



**Work-Family Conflict and Guilt among Athletic Trainers:
Influences of Family Role Performance, Years of Experience
and National Collegiate Athletic Association Level**

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The work-life interface continues to be a central focus for those working in sport; yet despite the growth in understanding the complexities of balancing work, life, and home roles much is yet to be explored. The aim of this study was to better understand the athletic trainer's experiences of work-family conflict and guilt while working for the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) member institutions as it pertained specifically to years of experience, age, and level within the NCAA. We used an online cross-sectional survey (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) to collect demographics, scales, and supporting questions. Results indicate that age and years of experience are variables that are associated with experiences of work-family conflict and guilt. Athletic trainers working in the collegiate setting are experiencing work-family guilt. Marriage and family are contributing factors for collegiate athletic trainers to experience work-family conflict, and feel work-family guilt. Our findings also imply that working in the Division I setting for the athletic trainer increases experiences of work-family conflict.

Keywords: role complexity, workplace considerations, work life balance

The culture of college sport demands an individual's time and energy, and for the professional working in this setting it can be draining and overwhelming. Since the early 2000's researchers have defined the sport workplace to be "greedy" and for success one must be willing to sacrifice their time (long hours, weekends, facetime) and have availability (24/7) (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019, 2021). The characterization of the sports setting to be consuming continues to stand as concerns around work addiction and workaholism are reported as well among those who work in college athletics (Eason et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019, 2021). To be successful in the sport setting, the ideal worker is often seen as someone who can dedicate a large portion of their time and energy to their work role, which often leaves them depleted for roles outside of the work setting (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Eason et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). Coaches and athletic trainers who are trying to meet the demands and expectations placed upon them may feel the need to choose their work over their home and personal lives; despite holding both roles as valuable and important. The strain placed on those working in the college sport setting have been reported, with coaches, athletic trainers, and support staff reporting concerns related to work-family conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Mazerolle et al., 2008). Although coaches, athletic trainers, and support staff share a similar backdrop to working in sport; the athletic trainer often finds themselves in an incongruent paradigm, in which their medical background can conflict with the win-at-all, play-at-all-costs mindset that can be accompanied with college sport (Mazerolle et al., 2017).

Recognizing that the work-life interface is multifaceted with complexities that are rooted within organizational, individual and sociocultural contexts (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dabbs & Graham, 2016; Dixon & Bruening, 2005) more research is needed to understand why conflicts may arise. From a conflict perspective, the consequences of work-family conflict and burnout have been well established in the athletic training literature (Oglesby et al., 2020). Among athletic trainers, the negative effects of burnout include emotional (irritability, depression), physical (headaches, high blood pressure, fatigue, weight concerns), and behavioral concerns (organizational and professional attrition, excessive drinking; (Oglesby et al., 2020). Behavioral concerns that may manifest from burnout should be of great concern to the employer as both occupational and organizational turnover may result in increased workload for the remaining staff, possible elimination of unfilled positions, and a cascade effect that may stimulate the turnover of other employees (Price, 2001). Literature in other fields has also started to highlight the potential impact these emotional, physical, and behavioral consequences of burnout have on patient care and outcomes (Argentero et al., 2008). Much of the literature in athletic training and those working in sport (Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008; Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015) have focused on the organizational variables impacting conflict (i.e. hours worked, job demands, etc.), while the individual or sociocultural factors have received less attention. Additionally, most of the organizational research in athletic training has focused on the collegiate setting or more specifically the NCAA Division I setting (*NCSA College Recruiting*, n.d.) More research is needed better understand the influence of NCAA division levels, as the organizational differences of each level could have implications on the employee working in the setting; as it certainly has an impact on the student-athlete's experience (Judge et al., 2018; *NCSA College Recruiting*, n.d.).

Recent literature suggests that athletic trainers are experiencing work-family guilt, mostly due to allegiances to both their family lives and their professional roles as athletic trainers (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). This suggests that athletic trainers have both a strong professional identity as well as a high desire for family engagement and participation. Little is known about how athletic trainers identify with family roles, and how their values and beliefs surrounding their personal roles can impact experiences of conflict and guilt.

Literature Review

Working Within the Sport Organization

Employment in healthcare and sport settings fundamentally have many differences, but share one common thread: *the need to be physically present to complete job related tasks and responsibilities, that at times can include long hours, that extend into the evenings and weekends* (Bruening & Dixon, 2008b; Dabbs et al., 2016; Graham & Dixon, 2014). Role theory suggests that an individual at any given time will engage in multiple roles including occupational, familial, and leisure roles; each giving satisfaction as well as juxtaposed demands on time and energy, a platform for discord and conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003, 2006). For the athletic trainer working within the sport organization, navigating the organizational expectations placed upon them can be demanding, but manageable; the challenge, however, can be when trying to perform their professional roles which is centered around patient care and advocacy in a culture that demands them to push their limits. Athletic trainers have reported feeling pressure to return an athlete to play earlier or even overlook an injury to support the athlete's continued play for the team (Lacy et al., 2020). The role incongruence that can manifest can cause conflict as well as emotionally draining (Lacy et al., 2020; Mazerolle et al., 2017; Weuve et al., 2014). Experiences of job burnout, workplace bullying, and work-family conflict have been reported among athletic trainers in the college setting; workplace issues that manifest themselves due to myriad of factors but underlying factors include the culture of sport; since researchers have portrayed it as demanding, greedy, and sets high expectations for all those employed within its borders (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Lacy et al., 2020; Mazerolle et al., 2017; Oglesby et al., 2020; Schenewark et al., 2012).

Athletic trainers report working long hours, but those who work more than 40 hours a week are often isolated to the sport setting (Bruening & Dixon, 2008b; M. A. Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008; Mazerolle & Eason, 2015, 2018; Mazerolle & Pitney, 2018). In combination to those long hours, athletic trainers are often not in control of setting their schedules, face working nights and weekends, and are required to travel to away competitions, which reduces the time available for family obligations and personal hobbies (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008). Navigating the athletics lifestyle is often associated with an athletic trainer's mindset and ability to be successful in the workplace. This is often necessary as staffing shortages are reported within the collegiate settings, where many sports medicine departments often do not meet the recommendation for appropriate staffing among colleges/universities (Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015).

The NCAA's policy changes regarding medical coverage has caused an increased time commitment for both the athletic trainer and the athlete. This includes longer seasons, year-round conditioning, and the inclusion of non-traditional seasons (Goodman et al., 2010). Due to many institutions not complying with these set guidelines and the NCAA policy changes, many athletic trainers work a likely minimum of forty-hours and a more likely sixty-hour work week, while

also working six to seven days with little to no time off (Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Mazerolle & Eason, 2015).

The NCAA infrastructure as it exists now boosts three subdivisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III (*Overview*, n.d.). The subdivisions were developed to align common institutions (size, philosophy), to foster more opportunities for competition for student-athletes (*Our Three Divisions*, n.d.). Research examining work-family conflict and other work-related issues in sport rarely examines the impact of NCAA subdivisions; yet implications could exist. For example, NCAA Division I institutions generally have larger student bodies, boost large athletics budgets, and offer the most scholarships for sport participation (*Comparing Competition Levels in College Sports*, n.d.; Griffith & Johnson, n.d.). The NCAA Division I setting is often viewed as one that promotes win-at-all costs mindset; and the pressures to win often drives the workplace culture (Lacy et al., 2020) which can have implications on the employee. Research directly linking work-family conflict to NCAA Division level are void in the literature; yet there is data suggesting the experiences of the athlete vary considerably between the NCAA Division I and NCAA Division III settings (Griffith & Johnson, n.d.).

Work-Family Conflict Conceptualized

Work-family conflict has been widely studied within sport and simplistically is a conflict between the time and energy available for one's life roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Many assumptions are made within this framework, but fundamentally it speaks to the concept that time is limited, and when participating in multiple life roles, conflict is inevitable (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Moreover, it suggests that when an individual becomes a parent or assumes a caregiver role, the struggle to find balance becomes more problematic. It is important to recognize that within the athletic training profession, regardless of sex, age, and family/marital status; conflict can arise (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2018).

Many athletic trainers agree that the time intensive nature of the athletic training role within sport; is problematic particularly as the work culture is not sympathetic of family responsibilities or personal interests (Eberman & Kahanov, 2013; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Mazerolle, Burton, et al., 2015; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008). In fact, many female athletic trainers depart the profession by the age of 30, as they struggle to find balance between their work roles, life, and their desires to be present and actively participate in their role as a mother (Eason et al., 2021; Eberman & Kahanov, 2013; Goodman et al., 2010; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). The departure has been linked to the woman's own personal struggles to fit into the sociocultural expectations placed upon a woman who chooses to work and parent, simultaneously (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Palmer & Leberman, 2007). **The emotional response to the struggles to balance both can be interwoven into a working woman's personal guilt to be present at work, as well as at home without having to sacrifice in either place.** There is growing support however, that male athletic trainers also report struggles of finding balance, as they too want a more active role at home or time for personal hobbies and leisure activities (Eason et al., 2021; Eberman & Kahanov, 2013; Mazerolle, Eason, et al., 2015; Singe et al., 2020).

The desire to participate in family life, not only to be present but to be active and to have the time to enjoy parenting and completing household tasks has been discussed as a challenge for athletic trainers in the collegiate setting (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). Conceptually, family role performance speaks to an individual's ability to fulfill what is expected of them within their family dynamic (Chen et al., 2014). Although the concept of family role performance has yet to

be examined in athletic training; there are implications that athletic trainers desire the chance to be active in their task-oriented roles, as well as the relationship within their self-defined family (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). However, due to the time constraints placed upon them with the expectations of being available 24/7 as well as traveling and working nights and weekends; this may not be possible and lead to work-family conflict.

Historically, work-family conflict has been viewed as occurring among working professionals who were female and married. In fact, in athletic training, much of the attention is focused on female athletic trainers leaving the profession due to family demands. Traditionally men have been viewed as the breadwinner, providing financially for the family, whereas women are viewed as caretakers thus, they burden more of the household and parenting workload. These stereotypes on gender role performance have often suggested that men would not likely experience work-family conflict (Shockley et al., 2017). Research, however, continues to demonstrate that men and women are experiencing work-family conflict (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Singe et al., 2020), and both sexes recognize that family time and parenting are important aspects of their identities (Shockley et al., 2017).

Experiences of Work-Family Guilt

Guilt can be defined as an emotion that originates from an individual's own personal perceptions that have violated a norm or standard of behavior and it is highly individualized (Tangney, 2001). Work-family guilt manifests itself when an individual believes they are not able to fully engage in work or life roles and often occurs when that individual is trying to manage work and family roles that are competing. Those who experience guilt believe their behavior was wrong or inadequate and often leads to feelings of regret (Tangney, 2001). While guilt is often perceived as a negative emotion, it is believed that it may prompt individuals to maintain relationships as it can serve as a motivating factor. Additionally, feelings of guilt have been linked to empathy and altruism as there is an understanding of the suffering of others (O'Connor et al., 1997).

Identifying with one's work is part of the professional identity process, and though that can lead to job satisfaction, finding satisfaction is a small part of the conceptualization of one's identity. So, when a person becomes work-centered it can lead to work addiction; a confounding variable for work-family guilt. The concept of work-family guilt is in its infancy of investigation within athletic training, and for the most part it has been investigated in unison with work-family conflict; largely as work-family predicts experiences of work-family guilt (Eason et al., 2021; Singe et al., 2022). Athletic trainers are at risk for work addiction, often as they find satisfaction in their role in healthcare and being a part of the team (Eason, Gilgallon, et al., 2020). In some cases, their passion for their role as an athletic trainer has led to experiences of work-family guilt; as when they take time away from their jobs to attend to household responsibilities or parenting roles, they experience feelings of guilt due to their absence from their work role (Eason et al., 2021; Singe et al., 2022).

Experiences of work-family conflict can stimulate emotions, particularly that of guilt. Guilt, simply is an individual outcome of work-family conflict (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). The concept of mom or parent guilt first emerged as more women entered the profession of athletic training and tried to balance their professional roles as well as their motherhood roles (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). Work-family guilt is a broader concept which illustrates one's internal struggle that can occur from attempting to balance work, family, and life (Tangney, 1990). Athletic trainers working in the collegiate setting are experiencing work-family guilt (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020). Although sex differences are often speculated to occur there have yet to be reports

linking sex to work-family guilt; only having children has been found to cause work-family guilt (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020). Parenthood is a demanding life role and coupled with a professional role that is also time consuming can create the platform for work-family guilt. Moreover, when an athletic trainer is required to work more hours, there is an increased likelihood to experience work-family guilt (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020). Limited research exists on work-family guilt within athletic training, as it is a newer concept to the work-life paradigm. One area yet to be explored centers on experiences of work-family conflict, work-family guilt, and the level within the collegiate setting. To our knowledge, no study has explored the differences between the various NCAA divisions in one study (Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015). There continues to be speculation, yet no empirical evidence that the NCAA Division I setting has the potential to expect more of athletic trainers who are working in the setting. An expectation that can increase the likelihood that work-family guilt can occur, along with conflict.

Engaging in Life Roles and Family Life

Conceptually, the term work-family conflict implies that conflict occurs because an individual is married and has children (i.e., family; Shockley et al., 2017). The assumption of life roles that require time and energy outside of the workplace, is considered a precursor to conflict and suggests that a person who is unmarried without children should not experience conflicts. These conjectures, however, have been proven to be false for the athletic trainer, as regardless of age, sex, marital and family status work-family conflict occurs (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Eason et al., 2021; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Singe et al., 2020). Organizational variables, not individual ones are the largest contributing factor to conflicts for the athletic trainer; including the time-consuming nature of the job, the travel load, the timeframe of the hours, and the inflexible nature of the work schedule (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008). These variables can impact anyone's ability to find time outside of the workplace, including basic tasks such as laundry or cleaning, in addition to personal hobbies or leisure activities.

Research within sport organizations and specifically in athletic training, has yet to explore the concept of participation in family or household activities. The underlying assumptions regarding work-family conflict have come on the heels of gender role theories and stereotyping of gender roles within the family domain. Stereotypes regarding gender roles within the family have been relatively stable over time; men are the "breadwinners" and females take on the traditional child-bearing and nurturing role (Shockley et al., 2017). This would suggest that because men provide for the family through financial means, that they would experience less conflict than women who participate more to the family by providing care and oversight of the home. Despite the stereotypical speculations about gender and work-family conflict and work-family guilt (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011); marriage and family appear to be more of a factor than gender (Eason et al., 2021; Singe & Mensch, 2021). However, division of chores and values associated with family roles, have yet to be explored. Some evidence exists that women athletic trainers struggle to find balance between work and family, as a remarkable decline is seen in the number of female athletic trainers between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-five years old, while the male population stayed relatively consistent from the ages of twenty-seven to forty-two (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). This decrease has been noted to be due to the increased family responsibilities during that period of life that are deemed to be a female's responsibility (Goodman et al., 2010; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Mazerolle, Burton, et al., 2015). Despite these studies, family role participation has not been investigated to directly link work-family conflict, gender, and attrition.

Due to the extensive hours, travel requirements for away competitions, and inflexible schedules, the participation in the family domain for many athletic trainers often seems to fall short to work-related responsibilities (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008; Singe et al., 2020). As many athletic trainers express the importance of both family roles and work-related responsibilities, the struggle for time between work and family can not only cause conflict for the professional, but for the family as well (Eason et al., 2021; Singe & Mensch, 2021). Family role participation involves both task related responsibilities (e.g. household chores) and relationship-oriented roles (ex. providing emotional support to family members). As many athletic trainers often lack the time to do simple tasks such as grocery shopping or folding laundry due to their extensive time/days spent working, other important family responsibilities such as picking children up from school, being present at family dinner, or attending sporting events are often familial roles that are difficult to uphold for professionals working in the sport workplace (Eason et al., 2021; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Singe et al., 2020). Upholding these responsibilities and being able to take part in family-oriented experiences is often just as important to these professions as their demanding work-related responsibilities. As previous literature has shown, regardless of sex, age, professional setting, or marital status of the athletic trainer, guilt and work family conflict can arise when work interferes with their role as a parent/family member (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2018). Finding a balance between work and family roles is a key factor to being successful in today's sport culture, while also satisfying the need to be present in one's family (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Graham & Dixon, 2017).

Purpose

As research continues to examine the complexities of working in sport, while balancing personal interests, and family obligations there is a need for a better understanding of an athletic trainer's participation in their family roles, as well as their experiences with feelings of guilt when working in the collegiate setting. The purpose of this study was to expand our understanding of an athletic trainer's family identity to extrapolate our knowledge of the factors that contribute to work-family conflict and guilt. Additionally, comparison of divisions within the college setting is warranted to assess whether experiences are similar. With the above in mind, the following hypotheses were made:

- H_{1a}: Athletic trainers with 3 or less years of experience will report higher levels of work-family conflict than those athletic trainers with more than 3 years of experience.
- H_{1b}: Athletic trainers with 3 or less years of experience will report lower levels of work-family guilt than those athletic trainers with more than 3 years of experience.
- H_{2a}: College athletic trainers in the Division I setting will report higher levels of work-family conflict compared to those athletic trainers in Division II, and Division III.
- H_{2b}: College athletic trainers in the Division I setting will report higher levels of work-family guilt compared to those athletic trainers in Division II, and Division III.
- H₃: College athletic trainers working in the Division I setting will report lower family role participation compared to those athletic trainers in Division II, and Division III.

H_{4a}: College athletic trainers 30 years and younger will report lower levels of family role participation than those who are in the 31-49, or above 50 age groups.

H_{4b}: College athletic trainers 30 years and younger will report lower levels of work-family conflict compared to those athletic trainers who are in the 31-49, or above 50 age groups.

H_{4c}: College athletic trainers 30 years and younger will report lower levels of work-family guilt compared to those athletic trainers who are 31-49, or above the age of 50.

H₅: Children and marital status are predictive of work-family guilt scores among collegiate athletic trainers.

Method

Study Design

We used an online cross-sectional survey (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) to collect data on collegiate athletic trainer's family role performance (FRP) (Chen et al., 2014) related to several participant demographics and work-family guilt (Gonçalves et al., 2018) as well as work-family conflict (Carlson et al., 2000). All scales used in this study are reliable, valid measures (Table 1) of the constructs included for measurement. Two of the scales (work-family conflict and work-family guilt) have previously been used within the athletic training literature. The survey instruments used in this study have been previously validated (Rynkiewicz et al., 2022), therefore the authors chose to not edit any of the questions from the FRP instrument, work-family guilt scale, and work-family conflict scale. The study was approved by XXX's institutional review board prior to data collection.

Table 1
Survey Scales Validity

SCALE ITEM	Previously Validated	Our Scale
FRP	$\alpha=.70-.91$	$\alpha=.89$
WFC	$\alpha=.78-.87$	$\alpha=.89$
WFG	$\alpha=.84-.86$	$\alpha=.76$

Participants

Recruitment. Prior to recruitment, a list of all colleges and universities offering NCAA athletic programs was created (D1=351, D2=307, D3=442) (*Schools Index*, 2022). From that list, the athletics staff directory websites of each institution were sought out, to determine a contact email list for all athletic trainers employed within those colleges and universities. This process led to a list of 6,110 athletic trainers employed in the NCAA collegiate setting. Emails were distributed to the list in the Fall of 2020, yielding 757 responses (12% response rate). Review of the data, with filtering of the inclusion criteria (clinically working 50% or more) and completing all sections of the survey, 586 responses remained for data analyses (77% completion rate). Our

response rate is comparable to other survey-based research published within the last two years; which ranges between 10-13% (Rynkiewicz et al., 2022).

Sample. A total of 586 athletic trainers (210 males (35.8%), 374 females (63.8%), 1 gender variant/non-conforming (0.2%), and 1 who chose “prefers not to answer” (0.2%) completed this study. The age range for the participants was 21 - 70 years, average age 33 ± 9 . Participants worked an average of 59 ± 12 hours per week in season and had an average of 10 ± 8 years of experience. Table 2 provides additional demographic information.

Table 2

Respondent Demographic Data (N=586)

	Sample Population
Demographic	Frequency No. (%)
Gender	
Male	210 (35.8)
Female	374 (63.8)
Gender Variant/Non-Conforming	1 (0.2)
Prefer not to answer	1 (0.2)
Marital Status	
Single	189 (32.3)
In a relationship	111 (18.9)
Engaged	19 (3.2)
In a domestic relationship	3 (0.5)
Married	252 (43.0)
Separated	2 (0.3)
Divorced	7 (1.2)
Widowed	2 (0.3)
Children	
0	387 (66)
1	62 (10.6)
2	85 (14.2)
3	28 (4.8)
4	10 (1.7)
5	1 (0.2)
Currently Pregnant	11 (1.9)
1 child & Pregnant	2 (0.3)
Overall Total (N)	586

Questionnaire. The web-based questionnaire (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) included a demographic section and 35 questions related to the aforementioned variables. Demographic questions were related to participant age, sex, marital and family status, ethnicity, highest level of education, National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) District association, and years as a certified athletic trainer. No individual personal information (e.g. institutional name) was collected to help maintain our respondents privacy.

Family Role Performance Scale. Family role participation was measured by the FRP scale developed and validated by Chen et al (Chen et al., 2014). The 8-item scale consists of two subscales: task-orientated (4-items) and relationship-orientated (4-items) FRP. Respondents' are asked to what extent they thought they fulfilled what was expected of them within their current family life. All scale items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1=did not fulfill expectations, to 5=fulfilled expectations completely (score range low 8- high 40). Sample questions included: 'Completed household responsibilities' (task), and 'Provided emotional support to my family members' (relationship).

Work-Family Conflict. To evaluate participant's experiences with work-family conflict and the bidirectional nature we used a scale with 3 subscales developed and validated (Carlson et al., 2000). This 18-item questionnaire has been previously used in the athletic training population and proven to be a valid, reliable measure of work-family conflict (Rynkiewicz et al., 2022). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) with statements regarding their work and life roles and how they interfere with one another. Sample items included: "The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities," "I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family", and "The problem-solving behaviors I use in my job are not effective in resolving problems at home." The subscales are totaled with a maximum score of 45 for work-family conflict; a higher score indicates a higher level of work-family conflict.

Work-Family Guilt. To evaluate participant's experiences with work-family guilt we utilized a scale developed and validated by Goncalves et al. (2018). The scale which has two subscales: work interference with family guilt (WIFG) and family interference with work guilt (FIWG) is rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree). The scores on each item are averaged together to determine a total score of work-family guilt; with higher levels indicated higher levels of guilt.

Data Collection

Each potential participant was sent an email invitation with a brief description of the study's purpose, inclusion criteria, and steps for completing the survey (including the link to the Qualtrics survey, Provo, UT). After indicating consent, the participant was asked if they were a certified athletic trainer, employed in the collegiate setting, and practicing clinically for a minimum of 50% of their overall job duties. The inclusion criteria were specific, as the aims of the study were to best understand the complexities of participation in family life, and the impact that may have on work-family conflict of those who are providing care to patients in the collegiate setting. The completion of those screening questions then led the participant to a series of demographic questions followed by the three aforementioned scales. One-week and three-week reminders were sent electronically to encourage participants to complete the survey. Upon termination of recruitment, the data was screened for inclusion criteria, and data reduction occurred if the respondent did not meet our inclusion criteria.

Data Analysis

The independent variables for this study included age, NCAA collegiate level, and years of experience as a certified athletic trainer. The dependent variables included levels of work-

family guilt, family role performance, and work-family conflict, which were later compared to the respondent demographics. We set the a priori level at $p=.05$, prior to analysis. Data was collected using Qualtrics LLC Software Program (Provo, Utah), and downloaded into Excel (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA). Respondent demographics, work-family guilt scores, family role performance scores, and work-family conflict scores were calculated and are displayed here as frequencies, percentages, means, minimums, maximums, and standard deviations. Non-parametric tests were utilized to determine the relationship between work family guilt, family role performance, work family conflict, age, division, and years of experience. These specific tests were selected to determine the statistical significance of the reported findings. To further investigate the data, we decided to group age into 3 groups: 30 years old and under, 31-49 years old, and over 50 years old. Similarly, we grouped years of experience into two groups: those who had less than 3 years of experience and those who have 3 or more years of experience. We decided to group age into these three groups to isolate newly certified athletic trainers (under 30), those who have been in the field for more than 10 years (31-49), and those who have the most experience in the field (over 50). Several studies in athletic training have found athletic trainers leave the profession around the age of 30, due to starting families. This served as our first cut-off point (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Mazerolle et al., 2008a). Our second group was formed as within past studies, the majority of athletic trainers fall within the 31-49 years of age category, as well as this is when most who have children the age of those children ranges from 6-18 (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Mazerolle et al., 2008a). The final category was based upon career longevity of an athletic trainer (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Mazerolle et al., 2008a). Similarly for years of experience, we wanted to isolate those who are new to the profession (under 3 years). The purpose of this was to investigate the stress, burnout, and conflict in those who are still adjusting to their career, and those who have built their career foundation.

Results

College athletic trainers with less than 3 years of experience reported statistically significantly ($U = 23237.00$, $p=.005$) lower WFC scores (43.90 ± 10.37) than those with 3 or more years of experience (46.44 ± 11.77). This results in rejecting H1a.

Athletic trainers with less than 3 years of experience reported a statistically significantly ($U = 21304.00$, $p < .001$) lower mean scores (20.58 ± 5.28) of work-family guilt than those with 3 or more years of experience (22.74 ± 5.39). This supports H1b.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed a statistically significant ($\chi^2[2]=7.59$, $p=.022$) difference between NCAA divisions within the WFC scale. Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's test indicated that NCAA Division I setting scores were observed to be significantly higher from those in NCAA Division III ($p=.006$). There was no statistical difference discovered between NCAA Division I and NCAA Division II ($p=.492$), nor between NCAA Division II and NCAA Division III ($p=.148$). Similarly, a Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed a statistically significant ($\chi^2[2]=7.48$, $p=.024$) difference between divisions within the WFG scale. Dunn's test revealed that Division I setting scored statistically significantly higher from those in Division III ($p=.011$). There were no significant differences between Division I and Division II ($p=.097$), and between Division II and Division III ($p=.676$). These results allow us to accept H2a and H2b.

College athletic trainers in the Division I setting reported a mean score of 27.71 ± 6.27 in the FRP scale. Division II and Division III scored a mean of 28.73 ± 6.30 and 28.92 ± 5.17 respectively. There was no statistical difference ($p=.111$) revealed thus, our H3 is rejected.

College athletic trainers under the age of 30 reported a mean score of 27.9 ± 6.20 on the FRP scale, while those who were 31 to 49 years old scored 28.33 ± 5.91 , and those over the age of 50 scored a mean of 29.85 ± 4.58 . A Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed there are no statistically significant differences between these groups ($p=.240$). Thus, we reject hypothesis 4a. Similarly, college athletic trainers under the age of 30 reported a mean score of 44.67 ± 10.84 on the WFC scale, where those who were 31 to 49 years old scored 47.43 ± 11.91 , and those over the age of 50 scored a mean of 44.61 ± 13.80 . A Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed statistically significantly ($\chi^2[2]=8.45$, $p=.015$) differences between age groups within the WFC scale. Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's post hoc analysis revealed that those under 30 years old were significantly lower from those in the 31-49 years age group ($p=.005$). There was no significant difference between 50 plus years and the 31-49 age group (.189), as well as the 50 plus years and the under 30 years age group (.998). Due to these results, we reject hypothesis 4b.

College athletic trainers under the age of 30 reported a mean score of 21.50 ± 5.32 on the WFG scale, those between the ages of 31 and 49 scored a mean of 23.33 ± 5.31 , and those over the age of 50 reported a mean score of 21.79 ± 6.25 . A Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed statistically significantly ($\chi^2[2]=16.85$, $p<.001$) differences between age groups within the WFG scale. Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's post hoc analysis revealed that those under 30 years old were significantly lower from those in the 31-49 years age group ($p<.001$). There was no significant difference between 50 plus years and the 31-49 years age group ($p=.171$), as well as the 50 plus years and under 30 years age groups ($p=.601$). Supports hypothesis 4c.

The analysis yielded a weak positive correlation between children and WFG scores ($r_s[585] = .244$, $p < .001$), and a weak positive correlation between marital status and WFG scores ($r_s[584] = .249$, $p < .001$). The multiple regression revealed that Model 1, children significantly contributed to the regression model ($F[1,582] = 10.87$, $p=.001$) and accounted for 1.8% of the variance in WFG. Model 2 included the addition of marital status which revealed that both children and marital status significantly contributed to the regression model ($F[1,582] = 24.11$, $p < .001$). Children and marital status accounted for 5.7% of the variance in WFG, with a significant change in R^2 . Confirming H5.

Discussion

As athletic trainers continue to face challenges with work-life balance, understanding the factors that contribute to it is important. Developing strategies to manage work-life balance may not be effective or mitigate the stress related to managing work and home life if we don't have a strong understanding of the causative factors. Limited research is available in athletic training on an athletic trainer's ability to fulfill their family life roles, and its impact on work-family conflict and work-family guilt. Our results demonstrate that newly certified athletic trainers, with less than three years of experience have less work-family conflict and guilt. We also found that working in the Division I setting can have a greater impact on work-family conflict, but mostly compared to the Division III setting. We do recognize that within our sample work-family conflict was present for all levels within the NCAA collegiate setting, however the NCAA Division I reported higher levels than those in the NCAA Division III setting. Prior to our study, work-family conflict was seen as occurring across the collegiate setting regardless of the subdivisions (Eason et al., 2014; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle, Bruening, Casa, et al., 2008; Mazerolle, Eason, et al., 2015; Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015). However, for our sample those who were in the Division I setting had greater levels of work-family conflict in the Division III setting.

Years of Experience and Age

Transition to practice for the athletic trainer often accompanies a period of higher stress and role uncertainty (Kilbourne et al., 2021). We hypothesized the athletic trainers with 3 years or less would experience higher levels of conflict, as we believed they would focus their time and energies on becoming legitimized and inducted into their work role. This in theory, would lead to conflicts with their personal lives as it reduced time available for other life roles as well as drained the available resources they may have to engage in their personal hobbies and leisure activities. In the early research examining work-family conflict among athletic trainers, many of the young professionals reported challenges with their social lives, due to their job demands (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008). The impact was seen mostly in managing their social relationships, and trying to find time to accommodate their personal hobbies and interests, not as much their family obligations (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008).

Despite the previous literature and our hypothesis, we found that athletic trainers with less than 3 years of certification reported lower levels of conflict, as compared to those with 3 or more years of experience on the job. Perhaps this speaks to better professional on-boarding both from an educational perspective, as well as from an organizational framework. Athletic trainers as part of their educational training complete an immersive clinical experience; designed to mimic an apprenticeship, this may help serve as a conduit to a smooth transition to practice as well as reduce stress (Harris et al., 2020). Work-family conflict manifests when an individual is under strain, and when they perceive their demands in their work role to limit their satisfaction in their other roles, so when an athletic trainer is confident in their profession, conceivably that spillover is reduced.

Previous research has found that professionals who are between the ages of 41 to 57 (the Gen X-ers) experience more work-family conflict than those who are 25 to 41 (millennials) and those who are over 58 (baby boomers; Bennett et al., 2017). The age or generational differences were also found among our sample, in which those who were under the age of 30 experienced less conflict, and those who were categorized as Gen-X-ers had the most conflict. Many individuals get married and start a family after the age of 30 (Press, 2022), and thus why conflict is likely greater between the ages of 30-50 (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008 Part 1). We did not ask the age of the children, it is possible that many of our participants had children between the ages of 6 -18; a large contributor to experiences of work-family conflict (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Bennett et al., 2017).

Our results give additional credence to the shifting of priorities, and to life course theory which suggests there is a period of time when career development and the growth of family through marriage and children can simultaneously occur, and lead to conflict (Demerouti et al., 2012). To explain our findings specific to years of experience and experiences of work-family conflict, it may be conceivable to assume that those with less than 3 years of experience are younger and less likely to be married or have children. This could lead to the assumption that without the life role demands of being a parent or spouse an individual would be less likely to experience work-family conflict. More research would be needed to support these assumptions, but the multifaceted individual-level factors that impact the work-life interface are apparent in the effort to explain findings. Data also revealed that work-family guilt was lower for those who were younger, and with less years of experience. Again, this makes sense, as many of those under the age of 30 or with less than 3 years as athletic trainers are unmarried, or without children, which can impact experiences of work-family guilt. Work-family guilt is reported among those athletic trainers who are parents and are married (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020; Singe et al., 2022). Experiences of work-family guilt for married athletic trainers, and also those who

are parents demonstrate the negative emotions that can arise when having to choose work over family time.

Impact of Collegiate Level on Work-Family Conflict and Guilt

Prior to this study, very little research has been done to compare the levels within the collegiate, and in fact they are often investigated from a holistic perspective and not levels (i.e., I vs. II vs. III). Only one study that we are aware of within athletic training, has looked at differences between the three levels, and it found work-family conflict occurred regardless of the level (Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015). Still, we hypothesized that athletic trainers in the Division I setting will experience higher levels of work-family conflict when compared to those athletic trainers outside of the Division I setting. Previous research has suggested that the more time and energy one has to place on job responsibilities, the more likely they are to experience higher levels of work-family conflict (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020). This is likely the reason behind our findings in this study. Although we did find significant differences between the NCAA Division I and III levels, we did not find differences between Division I and II. The NCAA Division III setting is known for its student first, athlete second mentality (Musico, n.d.); thus, finding differences between the Division I and III setting is understandable. When there is a balanced perspective between athletics, and life; often the time demands are reduced for the athletic trainer (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016).

It is important to note the NCAA Division II setting has similar characteristics as the NCAA Division I setting. This is most notable with scholarships and other financial contributions to maintain the NCAA requirements for sponsorship at the Division I or II level. Continued research is warranted on experiences of workplace challenges and issues among the various levels within the NCAA setting as recent evidence suggests that the NCAA Division I setting employs more full-time athletic trainers and staff members that provide direct care to their patients (Baugh et al., 2020). Workload and demands of the job have previously been linked to experiences of work-family conflict and burnout (DeFreese & Mihalik, 2016; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008). Yet, for our respondents who worked in the NCAA Division III setting, which staffs considerably less than the NCAA Division I setting, work-family conflict was less.

Like work-family conflict, little is known about work-family guilt between the various employment settings, let alone the levels within the collegiate setting (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020; Mazerolle, Pitney, et al., 2015). We aimed to close this knowledge gap and predicted that the time spent working would have a negative spillover, and the athletic trainers working in the NCAA Division I setting would report more work-family guilt than those in the other levels. Because work-family conflict is predictive of work-family guilt (Eason, Singe, et al., 2020), we made assumptions that this would occur especially in the NCAA Division I setting, as it is more time intensive and often those negative emotions can arise when time is limited for other activities. Our data again partially supported this hypothesis as we found that college athletic trainers working in the NCAA Division I setting reported higher levels of work-family guilt than those in the NCAA Division III, but not the NCAA Division II setting. Future research is warranted to better understand why there are differences between the NCAA Division I and III, but not II. As discussed before, the NCAA Division III setting is starkly different than the NCAA Division I setting. When one has to “choose” their work over their family or vice versa, feelings of guilt can arise, regardless of the employment setting.

Family Role Performance

Little research exists in athletic training on an athletic trainer's ability to fulfill their family role obligations, through a family role performance framework. Family role engagement conceptualizes an individual's desire to participate in both task and relationship aspects of their family lives, such as household chores and spend time with family members (Chen et al. 2014). In theory, time to engage in family life as well as domestic chores can be limited, when time demands are high from one's work roles. As previously mentioned, in order to be seen as "successful" in sport culture, one must give all of themselves to their work-related responsibilities (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008). Often seen as just as important, many athletic trainers must find time, no matter their life roles, to complete family responsibilities. Participating in one's family often includes house-hold chores such as cleaning and cooking meals (task-related responsibilities), but also spending quality time with family members (relationship-oriented roles). Previous research has focused on the effects of sex and age on family role participation, but before this study, the effects of collegiate level on family-role participation have yet to be explored in depth (Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2018). With the previous knowledge on the culture of Division I athletics, we hypothesized that college athletic trainers working in the NCAA Division I setting will report lower family role participation when compared to those athletic trainers outside of the Division I setting. We did not find differences within the NCAA Divisions and family role performance.

Our findings do suggest that overall athletic trainers in the NCAA Division I, II, and III setting are able to engage in and fulfill their family roles. Future research, however is warranted to better understand what strategies are helping them facilitate these life and home roles, and if in fact there is any spillover or impact to work-family conflict and work-family guilt. We do know that support networks and accepting of the athletics lifestyle, are facilitators of work-life balance and perhaps the reasons for our sample to engage in their family roles (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Eason et al., 2021; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008; Singe et al., 2020). Moreover, we do know that women athletic trainers demonstrate an adaptive lifestyle preference (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015); suggesting that they want to spend their time equally engaged in family and work roles. So perhaps our sample of men and women, are sharing this same preference; that is, athletic trainers want to be able to have equity in their efforts and time in family/life and work.

Life Roles and Experiences of Work-Family Guilt

Past research has indicated that traditional gender role ideology can contribute to feelings of work-family guilt that are associated with not being able to fulfill duties as a parent, due to working full-time as an athletic trainer (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). Simply women want to be able to provide for their families, spend time with their children, but also contribute to their professional lives with the same energy and attention they give at home. This requires time and energy, and when it is depleted, guilt and conflict can arise. Work-family guilt appears to be a consequence of marriage and family; as thus those who are parents are more likely to report experiences of work-family guilt. For our sample, those athletic trainers with less than three years of experience had lower levels; giving support to this ideology of family increased feelings of work-family guilt. A majority of individuals who are newcomers to their professions (i.e. three years or less), are less likely to have families and thus much of their time and energies can be given to their careers, and so missing family time or functions may invoke less work-family guilt.

We know that athletic trainers who are parents feel that they struggle to meet the demands of their personal lives, as they are their professional ones; thus, leading to guilt as well as conflict (Singe et al., 2022). We also know that experiences of work-family conflict increase the likelihood of work-family guilt (Eason et al., 2021); which is evident from our findings that our sample was experiencing both, and those in the NCAA Division I setting had the greatest levels. Spouses of athletic trainers often report that during the peak seasons for their partners double the home workload for themselves; which implies that the athletic trainer in the NCAA Division I setting may not contribute, whether they want to or not (Singe & Mensch, 2021). Work-family guilt than might arise for them, as they feel guilty for not being able to fulfill their family role obligations.

Future Research & Limitations

The findings of this study contribute to the continued understanding of work-family conflict and work-family guilt within sport, and the athletic training profession; however, it is not without limitations. We used a cross-sectional survey examining the self-reported experiences of work-family conflict in relationship to work-family guilt and family participation. Inherently, those who are interested in or have strong connections to the topic of work-family conflict participate; and so, we recognize that not all athletic trainers will identify with the findings reported here. Our study examined only those employed in the collegiate sports setting; thus, those in the secondary school setting or other employment settings may not experience similar concerns. Additionally, we chose for this study to separate the collegiate levels into I, II, and III; yet the NCAA Division I setting can be further separated into subdivisions. Future research should include an examination of the various subdivisions within the Division I level. We believe that future research must examine the employment setting, among other factors that can influence experiences of work-family conflict. Moreover, a qualitative or mixed-methods approach may offer deeper insights on family role participation as well as professional identity and how that can influence work-family conflict. We collected data during the Fall of 2020; when the COVID-19 pandemic was still considered at its peak; thus, the results of our study can be influenced by the restrictions and guidelines used to promote athlete safety while competing in sport. A follow-up study could help better understand the true influence of COVID-19.

Conclusions

This study sought to further our knowledge on the contributing factors to work-family conflict, work-family guilt, and family role participation in the athletic training profession. Young professionals with three years or less of experience reported lower levels of work-family conflict and guilt; suggesting that life stage and assumed life roles have a potential impact on these experiences and feelings. We found that athletic trainers in the NCAA Division I setting report more work-family conflict than the NCAA Division III, which highlights the demanding nature of the setting, but warranted future research as the setting often staff more full-time athletic trainers than the other two levels. Athletic trainers are fulfilling their family role obligations, and no differences were found between the levels, suggesting athletic trainers have developed mechanisms to fulfill these roles, or have a mindset that boosts adaptiveness. We do believe that at some stage, athletic trainers will struggle with work-family conflict and work-family guilt; but those who are married and have children appear to be at the greatest risk. Support networks at home and work, will be important for these individuals to be successful in managing their work and life roles.

Athletic trainers are valuable members within the athletics department; although experiences of work-family conflict can be a derivative of the organizational climate and culture, individual factors too can influence experiences of work-family conflict. The clinician should identify their own personal goals and recognize that some settings may have more challenges than others – it may be the organization and not the profession. Also, emphasize the family friendly culture/climate of organizations as an area to focus on to try and alleviate work-family conflict and work-family guilt for clinicians with significant others and children or family responsibilities.

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