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The Organizational Climate in Collegiate Athletics: An Athletic Trainer's Perspective

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Context: An organizational climate is largely based on an employee's perceptions of the working conditions in which he or she engages regularly. A multifaceted concept, the organizational climate is often formed by perceptions of employee welfare, rewards, and support. Achieving work-life balance is also a part of the climate.

Objective: To learn collegiate athletic trainers' perceptions of organizational climate and specifically how it may pertain to their work-life balance.

Design: Phenomenologic study.

Setting: Collegiate practice setting.

Patients or Other Participants: Thirty athletic trainers working in the collegiate athletics setting took part in 1-on-1 phone interviews. The participants were 30.5 (interquartile range [IQR] = 7.75) years old and had been certified for 7 (IQR = 5) years and at their current position for 4 (IQR = 3) years.

Data Collection and Analysis: Participants completed a phone interview that followed a semistructured framework. All transcribed interviews were analyzed using a phenomenologic approach. Researcher triangulation, expert review, and data saturation were used to establish credibility.

Results: Athletic trainers working in the collegiate athletics setting who had positive perceptions of their work-life balance described their organizational climate as family friendly. Our participants' supervisors allowed for autonomy related to work scheduling, which provided opportunities for work-life balance. These athletic trainers believed that they worked in a climate that was collegial, which was helpful for work-life balance. In addition, the importance of placing family first was part of the climate.

Conclusions: The perceptions of our participants revealed a climate of family friendliness, supervisor support, and collegiality among staff members, which facilitated the positive climate for work-life balance. The mindset embraced the importance of family and recognized that work did not always have to supersede personal priorities.

Key Words: work-life balance, workplace atmosphere, supervisors

Key Points

- Workplace integration is an important informal policy available to the athletic trainer. It describes cultural support from supervisors and coworkers, which improves the organizational climate for work-life balance.
- Accepting nonwork responsibilities from supervisors and coworkers can help reduce stress and conflict for the athletic trainer, as it promotes the perception of a supportive workplace, which is necessary for a positive organizational climate.

Work-life balance has become a popular term among the American professional workforce, particularly for those individuals who work in the athletic setting. Discussions on the topic have grown, as today's working professional strives to find a balance between work responsibilities and other pursuits and interests, such as family, friends, and hobbies. The desire to find work-life balance may stem not only from today's generational mindset (ie, millennials) but also from the 80% of today's working professionals who are part of a dual-earning family, which requires both adults to participate in both paid and nonpaid aspects of life.[1] *Work-life balance* can be viewed as spending adequate time at one's paid job, while also spending sufficient time engaged in other aspects of life, including with family and friends and on personal hobbies and interests.[2] *Balance* reflects a degree of harmony among those interests; when time and energy become unbalanced or perceived as incompatible, then conflict results.

Few work environments demand more of their employees than the collegiate athletics setting, because down time is often minimal and staff members may be expected to be available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.[3] This is largely due to the expectations of the individuals working in the setting who carry the responsibility of being readily available and willing to work long, unorthodox hours.[4–8] Although work-life balance is multidimensional, it is clear that several organizational variables are strong facilitators of conflict.[9–14] Dixon and Bruening[4,5] described these organizational variables as structural variables that help define the responsibilities of the job, such as work scheduling, role expectations, work hours, and organizational culture.

Organizational variables have often been described as strong contributors to the work-life–balance interface. As noted previously, organizational variables shape the job one performs or the nature of one's position.[4–6] For athletic trainers (ATs), those variables that outline their roles and responsibilities in the collegiate setting include long work hours, travel, work schedules that often change with little notice, and responsibilities that can at times be incompatible or complex (administrative tasks, supervision, patient

care, etc).[7,10,15] Often these organizational variables create conflicts between time and energy and between work and personal obligations that lead to imbalance.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)[3] has acknowledged that work-life balance is a central concern for those who work in the setting, resulting in the need for policies to promote a more positive culture and climate for work-life balance. The actions of the NCAA reflected the results of a 2006 study of its membership,[3] which revealed staffing shortages, workload concerns, and distress related to achieving success in all aspects of life (ie, work and home). At the core of the policies suggested to improve the work-life balance culture and climate are improved work scheduling and flexibility, valuing personal time, and establishing boundaries and priorities to help achieve balance through task completion.[3] These policies are not only recommended within the NCAA's *Matter of Balance* handbook[3] but also by the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) position statement on work-life balance in the athletic training profession.[16] Adopting these policies can shape the organizational culture (ie, guidelines that establish the structure of the workplace), which can directly influence the climate experienced by those working within it.[17,18]

The *climate* can be described as the shared perceptions and attitudes of the organization in which one is working.[17,18] Shared perceptions often reflect the employees' views of organizational factors such as leadership, decision making, and expectations regarding work. In the collegiate athletics setting, the organizational climate describes how the AT perceives whether the values, rules, and policies (eg, vacation time, sick time) are being implemented and applied. In the organizational literature, it has been suggested[19] that initiatives used to facilitate balance can be viewed as formal (eg, human resources-based time off, sick time, maternity leave) and informal (autonomy, supervisor support). Despite the need for formal policies, however, informal policies may shape the climate of the workplace and allow balance to occur. To date, little information is available regarding how an AT perceives his or her organizational climate in relation to work-life balance. Therefore, we sought to examine the perceptions of work-life balance from an organizational-climate perspective. Our study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did ATs working in the collegiate sport setting describe their organizational climate as it pertained to maintaining work-life balance?
2. What factors do ATs working in the collegiate sport setting indicate helped to foster a climate that was supportive of work-life balance?

METHODS

Design

Given our desire to highlight the experiences of participants working in the collegiate sport setting and understand how they perceived the organizational climate of their workplaces with respect to their work-life balance, we designed a descriptive phenomenologic study.[20] Phenomenology is a useful method for inductively gaining new knowledge regarding a person's opinion and insights on a particular topic, especially as he or she is immersed in the phenomenon of interest.[20] We used semistructured interviews, which lasted 35 to 60 minutes, to obtain more information about the organizational climate within the collegiate athletics setting as it related to work-life balance. Interviews were guided by 5 established questions (Appendix) with follow-up probes to fully capture our participants' experiences.

Sampling and Participants

Our sampling procedures were purposeful, as we wanted to study ATs who were willing to provide and interested in providing detailed insights into their experiences related to work-life balance in the collegiate setting (ie, organizational-climate phenomenon). We began recruitment after institutional review board approval was obtained. Our inclusion criteria were (1) employment within the collegiate or university setting, (2) employment that was considered full time (no interns or graduate assistants were included), and (3) employment for more than 1 year in collegiate athletics. To gain access to potential participants, we used contact information from a larger study in which participants completed an online survey investigating a multilevel framework of career intentions.[21] From that sample, we communicated directly with those who provided contact information.

Our participants (n = 30) were all NATA members and were employed in the collegiate practice setting. The median age of our participants was 30.5 (interquartile range [IQR] = 7.75) years. They had been certified for 7 (IQR = 5) years and in their current position for 4 (IQR = 5.5) years. They worked an average of 54 ± 9 (range = 20–70) hours a week and were contracted for 11 ± 1 (range = 9–12) months of the year. The average number of full-time ATs on our participants' staffs was 6 ± 4 (range = 2–18). Fourteen participants (47%) were male, and 16 (53%) were female. The majority of our participants were married (n = 17, 57%) and did not have children (n = 19, 63%). All participants who reported having children also reported being married. Demographic information and participant pseudonyms can be found in Table 1.

Interviews

All participants were asked to complete a semistructured phone interview with one of the researchers. The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed by a third party for analysis. The interview sessions were structured around 5 primary questions but included many follow-up questions based on the initial responses (Table 2). We developed the questions using the theoretical framework of the scarcity theory but also to reflect organizational and individual factors that can shape work-life balance and job satisfaction.[16,22–25] The questions were reviewed for content and clarity by an expert in organizational culture and climate in sports. Edits resulted in the 5 questions. The interview sessions were specifically designed to gather more information about the organizational climate and its effect on the individual's work-life balance.

Table 1. Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years Certified	National Collegiate Athletic Association Division or National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)	National Athletic Trainers' Association District	Years in Current Position	Hours Worked/ Week	Length of Contract	No. of Full-Time Athletic Trainers	Married?	Child?
AJ	M	23	2	II	4	1	55	12	4	N	N
Amelia	F	27	5	I	9	1	60	12	6	N	N
Bruce	M	27	4	I	10	1	55	12	3	N	N
Cate	F	33	11	I	1	8	50	11	10	Y	Y
Dexter	M	29	6	II	1	4	45	10	4	Y	Y
Elizabeth	F	30	8	II	1	3	48	12	4	N	N
Emma	F	42	19	II	4	14	60	12	3	Y	Y
Eve	F	38	6	I[a]	7	1	20	9	2	N	N
Grace	F	24	3	II	7	1	60	10	2	N	N
Grant	M	31	8	I	1	3	50	12	7	Y	N
Hayden	F	27	6	I	9	4	60	12	4	N	N
Howard	M	29	5	NAIA	5	4	45	12	3	N	N
Jace	M	34	9	I	3	1	55	12	7	N	N
James	M	29	6	II	5	4	60	10	4	Y	Y
Jake	M	38	15	NAIA	9	4	40	12	6	Y	Y
Jaylynn	F	30	8	I	9	8	50	12	4	N	N
Karl	M	32	7	III	2	3	60	10	3	Y	N
Karla	F	28	7	III	1	5	55	12	3	N	N
Khloe	F	33	10	I	6	5	55	12	16	N	N
Laura	F	35	11	I	3	1.5	60	11	9	Y	Y
Matt	M	56	32	II	6	6	50	10	6	Y	Y
Mckenna	F	28	6	II	3	4	60	10.5	3	Y	N
Morgan	F	36	16	II	9	10	65	12	8	Y	N
Nate	M	32	6	II	10	6	50	10	2	Y	Y
Riley	M	28	6	NAIA	10	3	45	11	3	Y	N
Ron	M	47	25	I	7	15	55	12	12	Y	Y
Sawyer	F	40	16	I	4	13	50	12	6	Y	Y
Taylor	F	28	7	II	4	5	60	10.5	3	Y	N
Wyatt	M	59	33	I	3	10	60	12	5	Y	Y
Yuri	F	29	6	I	4	4	70	12	18	N	N

Abbreviations: AT, athletic trainer; F, female; M, male; N, no; Y, yes.

[a] Club sports.

Table 2. Interview Protocol[a]

1. What are your biggest stressors at work? (Follow-ups included: How do you deal with these stressors? Why do you believe these to be your biggest stressors?)
   What are your biggest stressors at home? (Follow-ups included: How do you deal with these stressors? Why do you believe these to be your biggest stressors?)
2. What aspects of your job do you really enjoy? (Follow-ups included: Tell me why this is important to you.)
   What aspects of your job do you wish you could change, enjoy the least? (Follow-ups included: Why is this the case? Do you see these actually changing?)
3. What influences your overall day and work schedule? Can you share a little bit about your work hours/scheduling? (Follow-ups included: Describe the typical length of your day—when the day starts and ends, when can you or do you take vacations, and how you manage all your roles?)
4. How would you describe your department (sports medicine) and organization (athletics) in regards to its family friendliness? (Follow-ups included: What influences your perceptions of workplace friendliness?)
   Does your department or organization offer any formal family-friendly policies? (Follow-ups included: If yes, can you share them? How have they impacted you? If no, why don't you think they exist?)
5. If a conflict came up between a work and personal commitment, how would you decide which takes priority? (Follow-ups included: Do you ever miss personal or family commitments because of work? Why do you perceive this to happen?)

[a] Instrument is presented in its original form.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed inductively, allowing for a stepwise process of analysis from which the most common themes emerged. During the first step, we followed an open coding process in 3 stages. First we pursued a holistic evaluation of the data to gain a sense of the experiences described by our participants. This is often explained as "dwelling" on the data as a way to allow key findings to emerge and resonate with the researcher.[20] Becoming embedded in the data is helpful in configuring the data and determining which data are meaningful to the individual. In the second step, we broke down the data by labeling them with codes that matched the meaning of the experience. We grouped codes that addressed similar ideas and concepts; recurrent codes were grouped to represent likemindedness. In the third step, raw data were extracted from the interviews to shape the themes that were considered dominant.[20] Our intention was to arrange our findings so that we could summarize our participants' key topics, which represented the common aspects of their experiences. Once this process was finished, the themes as defined by the codes and raw data were shared with another researcher. The researcher independently completed the same analysis and then we compared the findings. Once consensus was reached between the researchers, data analysis was considered complete. The

negotiations accomplished during this process included the categorization of the codes (ie, use of *autonomy* versus *independence*). The raw data selected to represent themes were agreed upon during this time as well. Purposeful selection of the data to be presented helped us to generate a clear picture of the key findings as well as to share our participants' stories and experiences related to the organizational climate and fulfillment of work-life balance.[19]

Credibility and Trustworthiness Considerations

To address the overall quality of the current study, we considered the recommendations of phenomenologic research. First, we believed that rapport was established with our participants, as our lead interviewer had experience and skill in interviewing. This was a necessary tactic to ensure that our participants were honest and shared the most important aspects of their experiences related to their perceptions of workplace climate.[19] Second, we constructed our interview guide using relevant current literature and had it reviewed by a content expert. Creating a framework that is based on the literature and on the primary objective of the study ensures accuracy in examination of a phenomenon. However, the semistructured nature of the interview protocol was purposeful in enabling the experienced interviewer to gain more in-depth information while allowing the natural flow of interviewing to guide the process.[19,25] Third, we used researcher triangulation to code the data; this helped limit our personal biases during the coding process and allowed the dominant findings to emerge. Triangulation is common practice in qualitative research, and the use of 2 researchers in the coding process maintained rigor in the analytic process.[19] Fourth, we used a coding process that is viewed as fundamental and efficient when dealing with large amounts of raw data and when trying to uncover the most critical aspects of a person's experiences.[19,25] Phenomenologic research is based on understanding the lived experiences of a group of individuals, so becoming embedded in our data assisted us in uncovering those main perceptions and meaningful experiences.[19,25] Finally, we used data saturation as our benchmark for recruitment. We believe this process provided us with a comprehensive, representative sample to address our research questions.

RESULTS

From organizational and individual lenses, our results speak to the importance of a climate that supports family and embraces the individual's needs beyond patient care and engagement in the athletics climate. Specifically, we identified 4 major themes (Figure): (1) family friendly, (2) supervisor autonomy, (3) collegiality, and (4) value of family. The first theme was further contextualized by workplace integration and acceptance of family and personal roles. We present each theme with supporting data.

Family Friendly

Our participants described their organizational cultures as family friendly, a perception that was founded on the ideology of (1) workplace integration and (2) acceptance of family or personal roles outside of the workplace.

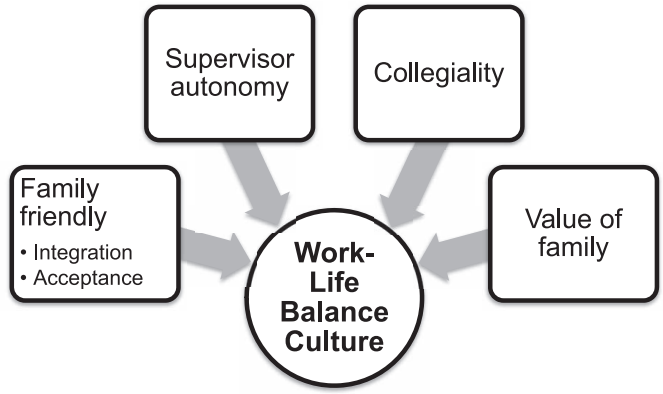

Figure. Factors leading to a positive organizational culture for work-life balance.

Workplace Integration. The ability to bring children into the workplace appeared to be an important aspect of a family-friendly culture. With respect to having a sick child or simply wanting more time with family or children, Jaylynn shared:

> Everybody that I work with is very happy to have children come [into the workplace], especially when it's appropriate. So I would say it is family friendly, and it's a good thing. When we have social gatherings outside of the workplace, [our] children are always invited. I think that is helpful.

Laura commented, "[T]he athletic training department does an excellent job of being family friendly." Laura believed it was a culture that was apparent in her peers and supervisors. She continued, "[W]e take care of each other. There are 3 of the 9 staff members with children." She spoke about having to bring her young daughter to campus a few times for various reasons and not having any problems doing so:

> I had to pick my daughter up one day from school; she was sick. I brought the Pack 'n Play, and she just laid down in my office while I was at work. I have also brought her in for morning treatments on a weekend. One time, I remember I did it [bringing her to work], and my supervisor came in and colored with her. The athletics department is fantastic. This environment makes me feel like I can get it [my work and parenting responsibilities] done. There is no reason why every place in America can't be like this [family friendly].

Hayden discussed the support for and acceptance of parenting while needing at times to be integrative and creative to handle her work and personal responsibilities:

> It's extremely family friendly. My coworker has an infant. We, as a staff, got her a "baby backpack," and she has a playpen in her office. The athletic director, his son comes to work with him. So I mean it's very family friendly. All of the department kids are loved and treated well by everyone. It's fantastic, as it's as if they have a bunch of aunt[s] and uncles.

Riley described how the workplace integration was not limited to athletic training but shared with the entire athletics department:

> It's [our organization] pretty family friendly. The coaches bring in their kids a lot. You know, I have brought my son in a couple of times already. I think it's an environment that even the athletic director comes in with his children. So they promote family and family friendliness as much as they can.

A majority of our participants viewed their supervisors and peers as understanding and supportive of personal obligations, and they talked about helping each other out. When Matt needed to request time off, his supervisor was "supportive."

Acceptance of Family Roles and Personal Roles. While enjoying the climate of family friendliness, our participants recognized and accepted that other ATs would also need to attend to responsibilities and personal demands. Dexter stated, "One of our core values is to be a family-friendly department...[W]e all have things to do. It's [family and outside obligations] acknowledged and accepted." In describing his work environment, Jake remarked:

> [O]ur department, including the supervisor and staff, is supportive. Everyone is family. We are understanding about it [other obligations] all. For example, if someone has to go to a kid's appointment or something like that, we [the other staff members] just take care of it [the work load to cover for our coworkers].

Supervisor Autonomy

Another aspect that emerged as a facilitator of a culture that promoted work-life balance was the supervisor. A supervisor who allowed for autonomy over work scheduling was part of a culture that was conducive to work-life balance. The clear consensus among our participants was that this was a true benefit of a climate that allowed for work-life balance and the ability to "get it all done." *Autonomy* was defined as the freedom and flexibility to manage one's work responsibilities without micromanagement from a supervisor. Cate highlighted the idea of autonomy when discussing her supervisor:

> In terms of when I come into the office, I do get a little more leniency, as long as we [our staff] have our treatments covered and practices covered, you can come to the office when you need to, to get things done. So as long as your day-to-day stuff is being covered, you can kind of decide on when it's best to come in.

Mckenna saw the relationship with her head AT as trusting and perceived that she had more control over her schedule. She said, "My supervisor trusts me, so I can come in, you know, when I want, as long as my team isn't practicing or needs anything." Mckenna believed this flexibility contributed to her ability to complete tasks at work and home. Thanks to their supportive supervisors, Riley and Nate also appreciated the autonomy they had over work schedules:

> Speaking of work scheduling and control over work schedules. . . I think as long as we, the staff, have things covered and are doing what we are supposed to, it's an unspoken thing about navigating our own schedules. –Riley

> I can pretty much, to a certain extent, structure my workday however I see fit. My supervisor's [the head athletic trainers] rules are, as long as you are servicing your student-athletes, you are not behind in your paperwork, and no one is looking for you, you know, come to work as you see fit. –Nate

The importance of supervisors who allowed individual staff members to recognize and prioritize their work needs was evident during the interviews. Also valued was a shared sense of working collectively with staff members to cover work responsibilities and balance the load so that everyone had control of work schedules. Amelia illustrated these factors:

> I have a lot of influence on my own schedule. If something comes that I need to address, I know that I can talk to my supervisor or coworkers and figure it out. I can let them know something has come up and say, "Hey, I can't come in [today] because of XYZ. Can you cover for me?" Luckily they help me.

Supervisors were gatekeepers for work-life balance and fostering a positive climate that facilitated work-life balance.

Collegiality

Participants spoke pointedly about the collegiality of the athletic training staff. *Collegiality* refers to the relationships that exist among coworkers and is often viewed as working toward a common purpose with respect, cooperation, and positivity.[26] Descriptions of collegiality were largely positive, with many reflecting on their coworkers as friendly, supportive, and team players. Grant said, "Our staff, everybody, is friendly. The athletic(s) department is casual." James agreed: "We are really great at supporting one another."

The descriptions of collegiality extended beyond the general culture and atmosphere and centered on the idea of supporting one another to create chances for more time at home. Khloe commented, "Our staff gets along well. It's not an issue. When I ask or tell somebody [coworker] that you have something going on, they will step in and help you out." Amelia explained that it was not uncommon for a coworker to cover her responsibilities, if needed, to allow her to attend family functions or obligations: "[W]ith our staff, the other 2 members, if it's something big or we need to get to, they will help you figure it out." Cate detailed, "If you have or need to take care of family businesses or issues, I mean, with 6 athletic trainers on staff, you know, we are still understaffed, but we have enough to take up the slack if necessary." Collegiality was conceptualized as being

supportive and accepting of everyone's different personal and family needs.

Value of Family

Our participants shared a mentality that family should come first. Our participants were committed to keeping family obligations a priority, just as attending work functions was. Jace, for example, observed, "Family comes first, so if I am needed there, at home or with family, that is where I will be. I think you have to gauge its importance." James had a similar opinion of balancing work and family priorities: "Take care of your family. It should be your number-one thing you have to worry about." The ATs realized that missing work for family obligations should be assessed on an individual basis and that, when making the decision to select one responsibility over another, it had to be important. For example, Wyatt chose family over work when his young child's needs were more important: "If there is an opportunity where my little guy is sick or he needs to go to the doctor, whatever his needs are, my supervisor encourages me to do those things." Laura also evaluated the importance of the conflict, saying candidly, "[M]y decision to choose one over the other would be based on the severity of the conflict." She gave specific examples of when family should come first, including, "[F]or example, my dad passed away, and I was gone, out of work immediately." As the mother of a young child, she also addressed the magnitude of the conflict related to being sick or having a sport or hobby conflict:

> [Y]ou know, if my daughter was sick and it was a little fever or something, yeah, I might stay home. I can call the women's ice hockey athletic trainer or football athletic trainer. Someone could cover my practice, a staff member who is not in-season. So if it came to a work or personal thing, family would come first, unless, you know, it was a soccer game for my daughter; then work might have to come first.

Like several others, Amelia and Laura noted that personal obligations were important but that timing and importance should be considered. Amelia said:

> I think, when a conflict comes up, it depends on the type of personal commitment, if my college friends are coming to visit versus my brother's wedding. So some of it's understandable, and we can figure it out.

Our participants described a collective mindset of "family comes first," and because everyone believed that family was important and work obligations should not always supersede family time, a climate of balance was perceived.

DISCUSSION

The goal of our study was to examine the perceptions of collegiate ATs regarding the climate that exists in their workplace and how it affects their ability to maintain work-life balance. We focused specifically on those factors that created a positive climate surrounding work-life balance. Recently, the athletic training literature[10,27–29] has highlighted the difficulty many ATs have balancing the demands of work and personal life and how this conflict has led to decreased job satisfaction and professional commitment. Our goal was to explore the organizational climates in which work-life balance was fostered, as we know that it can be achieved under the right circumstances.[30,31] The perceptions of our participants revealed that a climate of family friendliness and supervisor support and collegiality[32] among staff members was present, which facilitated the positive climate for balance. Also apparent was a mindset that embraced both the importance of family and the fact that work did not always have to supersede family priorities.

Family-Friendly Climate Founded by Integration and Acceptance

Our findings illustrate the importance of workplace integration and acceptance of the important roles everyone assumes outside of their profession, including spouse, caretaker, parent, and friend. These 2 concepts (integration and acceptance) seem to help create a climate that is family friendly, which is often viewed as one that allows employees to balance family and work and fulfill the obligations and expectations in each of those life domains. Conceptually, integration has become an emergent strategy for individuals trying to "fit it all in" during the day; fundamentally, a flexible workplace practice allows an individual the chance to transition between worker and nonworker roles without resistance. Several researchers[33,34] in athletic training have reported the use of integration as an effective way, when necessary, to be creative and practical in trying to navigate parenthood, life, and working full time.[10,14,] Simply stated, integration provides flexibility and control over when, where, and how the individual accomplishes tasks. The College and University Work and Family Association recommended the need for work integration and implied that, without it, persistence in collegiate athletics is unlikely.[35] Organizationally, collegiate athletics demand a great deal of their employees, and at times, the job can appear to be "24/7"; thus, perceiving that integrating work and home responsibilities throughout the day is feasible can be one way to achieve balance.[3] Furthermore, coworkers' support for engaging in family and personal roles, much like the support described by our participants, has been reported[35] as a way to create balance for the employee and suggested as a way to cultivate a climate that is conducive to fostering work-life balance.

Supervisor's Role in Climate

Supervisors have been proposed to be the gatekeepers of work-life balancing and creating a climate that can encompass work-life balance.[34,36] Supervisors can offer this assistance through various mechanisms, including providing emotional support for their employees' work-life–balance challenges, modeling effective balance strategies, and being creative and supportive of strategies to provide flexibility in work schedules.[37] Because their supervisors were "hands-off" leaders, our participants had some control over when they came to work and met their obligations. Having a supervisor who permitted the workday to be structured according to the AT's needs and responsibilities was previously found to be a useful benefit

of working in the collegiate athletics setting.[30] The athletic training literature[10,30] has linked the lack of micromanagement and the positive influence it can have on an AT's ability to create balance; in a fast-paced, demanding environment that often requires long hours, having the chance to manage one's work is important.

Supervisors—in our case, head ATs—have the ability to recognize when an employee needs time off or has a workload that may be excessive and can then intervene and assist in reducing the stress. One major way to facilitate this stress reduction is by giving the employee—in our case, the AT—the freedom to manage work schedule and job responsibilities as he or she sees best. The research[38,39] is clear: if an employee feels supported and the climate encourages flexible scheduling and control over completing one's responsibilities, work-life balance is achievable. Flexible work arrangements or promoting more flexibility for the working professional has become a primary focus for human resource departments, as they recognize the need to reduce the stress related to work-life balance and the direct benefits it can have on productivity and retention, and for ATs, the quality of care given to their patients.[35,36] Although lack of control over work schedules has been cited as a major catalyst to work-life imbalance, for the AT, when efforts are made such that he or she perceives some autonomy in scheduling his or her time within the constraints of the organizational setting, balance appears to improve.[7,10] Thus, drawing from our results and the work of those before us, we see the value in having a supervisor who provides autonomy and the freedom to structure one's work schedule in a way that blends work and personal obligations and needs.[31,37] This concept that everyone can have control over their work schedules as long as they complete the work has recently emerged as the critical piece to providing, encouraging, and maintaining that control.[35]

Collegiality in the Workplace

Cooperation and community were discussed previously as the foundation for creating a climate that enables work-life-balance to be achieved.[12] Our participants' rich descriptions of working with individuals who were supportive, team players, and collegial were viewed as a likely finding consistent with the existing data and served as a continued reminder that cultural workplace support is necessary to create a climate that is work-life friendly.[19,38] A key aspect of the collegiality theme was the idea that coworkers maintained similar mindsets regarding family and had supportive outlooks that suggested accommodations could and should be made when family commitments arose. Our findings indicated that, when coworkers had a family-supportive type of mindset, a positive workplace climate was perceived to exist and support work-life balance.

Warner et al[40] defined *cohesion* as a dynamic process that is highlighted by the tendency for a group to unite in the pursuit of objectives and for the satisfaction of the affective needs of group members. They also demonstrated that cohesion had a circular relationship with performance; teams with higher levels of perceived cohesion were more likely to succeed, probably due to shared beliefs. Cohesion may help explain why our participants seemed to benefit from collegiality in the workplace.

Collegiality among the staff was discussed not only as a means to promote a family-friendly climate but also as a way to encourage balance, as coworkers often helped share the load by providing medical coverage in times of conflict for a peer who could not be present because of a family obligation. The concept is much like that of the substitute teacher role or even as described in the patient-centered model of medical coverage, whereby block scheduling not only allows for consistency in work schedules but suggests that all ATs can provide suitable care, and therefore, all ATs need not be present at all times.[41] The patient-centered model as first described by Laursen[42] discussed the creation of a work schedule for the AT, within which the AT could provide medical coverage to the team practicing or competing. A block schedule allows advance planning but also fosters the idea that credentialed coworkers can all provide the same quality of care, thereby ensuring a more reasonable workload. In a report[43] examining the patient-centered model and work-life balance and climate, collegiality and cohesion among staff members were described as present in the organizational structure of the workplace.

The Importance of Putting Family First

Our participants spoke candidly about valuing their time at home and the need to put their family first. Researchers[10,44] have demonstrated that an employee, regardless of the work type or environment, must determine priorities as well as boundaries for when and where work can be completed. Priorities involve a blend of personal, family, and work responsibilities and then identifying the rank order in which daily tasks must be completed.[10] Our participants discussed the importance of their family and personal obligations but were also quick to realize that, at times, work must come first. Many of today's professionals are part of the millennial group, characterized as a generation that wants work-life balance, thus suggesting that they prioritize more time in personal and family roles.[1,45] The literature[44] in institutional complexity tells us that organizational decisions are guided by those individuals who bring their interpretations of priorities and desirable outcomes to the decision process. The importance of individuals within a group cannot be underestimated because organizational decisions are not simply a function of who participates; the degree of influence of a group within the organization also matters.[43]

LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the contributions made by our study, we are aware that the research is not without limitations. We present findings that represent all levels of the collegiate athletics setting, as we did not exclude ATs based on institutional level (NCAA Division I, II, and III and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics). We believe that it is important to understand work-life balance from a broad spectrum; however, as it relates to organizational climate, evidence shows that the workplace atmosphere can be vastly different among the different levels of collegiate athletics.

Our data highlight the positive aspects of an organizational climate that embraces and supports work-life balance. However, we recognize that not all ATs work in organizational cultures that are conducive to or supportive of work-life balance and family-friendly concepts. In fact, the lack of balance has been reported as a reason for dissatisfaction in the workplace and turnover; thus, it is critical to identify ATs who perceive that they work in a climate that is not supportive as a means of fully capturing the organizational climate for collegiate ATs.

Our sample was predominantly married without children. Despite the understanding that work-life balance can become problematic regardless of marital or family status, future researchers must decipher the perceptions and experiences of ATs who are unmarried and who have children. Both demographic groups could offer insights that were not present in our sample, particularly as they relate to the perceptions of family friendliness, family values, and collegiality.

CONCLUSIONS

Conflict between work and personal or family obligations affects all working professionals at some point, as 70% of all workers were reported to struggle with it.[44,45] The rise in conflict is related to the increase in the number of dual-earning couples in the workforce and to the unchanged expectations of employees despite the need to balance the demands of work and domestic and household duties.[45–47] So often, the discussions of work-life balance are tipped in a negative direction. The goal of this research was to highlight the organizational climates in which collegiate ATs had positive perceptions of their work-life balance. This may spark conversations among collegiate athletic training staffs regarding how they can change the organizational climates within their own institutions. In addition, our hope is that young ATs will consider these findings as they interview for jobs and specifically look for employment in organizations that foster climates that support work-life balance. They should ask questions to help them determine the collegiality of the staff, the attitude toward families, and the scheduling policies in the department. These factors are important to help ensure employment in an organization that promotes work-life balance and values its employees' needs, which ultimately assists in retaining ATs.

Appendix. Phase II Interview Guide[a]

Demographic Questions

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Years certified
4. NATA District
5. Current Employment Setting
6. Current position
7. # of years in current position
8. Avg # of hours worked/week
9. Length of contract
10. # of full-time staff ATs
11. Organizational structure
12. Marital status
13. Any children?

Open-Ended Questions

1. Tell me about your career path and how you originally became interested in athletic training?
2. How would you describe yourself? ← personality
   a. Probe: Personality, values, etc.
3. What are the things you value in your life? ← personality values
4. What do you like most about your current job? ← personality values/job satisfaction
5. Is there anything you would change about your current job? ← personality values/job satisfaction
6. What motivates you in your job? What motivates you in your personal life? ← intrinsic motivation/personality
7. How do you manage stress? What do you do for fun? ← coping
8. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Women are typically the caregivers, and men are the breadwinners. ← gender perceptions and gender ideology
9. Should a male athletic trainer work with a female team and vice versa? ← gender ideology
10. What are your biggest stressors at work? What are your biggest stressors at home? ← job pressure stress
11. How do you influence your workday and work schedule? ← work hours/scheduling
    a. Probe: length of day, taking vacation, when the day starts and ends
12. How would you describe your department and organization in regards to its ''family friendliness'' ←organizational culture
13. Does your department or organization offer any formal ''family-friendly policies''? ← organizational culture
14. If a conflict came up between a work and personal commitment, how would you decide which takes priority? ← scarcity theory
    a. Probe: do you ever miss personal or family commitments because of work?
15. Tell me about your communication style. How does that compare to the communication style of your coworkers and your supervisors?
    a. Probe: how would you describe your supervisor?
16. Where do you see yourself in 5–10 years? ← career intentions
    a. Probe: if leaving athletic training, what other professions are they looking at?

Reminder

Research Questions

1. How do collegiate athletic trainers' perceptions of their supervisor impact their career intentions?
2. How do collegiate athletic trainers perceptions of their gender roles impact their career intentions?
3. How do collegiate athletic trainers' perceive their own skills (both work and personal skills) impact their personal and work lives?

Abbreviations: AT, athletic trainer; NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association.

[a] Instrument is presented in its original form.

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