe is my calling, and I love it.” Coach C explained this passion in even more depth:

Make sure you love it. In order to put up with the parents, disappointing your own kids from time to time and having them miss you, disappointing your wife . . . if the payoff isn’t something you love, don’t bother. Either you love the kids, love the sport, or love being a coach. Love has got to be part of it.

This view was held by all respondents. Not a single respondent expressed uncertainty about the coaching role. Each exhibited a passion and love for the role, which colored his life view and overall experience of balancing coaching and fathering responsibilities.

### Experiences of Conflict and Strain

With the above context of a strong coaching role saliency, it is important to discuss the respondents’ experiences of conflict and strain resulting from the work and family domains. The experiences of strain stemming from each role are discussed in the following section.

**Work–family conflict.** Conflict resulting from work obligations impinging on family obligations was most common among respondents. Four specific types of conflict—time, energy, attention, and emotional spill-over—are discussed in this subtheme.

**Time.** Time conflict was reported by each respondent. Coach T effectively described this form of tension: “There is conflict every day. You spend more time with other people’s kids than you do your own, and that’s pretty much true for every coach that I’ve ever coached with.” Coach E agreed when he said, “As far as conflict, it’s a conflict because coaching can take so much if you are not careful with your time.” Coach M shared an example of the lack of time for family being a reality in coaching:

We had our coaches get together [at the start of the season], and the [head coach] said to bring our significant others. After we all were there hanging

out for a while, he stopped and said, “Hey, we’re glad everybody is here. Ladies, take a good look at your husband, because it’s going to be about three months before you see him again.” And everyone laughed. Then I realized, “Oh, my gosh, it really will be.”

The time demands of coaching and the conflict these demands caused in the family role were prominent across the interviews. Some even expressed time demands as the reason some families do not stay together. Coach A shared the following: “I’ve been married once before, and coaching was a very serious factor in the loss of the first marriage.” Coach G commented, “The time commitment is tough on families. You’ll find very few guys have their families still together. There’s just a lot of time away from home.” Respondents attributed conflict in the family domain most often to the time requirements of coaching.

**Energy.** Respondents also reported strain in the family role as a result of the requirement of the coaching role for high levels of physical energy. Coach T expressed how the coaching role demanded energy that resulted in his inability to interact with his children when he returned home. He said, “I can’t throw a ball with my kids. I can’t teach them how to ride a bike. I just don’t have the energy.” Coach J discussed how the lack of energy resulted in neglecting household chores in the following example:

I let things slide, I just didn’t have the energy. Once I took care of the [baseball] field, and when you mow two and a half acres, two or three times a week, then go back home and have to mow two acres at home, you don’t want to do it.

The respondents felt that the energy requirements of the coaching role reduced their ability to fulfill fathering responsibilities at home. This then caused tension in the family role as chores were neglected or meaningful interactions were reduced.

**Attention.** Conflict in this subtheme was often the result of the respondents’ allowing the coaching role to permeate all facets of their life. Some respondents discussed how they simply were unable to take their minds off their coaching duties. Coach A provided a great example:

I know how to be a coach a thousand miles an hour, every minute of your day that you can possibly devote to game planning or preparation. Whether I am home, or in the shower, or anything, my mind is always on that. So, that can create conflict.

Coach T expressed a similar mindset about the attention coaching demands, saying, “Yeah, there’s really no switch. Coaching is a passion, so even when you get home you’re thinking about it.” Consequently, the respondents expressed that the attention paid to coaching resulted in tension in the family role as family members felt neglected or unimportant.

**Emotional spillover.** Finally, the coaching role caused strain in the family role through negative emotions from the coaching role spilling over into the family role. Coach F said:

There are times where I catch myself frustrated from practice, and I go home and my kids are doing something and I jump on them like I jumped on my players. It’s probably not the best way to handle it.

Coach I also captured this emotional spillover easily happening when he said, “You try not to take it home, but when you put in time as a coach . . . your life [goes] into beating your opponent. Then when that doesn’t happen, it’s defeating.” The respondents discussed how in this emotional state, from a practice or a contest, it is easy to allow the negative emotions of the coaching role to impact the family role.

**Family–work conflict.** Respondents discussed how conflict flowed not only from the work role but from family responsibilities causing tension in the coaching role. However, it was also clear that the respondents expressed far fewer experiences of tension stemming from the family role than from the coaching role. Coach D represents this trend: “For the most part, being a father has never really conflicted with my job.” Even so, the subthemes of time and attention emerged as areas of conflict stemming from the family role.

**Time and Attention.** Some respondents discussed how certain familial responsibilities took desirable time away from the coaching role. Interestingly, although the time and attention required by the coaching role independently created strain in the family role, these two elements seemed to combine in the family role into a single factor that created strain in the coaching role. Coach U shared this viewpoint: “It’s one of those family things. I am rarely there at freshman practice because the trade-off with my wife is, I take the kids to school. That has worked out for us . . . If I weren’t taking my kids to school, though, I would be [at the field house] at lot earlier.” Mental and physical attention required in the family role also emerged as a source of occasional tension in the coaching role. Coach C shared the following common situation:

The biggest burden on me was the kids constantly being sick. My kids are little, and they’re sick . . . So sometimes they’ll call and tell me I’ve got to miss basketball. I have to go pick up my son, he’s throwing up, there’s no two ways about it. My wife’s in a meeting and she can’t be reached. You know, I’ve got to go do that.

Family emergencies that required immediate unplanned attention, such as the one just illustrated, were a primary source of family–work conflict expressed by the respondents. Coach X explained his experience:

In twenty-three years I missed one week of football. My mom passed away. She was dying of cancer and

was on her deathbed. So my head football coach at this place where I was at relieved me of my duties for a week and said go as long as you need to and we'll cover for you here. So I left. That's the only time I've ever missed. So, I consider myself very fortunate for that, because nothing else has come up.

Family role infringement on the coaching role was not received well by the coaches. Although these experiences were not frequently reported, they were certainly not welcomed and often received with annoyance. Coach F's experience with his father-in-law's health issues gives insight into this mindset:

Most of the time your job takes priority. This last May, though, we were in spring football practice and my father in law was real sick. He didn't look like he was going to make it. It was like, "We have got to go get on a flight tomorrow and go out to see him." So those types of things come up and you *hate* to miss [practice]. I had to miss a shitload of practice and you hate to have to do that because, for one, I am the head coach. I'm supposed be out there, but at the same time there are certain situations that take precedence. But things as far as missing [practice] to go to [one of my kids'] game or rehearsal or whatever, that's probably not going to happen. So there are not many times that family will take precedence over working, especially during the season.

Another important difference in the directionality of conflict is that when the coaching role created tension in the family role, the coaches depicted this tension as factual, something that simply could not be helped and needed to be approached with calm and tact. However, when the family role spilled into the sport role, the coaches reacted with anger or frustration. Coach F used of the word "hate" and Coach C used of the word "burden," indicating that the sport role was less forgiving than the family role. Whereas the family was expected to be understanding or supportive, the sport role lacked room for understanding or compromise.

This might speak to the lack of security in the coaching role and the pressure to be successful. Because the coaches felt a lack of stability in the coaching role, they felt a need to continually show their commitment to the role by devoting time, energy, and attention to it. As Coach Q said, "In coaching there's no guaranteed contracts." In contrast, the coaches felt comfortable in their family role and knew that this role was not likely to be terminated in short order. Therefore, they felt more comfortable taking advantage of the family role and allowing sport to spill over and create tension in the family role, and less comfortable when family responsibilities detracted from and created strain in the sport role.

## Coping Strategies

To manage the strain and tension of balancing work and family responsibilities, respondents discussed a variety

of coping mechanisms. Five themes emerged as primary coping strategies: seeking understanding role partners, communicating with role partners, relying on the wife, compartmentalizing and integrating roles, and increasing resource efficiency. Each theme is discussed in the following sections.

**Seeking understanding role partners.** One common strategy expressed by the respondents included identifying and working with role partners that understood their viewpoint of the demands, pressures, and above all the value of the coaching role. In many ways, understanding equated to agreeing with the notion that the coaching role was more than a simple occupation and more of a life calling. Men discussed their wives in this context frequently. Coach W expressed it in the following way: "My wife understood from the get-go that the time constraints placed on her as a wife and mother were going to be different than maybe somebody married to a banker or a nine to five type." Coach T further explained:

A coach's wife is someone who knows exactly what the demands are of being a coach's wife, knows the responsibilities. My advice to younger coaches who plan on getting married and raising a family is make sure that your wife understands the amount of hours and time you have to put in . . . There's a lot of coaches that have been married and divorced, married and divorced several times because when they got married the one that they married didn't understand the passion and the time requirements of coaching.

School administrators were also frequently mentioned as possible role partners, especially if an administrator was understanding of the coaching role. Coach D said, "If an administrator *gets it*, though, and is on board with athletics, they can be a great ally. Yeah, it can be huge for you" [emphasis added]. Coach R agreed with this sentiment:

It seems like if you have a principal who is trustworthy, and who you feel like you have a comfortable relationship with, they're a great resource. But then, if there's someone there that you don't trust, or who may not understand your situation, that could be a real inhibitor to trying to find support.

Working together with understanding role partners was very important for the sustainability of the coaching role. The respondents felt that successfully reducing tension between work and family was especially possible with an understanding wife and/or school administrator.

**Reliance on the wife.** Another theme discussed by the men in the study, especially in relation to understanding role partners, was the dependence on their wives for accomplishing familial tasks. This was perhaps the most frequently discussed coping mechanism for being able to coach and be a father. Coach U relied completely on his

wife during the season. He expressed the way their family handled the in-season tension in the following response: “My wife, during the season, there is more on her, and she knows it and takes it. She jokingly calls herself a ‘Basketball Widow’.” Coach E also discussed the importance of his wife: “My wife is honestly the one that keeps our family together.” Coach C summarized this viewpoint:

My wife is the one I lean on most for all [family] things. That’s the most important relationship that I have. You try not to lean on that person too much, because she’s already doing so much as it is. So you don’t want to double on them too much.

This reliance on their wives complements the idea of having a wife who understands the coaching role. Because the burden of managing the family falls almost entirely on the wife during the season, if that wife does not agree with or support the coaching ethic, then there is likely to be increased levels of tension and strain. However, if the wife agrees with her husband’s vision of and goals for the coaching role, then her support reduces the husband’s experiences of tension. Men also discussed their general reliance on extended family if they had family close by. However, not all the coaches had families that were close enough to depend on for support.

**Effective communication with role partners.** The men in the study predominantly discussed communication as a primary coping strategy. Coach B summarized the importance of this strategy: “Just keep communication open. It’s so easy to get tunnel vision, and so you have to keep that open.” Coach F discussed the need for frequent communication: “I talk with my wife about things quite a bit, pretty much everything that’s going on [at school]. She helps and supports and it’s good to have somebody at home to bounce things off of.”

The men in the study pinpointed calendaring family time and events as an especially important aspect of communication. Coach E summarized this viewpoint:

One thing that we try to do [is] to plan the whole week ahead. We try to do that on Sundays in the evening. That way we know what each other is doing and if we need to help or if we are not going to be around or if I’m not going to be around more than anything else. That has helped us.

In addition to communicating with family, the men in the study also discussed how communication with their coaching staff about family topics was also important. Coach C expressed his policy about communicating with his assistant coaches:

I thought it would only be fair to my assistants, who both have kids. I say, “Here’s the plan. I will tell you *for sure* when you can leave. This is when practice is over, this is when you can expect to be home.” And I don’t think that I’ve deviated from that in two years.

In general, it was clear from the respondents that communication was a primary strategy for finding a sustainable system for meeting coaching and family responsibilities. This was especially important for the most important role partners, such as the wife and the assistant coaches.

**Compartmentalizing and integrating roles.** The men in the study utilized a blend of both compartmentalization and integration of work and family rather than strictly one strategy or the other. Coach O discussed this blended strategy:

For example, we cooked out the other night and I put my phone in my truck outside. It wasn’t even in the house. It was gone. I didn’t want to feel like I had to go check it or be interrupted if somebody was calling me. So, purposely, *sometimes* you got to put it away [emphasis added].

The phone in this instance was his connection to work. For him, putting the phone outside of the house was a literal separation from the coaching role. Notice, however, that this separation was only temporary, something that needed to be done sometimes but not all the time. Coach D also expressed this blended approach to separation and integration. He said, “I’d say I take my work home with me, but only to an extent.” The extent of the integration was more specifically discussed by Coach J: “I wanted [my family] to be involved with just the whole atmosphere of it, not necessarily what coaching was about, but being involved with athletics and experiencing that whole scenario.” For Coach J, the integration extended only to the atmosphere and athletic experience, such as attending games, fan events, or awards ceremonies, as well as getting to know the players personally. However, he shielded his family from other aspects of his coaching such as disciplining players, dealing with angry parents, and specific opponent scouting or planning—things he termed the coaching aspect of the job. This was a common strategy used by the men in the study. Integrate the family with the coaching role to a certain extent, but then compartmentalize some of the less glorious aspects of coaching.

**Increasing resource efficiency.** The respondents had an acute awareness of the finite nature of their resources, especially time. As a result, many discussed the need to utilize their time efficiently. Coach N captured this notion in his discussion of time use:

I am always trying to look for ways to steal time for our staff to get away and just go spend time with their family. I think one thing is you’re not going to outwork anybody. And people are going to say they are going to outwork someone, and you’re not. I think you have just got to be smarter and efficient with the time you have. We all got the same time in a day; it’s just how you are utilizing it.

In addition to managing time efficiently, some coaches adopted an outsourcing mindset to increase their well-being. Coach D shared his experiences of outsourcing: “I quit mowing that [lawn]. I’m paying a guy to do that so my life became a lot better . . . It allows me to focus on the things I need.” By outsourcing physical labor around the home, it opened up more time for him to spend with family or do things he enjoyed. By using resources, such as time, purposefully, the respondents were able to reduce felt tension in the family role.

### Nonutilization of Organizational Supports

One coping strategy that was noticeably missing from the narrative of almost all of the men in the study was the use of organizational supports to help with family and coaching responsibilities. This was not for lack of knowledge or understanding of policies but was rather a strategic choice on the part of the men across the study.

Many of the respondents discussed a primary reason for not using organizational supports (e.g., taking time off or asking for a change in workload): distrust of the general school administration. This, in large part, stems from the lack of job security surrounding the coaching profession. Coach Q addressed this dilemma succinctly:

The funny thing about coaching is every year we really don’t know if we’re going to be hired back. That’s the stress of it. You just don’t know. I wonder, you know, if the principal is going to keep me this year. And then when a new principal comes on board, it’s just uncertainty. In coaching there’s no guaranteed contracts. It’s year to year . . . So, you have to be *very careful* of what you reveal to the administrators [emphasis added].

In a similar tone, Coach N also discussed the issue of distrust of administration: “I would lean on friends and family more than anyone else . . . When it comes down to it, I go talk to people I know I can trust the most.” As a result of the perceived distrust in the coach–administrator relationship, the men in the study rarely used organizational supports.

Those who did use organizational supports only used them in one of two situations. First, they felt comfortable using organizational supports in extreme health or family situations. Coach I gave an illustration of when he used organizational supports: “I’ve got to have some medical procedures done next week. That’s going to be the first time in thirty-three years, that I can remember, that I missed practice.” Many of the coaches felt that organizational supports could safely be used in cases of family or personal medical necessity.

However, many felt that, if possible, even personal medical treatment should be delayed until after the focal season. Coach D shared an extreme example that showed

how many of the coaches viewed using organizational supports:

I had a brain surgery five years ago, and I have ten plates and thirty-two screws that are in the back part of my head. Anyway, I could have died. . . . I had headaches so I used aspirin, and I worked through it *during* the football season. It was excruciating headaches, but I just had to endure it. That’s the way I felt. I was out from January to February, and I came back to work. My point is I had to *make it through the season* to get to a spot where I could take time off. I’d say ninety percent of coaches are going to find a way to *make it through* [emphasis added].

The men in the study predominantly cited two circumstances, either an inflexible emergency or waiting until the season was over, as acceptable ways to use organizationally available mechanisms to cope with work and family responsibilities. However, approaching an administrator to discuss the strain of coaching responsibilities or to ask for additional support was simply not an acceptable solution.

### Experiences of Enrichment

Beyond simply coping with WFC, coaches also expressed the enriching elements of their dual roles and how each role brought important benefits to their lives. Enrichment from work to family as well as from family to work are discussed as subthemes.

**Work–family enrichment.** The respondents commented frequently about the ways in which their coaching role benefited their role as a father. Some viewed this connection quite directly. For example, Coach A discussed his experience of becoming a stepfather of an older child, in which his coaching experience allowed him to relate to his stepson quickly:

[Being a step-dad] I didn’t know anything about being a dad. You know, usually you kind of ease into [being a dad] because [when they’re young] it’s just diapers, and they can’t talk back, and they don’t do anything wrong for a while and you can figure it out as you go. But, I think if I hadn’t been coaching, and been around kids, if I had just been a guy in the business world, I don’t know if I would have known how to relate [to an older step-child]. So that’s been huge for me.

Similarly, Coach G explained how, as his kids have aged, coaching has given him insight into their lives that has improved his parenting abilities:

There’s no doubt. I’ve been around teenagers long enough. I know when they’re telling the truth, when they’re making excuses, or giving me attitude. That’s made me a better father. There’s no doubt.

I'm a much better parent now that they're older because I know what to look for. I know when my daughters are doing things they shouldn't do. I've seen it all before. I tell them, "I've coached you a thousand times."

In addition to directly improving their ability as a father, many of the men in the study discussed how the coaching profession in general can enrich the family. This was in large part due to vacation periods in the school calendar. Coach B discussed how he utilized these breaks to be with family: "I look for opportunities to be with family. We took opportunities to go on retreats or to go together to Colorado. We've had special times, because you get Christmas break and sometimes you get a nice window [during the summer]." Coach M's response reiterated this benefit: "We do a lot of family time throughout the summer, or on our break. We make sure that, pretty much whatever we're doing, that it is all together." This suggests that for many coaches there are built-in times to be with family that coincide with school calendar breaks. As a result, the family benefits from the coaching role because of the built-in school schedule.

**Family-work enrichment.** The men in the study also discussed how the family was also a benefit to the coaching role. Most often the men discussed how being a father helped them relate to their players more directly. Coach E's comments represented this theme:

When [I became a father] I had more empathy with the kids. These kids are like mine and I want them to have success, I want them to grow up, I want them to be men and all these things that I would want for my sons. I think the meaning of the coach for me then changed a bit. So instead of just being a father or instead of just being a coach [who's] in it to win, who wants to win right now, let's just try to make these young men into men.

In addition to having an increased ability to relate with the players, the men also described being able to relate with the parents in the program. Coach G discussed how his role as father has helped him to relate with the stress of being a parent in sports in the following example:

I didn't realize how much stress was on the parent to watch their child go up there and strike out and know that the next game they're going to drop three spots in the batting order if they don't get a hit. So I'm going to be a little more sensitive to that, and it will help me a little bit as a coach.

Both of these subthemes also related to the way the men directly saw how their role as a father improved their focus and performance in the coaching role. Coach E, when discussing the way his wife helps him, expressed this view: "Without my wife, I don't think I'd be as good of a coach as I am now. I'm more focused."

Coach N also expressed this direct role performance benefit: "Being a father has helped me be a more effective coach. My daughters have taught me to listen better, to see what [the player] is going through, and figure out how I can help them."

Additionally, many of the coaches discussed how the family role provided a buffer from the coaching role, giving them a way in which to distance themselves from poor performance or a lack of success. Coach S shared how having a family changed his perspective on winning and losing:

Your family above all keeps your sporting life in perspective. I had eight really good years when I started my career, and I really thought coaching was kind of easy. I had my little girl during this time and went to a big-time program that I thought was the best job ever. We were one and nine, and we were terrible. Luckily, that little girl didn't have a clue whether we won or lost and still really doesn't. I used to be "no losses." I would just eat myself up. But having a family totally changed that. Of course it still eats on me and stays with me some. But when you're holding that little girl walking to your car or whatever, life, it could be much worse than that. You know, sure, I would have loved to have just won that game, but I have a great wife and a healthy baby. So family sure does keep life in perspective. I think most head coaches would keep perspective better if they had a family.

In the ways illustrated, the family role not only provided direct benefits to the coaching role but also provided a buffer from negative experiences in the coaching role.

## Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

The data from the coaching fathers point to a complex experience of managing family and coaching responsibilities. In particular, the findings have important theoretical implications in the broader areas of masculinity studies, role conflict and enrichment, and coping strategies, as well as practical implications for the successful management of fathers who are coaches. Each of these implications is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

### Masculinity Studies

Investigations of masculinity in sport, especially team sport, have often looked specifically at how orthodox (hegemonic) masculinity is constructed, protected, and passed down (Schacht, 1996). Orthodox masculinity is based on values such as homophobia, misogyny, physicality, and bravado (Pronger, 1990). Scholars researching masculinity in sport suggest that coaches play an important role in providing institutional support for and

promotion of orthodox masculinity (Anderson & McGuire, 2010).

Surprisingly, this expectation was not fully supported by the respondents in this study. Instead, many of the coaches described a masculine attitude that reflected more of an openness to behaviors and attitudes that may not fit the strict confines of orthodox masculinity. Some elements of orthodox masculinity were supported in the study, both in the coaching role and in the familial role. Behaviors that encouraged competition, aggression, and brutality were still discussed, especially by those who were involved with football. These coaches discussed the ways in which they were influencing the men of the next generation in a way that embraced values such as discipline, hard work, and accountability. In addition, some of the coaches discussed the fatherly role in terms that related more closely to orthodox masculinity. That is, they discussed being the primary disciplinarian for their children and taking on family duties that would be characterized as more traditionally masculine, such as repairing things in the home, mowing the lawn, or working on the family's cars. However, those same coaches discussed wanting to create a true family atmosphere on their teams, loving their athletes like children, hugging their players, and in general expressing love and nurturing behaviors. These attitudes and behaviors are more congruent with emerging notions of masculinity.

Anderson (2009, 2011) discussed another form of masculinity that is emerging in society, inclusive masculinity, arguing that inclusive masculinity is characterized with attitudes that allow for behaviors such as caring, nurturing, and comforting others (Anderson, 2009). Inclusive masculinity seems to have support in a broader social sense among men as they become more and more involved with the familial role (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Humberd, 2011; Harrington *et al.*, 2010).

Studies of inclusive masculinity in sport (albeit limited to studies of athletes, not coaches) suggest that athletes, even those participating in arenas typically thought of as hypermasculine (e.g., football, rugby, wrestling), are becoming more open to various forms of masculinity (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). That is, athletes are beginning to show loving, kind, and compassionate behaviors with one another. Additionally, studies suggest that even outward physical affection behaviors, such as hugging or kissing on the cheek, are becoming more prevalent among athletes in sport (Anderson, 2011).

The findings from this study of coaching fathers lend empirical support to the notion that ideas of masculinity and the expectations of modern fathers have changed (Graham & Dixon, 2014). The men in the study discussed their fathering role in terms of showing affection, loving, hugging, and kissing their children, reading to their children, engaging in recreational activities together, and in general doing what they could to be involved with the family, especially in the off-season. It is important to note that this type of involved fathering is fundamentally different from the way fathers decades ago saw their fathering role (e.g., disciplinarians and

breadwinners only). Additionally, many of the coaches discussed hugging and having love for the players on their team. These kinds of attitudes and behaviors align more closely with the theorizing of inclusive masculinity than that of a strict orthodox masculinity, as was expected. As a result, this study has important theoretical implications for masculinity studies, as it suggests that coaches (at least those who are also fathers) may also be embracing a more open and inclusive way of defining masculinity and what it means to be a man in society today.

These changes have implications for the tensions that coaching fathers experience. The expectations of the father role have shifted such that fathers are expected to be more available to their families, yet the expectations of the coach role largely remain stagnant. The coaching role continues to demand a considerable amount of time, energy, and attention, even at the high school level. Scholars have long suggested that if societal roles shift but employment roles remain stagnant, individuals will experience heightened levels of strain as they attempt to balance the two roles (Pleck, 1977). This study gives insight into the experiences of men who are facing these exact challenges. Although they report the enjoyment and fulfillment that come from both fathering and coaching, they also discuss the challenges and strain this chase for balance creates.

Furthermore, they reported receiving support for both coaching and fathering from family members, especially from their wives. However, they did not discuss support for coaching or for fathering from their employers. Some coaches purposely avoided seeking out support from their organization in order to prevent coming across as unable to manage their life roles. Others discussed not feeling safe to discuss challenges with work and family because of a lack of job security. In any case, few of the coaches in the study reported receiving support from the organization, which may be a factor in the amount and magnitude of the conflict reported.

This study contributes by expanding inclusive masculinity theory to the experiences of sport coaches. Further research in this area would contribute to understanding of the ways in which those with power and authority, such as coaches, influence the attitudes and behaviors of the athletes in their programs from the top down and their experiences of masculinity. It would also be valuable to examine how and why organizations and managers are slow to embrace the notion of inclusive masculinity and changing father roles and the resultant impact this has on coaching fathers.

### Role Conflict and Role Enrichment

The men in this study reported experiencing a high level of enjoyment and satisfaction as they embraced their father role and their coaching role. They reported how having these roles enriched their lives. However, they also discussed a high level of conflict stemming from their attempts to succeed in both roles. Their experiences

of conflict and enrichment as a result of role saliency have implications for further inquiry.

Some scholars propose that when a life role (e.g., work) is particularly salient, an individual is likely to experience greater levels of role conflict in the nonsalient role because rewards and success in the salient role are highly tied to a person's self-concept (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Conversely, when a given role is not highly salient for an individual, it is not likely that they will experience a heightened level of conflict in other life roles. This is so because success and rewards in the nonsalient life role are not central to the person's self-concept or level of self-esteem (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, scholars suggest that when role saliency is not limited to a single life role, (i.e., when an individual is highly identified with two or more life roles), conflict in both life roles is increased (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The present study both confirms and challenges this proposition.

In this study, the men certainly reported high levels of passion for their coaching role. They devoted large amounts of time, energy, attention, and emotion to it. The coaches were enriched by the impact they had in the lives of the athletes in their programs and felt uplifted by the chance to be a father figure for some of the athletes they worked with. In short, they perceived their coaching role as a life calling, something they were meant to do. Consequently, the saliency they attributed to this role was considerably high.

The men's narratives also suggested strong identification with the father role. The men discussed their love for their wives and children. Many discussed how they depended on their families to give them balance and how they treasured family trips during which they spent time together on summer and winter breaks. The men also reported that the family role enriched their coaching role, leading to improved functioning, both psychologically and literally.

Furthermore, based on the frequency and urgency of comments from the participants, the proposition that the men experienced high role strain is supported. The source of this strain stemmed primarily from the coaching role's impinging on the family role, although evidence suggested that the family caused tension in the coaching role in some cases (e.g., family emergencies or sickness). As a result, coaches engaged in multiple coping strategies in order to manage and mitigate the tension felt in trying to balance work and family.

Nevertheless, although the respondents reported experiencing tension and conflict in managing their life roles, they did not experience the hypothesized highly negative outcomes from that conflict. Literature on role conflict suggests that the consequences of prolonged role conflict include increased levels of dissatisfaction and distress in both work and family roles, as well as high levels of burnout (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). But these outcomes were not strongly evident in the sample. Instead, the respondents had been in coaching for many years (averaging just over 13 years as head

coach with a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 33 years), and although they discussed challenges of balancing work and family, these discussions were not framed in terms of experiencing dramatic decreases in levels of enrichment stemming from either the coaching or the family role, or increased feelings of burnout.

This finding suggests two things about the relationship between high role saliency and conflict in the work–family interface. First, it suggests that fathers who are coaches will certainly experience strain as they try to balance the needs and responsibilities of the two life roles, especially when they are highly identified with those roles. This confirmative finding contributes theoretically because it supports the argument that men are not immune to tension as they strive to manage their life roles, and that work–family balance is not only a women's issue. Scholars have suggested that a societal shift is taking place in which fathers are beginning to experience the strain that comes with balancing work and family, just as mothers have reported for some time (Galinsky *et al.*, 2011; Harrington *et al.*, 2011). This study supports findings that fathers in sport are indeed experiencing this conflict in both family and the coaching roles, and that WFC is not isolated as a women's issue (Harrington *et al.*, 2010). Other literature has suggested that fathers in general are feeling tension as they balance work and family. Sport is often depicted as a highly masculine realm, one in which hegemonic masculine ideals are celebrated and one that is slower to adjust to mainstream expectations (Graham & Dixon, 2014). However, this study indicates that even in the sport world men are reporting similar tension and strain as fathers in society have discussed.

Second, the data suggest that the level of enrichment stemming from life roles may become more intense as role saliency increases. That is, as an individual increasingly identifies with a life role, that life role may produce higher levels of enrichment for the individual (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006); this is something not previously studied. The men in the study reported high levels of enrichment stemming from both coaching and family roles. In many ways, these enriching experiences overlapped and reinforced each other. This finding is in contrast to the drastic negative outcomes postulated by role conflict theorists. In fact, the men in this study, who were all highly identified with both their coaching and their father roles, reported experiencing both the tension and the joy that comes with finding harmony in all of their life roles, and they were happy to utilize their coping skills/resources to make their multiple roles "work." Further examination of the relationship between work role salience, family role salience, and role conflict and enrichment outcomes is warranted.

### Coping Strategies and Social Network Utilization

The men's type and use of coping strategies has important implications, especially in comparison with the

coping strategies reported by coaching mothers (Bruening & Dixon, 2007). Fathers in sport approach coping with work–family tensions in different ways than mothers, especially with regard to the use of social networks.

**Size, scope, and purpose of social network support.** One difference between men and women is the strategy of relying on a wide versus narrow social network for support. Studies examining women in sport suggest that women rely on a wide social network for support, including direct family, extended family, close friends, assistant coaches, graduate assistant coaches, and paid care, as well as administrators in their organization (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). The women in these studies also reported that they relied on their social networks heavily for both emotional and practical (e.g., childcare, housework) support (Bruening & Dixon, 2007).

The men in the current study depended on social networks of friends and family for support in balancing work and family. However, the social networks they depended on and the ways in which they utilized these networks were characterized much differently. The social networks were characterized as narrow. Often the participant identified only one or two people on whom he might depend for support. The participant's wife was the most often cited source for support, followed by another trusted coach or another family member (e.g., a father). These narrow social networks surely did not capture the entirety of a participant's overall social network. But this was the network the men felt comfortable relying on for managing work and family responsibilities.

Just as the size of the social network differed between men and women, the ways in which they utilized their social networks for support differed. The respondents were clear that wives acted as the primary source of support for childcare, family duties, household responsibilities, and personal support during the season. Developing a strong, yet narrow, social support group has inherent benefits and drawbacks. The coaches reported that being able to depend on wives for familial support enabled them to function in the coaching role more successfully and efficiently. Without extra negotiation, familial responsibilities were simply taken care of. A wife's increased level of support reduced the men's stress and pressure in the fathering role, leading to reduced levels of tension between work and family.

However, depending solely on wives for this level of support also has negative unintended consequences. This coping strategy creates a tremendous amount of pressure on wives to take care of the family unit and support their husbands. Many of the coaches even described their wife during the season as a "coaching widow" and discussed with pride their wife's ability to manage the entire family with little support. That is, they admired and respected their wife for taking on additional responsibilities in the family role that the men would re-engage with once the season was over. The wisdom of

this strategy falters, however, when the wife no longer is able or willing to support the coaching role. For example, what happens when the wife becomes ill? What if the wife finally decides she no longer can support the sacrifices the coaching role demands? Does this result in the entire support system failing? Further research is needed in this area to understand the mechanism as well as the outcomes of having such a narrow support network.

**Provision and utilization of organizational supports.** Another important difference between the men in the current study and women in previous studies was the relationship between the women coaches and their administrators. Many of the women in the Bruening and Dixon (2007) study as well as in the Palmer and Leberman (2009) study reported the importance of organizational support in helping to balance work and family. They explained how an understanding, trustworthy, and supportive administrator proved to be an important resource for reducing tension between work and family. They relied on their administrators for providing flexibility and felt they could communicate challenges they were having, even ones extending beyond work responsibilities (Bruening & Dixon, 2007).

The men in the current study, however, reported a less successful relationship with administration than described previously. Only very few reported feeling that they could approach an administrator with challenges not directly related to their work responsibilities. The respondents' narrative suggested that in general they distrusted their administrators and would not approach them with family-related issues. The coach–administrator relationship for was characterized as one of contention and avoidance.

This suggests that men in sport approach managing work and family responsibilities almost exclusively from the individual level. For the respondents, depending on organizational supports or direct support from their supervisor was simply not perceived as an option. Although there were a number of different explanations as to why the coaches did not feel comfortable approaching their administrators for support, each had connections to the lack of psychological safety in the coaching role. Coaches felt that the coach–administrator relationship was inherently combative. Coaches discussed that administrators' primary objective was to avoid negative interaction with dissatisfied parents. As a result, very few coaches believed their supervisor would defend them or support them when a parent was unhappy with some aspect of the sport program. For example, if a parent came to the principal or athletic director to complain because they felt their child was being treated in a harsh or overly aggressive manner, the administrator would intuitively side with the parent rather than the coach. The coaches transferred this reluctance to support them in sport-specific contexts to personal matters as well, believing that the administrator did not support them in the coaching role and so would not support them in

additional life roles. Whether these beliefs and concerns are founded is uncertain. However, on their own they were enough for these coaches to perceive a psychologically unsafe environment and avoid reaching out to the organization for support, thereby making work–life balance an individual challenge. This is especially concerning when research indicates that having a supportive supervisor is a critical factor in work–life satisfaction (Dixon & Sagas, 2007).

Near total reliance on individual-level supports may also have strong unintended consequences for both organizations and families. Further inquiry in this area needs to address at least the following questions: What is the long-term result for organizations when employees feel psychologically unsafe? How can organizations and administrators support the mission of their school, respond positively to parental involvement, and support their employees? Is it effective management to co-opt the unpaid labor of spouses in support of coaching duties? What are examples of administrators who have developed successful relationships with their coaches, and what did they do to create these positive working environments? The outcomes of resolving these tensions for organizations and families are critical to the success of both.

**Limitations of the study.** Three major limitations of this study are discussed in this section. They include (a) the voluntary nature of the study, (b) the geographic restrictions of the participants, and (c) fathers-only interviews. Each limitation is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

**Voluntary nature of the study.** This study is limited in that it relied on participants who volunteered and were willing to discuss the issues. Because the men who volunteered to discuss work and family issues already had strong beliefs about fatherhood, the family, coaching, and the tension that exists between these roles, they may not represent the overall picture of the work–family interface among fathers who are coaches. Instead, they may overly represent the feelings and experiences of those fathers who positively associate the family with coaching. Responses may be different among a group of coaches who have negative experiences in their dual roles. Clearly, more broad sampling is needed to generalize these findings.

**Geographic restrictions of participants.** All of the men who participated in the study were head coaches in Texas. The goal of the study was not to attract a nationally representative sample from which to gather experiences. Even so, recruiting only fathers who are coaches in Texas may have created some response bias in the data. It is possible that Texas athletics represent a special culture or emphasis that influenced the participants in a particular way not as prevalent in other states or geographic regions. As a result, the transferability of the findings is potentially limited. Future studies will benefit from attracting fathers who are coaches in other regions of the United States and the world.

**Father-only interviews.** Finally, the study relies only on the narratives provided by fathers. As a result, the findings portray a single view of the family system experience. Naturally, a father's perspective is meaningful for understanding the experiences of men in sport. However, gathering the viewpoints of partners and children would have likely created a more thorough picture of the ways in which coaching provides enrichment and conflict in the family system. It should provide valuable insight in future research.

## Conclusion

Although the purposive sampling and small scale of the study prohibit large-scale generalization to all men in sport or all men in general, this study's analysis of coaches' experiences contributes to the sparse body of literature examining how men in sport balance fathering, family life, and coaching responsibilities. The importance of making work and family allies rather than competitors for both men and women in sport cannot be understated. This study builds a strong foundation for inquiry that will help organizations and individuals develop better work–life management systems.

## References

- Allen, T.D. (2001). Family-supportive work environments: The role of organizational perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 58*(3), 414–435. doi:10.1006/jvbe.2000.1774
- Allen, T.D., Herst, D.E., Bruck, C.S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 5*, 278–308. PubMed doi:10.1037//1076-8998.5.2.278
- Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. (2011). Masculinities and sexualities in sport and physical cultures: Three decades of evolving research. *Journal of Homosexuality, 58*(5), 565–578. PubMed doi:10.1080/00918369.2011.563652
- Anderson, E., & McGuire, R. (2010). Inclusive masculinity and the gendered politics of men's rugby. *Journal of Gender Studies, 19*, 249–261. doi:10.1080/09589236.2010.494341
- Aumann, K., Galinsky, E., & Matos, K. (2014). *The new male mystique*. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.
- Bauman, K., & Ryan, C. (2015). Women now at the head of the class, lead men in college attainment. United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <http://blogs.census.gov/2015/10/07/women-now-at-the-head-of-the-class-lead-men-in-college-attainment/?cid=RS23>
- Bianchi, S.M., Robinson, J.P., & Milkie, M.A. (2006). *Changing rhythms of American family life*. New York, NY: Russell Sage.

- Bragger, J.D., Rodriguez-Srednicki, O., Kutcher, E.J., Indovino, L., & Rosner, E. (2005). Work-family conflict, work-family culture, and organizational citizenship behavior among teachers. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 20*, 303–324. doi:10.1007/s10869-005-8266-0
- Bruening, J.E., & Dixon, M.A. (2007). Work-family conflict in coaching II: Managing role conflict. *Journal of Sport Management, 21*(4), 471–496. doi:10.1123/jsm.21.4.471
- Bruening, J.E., & Dixon, M.A. (2008). Situating work–family negotiations within a life course perspective: Insights on the gendered experiences of NCAA Division I head coaching mothers. *Sex Roles, 58*(1–2), 10–23. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9350-x
- Bruening, J.E., Dixon, M.A., & Eason, C.M. (2016). Coaching and motherhood. In N.M. LaVoi (Ed.), *Women in sports coaching* (p. 95). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carlson, D.S., Hunter, E.M., Ferguson, M., & Whitten, D. (2014). Work-family enrichment and satisfaction: Mediating processes and relative impact of originating and receiving domains. *Journal of Management, 40*(3), 845–865. doi:10.1177/0149206311414429
- Carlson, D.S., Kacmar, K.M., Wayne, J.H., & Grzywacz, J.G. (2006). Measuring the positive side of the work-family interface: Development and validation of a work-family enrichment scale. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 68*(1), 131–164. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2005.02.002
- Carlson, D.S., Kacmar, K.M., Zivnuska, S., Ferguson, M., & Whitten, D. (2011). Work-family enrichment and job performance: A constructive replication of affective events theory. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 16*(3), 297–312. PubMed doi:10.1037/a0022880
- Coser, L. (1974). *Greedy institutions*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dixon, M.A., & Bruening, J.E. (2005). Perspectives on work-family conflict in sport: An integrated approach. *Sport Management Review, 8*(3), 227–253. doi:10.1016/S1441-3523(05)70040-1
- Dixon, M.A., & Bruening, J.E. (2007). Work-family conflict in coaching I: A top-down perspective. *Journal of Sport Management, 21*(3), 377–406. doi:10.1123/jsm.21.3.377
- Dixon, M.A., & Sagas, M. (2007). The relationship between organizational support, work-family conflict, and the job-life satisfaction of university coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 78*(3), 236–247. PubMed doi:10.1080/02701367.2007.10599421
- Galinsky, E., Aumann, K., & Bond, J.T. (2011). *Times are changing: Gender and generation at work and at home*. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.
- Goode, W.J. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review, 25*(4), 483–496. doi:10.2307/2092933
- Graham, J.A., & Dixon, M.A. (2014). Coaching fathers in conflict: A review of the tensions surrounding the work-family interface. *Journal of Sport Management, 28*(4), 447–456. doi:10.1123/jsm.2013-0241
- Greenhaus, J.H., & Beutell, N.J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review, 10*(1), 76–88. doi:10.5465/AMR.1985.4277352
- Greenhaus, J.H., Collins, K.M., & Shaw, J.D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 63*(3), 510–531. doi:10.1016/S0001-8791(02)00042-8
- Greenhaus, J.H., & Powell, G.N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(1), 72–92. doi:10.5465/AMR.2006.19379625
- Grzywacz, J.G., & Carlson, D.S. (2007). Conceptualizing work–family balance: Implications for practice and research. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 9*(4), 455–471. doi:10.1177/1523422307305487
- Harrington, B., Van Deusen, F., & Humberd, B. (2011). *The new dad: Caring, committed and conflicted*. Boston, MA: Boston College Center for Work and Family.
- Harrington, B., Van Deusen, F., & Ladge, J. (2010). *The new dad: Exploring fatherhood within a career context*. Boston, MA: Boston College Center for Work & Family.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist, 44*(3), 513–524. PubMed doi:10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513
- Holsten, J.E., Deatrick, J.A., Kumanyika, S., Pinto-Martin, J., & Compher, C.W. (2012). Children’s food choice process in the home environment: A qualitative descriptive study. *Appetite, 58*(1), 64–73. PubMed doi:10.1016/j.appet.2011.09.002
- Jindani, F.A., & Khalsa, G. (2015). A yoga intervention program for patients suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder: A qualitative descriptive study. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 21*(7), 401–408. PubMed doi:10.1089/acm.2014.0262
- Kahn, R.L., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R.P., Snoek, J.D., & Rosenthal, R.A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Kossek, E.E., & Ozeki, C. (1999). Bridging the work-family policy and productivity gap. *International Journal of Community, Work, and Family, 2*(1), 7–32. doi:10.1080/13668809908414247
- Marks, S.R. (1977). Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time and commitment. *American Sociological Review, 42*(6), 921–936. doi:10.2307/2094577
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldana, J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Netemeyer, R.G., Boles, J.S., & McMurrian, R. (1996). Development and validation of work-family conflict and family-work conflict scales. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*(4), 400–410. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.81.4.400
- Palmer, F.R., & Leberman, S.I. (2009). Elite athletes as mothers: Managing multiple identities. *Sport Management Review, 12*(4), 241–254. doi:10.1016/j.smr.2009.03.001
- Parker, K., & Livingston, G. (2016). 6 facts about American fathers. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/16/fathers-day-facts/>
- Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013). Modern parenthood: Roles of moms and dads converge as they balance work and family. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>

- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pleck, J.H. (1977). The work-family role system. *Social Problems*, 24(4), 417–427. doi:10.2307/800135
- Pronger, B. (1990). *The arena of masculinity: Sports, homosexuality, and the meaning of sex*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing and Health*, 23, 334–340. PubMed doi:10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G
- Sandelowski, M. (2010). What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 33, 77–84. PubMed doi:10.1002/nur.20362
- Saragiotto, B.T., Yamato, T.P., & Lopes, A.D. (2014). What do recreational runners think about risk factors for running injuries? A descriptive study of their beliefs and opinions. *Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy*, 44(10), 733–738. PubMed doi:10.2519/jospt.2014.5710
- Schacht, S. (1996). Misogyny on and off the "Pitch": The gendered world of male rugby players. *Gender and Society*, 10(5), 550–565. doi:10.1177/089124396010005004
- Schenewark, J.D., & Dixon, M.A. (2012). A dual model of work-family conflict and enrichment in collegiate coaches. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 5, 15–39.
- Sieber, S.D. (1974). Toward a theory of role accumulation. *American Sociological Review*, 39(4), 567–578. doi:10.2307/2094422
- Sturges, J. (2012). Crafting a balance between work and home. *Human Relations*, 65(12), 1539–1559. doi:10.1177/0018726712457435
- Vaismoradi, M., Salsali, M., & Ahmadi, F. (2011). Nurses' experiences of uncertainty in clinical practice: A descriptive study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 67(5), 991–999. PubMed doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2010.05547.x
- Wang, W., Parker, K., & Taylor, P. (2013). Breadwinner moms. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/>
- Wayne, J.H., Casper, W.J., Matthews, R.A., & Allen, T.D. (2013). Family-supportive organization perceptions and organizational commitment: The mediating role of work-family conflict and enrichment and partner attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(4), 606–622. PubMed doi:10.1037/a0032491

### Appendix: Participant Information

Coach	Sport	Age	Years as Head Coach	Total Years Coaching	Children's Ages	Years Married	Previously Married
A	Track and field	35	5	15	8	1.5	Yes
B	Baseball	64	42	42	26, 24	28	
C	Basketball (boys)	37	2	13	7, 4	9.5	
D	Football	51	10	30	12	16	
E	Soccer (boys)	50	21	27	14, 12, 10, 6	15	
F	Football	44	3	5	19, 17, 14, 11	23	
G	Football	47	20	25	14, 12	25	
H	Baseball	47	10	17	17, 2	9	
I	Track and field	54	33	33	22, 18, 11, 8	13	Yes
J	Baseball	50	15	27	23, 21	28	
K	Football	49	4	27	31, 23, 20	25	
L	Football	52	17	20	21, 17	24	
M	Cross country	37	3	14	7	9	
N	Football	52	15	27	23, 20	25	
O	Football	41	11	20	17, 14	20	
P	Football	50	18	28	27, 23, 19	29	
Q	Basketball	53	9	22	25, 20, 18	30	
R	Track and field	36	8	14	3, 1	7	
S	Football	39	13	17	6	10	
T	Track and field	49	7	24	10, 7	13	
U	Basketball	44	12	22	15, 12	17	
V	Swimming (boys)	36	2	15	13	2	
W	Football	52	23	30	23	30	
X	Baseball	45	17	20	19, 17	23	

Copyright of Journal of Sport Management is the property of Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.