

## Adaptive Lifestyles in Intercollegiate Athletics

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*Scholars have suggested balance is achievable in the work-life interface, especially when utilizing current guiding theories in the field, such as role, scarcity, border, and boundary theory. However, within intercollegiate sport, research on the work-life interface suggests a culture characterized by imbalance due to long, nontraditional hours, frequent travel, and the stress of high-performance expectations. Thus, current theories often utilized to examine the work-life interface within sport may not adequately explain the dynamics of the profession. This manuscript proposes an updated framework more fitting to working in intercollegiate athletics and introduces the concept of an adaptive lifestyle. The adaptive lifestyle model suggests an athletic department employees' personal life domain adjusts to allow for the completion of work duties, even if this means making sacrifices within the personal life domain. This model has important theoretical and practical implications for future research focused on the work-life interface literature of sport management as well as other professions, especially those with high workplace demands.*

*Keywords: adaptive lifestyles, intercollegiate athletics, sustainable lifestyles, work-life interface, work-life balance, work-life conflict*

**P**redominant theory focusing on the work-life interface hinges on the idea that balance between work and life outside of work, such as time with family, hobbies, leisure, and so on is achievable (Carlson et al., 2009; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Scholars have used role, scarcity, border, and boundary theory to examine the perceived experiences of work-life conflict and work-life balance among employees across numerous professions and occupations (see Table 1; Clark, 2000; Galinsky & Kim, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Nippert-Eng, 1996). The literature identifies many factors which may create conflict between work- and personal-life, which is defined as the tension present when an individual's work and personal life responsibilities are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The literature also offers recommendations to alleviate tensions created by conflict between work and non-work domains. For example, previous literature identifies formal workplace supports such as work-life supportive benefits, flexible scheduling, tuition assistance help, referrals for child or elder care, and informal supports such as having supportive coworkers or an accepting workplace culture, may be useful for decreasing work-life conflict (Lobel & Kossek, 1996). In addition to suggesting ways to reduce work-life conflict, current theory argues balance between work and personal life is attainable.

Intercollegiate athletics research, however, across multiple studies and among different populations, continues to find a culture characterized by *imbalance*. Intercollegiate athletic administrators, and coaches (Dixon et al., in press; Schenewark & Dixon, 2012; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018; Weight et al., in press), trainers (Mazerolle et al., 2008), academic advisers (Hardin et al., 2017; Hardin et al., 2020; Rubin, 2017), marketers (Hall et al., 2010), and those working in sports information (Hatfield & Johnson, 2012) all report high levels of work-life conflict. This conflict has been attributed to long, nontraditional hours, frequent travel, and the added stress of high-performance expectations (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Dixon et al., in press; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016; Weight et al., in press). Because experiences of work-life conflict are so common, many working in the sport industry have rejected the idea that work-life balance is achievable. Intercollegiate athletic department employees have even come to accept this imbalance, dedicating a large majority of their time to work, while their personal life responsibilities assume a secondary role to professional responsibilities (Smith et al., 2020; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Employees in intercollegiate athletics report the profession as a lifestyle, not a job, and suggest it would be nearly impossible to be successful at the highest level without dedicating so many hours to their work (Dixon & Warner, 2010; Gaffney et al., 2012; Weight et al., in press).

Additionally, employees within intercollegiate athletics have discussed making purposeful decisions to ensure they are able to dedicate adequate time to their work in order to achieve success by adopting strategies such as limiting romantic engagements or missing family events (Taylor et al., 2018). Further, employees who are unmarried or without children have made reference to predictions of future career changes when they begin to make changes in their personal life such as getting married or having children (Hardin et al., 2017). This phenomenon is not unique to collegiate athletics, however, as other professions such as military, law enforcement, fire, and medical face similar demands (Feeney & Stritch, 2019; Gan, 2019; Plummer, 2019). As such, it is important to recognize that the absence of work-life balance is not simply a private struggle for individuals or couples, but rather a structural and cultural issue

across organizations, industries, and even countries (Moen, 2015). Consequently, even if organizations are working to enhance their employees' ability to negotiate the demands of their professional and personal life by implementing family-friendly policies such as family care plans, family leave, access to childcare, and flexible work schedules (Feeney & Stritch, 2019; Gan, 2019; Plummer, 2019), there are employees who will be unable to utilize them to the fullest extent in their quest to achieve work-life balance.

Although we understand many employees within the industry of intercollegiate athletics – and the broader sport industry – share some commonalities in experience (Graham & Dixon 2014, 2017; Huml et al., in press; Taylor et al., 2019), there must be acknowledgement that sport as an institution is built on bias and the inequitable policies and practices reflect larger societal policies and practices. Accordingly, social identities including gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and role within the athletic department impact the experiences and perceptions of employees. Thus, although the family-friendly policies and practices listed above exist, the social identities and societal expectations/realities of those identities may cause many individuals to lack the perceived ability or security to engage in these offerings from their organizations. Therefore, the current theories, see Table 1, often utilized to examine work-life conflict within intercollegiate athletics may not be adequate in explaining what is occurring in the profession or other professions with high time demands. It is important to note that one critical element of each of the theories discussed in Table 1 is the notion that achieving a balance between work and personal life is possible. That is, by carefully managing role partners (role theory), scarce resources (scarcity theory), engaging in boundary work to manage the boundaries between work and home life (boundary theory), or the people and culture in each life sphere (border theory) an individual will be able to achieve a sustainable level of work-life balance, as defined by that specific framework. In many professions this is possible, however, research continues to suggest individuals involved in intercollegiate athletics including administrators, coaches, trainers, and staff within athletic departments, find the traditional notions of *balance* to be impossible (Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018; Weight et al., in press). Consequently, a different model for conceptualizing a successful negotiation between work and family for people working in intercollegiate athletics is necessary. Thus, this manuscript will provide a different perspective to evaluate work-life balance by proposing a framework that more accurately depicts the relationship between an intercollegiate athletic department employees' work and personal life, the adaptive lifestyles model. The discussion of the culture driving these notions and experiences related to balance is presented in the following section.

## Multi-Level Pressure

Pressure to succeed in intercollegiate athletics is felt on a multitude of levels. At the organizational level, athletic programs strive to demonstrate prestige and excellence, which creates fan identification, employee organizational commitment, and a positive psychological bond to the organization (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2004). Perceived organizational prestige for a university or athletic department can create a sense of positioning and visibility among competitors and peers (Andrew et al., 2006) showcasing these academic institutions to a wider audience (Anderson, 2017; Pope & Pope, 2014). There is significant pressure for athletic departments to demonstrate success. This success can be leveraged as marketing for the university as a whole, expanded applicant pools, increased donor relations, and enhanced reputation of the university (Anderson, 2017; Pope & Pope, 2014). These pressures can impact

Table 1  
*Common Work-Life Interface Theoretical Frameworks*

Theoretical Framework	Core Tenets	View on Balance	Theoretical Founders/Key Contributors
Role Theory	Society is comprised of individuals fulfilling various roles. These roles can at times have incompatible demands, which cause tension between roles. Balance is defined as full and meaningful engagement in all life roles.	Balance is achieved via proper role management. Role management strategies include communication with role partners, role negotiations with role partners, increasing or decreasing engagement with roles as needed, and adding or decreasing life roles.	Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Goode, 1960; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964
Scarcity Theory	Personal resources (e.g., time, energy, attention) are limited and require careful management. Conflict between work and personal life results when personal resources are not properly management and/or controlled.	When individuals are able to manage their time, energy, and attention carefully, they will be equipped and able to achieve balance by reducing or eliminating the conflict that can be present when resources are depleted or unavailable.	Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003
Boundary Theory	Individuals organize and categorize the people, tasks, and aspects of their life into personal and work realms. Individuals engage in behaviors and cognitions to maintain this set of physical and mental boundaries that separate work and personal life. These boundaries range on a continuum from thick to thin.	Boundary congruence (i.e., balance) is achieved by properly managing the strengths of various work-life boundaries. Successful boundary work requires negotiating expectations of role partners. When all role partners are in agreement, boundary congruence occurs. Boundary conditions often require re-negotiation and discussion, especially when work or personal life conditions change.	Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996
Border Theory	Just as various countries have different customs, cultures, traditions, and procedures, employees also cross a metaphorical work-life border as they go through the border from personal life to work. People build bridges and borders between the two to facilitate/hinder crossings.	Balance is achieved as individuals successfully manage border crossings between work and personal life. Facilitating border crossings via communication, translation, education, and increasing understanding can increase balance.	Clark, 2000

an organization's culture, which can impact the family-friendly culture of the organization, policies, and the compensation of the labor force (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). These pressures manifest as individual-level pressures on coaches to succeed on the court, field, track, etc., and on administrators to hire successful coaches and fundraise large sums of money to supplement ticket sales and media deals.

Intercollegiate coaches face high performance related demands over their own performances and the performances of their athletes (Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Hanton et al., 2005), leading to the added stressors and uncertainty of accompanying low job security and short-term contracts. Additionally, public firings occur when performance is not deemed acceptable (Altfeld & Kellman, 2013; Arnulf et al., 2012; Rhind et al., 2013), which is distinctive to intercollegiate athletics and the sporting culture. Furthermore, the magnitude and scale of performance pressure is severe at the intercollegiate athletic level, as NCAA coaches and administrators, especially those at Division I FBS – Autonomy institutions, or Power 5 institutions such as the University of Alabama or Ohio State University, have noted higher levels of pressure and stress from a win-at-all-cost mentality (Buer, 2009; Collins, 2018). There is a race to achieve objective measures of success including win-loss statistics, revenue generation, and high performance organizations (Burton & Leberman, 2017) and establish conference and national dominance (Weight et al., 2014); without an end in sight (Bass et al., 2015). Thus, the win-at-all cost mentality can cause coaches and athletic directors to approach leadership in a destructive manner including prioritizing financial gains, rewards, and systems that cause toxic leadership and questionable ethical scandals (Burton & Leberman, 2017). The overemphasis on winning creates an environment where coaches and administrators are expected to prioritize work over their personal lives. This system devalues the importance of personal life and the need to take care of one's self through activities that promote physical, mental, and emotion wellness (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Dixon & Bruening, 2007).

Athletic directors and administrators are also susceptible to high pressure and expectations within their roles. As an athletic director, there is a high-level of pressure due to the visibility and prominence of being a public figure who represents the university and the athletic department (Heil, 2018). Furthermore, in many cases the athletic director reports directly to the president of the university or the most senior executive leadership team which includes the board of directors or regents (Duderstadt, 2009). Beyond the pressure to report to the executive team of the university, the athletic director also has a multitude of responsibilities both internally and externally such as: oversight of the budget, hiring and firing decisions, student-support programs, donor and fundraising initiatives, and ensuring the department adheres to NCAA rules (Marburger, 2015). When lower level employees see senior level staff and head coaches working long, nontraditional hours due to this immense pressure, it may create a culture in which all employees feel pressure to be in the office for more hours, even if they feel it may be unnecessary (Weight et al., in press). This pressure only escalates for women and minoritized individuals who serve as athletic directors or in high leadership positions within the athletic department including the associate athletic director, chief operations officer, senior woman administrator, and so on. Research has found these individuals receive higher levels of scrutiny from peers, employees, fans, and donors than their male counterparts, in addition to battling organizational, gender, sociocultural, and racial norms that are deeply embedded in intercollegiate athletics that privileges White, hegemonic masculinity (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Burton & Leberman, 2017; Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Hartzell & Dixon, 2019; Hoffman, 2010; Smith et al., 2020; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Thus, the

current structure within intercollegiate athletic departments favors White, male leadership over female leadership as men are perceived to exhibit more desirable leadership qualities (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007). Additionally, men and women may have different ideas of what constitutes life success, as women place a greater value on success outside of the workspace such as family (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Hardin et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017).

### **Development of Adaptive Lifestyle**

The adaptive lifestyles model is necessary to create a different perspective of the work-life interface, especially for those working in the sport industry as some employees coming to expect and accept this imbalance as part of their job (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Consequently, examining the work-life interface experiences of those working in sport, utilizing current theories is problematic. For work-life balance to be achievable within the sport industry, as it is currently constructed by existing theories, intercollegiate athletic departments would have to make drastic changes, even decreasing required responsibilities and expectations for employees by adopting workplace elements like shorter work hours, less travel, less pressure to win, less face time expectations, and so on. However, the opposite is actually occurring within athletic departments where things like longer hours, more frequent travel, and increased performance pressure are common (Weight et al., in press).

For example, University of Georgia head women's basketball coach, Joni Taylor, gave birth to her second child just 12 hours after coaching the team to a victory over Ole Miss (Boone, 2019) and returned to the bench two days later to be with the team in a win against Arkansas (Gleeson, 2019). Other coaches, like former Division I football coach Urban Meyer, have prematurely retired for health reasons and lack of work-life balance, and later returned to coaching with a new outlook and self-imposed guidelines (Graham & Dixon, 2014). Although coaches, and other sport professionals, may feel the need to continually show their commitment to their organization through long hours in the office and limited days off for vacation, previous literature suggests time spent on a personal life, as well as tending to personal life responsibilities is a release from work and a way for both male and female coaches to "stay sane" within the demanding industry (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2017).

Additionally, research from Huml, Taylor, and Dixon (in press) found work-family conflict partially mediated the relationship between work engagement and work addiction. Work-life conflict acted as a buffer from turning an engaged worker into a workaholic. This finding gives credence to the idea that work-life conflict is not always negative. These studies also suggest that although work demands may be high within intercollegiate athletics, especially at the NCAA Division I – Autonomy level, it is critical for employees to invest time into their personal lives, even if balance between the two is not attainable. Therefore, the goal for many in athletics is to create an adaptive lifestyle which is characterized by a nontraditional, but sustainable family system rather than one characterized by balance. The environment of intercollegiate athletics seems to be distinct from previous research in the area of work-life conflict, therefore, different language is needed to conceptualize it.

## Conceptualization of Adaptive Lifestyles

In the intercollegiate athletics setting, employees are often attempting to create sustainable lifestyles characterized by adaptability, rather than balance. The concept of an adaptive lifestyle emerged from a series of studies focusing on the experiences of women working at different levels in intercollegiate athletics (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005, 2007; Hardin et al., 2017; Schenewark & Dixon, 2012; Smith et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor & Hardin, 2016;). The idea of balance was foreign to many of the women in the aforementioned cited studies, as much of their professional life had been focused on work – in attempts to progress in their career – often times at the expense of their personal lives. Although research may suggest achieving balance leads to a more fulfilled life (Carlson et al., 2009), women working in intercollegiate athletics recognize the challenges associated with achieving balance. Therefore, rather than attempting to achieve balance, female Division I conference commissioners reported purposefully scheduling their day in a way that allows them to achieve both personal and professional goals without necessarily maintaining equity between their work and personal life (Taylor et al., 2018). These women discussed knowing they would work late, so exercising after work was not practical. Therefore, they scheduled meetings to begin after 9 a.m. to give themselves time to exercise prior to coming into the office. Additionally, the commissioner position often requires a great deal of travel, so these women would plan personal travel at the beginning or end of work trips to ensure they were taking adequate time off (Taylor et al., 2018). Again, although these women were not typically achieving balance, as one participant noted, “There are going to be times when family is all consuming and you hope there aren’t too many times when work is all consuming, but you have to make time for those instances,” they were able to successfully complete all necessary tasks - both personal and professional - by being adaptive (Taylor et al., 2018, p. 325).

Female athletic directors reported similar strategies like being purposeful in their planning to ensure all tasks, personal and professional, were achieved within the allotted 24 hours of the day. In addition, they discussed how the athletic director position was a lifestyle, not just a job (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). One female athletic director explained how they do their AD job 24/7, but also “do the mothering stuff 24/7” and how, “being an AD isn’t a role I take off and put on, but it is who I am” (Taylor & Wells, 2017, p. 171). Others described the career as “a demanding lifestyle” discussing how the position includes nights and weekends coupled with frequent travel and it, “takes away from what you’d be doing with your partner or what you’d be doing with your family” (Taylor & Wells, 2017). However, these women also discussed how their college and university campuses became a second home for their families. One of the female athletic directors who had children said, “I mean my kids walk around campus, and they think they belong here, and the student-athletes and staff love them,” she went on to note that she was so grateful to be raising a family on a college campus, but if her family did not embrace it she would be a miserable person (Taylor & Wells, 2016, p. 170).

These challenges are not only present for those women at the top of the profession. Female graduate assistants working in intercollegiate athletics face similar pressures. Graduate assistants are full-time students while also maintaining employment within intercollegiate athletic departments, adding school to the list of duties they must complete each day. These women reported challenges associated with time management. One GA explained,

Often there are not enough hours in the day and most of the time, work takes precedence over school and I know that is horrible. I just feel like other departments do a better job of allowing their GAs to still be in the role of a student and I don't feel (like) a student at all. I go to class and I don't feel connected at all to my peers (Smith et al., 2017, p. 248).

Similar to other populations, female graduate assistants acknowledged knowing the challenges associated with a career in intercollegiate athletics saying,

There is an expectation that if you work in athletics you are going to be working more than 9 to 5. I think most people that work in athletics know that about going into the field or an awareness of it at least (Smith et al., 2017, p. 248).

The proposed adaptive lifestyle allows for sustainable careers within the industry versus premature departure when balance is not achieved. These career insights from both aspiring and experienced female professionals show how the work and personal life must adapt for the individual to be a successful employee within intercollegiate athletics and an individual outside of their work.

Research on female intercollegiate coaches suggests adaptive lifestyles and work-life negotiation is necessary to achieve success within the profession. Bruening and Dixon (2008) found for female coaches a major turning point in their career was the birth of a child, as it “brought to the forefront structural incompatibilities between the coaching lifestyle and the needs of young children” (p. 16). This research suggested the support, or lack of, from athletic directors was more critical to the career trajectory of female coaches than support from their spouses or partners. This point highlights how intertwined the personal and professional lives are for those working in sport (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Some of the female coaches discussed being in departments with a “family” environment where they were allowed to bring their children to work while others described their environments as more “cut throat” with a pressure to maintain the fast pace of intercollegiate athletics (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). The ability to integrate one's children into their work is an example of utilizing an adaptive lifestyle to be successful.

Although the female employee is still potentially working long days, evenings, and weekends, by bringing their children to work with them they are able to complete their parenting responsibilities while also completing their professional duties. It is important to highlight again how these examples of coping strategies do not fit well within current theoretical frameworks around notions of balance, but instead suggest a pattern of behavior characterized by imbalance and adaptability. Female coaches who found themselves in unsupportive organizations resistant to this integrative or adaptive lifestyle reported experiencing strain in their relationships with others (Bruening & Dixon, 2008) and felt they had a lack of meaningful control over their lives (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). They may face strain in the relationship with their spouse or partner if they are unable to complete their necessary parental duties or in the relationship with their athletic director if they are unable to complete their required professional responsibilities. This strain likely causes female employees to reevaluate their situation and make decisions about whether or not they can stay at their current institution or within their current field. Changes to the “traditional family” with increases in dual-earning and single-parent homes (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Harrington et al., 2013) or same sex couples (Heaphy, 2018) may create increased personal or family demands for employees with children. Therefore, if workplace requirements remain unchanged, or see increases, employees may experience increased tension



between the two realms. Thus, organizations must work to create workplaces that are grounded in the tenets of social well-being, with things like positive and supportive relationships with colleagues as well as feelings of security (Keyes, 1998; 2005; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018).

Research has suggested the presence of work-life supportive benefits like flexible work schedules, telecommuting, allowing children in the workplace or to travel with coaching mothers, expressing concern over employees' families, and embracing a broader definition of success in athletic programs may help to mitigate the negative effects of work-life conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon et al., 2008). However, Dixon and colleagues (2008) found significant differences in the usage of work-life supportive benefits between male athletic directors and female senior woman administrators suggesting the availability of these benefits did not necessarily dictate the usage. Rather, the perceived climate of the athletic department, measured by how supportive the climate was toward the usage of these benefits, dictated which benefits participants utilized. Male athletic directors reported a general agreement that their athletic departments were work-life supportive and therefore utilized every benefit more often than their female senior woman administrator counterparts (Dixon et al., 2008). Further, although many of the benefits offered were utilized by at least some of the employees, female senior woman administrators who participated indicated they did not utilize childcare referrals, the ability to telecommute, or the opportunity for a compressed work week at all (Dixon et al., 2008). These senior woman administrators also indicated work-life imbalance impacted their retention within the industry. Therefore, if employees within athletic departments feel as though they are unable to use benefits, their ability to achieve work-life balance is hindered, which may lead to premature departure from the industry. This idea has been illustrated within research on female early career professionals within intercollegiate athletic departments who have reported:

My husband and I are now expecting, and working 60 plus hours a week, working around other people's schedules has been my life. And once again, I've been willing to roll with the punches on it, but moving forward, when the baby gets here and that kind of thing, things are going to change (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 161).

Similarly, other participants discussed feeling as though their friends and family did not understand the nature of their work, such as the expectations of late night games and early mornings in the office, which created tension in relationships (Taylor et al., 2017). Not all employees, especially those with families, are willing to sacrifice their personal time for professional gain. Thus, it is important to begin understanding how departments can better assist employees in achieving a lifestyle that is adaptable and sustainable rather than one that reflects balance, as the organizational culture within sport organizations is simply not currently structured to facilitate balance. It is useful to present an update to a model which can be utilized to depict the work-life interface to better understand the adaptive lifestyle.

### *Central Concepts*

Traditional frameworks guiding work-life conflict literature in intercollegiate athletics hinge on the concept of balance. One prominently adopted model is depicted in Figure 1 (originally from Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

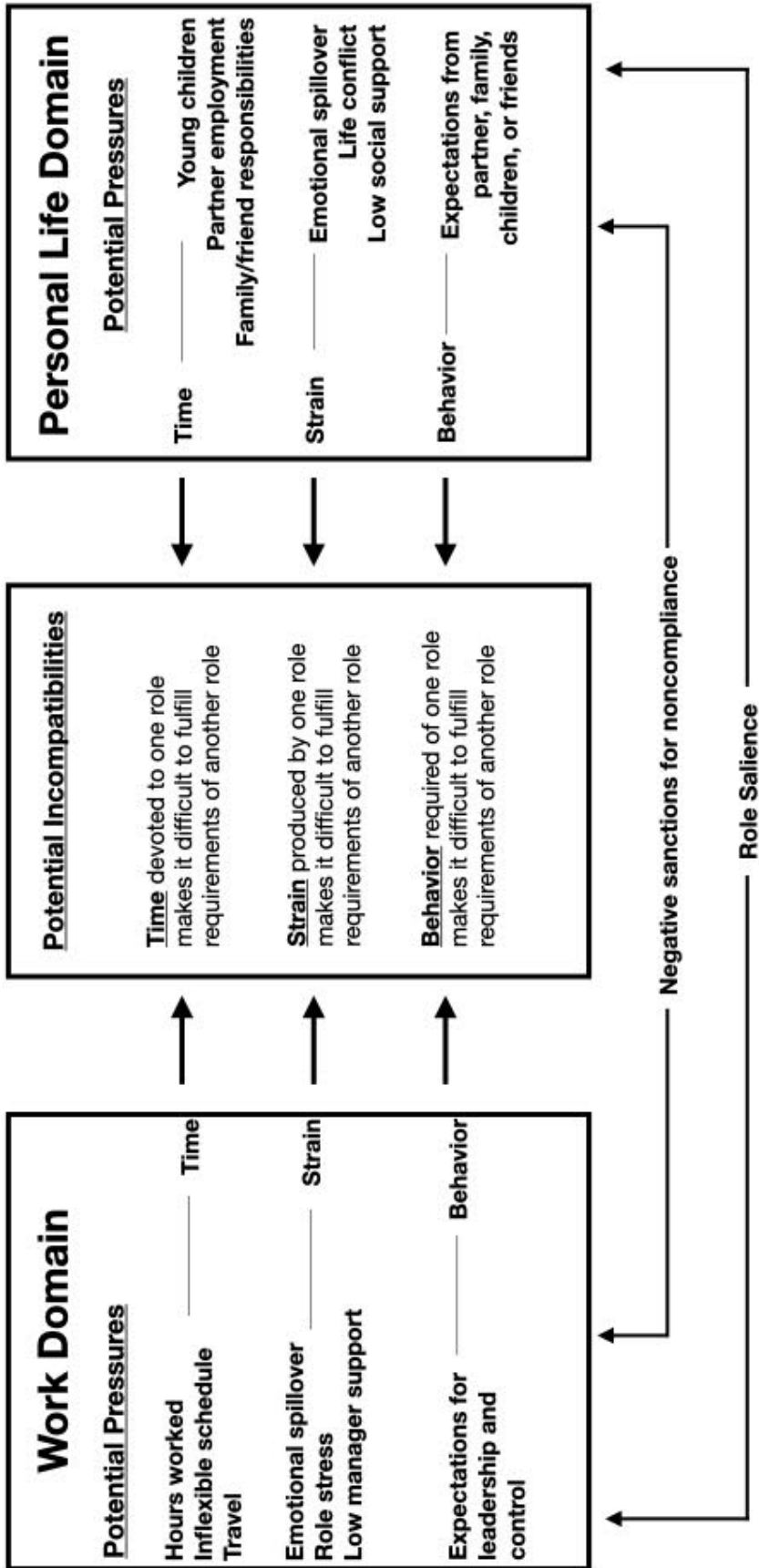


Figure 1. Work and Family Role Pressure Incompatibility

This figure highlights the work domain on the left and personal life domain on the right. It represents how time requirements, strain, and behavioral norms from both work and personal life can create potential incompatibilities and instances of imbalance and tension between work and personal life, as depicted in the center. That is, both the personal life domain and the work domain compete for prominence in a person's life, as depicted by the direction of the arrows in the model, resulting in tension as that individual seeks to balance the demands of the two domains. Also influencing the individual's actions are sanctions against that individual for noncompliance. That is, as an individual rejects the demands of one role domain, there are often negative consequences resulting from the decision to block requests or behaviors. For example, if an athletic administrator meets with a donor for dinner and misses a family birthday celebration, this could cause hostility, disappointment, and further strain in the family relationship. In contrast, if a head coach leaves the office early to attend a family function, assistant coaches and graduate assistant coaches may feel disappointed or frustrated with the head coach for choosing their personal life over work, and leaving them to complete coaching tasks. Finally, the traditional model theorizes an individual's level of role salience for a given domain also pushes and pulls them toward one domain or another. The individual achieves balance through various behaviors geared toward managing domain requests, consequences, and personal role saliency levels, as outlined in the previous sections.

The adaptive lifestyle model has many of the same elements as the traditional model (see Figure 2), but important elements have been modified.

The potential pressures from the work domain remain the same. Working in intercollegiate athletics is accompanied by many opportunities for pressure. The pressures of time, strain, and behavior continue to influence the individual and present them with challenges to which they must respond. However, the adaptive lifestyle model changes at this point. Rather than being faced with additional pressures from the personal life domain to which the individual must respond and negotiate to find balance, the individual brings the work domain pressures with them into the personal life domain. The personal life domain then adjusts to the pressures from the work domain, aligning with the individual in an attempt to accommodate the work domain and alleviate these pressures, as indicated by the directional arrows. For example, when a college coach is faced with the work domain pressure of working long hours in preparation for an upcoming game, their personal life role partners may respond to this pressure in a number of ways. They may respond by reducing expectations of time together or supporting the coach by granting additional time away from home without scorn. They may further support by providing an understanding attitude, characterized by sympathy and encouragement for the work domain. In this way, the personal life domain adjusts to and accommodates the work domain, reducing the potential incompatibilities and creating a harmonious and sustainable interface. The traditional model might suggest in this instance the personal life domain would compete with the work domain for the coach's attention, time, and energy. However, the adaptive model indicates in this instance the personal life role partners working with the coach to relieve pressure from the work domain, even if it results in reduced personal life domain involvement. It is important to note there are some instances in which the work domain might make accommodations for the personal life domain. This is most evident when personal relationships, such as spouse/partners, family, or close friends receive tickets to contests, visit the athletic offices, travel with the team on away contests, or when the athletic department hosts activities specifically for personal life role partners. However, in contrast to the personal life domain adapting to the work domain on a daily and weekly basis to relieve work domain pressure, these work domain accommodations are

not necessarily aimed at supporting a coach’s efforts to achieve balance between work and personal life. Rather, they are often an attempt by the work domain to reward the personal life role partners for their willingness to adapt to the work domain’s demanding nature, and allow them to directly take part in the work domain.

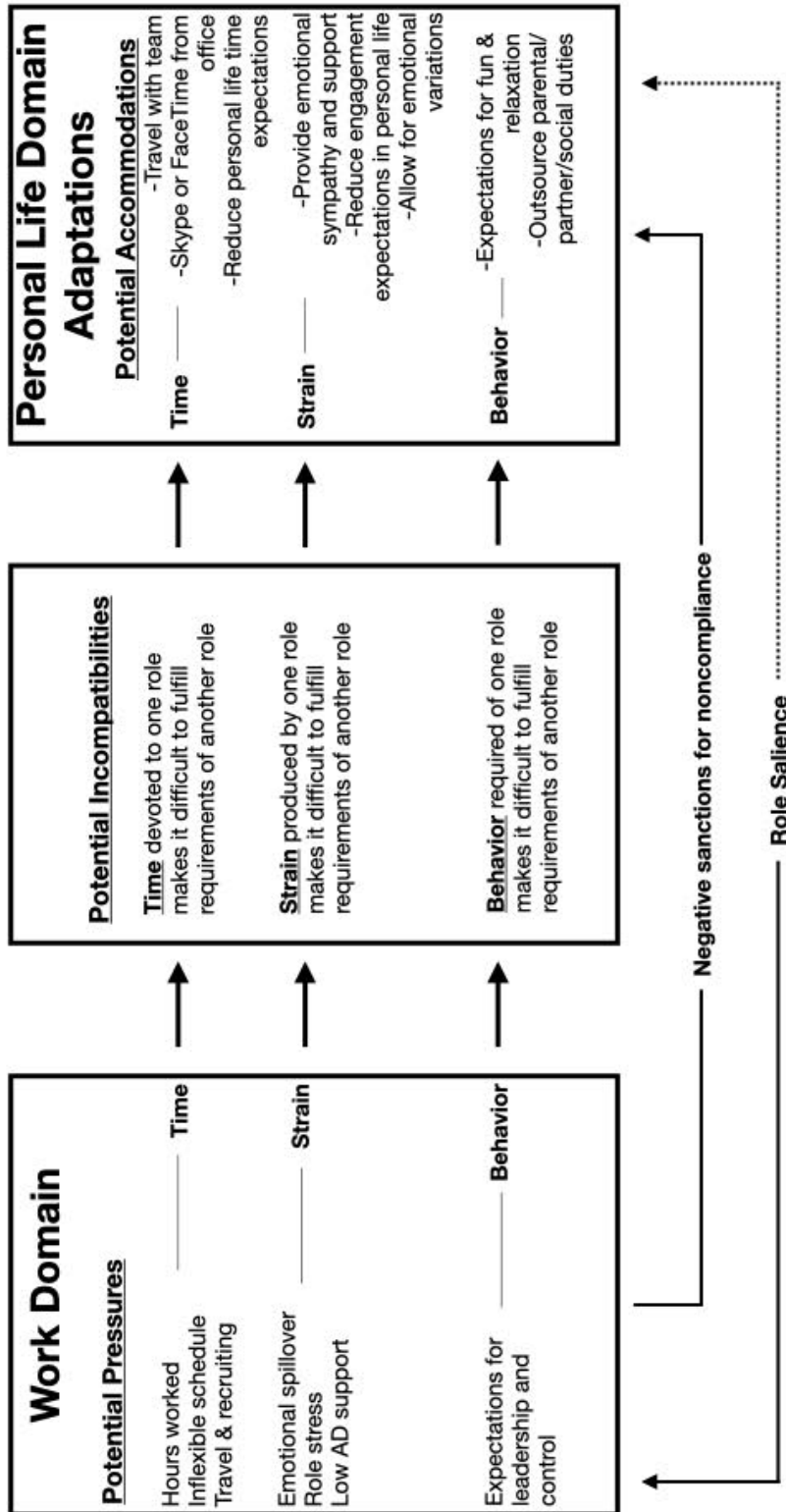


Figure 2. Adaptive Lifestyle for Work and Family Compatibility

Negative sanctions for noncompliance also influence the individual in the adaptive model. However, the model suggests negative sanctions will only flow from the work domain to the personal life domain. The requests from the work domain in intercollegiate athletics are clear, direct, public, and are often associated with penalties, such as the loss of a job in the most extreme cases. When an individual does not comply with them, the consequences can be severe and quick. Consequently, the individual has a strong motivation to comply with these requests so as to avoid any negative sanctions. Furthermore, when the personal life domain does not adjust to and accommodate the pressures from the work domain, negative sanctions may spillover into the personal life domain, causing additional challenges. For example, if the coach is fired, many in the personal life role system are affected as well. The personal life domain also may present negative sanctions for noncompliance to an individual in the form of frustration or anger toward the coach. However, the adaptive model suggests because these negative sanctions lack force, they simply do not create pressure from the personal life domain toward the coach to modify behavior over the long term. As a result, the model only depicts sanctions flowing from the work domain to the personal life domain in a single direction.

In the traditional model, role saliency influences both the work and personal life domains equally and is related to work-life conflict. As individuals develop high levels of saliency for a particular role, they commit to the role more fully and engage with the role in higher amounts of time and involvement. This high amount of time and involvement with one particular role can create role engulfment or the idea that this single role dominates all other life roles or simply overwhelms the individual (Adler & Adler, 1991). The traditional model suggests this will create tension between work and personal life. For example, as an individual with a high level of work role saliency engages with the work role, the personal life domain would put pressure on the individual to engage more with the personal life role partners to balance out the overall interface. The individual therefore experiences higher levels of conflict as they attempt to manage the demands of both domains, even though they have naturally higher levels of saliency with one domain or the other. The adaptive lifestyle model recognizes this tension, but suggests saliency in the personal life domain acts as a reprieve from the pressures of the work domain, rather than a pressure to engage more frequently or fully in the family domain.

Although much of the previous literature on the work-life interface within intercollegiate athletics focuses on women in coaching and administrative positions there is work on male coaches to suggest they face similar work-life conflict (see Graham & Dixon, 2014, 2017). This suggests that work-life conflict is not necessarily the gendered phenomena it was once thought to be. That is, it is not just women who need to refocus on adaptive strategies as opposed to balance strategies (Taylor et al., 2019). Additionally, since many athletic departments are headed by men – less than 10% of Division I athletic departments have a women athletic director – it is critical these men create cultures that promote adaptive strategies and policies that make the strategies possible, similar to those discussed by the women conference commissioners in Taylor and colleagues (2018). This culture that promotes adaptive lifestyles is especially important for those employees who work in high work salient positions, such as head coaches, as they may be more prone to work-life imbalance due to high workplace demands and pressure to win. Further, research on early-career women in intercollegiate athletics found some women made purposeful decisions to further their career at the expense of their personal life (Hardin et al., 2017), suggesting a high professional identity and an overwork culture that could ultimately lead to burnout and premature departure from the field. Engaging in adaptive strategies could potentially alleviate the presence of the overwork culture.

In general, the adaptive lifestyle model seeks to present a more realistic and accurate depiction of the relationship between work and personal life in the sport industry, especially at the intercollegiate athletic level. However, the experiences of those working in intercollegiate athletics is not exclusive. There are other occupations that may require personal life role partners to adapt and accommodate the work domain. For example, those working in military, police, or fire departments might also connect with the adaptive lifestyle model more closely than with traditional models depicting work-life conflict. That is, occupations or vocations characterized by high levels of imbalance are likely to connect with this depiction of work-life conflict.

## **Practical Implications of Adaptive Lifestyles**

Intercollegiate athletic administrators can begin creating adaptive policies and procedures for those within their departments by encouraging personal life role partner interactions on campus, in the athletic department, or athletic events. For example: encouraging spousal and children travel, flexible scheduling, and telecommuting. These policies alone will not be enough, however. Ultimately the adaptive policies will need to work to change organizational culture. These changes must come from the top down, starting with head coaches, athletic directors, or conference commissioners, which would signal a shift in leadership priority. This shift in priority would illustrate to employees that their personal well-being was valued as much as winning and revenue generation. Previous research on employee engagement has typically focused on strategies to increase engagement (Cunningham et al., 2005; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), however continually increasing engagement by way of increased in-office hours may lead to employee burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and premature departure from the industry. As such, leaders should focus on strategies to “work smarter” instead of longer. Leaders must also gain a better understanding of the non-work lives of the employees working in their departments. For example, the athletic director of a Power 5 institution may make enough money where his partner is able to stay at home with their kids. However, that same luxury may not be afforded to director of compliance or assistant director of ticketing. As such, it is critical for athletic directors – and leaders at every level – to understand the needs of their employees.

Employees working within intercollegiate athletic departments can begin incorporating small life role practices into their work schedules on their own as well. As suggested by the participants in the study conducted by Taylor et al., (2018), prioritizing adaptive strategies is important. They gave examples such as: workouts in the morning or during your workday, scheduling personal time off for important life events or hobbies in advance, or simply using travel for work to incorporate seeing a new city, culture, or catching up with an old friend. Additionally, some athletic department staff members are offered benefits that may provide opportunities to engage personal life role partners in work events. For example, family members may be given tickets to home competitions or allowed to travel with the team to away competitions. These benefits are not the same as work adapting to personal life, rather work rewarding family for adapting. Even so, it still allows for athletic department staff to engage with personal life role partners during time they normally would not.

It is important to note however, that the ability to prioritize these adaptive strategies is contingent on an administrator’s or coach’s position and level of autonomy. These benefits are not typically allocated to all athletic department staff, and are traditionally reserved for only senior-level staff and head coaches (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016). Those in support roles such as graduate assistants and early-career

professionals may not have such a luxury (Smith et al., 2007). By making these types of benefits more readily available to all staff, athletic departments can assist in fostering opportunities for staff members to integrate their personal life into the work environment. This would, again, signal a culture shift within the department. Recent work published in *Harvard Business Review* supports this culture shift noting an overwork culture, with elements of working long hours or taking limited vacations, and how such a culture is creating a negative workplace and contributing to the lack of women in leadership positions (Ely & Padavic, 2020). Within the business sector, organizations have started limiting work hours and days as well as increasing support for working from home, telecommuting, and utilizing vacation days in attempts to enhance organizational culture and decrease burnout (Eadicicco, 2019; Glaveski, 2018). Intercollegiate athletic departments should follow suit and offer these work-life supportive benefits. Furthermore, as intercollegiate athletic administrators look towards this adaptive lifestyle framework it is imperative to consider the next generation of leaders. Thus, these intercollegiate athletic administrators can begin having conversations with student interns, graduate assistants, or even guest speaking in sport management courses about how important it is to consider these adaptive lifestyle strategies when they are learning about, working in, and eventually managing sport organizations.

### **Future Research Utilizing Adaptive Lifestyles**

The concept of adaptive lifestyles introduces a new dynamic to intercollegiate athletic administration and coaching. It has been thought employees are attempting to find a work-life balance to avoid burnout and attrition, but the key is creating an adaptive lifestyle that synthesizes the time demands and responsibilities of work and personal life. This new conceptualization broadens the research possibilities within intercollegiate athletics.

Adaptive lifestyles can be applied to athletic trainers, athletic directors, academic counselors, coaches, and similar careers to examine the availability and implementation of an adaptive lifestyle to manage work and personal life demands. It is important to note that some populations may be examined for availability as opposed to implementation as some may have limited autonomy over their ability to utilize these adaptive strategies. For example, support staff such as athletic trainers or academic counselors may not be given the autonomy to utilize adaptive strategies, therefore researchers would need to focus on the availability of these resources versus usage with those populations. Adaptive lifestyles can also be applied to administrators in different stages of their career. This work would ultimately examine the culture within athletic departments and determine whether or not adaptive strategies were available for employees and how that impacted the individual employee. That is, how does organizational level use impact individual level outcomes. There has been a plethora of research on burnout, voluntary turnover intention, and satisfaction among these groups, but now scholars can utilize the adaptive lifestyle framework to further advance research in this area.

Building on the work of Dixon and colleagues (2008) and Dixon and Sagas (2007) which focused on the use of workplace policies and their relationships to worker satisfaction, the adaptive lifestyles model could also be utilized to examine how gender impacts the accessibility, communication, and usage, or expected usage, of adaptive strategies. This previous work suggests that although the availability of benefits is equal between men and women working in intercollegiate athletic departments, men report utilizing benefits more often. It is possible the usage of these benefits may impact an employee's ability to achieve an adaptive lifestyle

therefore influencing their tenure within the field. Since the majority of athletic departments are led by men, it would be interesting to examine what role the ability to achieve an adaptive lifestyle plays in organizational success.

Furthermore, as scholars adopt the adaptive lifestyle model as a theoretical framework from which to examine these respective populations, additional human resource and organizational behavior questions become salient. How do levels of power in athletic departments influence the pressure individuals feel from the work domain? How do sanctions for noncompliance to work domain requests influence the behaviors and choices of those working in sport? How does athletic department culture influence the degree to which adaptations in the family domain become necessary? In addition, scholars might explore nuances of the personal life domain and structure in more detail. How do these personal life adaptations come about? Are there ebbs and flows related to seasonality to the level and degree to which personal life role partners must support and respond to the pressures of the work domain? How are personal life role partners utilizing creative and innovative technologies to adapt to and accommodate the work domain? Researchers might also ask questions of those who exited intercollegiate athletics, examining why an adaptive lifestyle was not ultimately sustainable.

Additionally, a majority of the previous research utilized to create the updated adaptive lifestyles model was from research on women working in intercollegiate athletic departments. However, recent research on male coaches (Graham & Dixon 2014, 2017) and large, diverse samples of employees within intercollegiate athletics departments (Taylor et al., 2019) suggest experiences of work-life imbalance are not specific to women in coaching and administration. Therefore, it is important future research examines a diverse sample of intercollegiate athletic department employees including men, racial and ethnic minorities, those in non-traditional family structures, like same sex couples, and those in non-coaching or administration positions. Furthermore, future research should explore adaptive strategies from a multi-level approach; exploring how organization's (meso) usage of these strategies can affect individuals (micro) commitment to the organization. By examining these additional populations, researchers will be able to gain more understanding into the holistic culture of intercollegiate athletic departments and how to improve their offerings – and the effectiveness – of adaptive policies that support sustainability.

## *Conclusions*

The purpose of developing the current model was to illuminate how former theories are not adequate in exploring the work-life interface of intercollegiate athletic employees. Specifically, these theories do not take into account the pressures, expectations, and general nature of commitment to the work role that intercollegiate athletic employees face. Further, the proposed model explains specific suggestions intercollegiate athletic leaders could adopt to positively influence the aforementioned relationships of work and personal life. Thus, the aim of developing this model is to assist intercollegiate athletic administrators and researchers in advocating for more realistic and sustainable practices encompassing the adaptation of work and family.



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