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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Work-Life Balance in Higher Education for Women: Perspectives of Athletic Training Faculty

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Context: Women are largely underrepresented in science fields in academe, and most often issues with motherhood and career-life balancing are identified as reasons. In athletic training, career-life balancing has become the dominant factor in women leaving the field, as they feel they cannot fulfill the roles of mother, spouse, and athletic trainer adequately.

Objective: To better understand the perceptions of women athletic training faculty members regarding balancing their roles in higher education and those outside of the workplace.

Design: Interpretative phenomenological analysis study, with semistructured interviews.

Setting: Higher education institutions sponsoring Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education–accredited athletic training programs.

Patients or Other Participants: Sixteen (8 with children, 8 without children) women athletic training faculty participated. Ten were married at the time of the interview, 3 were single, 2 were engaged, and 1 was in the process of getting a divorce.

Main Outcome Measure(s): Each participant completed a one-on-one interview with a researcher and all data were coded following interpretative phenomenological analysis. Data saturation was attained. We completed member checks, peer review, and researcher triangulation for credibility.

Results: We found that motherhood was perceived to be a challenge and balancing the role of motherhood created conflict. Despite concerns for motherhood and balancing faculty roles, higher education was perceived to provide flexibility. Support networks and individual strategies were common to manage the responsibilities of faculty as well as nonfaculty roles.

Conclusions: Our results demonstrated that higher education cultivates a climate of balance through flexible workplace arrangements and that support networks are necessary to create role balancing in and out of the workplace. Finally, time management and organization are necessary for women to establish balance, regardless of roles outside of the workplace (eg, spouse, mother, friend).

Key Words: Flexible workplace arrangements, support networks, organization and planning

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Work-Life Balance in Higher Education for Women: Perspectives of Athletic Training Faculty

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KEY POINTS

- Women in athletic training faculty positions struggle with work-life balance similar to women in faculty positions in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- A culture of balance in the workplace, which allows female faculty members the flexibility to arrange and prioritize their work schedules, can assist women in achieving work-life balance.
- Support networks are necessary both within and outside of the workplace to allow women to balance their responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance has become an important focus for organizations and the working professional because it is essential for overall health and wellbeing and also for creating productive and positive work environments.[1–3] Globally, work-life balance has garnered attention including at higher education institutions.[4,5] The *Chronicle of Higher Education* has a forum ("Balancing Work and Life Forums") whereby topics of work-life balance can be explored, scrutinized, and resolved; the inclusion of this forum signifies the topic as one of interest and importance within the field. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP)[6] has acknowledged the uniqueness of a faculty role as one seemingly viewed as immeasurable, providing a platform for challenges with finding an appropriate balance between family, personal, and career expectations and obligations. Factors contributing to conflict for the faculty member are multifactorial, and, as for other working professionals, include work pressures, work overload, and job insecurities.[7] In addition to work-related responsibilities, domestic and household chores as well as child and elder care can increase the burden for working professionals; these responsibilities often are absorbed by women despite their contributions to the financial needs of the family.[8] Notwithstanding the changes of the family dynamic and changes within the workplace to address employees' needs, women often experience issues with finding a balance.[9] This is not to suggest that men do not struggle at times to find balance, but a general sentiment is that women do face "mom guilt" and other personal conflicts when trying to successfully navigate motherhood and a professional career.[10]

Work-Life Balance a Women's Issue

Some have assumed that work-life balance is a gendered issue,[11] one that focuses only on women, yet research[12,13] reveals that men and women value balance and strive to achieve satisfaction from their families, work, and personal interests. In higher education, however, the pursuit of work-life balance appears to be a gendered issue. Some scholars have suggested that women intentionally pursue careers or jobs that are viewed as less challenging, so as to balance it all—that is, to be successful as a career woman and a mother.[14,15] Hakim[16] suggests that this is an adaptive lifestyle preference, whereby engaging in paid work is important but valued proportionately to engaging in domestic, household, and personal/family obligations. The ideology that women select less demanding jobs as a means to create balance speaks to the sociocultural impact on career choice, and for women faculty[14,15] and women athletic trainers[17–20] this has been investigated and found to be somewhat true.

In several studies examining work-life balance, female faculty members have been found to make choices that accommodate their families, reduce working hours to address nonwork obligations, and sacrifice work success to balance other roles.[21] The AAUP shares that most PhDs earn their degrees at the age of 33, with tenure occurring around 40, a period of time that coincides with childbearing and child-rearing. Some[6,21,22] speculate this creates a situation in which a woman must make a choice regarding career and family goals, a choice not often forced upon male faculty.

A few studies[9,23] have suggested that women faculty identify large workloads and long work hours as impediments to finding balance. Moreover, women with caring responsibilities (ie, parenting or elder care) struggle to create balance and maintain distinctions between work schedules and deadlines and domestic and family needs.[23–25] Often there is a misperception that because of the flexible nature of higher education in regards to teaching and research obligations, work-life balance is easier or more obtainable.[9] This is remarkably untrue; women continue to struggle to get tenure, and when this is coupled with balancing motherhood the obstacles can become greater.[26] The culture of long hours that often accompanies academic positions, when coupled with managing family obligations and commitments, can make it difficult for women to create balance. Organizational barriers are apparent, but it is important to acknowledge that barriers to work-life balance can extend beyond workplace culture and the nature of the job and to personal preferences[16] and sociocultural norms that speak to traditional gender ideologies and expectations for women to remain the domestic and household leaders.[27,28]

The link between sex and work-life imbalance stems from the ideologies that exist that suggest women assume the burden of domestic responsibilities; that is, despite outside roles (ie, working), they also need to address the day-to-day functioning of the household, independent of more traditional roles of parenting. Gender roles are founded on norms and standards that have been created by society, and despite advances in thinking women often continue to be viewed as those who should be focused on child care, parenting, and housekeeping.[29] Evolution of these roles has more women engaging in paid work and men participating in housework; however, women often still experience guilt and shoulder a larger portion of these duties, leading to conflict and imbalance.[9,25] The conflict manifests because of what is referred to as the second shift, where during the day women do their paid jobs and at night do household chores and caregiving.[30] Women in general have been said to struggle in higher education, and in

many cases it's because of their attempts to sustain success in both roles.

Management of Work and Life

Flexible work arrangements have emerged as the driving initiative behind the pursuit of work-life balance. The types of flexible work arrangements may vary, but the premise is still the same: control over when and where the work is completed.[31] For the athletic trainer, control over work scheduling is limited, especially in the college and university settings; yet for a faculty member a benefit to the employment setting is flexibility and the freedom to decide when and where work will be completed.[32,33] Academic freedom has several meanings and implications, but at the core it simply allows faculty members the chance to freely navigate their responsibilities within their job descriptions.[34] Such freedom can allow for a more balanced lifestyle, in theory, as the faculty member can allocate the necessary time, energy, and resources as needed to meet those obligations regularly. The academic freedom offered within higher education, as discussed here, speaks to the autonomy to do one's work where and when it is best for the faculty member. For practicing athletic trainers, long work hours and little freedom to decide how and when work is completed create a greater potential for conflict with time to engage in leisure and family activities.[17,35–39] Despite a clear understanding of the work-life and work-family interface in athletic training and higher education, little is understood about the two among athletic training faculty members, particularly female faculty members.

The debate continues on whether female faculty members are able to be successful navigating the rigors of higher education as well as role balancing among their work and nonwork interests and responsibilities. This is regardless of the academic discipline, but there has been some speculation that health care faculty, such as those in nursing and athletic training, may face challenges. Nursing faculty are able to find greater work-life balance when tenure has been earned, children are older, and patient care is limited.[40] This finding suggests that not yet having earned tenure and having young children can make finding work-life balance a challenge. The guiding purpose of our study, therefore, was to examine the experiences of female athletic trainers who are currently employed as faculty members in a higher education institution. Our study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of women athletic trainers who have chosen a career in higher education regarding their ability to find and maintain work-life balance?
2. What are the perceptions of women athletic trainers who have chosen a career in higher education regarding motherhood and successfully navigating both roles?
3. What are the specific challenges to finding work-life balance as well as those strategies used to find work-life balance for women faculty in athletic training?

METHODS

Research Design

We used a phenomenological approach[41] to investigate the experiences of women athletic trainers who are faculty members in higher education. Phenomenology allowed us to focus on the lived experiences as well as the perceptions of our participants as they navigated role balancing within their roles in higher education as well as at home. One-on-one interviews were purposefully selected, as we wanted the chance to become immersed in our participants' experiences and to gain rich descriptions of their experiences within higher education as it pertained to role balancing.

Participants

After securing institutional review board approval, we used convenience and snowball sampling procedures[41] for recruitment. We relied on professional networks to identify our initial convenience sample, and then used snowball sampling with recruited participants to connect with others meeting the same inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were female specific and employment in a full-time faculty position with a minimum of 1 full year of experience and without a dual role as clinician. We purposefully recruited faculty members with ($n = 8$) and without ($n = 8$) children, as we sought to gain an appreciation for the role of a faculty member with and without the influence of parenting. Sixteen individuals consented to speak about their experiences as female faculty members. Saturation was satisfied with our initial sample.

Of our 16 faculty members, 10 were married at the time of the interview, 3 were single, 2 were engaged, and 1 was in the process of getting a divorce. The average age of our participants was 35 ± 6.2 years (range, 28–49 years; 2 did not report ages), and they had an average of 14 ± 5.9 years of experience (range, 7–25 years) as certified athletic trainers and an average of 11 years of experience teaching within an athletic training program. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality. The Table provides individual faculty member data.

Data Collection Procedures

Using the literature and research agenda, we designed the interview framework (Appendix) to gain a holistic impression of our participants' experiences as well as to gain an appreciation for the influence outside-work roles (ie, roles in marriage and family) can have on experiences as a faculty member. To certify the information collected and truly capture the phenomenon of interest, we had an expert in the socialization framework review the content and structure of the interview guide. The expert was a female faculty member meeting our criteria for inclusion and assisted in the study's development and analyses. Finally, we piloted the study with 2 female athletic trainers (1 married with children, 1 married without children). We used the pilot as a final step in establishing the interview framework and as a means to establish content of the framework. Blending multiple aspects into the interview framework, including academic research and practical experience, has emerged as commonplace when using a phenomenological approach.[42,43]

We used a semistructured format when conducting phone interview sessions to encourage discourse between the researcher and participant. An independent company transcribed all of our interviews verbatim, and field notes were taken by a researcher during each interview session as a means to capture key experiences and reflections made by each

Table. Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Children	Years of Experience Teaching	Marital Status	Position Title	Carnegie Classification
Jennifer	33	2	8	Married	Assistant professor	R2: Doctoral universities—higher research activity
Rebecca	32	0	9	Single	Assistant professor and clinical education coordinator	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Monica	29	0	6	Engaged	Assistant professor	R1: Doctoral universities—highest research activity
Amanda	42	0	15	Single	Associate professor	R2: Doctoral universities—higher research activity
Melissa	28	0	6.5	Married	Assistant professor	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Alyssa	36	2	9	Married	Assistant professor	R1: Doctoral universities—highest research activity
Jesse	37	0	13	Single	Assistant professor	R2: Doctoral universities—higher research activity
Brooke	31	0	3	Engaged	Assistant professor	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Megan	49	3	25	Married	Professor and chair of the school of physical therapy and athletic training	R2: Doctoral universities—higher research activity
Jamie	45	0	20	Married; getting divorced	Associate dean for graduate programs	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Amy	36	2	7	Married	Associate professor and program director	R3: Doctoral universities—moderate research activity
Linda	NA	2	16	Married	Athletic training program director and director of office of graduate studies	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Vanessa	NA	1	NA	Married	Associate professor	M1: Master's colleges & universities—larger programs
Lauren	33	1	10	Married	Associate professor and research scientist	R2: Doctoral universities—higher research activity
Caitlin	34	3	12.5	Married	Associate professor	R1: Doctoral universities—highest research activity
Karen	29	0	5	Married	Assistant professor	R1: Doctoral universities—highest research activity

Abbreviation: NA, not available.

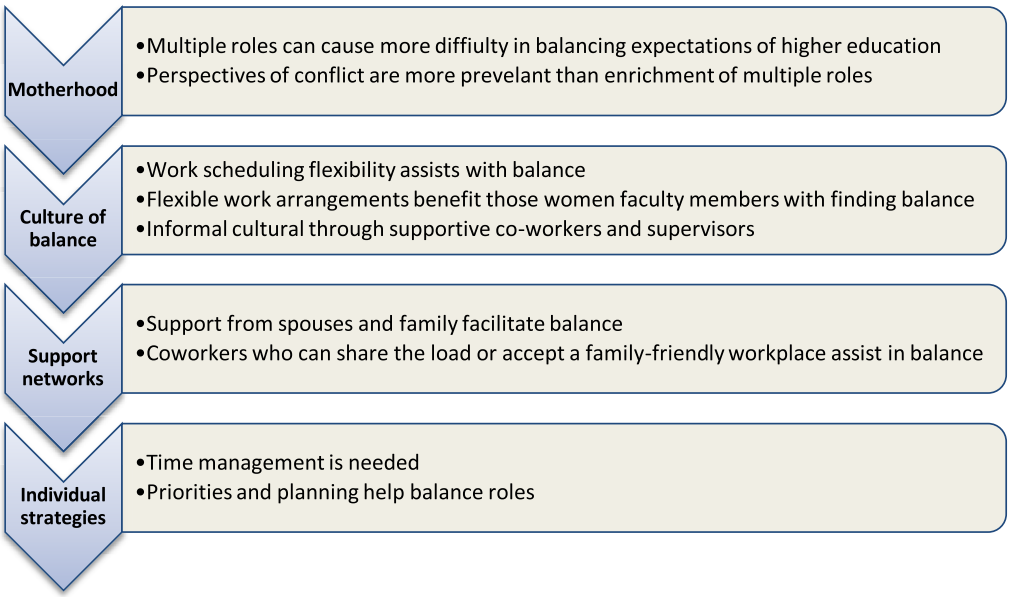
participant. Those field notes serve as a support mechanism during the coding process described next.[41]

Data Analysis and Credibility

We selected a thematic analysis with principles of an interpretative phenomenological analysis[42,44] to code our data. We believed blending both analyses would allow for a rigorous examination of the raw data. Both strategies are fundamentally linked through the inductive lens that is considered when making sense of the data and those living the experience under investigation.[44] During step 1, 2 researchers read the data as a means to become familiar with its content, attempting to inductively identify patterns in the data. We used simple codes detailed in the transcripts to accomplish this step. During step 2, initial codes were evaluated and then integrated or regrouped to create categories that reflected the meaning of the data. During step 3, the categories identified were organized and combined into meaningful themes. During this step, categories that were not viewed as dominant or a fit were excluded. During step 4, codes were defined and supported with raw data from the transcripts. The data we selected allowed for a rich description of the findings and a means to support our coding strategies. The final step, a credibility check, was completed with 1 participant. Our synopsis of our findings was shared with our pilot study participant, and she was asked to evaluate our interpretations compared with her experiences and confirm their accuracy. The process was completed in person and was supportive of our analysis.

We purposefully selected credibility measures using the parameters outlined by Creswell,[41] including credibility check (as just detailed), peer review, and researcher triangulations. We selected our peer carefully, as we wanted the person to

Figure. Emergent findings regarding work-life balance for women athletic training faculty members.



have a strong knowledge of the topic being studied. Our peer not only had a strong scholarly record, but also fit the inclusion criteria for participation. The peer was not part of the study as a participant, but her experiences allowed for an external review that was founded on lived experience. Researcher triangulation was completed through the independent analysis of the raw data after our analysis approach described previously. Upon completion of the interpretative phenomenological analysis process, we had the 2 researchers exchange coding sheets and labeled transcripts to complete the process. Both researchers were trained in the analysis before engaging in the process, and the exchange resulted in the findings presented next.[41]

RESULTS

Our analyses revealed 4 key perspectives (Figure) for women athletic trainers in higher education as they traverse the expectations of academia and being female. These perspectives reveal that higher education does provide a culture that is demanding, yet through various mechanisms can provide a situation where work-life balance can be navigated and obtained. Our first perspective is focused on the demands of working mothers in higher education, as participants noted motherhood could place strain on the female faculty member. Second, the culture of higher education was viewed as one that provided workplace flexibility and control over schedules as well as an informal culture of support and recognition of a life outside of work. Third, we found that support networks in and out of the workplace must be present to provide the female faculty member with the chance to create work-life balance. Finally, each female faculty member must have personal strategies to create work-life balance. We present these 4 distinct perspectives with supporting data and discussion, successively.

DISCUSSION

Motherhood and Faculty Life

Work-life balance has been a growing concern for today's working professional, and the reasons are multifaceted.[26,45,46] As more women[47] are present in the workforce, these individuals may face greater demands to juggle responsibilities from work, home, and family domains. Despite the demographic shift in academia,[26] where more women are entering faculty roles, issues with gaining tenure appear to be gendered.[48–50] Our participants, regardless of family status, were acutely aware that balancing faculty roles are made more challenging with children. Jamie shared,

> *I think [it's] just very, very difficult to try to get tenure and be successful in academia as a parent. I just didn't see very many people being successful doing that, I didn't really see the, for me personally the, had no interest in trying to balance all that, so it's just easier not to have children.*

Several of our women faculty members without children reflected about the difficulties they see colleagues encounter when attempting to earn tenure. Jesse, who did not have kids, said,

> *I can tell you on a daily basis I don't know how I would do this if I had a family. I really do, and look at some of my colleagues who are going through the process, who have a husband and 2 kids. I have no idea how they are doing it, because it's a challenge for me, without the responsibility.*

Evidence suggests that women who want a career in higher education and a family are more likely to suffer from the "baby penalty."[51] *US News and World Report*[51] indicates that women in academia suffer more disadvantages than women with children in law or medicine. Specifically, in higher education settings there is heavy pressure to maintain productivity and high levels of teaching. Therefore, family planning, having children and caring for them, is often seen as a secondary thought,[45] or something to be considered after tenure. The data support this message, as married men with children under 6 are 50% more likely to earn tenure than women with the same status. Overall, men are more likely to earn tenure regardless of marital and family status.[52] Family demands, especially when children are young, place a greater strain on the faculty member, as the needs of the children

often come first, and at times are unpredictable (eg, illness, school activities). Furthermore, it is often the mother who will feel the pressure to take care of the child and sacrifice work deadlines or responsibilities.[53] Nursing faculty reported significant improvements in work-life balance after earning tenure and when their children were older and less dependent on them. Faculty working within the landscape of academic medicine must balance expectations of clinical relevance and productivity as defined within the higher education climate.[40] To be successful, then, faculty may opt to delay having a family to reduce outside stress. Karen was very direct: "I have delayed family planning because of my position in higher education." Amanda shared this thought: "I think probably, to be quite honest with you, there's a little part of me that I would imagine you can't have children while you're going through tenure." This reflection indicates that despite AAUP recommendations for supporting family planning (ie, policies on child care, parental leave, and stopping tenure clock), careful consideration of the potential impacts is critical to maintaining success as a female faculty member.[6]

Family formation[15] has been identified as a negative career influence for women, as many struggle to achieve success or maintain productivity at a level that is considered acceptable for higher education. Among tenured faculty, 70% of men are married with children, whereas only 44% of women are married with children.[22] Vanessa was direct on the impact motherhood had on her success: "[Motherhood,] from a research standpoint, has changed. I might be a little less prolific. Having [daughter's name] did, I guess, impact a little bit of my research success." Although none of our participants discussed feeling the need to choose a career or family, as other scholars have found,[54,55] there was a consensus that having children confounded the success of each role, and that sacrifices often occur to balance it all.

A Culture of Balance

The growing interest in the work and family interface has compelled organizations to develop policies and invest in resources to support the pursuit of work-life balance for the working professional. These work-life policies and practices have been viewed as structural, where formal policies exist that are supported and documented by human resources, and cultural, where less formalized but useful policies and practices exist within the workplace.[46] Policies often emanate from the values or norms cultivated by coworkers and supervisors.[56] Formal policies that are disseminated from human resources are important for the working professional, often including maternity leave and sick time. However, what seemed to be more noticeable and meaningful for our participants were the informal work-life balance initiatives within their departments and institutions**.** The culture as described by our participants was informal and founded on work-scheduling flexibility that was supportive of work-life balance.

Work Schedule Flexibility. Job autonomy and flexibility are strong factors that can promote life quality and balance.[56,57] Flexibility was the primary finding that aligns with existing literature and trends within work-life balance initiatives. Flexibility refers to employers who provide their employees with some level of control over their work schedules, including when and where they complete work-related tasks.[31,58] Caitlin described a workplace that was embracive of work-life balance. In fact, she valued the chance to "work with individuals who share the same values with work-life balance." Caitlin described "feeling supported" by her supervisor, her peers, and others in the department.

Having a flexible work arrangement gives the control to the working professional to freely navigate work and home responsibilities. Our female participants, regardless of their family status, believed the flexibility was important. Alyssa, when sharing her thoughts on motherhood and higher education, said, "It is pretty wonderful to have a position that gives me the ability to move things around so that I can make things happen." For Alyssa, those things included grant/journal reviews, playdates for her child, and grading papers. She shared,

> *My son's in kindergarten so he's just starting public school. It meant a lot to me yesterday, we decided to change his after-school care, so yesterday he didn't have any so I just worked from home and I picked up in the car line and we came home. He got his homework done. I set up a play date with the kids down the street and was able to watch them in the backyard while I finished a journal review. It means a lot to me that I have the flexibility to be that mom, where I can help with homework, encourage playing outside, making dinner, and getting him to basketball practice.*

Our participants' discussions reflect a work arrangement that is classified as both flextime[58] and "flexplace."[59] In these arrangements, employees are allowed to establish their working hours, as well as where their hours and work are completed, based upon their professional and personal obligations. Flexible work arrangements are work-life balance policies that have been determined to reduce conflicts.[60] Despite the formality of the flexible work arrangements described by organizational scholars,[31,56] the flexibility described by our faculty reflects more informal agreements or expectations of supervisors. Higher education institutions are viewed as employers that can offer their employees flexibility.

Informal Culture. The foundation of an organizational climate that is accepting of work-life balance is the recognition that today's working professional has wants and needs beyond working. The culture within the various higher education institutions shared by our participants truly captures the ideology of "cultural work-life support" as first described by Kossek et al[46] and Kossek and Hammer,[56] whereby coworkers and supervisors believe family and home life is just as important as work life. Jennifer discussed the culture within her department as "understanding of family situations." The understanding originated from her coworkers as well as her supervisors. Lester[61] found that supportive leadership was a cornerstone in the creation of cultural work-life support, as supervisors are often the gatekeepers of informal work-life initiatives because of their involvement in day-to-day operations. Jennifer continued to reflect on the family-friendly environment that exists within her workplace, saying,

> *If you need to spend more time with your family for whatever reason, if there is something going on at home, could be a sick kid or whatnot, it is understood and everybody at work steps in and helps out.*

Monica, much like Jennifer, described a culture that was supportive of a healthy work-life balance including those with or without children. Monica said,

> *In our department we have had a male and female faculty member have children, and there is no issue with needing to take time for them or leaving to pick them up from day care, or whatever the need may be. I don't see any issues.*

It was common to hear our participants discuss a culture that was understanding of family and personal needs, with expectations that allowed faculty members to attend to the day-to-day needs of their families as well as their own individual needs. Discussions were not isolated to just those with kids, as illustrated by Melissa, who shared similar perspectives on the supportive and work-life–friendly environments they both worked within. Melissa shared,

> *Our department is very supportive to family stuff. Most faculty members are out [of the office] by 3:00 so they can pick up their kids. We've got a really laid-back and personal environment, which I actually really like because people can have families and they can have an outside life.*

When probed to describe the climate and culture within her department, Monica said,

> *It is pretty good here. It is assumed that you get your work done, wherever that might be. Some of us work better at home, while others in the office. If you need to do something or go somewhere and you are not teaching then you can do it. We all have, at times, picked up the slack or pitched in, when things come up. I think the teamwork aspect here has been fantastic as far as work-life balance is concerned.*

Monica's comments reflect a culture that is supportive of work-life balance, regardless of the faculty member's marital or family status. Lester[61] suggests the work-life balance initiatives within higher education must be sensitive to the individual's needs; thus, the culture must be supportive and embrace the roles of its faculty members inside as well as outside the institution. Moreover, Monica's comments indicate that teamwork can cultivate an understanding workplace. Within the field of athletic training, where work-life and work-family conflict have been reported,[12,36] teamwork and support within the workplace have been viewed as shaping a landscape that encourages and endorses work-life balance.[2]

Support Networks

The importance of having a support system has become a steadfast recommendation for the creation of work-life balance,[62] a finding that also emerged from our interviews. Support systems are divided into 2 main categories: work and home. As previously described, our female faculty benefited from a culture that was flexible, thus creating a sense that balance was possible, though still challenging. A distinguishing characteristic of this culture was the relationships between coworkers, and at times their ability to help facilitate balance, or minimally the ability to meet the demands of life.

Workplace Support. Coworkers can reduce strain and stress by sharing responsibilities, or at best stepping in when conflict arises that can be overlooked.[35,36] For example, Ehrens[53] reported that women faculty often reach out to their colleagues for support when something unexpected arises regarding their family life. Some of the best companies, as shared by Sandberg[63(p240)] in *Lean In*, support their female employees by connecting them with their coworkers as a means to support a healthy work-life balance. Vanessa captured this sentiment about her workplace, sharing, "There is a lot of support that comes from the faculty. It comes from the tenure-track faculty, nontenure faculty, adjuncts, and other members of the department." Vanessa continued to describe how at times her coworkers are supportive and help her navigate faculty and mother roles. She said, "I like the accountability of the mentor group. We often call it the boot camp. We get together and see what is working for us, and how we can support one another." Jennifer said,

> *Yeah, I mean, colleagues are always willing to help out, and cover classes, or you know, help out with research projects if you have to be in class and can't supervise or be in the lab they're always helpful.*

A supportive work environment has been described within the culture of athletic training previously[3] and truly speaks to the ideology that collaboration and support can be gained from coworkers. Associations can be drawn to the social exchange theory where interactions between people can be rewarding and supportive.[64] Those individuals who draw upon the energies of others and who enjoy being interactive and social are likely to cultivate a more supportive environment and to be more accepting of their coworkers' outside interests and values.[46]

Home Life Support. The idea of "divide and conquer" emerged as critical in the quest for work-life balance. Our participants used their spouses or significant others as a means to share the load of domestic chores and parenting duties. Lauren and Alyssa both described the importance of having a spouse who can help out. Lauren said simply, "I have an incredibly supportive spouse, we split everything 50/50." Alyssa said, "I lean on him to take over what would be considered normal motherly duties. He's a pretty amazing father so me leaning on him is not a big deal." She continued, "My husband allows me to [be] successful." Even those who did not have children recognized the support they received from their spouses in regards to balancing it all. Jamie shared, "The main person in my life, my partner, is very helpful. He does a lot of the laundry and shopping, so yes my partner is very important to 'balancing it all.'" Karen was honest and direct: "My spouse does it all. I would say he does almost 75% of the domestic chores. He carries a majority of the workload at home." Melissa simply said about her husband, "He does help me maintain balance." Monica echoed these comments, stating,

> *My fiancé's been fantastic as far as helping out with dinner or just having someone else to talk to that has nothing to do with work. Being close to family has helped, because there's been a couple of nights where I've been here, at work, later and, you know, someone's had to run over and let the dog out because my fiancé traveling or he's working late or something, but having that support helps at this point [with balance].*

Spousal support and family and friends who are outside of the athletic training network are necessary for working professionals to find balance. For the athletic training professional, such support has been found as essential to creating work-life balance. Melissa Terras,[33] a professor and mom of 3, shares that women are not superwomen, but rather individuals who are not afraid to ask for help. She advocates that women

follow her lead and surround themselves by supportive individuals, such as mothers and spouses. This sentiment describes that having individuals to assist in the chaos of parenting and dealing with non–work-related responsibilities could reduce conflicts, and at times cultivate balance.

Previous research has indicated that spousal support can be a positive mediating factor for conflicts among work, home, and personal life.[65] Women athletic trainers who work in a clinical capacity providing patient care identify spousal support as critical in being able to balance their workloads.[62] The support they receive helps them to delegate, as well as to have someone to "pick up the slack" when work obligations take over. Our findings are also a reflection of the changing face of typical gender roles,[66] which once suggested that women should bear the majority of the domestic responsibilities in addition to their working roles. A shift in this mindset appears to help women feel the ability to be successful faculty members as well as to be individuals with other responsibilities (eg, mom, caregiver, spouse), though they still perceive the multiple roles to create challenges. Recent consensus suggests that 64% of the population is 2-career families, which also may indicate that there is a shift in how these families manage work-life balance.[67]

Individual Work-Life Balance Strategies

Research has suggested that working professionals must develop individualized strategies to manage their responsibilities in and out of the workplace.[3,36] Strategies must reflect their own personal goals and objectives, but also their strengths and obligations. Planning and time management are often the foundation of these individual strategies. Our participants described being planners and needing to organize their responsibilities at work and home. Karen shared that she was "task orientated." She believed this allowed her to remain focused and set the time needed to accomplish her responsibilities and expectations set for the week. Brooke shared about her personal strategies,

> *I'm definitely a planner and, planning ahead and knowing what I have going on a couple days in advance just so there's no surprises or anything like that. I mean definitely just you making lists, staying on track, making sure prep is done, following the schedule and things like that.*

During our interview sessions, many of our participants shared the need for "structure," "organization," and "boundaries," but often those were compartmentalized to the various roles they would assume each day. Effective time management essentially is the platform for work-life balance, as we need to allocate the time, energy, and resources we have to perform each of the duties in our lives. Many shared the importance of "making lists," "staying on track," and "scheduling time for each task or responsibility." This is not a surprising finding, as anecdotal and empirical reports[62] have described the need for time management and the ability to stay on task. Athletic trainers have been found to be individuals who prioritize and use to-do lists as a means to balance their workdays,[3] which affords a sense of balance through control over scheduling, completion of tasks, and the reward of completing those tasks. As Marsh[68] suggests in a 2010 TED talk, we must take control over our own work-life balance and not leave it up to others and expect for it to organically happen. Setting priorities and boundaries through time management practices can allow a faculty member the chance to have control over when and where the work gets done.

The importance of boundaries and priorities is also critical in the academic culture. The trap of being accessible 24-7 because of advancements in technology (e-mail, texts, etc), is the primary culprit and pitfall for creating conflict, because it can allow constant communication without separation of roles. Many of our participants shared the need to be organized, but also to set guidelines and expectations with peers, collaborators, and students. For example, Rebecca shared,

> *I think it's really helpful to set boundaries with students, so even though I have e-mail on my phone and I can constantly check it, I purposefully only respond to students during a certain period of time each day. They realize then I am not always available to them. I have seen others fall into the trap, they are always answering e-mails and working late because of it.*

Rebecca's comments reflect the importance of making conscious decisions regarding when to work and when not to engage in work-related activities. Also, as Highwood[32] suggests, we should avoid the acceptance of the 24-7 culture and work smarter. The reflections also suggest that a mindset that is enriched, rather than conflicted, is important. Setting boundaries can allow for enjoyment to be felt, as faculty members can focus their energies on each role, without a negative spillover.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At the outset of the study, we did not intend to examine the impact that institution type could have on the faculty member; therefore, we did not purposefully pursue a specific institution type. Our findings as presented speak more to the overall experiences of female athletic trainers as faculty members; thus, future research should examine the various classifications of higher education (private versus public, Carnegie Foundation classifications) and how that may influence success and experiences with role balancing. Our participants reflect both pretenured and tenured faculty members, as we wanted a holistic impression of work-life balance, yet we did not make generalizations regarding role balancing for pretenured versus tenured faculty members. Hypothetically, pretenured female faculty may experience more stress and difficulty role balancing compared to those who have achieved tenure. Future studies need to investigate the impact that tenure can have on creating role balance. Also, we did not include female faculty members who were in a dual role with clinical practice responsibilities. We recognize that this subgroup could have different experiences in regards to work-life balance as compared to our participants. Inclusion of this sample is necessary in the future. One of our participants indicated navigating a divorce. We recognize that future studies should examine more closely the impact that conflict can have on the spouses of faculty members. The focus of this study was not to make comparisons of experiences based upon marital or relationship status, yet this may yield some more critical data. Finally, we only present the experiences of female athletic training faculty on work-life balance and a career in higher education. As the research continues to illustrate that men and women struggle to find

work-life balance, male faculty members may be able to offer greater insights to this topic.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Work-life balance at times can seem like a fallacy, especially for professionals who are working 40+ hours a week and engaging in roles outside of the workplace (eg, spouse, caregiver, parent). Female faculty members in athletic training recognize the demands of higher education, and at times do struggle to balance them along with their other roles. Our participants describe struggles and strategies (eg, partner and departmental support) that compare to those of other women faculty in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics–related academic programs, suggesting that work-life balance concerns exist regardless of the specific discipline.

Higher education institutions afford a flexible work arrangement and a culture that does support work-life balance. However, this does not always result in the perception that work-life balance is easy, particularly as it relates to success in the field and motherhood. Delegation—that is, sharing the load with their spouses and support networks—was critical for finding balance for our faculty members. Also, recognition of what is important versus what is not during the workday was used as a means to gain balance and control over the day's activities.

Our findings contribute to the growing body of literature regarding today's challenges in higher education for female faculty members. Our recommendations are specific to the 4 main findings presented previously:

1. Women faculty members should be aware that engaging in multiple roles will be inherently stressful, but can be manageable if work-life balance strategies are developed and implemented.
2. Women faculty members should establish routines for the workday, including planning time for personal, family, and work responsibilities.
3. Women faculty members should communicate with coworkers, supervisors, and spouses regarding personal and work-related obligations as means to complete their responsibilities in all roles.
4. Women faculty members should create boundaries between work, family, and personal roles as a means to focus on each task while engaged in that role. Focus can reduce stress, increase productivity, and allow satisfaction in all aspects of one's life.

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Appendix. Interview Questions

All Participants	Married or Single Without Children	Married or Single With Children
Do you face any challenges in regards to your current position?	What are your perceptions regarding motherhood and balancing faculty roles and expectations?	Talk a little about what being a mother and motherhood means to you.
Do you serve multiple roles in the workplace? If so, how do you balance your roles in the workplace?	Please describe the workplace culture that exists in your college/department regarding work-life balance. Same for motherhood as well.	Has motherhood had an impact on your ability to be successful in your role within higher education?
Do multiple roles create challenges? If so, how do you handle those challenges?	Are the policies or benefits that could assist you or help you better manage your personal and professional responsibilities?	Has motherhood had an impact on your career? If so, what type of impact?
Are there particular strategies or methods that you employ to help you manage your responsibilities at work? At home?		Specifically, what influence has it had on your choice of employment setting/job type?
Are there particular people you feel make a difference in your ability to perform your job responsibilities? Who are those people and what do they do?		Do you feel you face struggles specifically as a mother in athletic training?
		How do you balance your roles as a mom and an athletic trainer, educator, researcher?
		Do you feel supported or unsupported by your institution in managing motherhood?
		Does your institution provide benefits to help you manage motherhood and your position in higher education? Please explain.
		Please describe the workplace culture that exists in your college/department regarding work-life balance. Same for motherhood as well.
		Are the policies or benefits that could help you better manage your personal and professional responsibilities?