A Perspective on Work Life Balance in the NCAA Division I Setting: From the Female Athletic Trainer

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A Perspective on Work Life Balance in the NCAA Division I Setting: From the Female Athletic Trainer

Elizabeth M. Ferraro

B.S., West Chester University of Pennsylvania, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science at the University of Connecticut 2013
APPROVAL PAGE

Masters of Science Thesis

A Perspective on Work Life Balance in the NCAA Division I Setting: From the Female Athletic Trainer

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2013
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Factors and Strategies that Contribute to Work Life Balance of Female Athletic Trainers Employed in the NCAA Division I setting

Ferraro EM, Mazerolle SM, Barone CM: University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

**Context:** Work life balance (WLB) can be challenging particularly for female athletic trainers (ATs). Evidence suggests female-ATs persist in the profession because of job enjoyment, increased autonomy, and social support networks. Departure factors such as long hours, travel, and inflexibility of schedules often comprise issues with WLB. Time management, support networks, and setting boundaries are strategies used to find WLB, however, little is known about the strategies female-ATs use to maintain WLB in the Division I setting as they seem to struggle more with finding WLB potentially due to the responsibilities associated with motherhood. **Objective:** To gain insight of contributing factors and strategies used by female-ATs employed in the Division I collegiate setting to fulfill WLB. **Design:** Structured, online asynchronous interviews via QuestionPro™

**Setting:** NCAA Division I Collegiate setting. **Patients or Other Participants:** 27 female-ATs (single=14; married=6; married with children=7) currently employed as full-time ATs in the NCAA Division I setting participated. Majority of female-ATs were contracted for 12 months and worked 58±19 hours a week. Primary sport coverage responsibility was women’s basketball (9 female-ATs) followed by women’s soccer (7 female-ATs) and football and volleyball (3 female-ATs). **Data Collection and Analysis:** Female-ATs responded to a series of open-ended questions via reflective journaling using QuestionPro™, a secure data tracking website. The survey was piloted prior to distribution. Data was examined borrowing from the principles of general inductive approach. Trustworthiness was established by multiple analyst triangulation, member interpretive review, and peer review. **Results:** Regardless of marital status, participants
indicated 3 main factors influencing WLB; *hours worked and travel, inflexibility and control of work schedules*, and *communication with coaches*. These factors have been shown to affect retention by pressuring ATs to sacrifice time spent with family and limiting personal time, while insufficiently meeting their financial needs. Female-ATs who were married and/or had children found the ability to *prioritize* and have *separation from work* as useful strategies to fulfill WLB. Single female-ATs utilized time away through *exercise* as a means to achieve WLB. Regardless of marital status, the main factor necessary to accomplish WLB was to have a *strong support system* both at work and home. No formal policies or strategies were in place to help mothers achieve a work life balance. **Conclusions:** As indicated in previous research, female-ATs experience issues with WLB in the Division I setting. Female-ATs should continue to make time away from the role of AT and as the literature indicates, capitalize on informal resources such as co-worker support as a means to maintain WLB. WLB strategies are useful, but formal policies need to be established to help retain female-ATs in the profession. Future research may investigate what policies and strategies can be employed to achieve WLB. **Word Count:** 447
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historically, working females have more difficulty balancing their career demands and family responsibilities; mostly due to their mothering philosophies and traditional gender stereotypes.\textsuperscript{1} Surprisingly, gender differences have not been found in the occurrence of conflicts between work and life in the athletic training profession.\textsuperscript{2,3} However, females in athletic training have been found to change careers and/or clinical settings to strike the desired balance between the two as indicated by recent data.\textsuperscript{1-4} A study by Mazerolle \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{2,3} found that only twenty-two females with children were employed at the collegiate setting; a statistic supported by Kahanov \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{4} in which only about a quarter of all athletic trainers at the collegiate setting are female. Life balancing issues and time for parenting have been found to influence the decision to persist within the collegiate or professional levels, as often the job responsibilities include long hours (>40 hours) and travel, which can impede time spent at home with family.\textsuperscript{1-4} It is a sad fact that female athletic trainers only comprise approximately 28\% of the full-time collegiate staff and it appears that there is a relationship in balancing professional responsibilities with parenthood that plays a key role in attrition and retention factors particularly away from the collegiate clinical setting to more favorable family life clinical setting.\textsuperscript{4}

Work Life Balance

Entry level to experienced positions leads to different perceptions of work life balance. With aspirations for career growth and maturity, priorities change and more or less responsibilities are desired. The translation of work life balance represents inner satisfaction with one’s responsibilities both professionally and personally.\textsuperscript{5} Our ability to
define work life balance becomes critical as it the overriding theme of all work relationships related to family, home, and profession. We shift priorities, and accept responsibility for making adjustments due to our circumstances. These inner feelings play a crucial role in our positive work life balance.\textsuperscript{6} Fereday \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{7} defines work life balance as the ability for people to achieve what they regard as most important. Usually, there is an inverse relationship between career progression and work life balance. Although the achievement of work life balance is not always an easy task, it is something we are always doing with each decision we make, activity we plan, or new responsibility we undertake.\textsuperscript{6}

Responsibilities and priorities drastically change once the decision to start a family occurs. Hills and colleagues define work-family balance as one type of work life balance.\textsuperscript{6} It is referred to as “the degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional, and behavioral demands of both paid work and family responsibilities.” As a balance is attempted it is often hard to accomplish and leads to work-family conflict.

\textbf{Work Family Conflict}

American’s ability to decide what is most important is frequently prioritized by material desires, which makes work life balance an issue. Today’s increasing participation of women and a greater number of couples where both partners have a paid occupation leads to more work-family conflicts.\textsuperscript{8} Work-family conflict arises from the incompatible, emotional, and behavioral demands of work and non-work roles, such that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other.\textsuperscript{9} Typically, the more we fight for work life balance, the more work-family conflicts occur. The
occurrence of work-family conflict can lead to tension between work and family roles that can become a source of stress and can diminish psychological and physical well-being.\textsuperscript{8}

According to the literature, activities in daily life that contribute to increasing work-family conflict are workload, emotional involvement in one’s job, inflexible requirements, and high job demands.\textsuperscript{8} Nelson \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{10} found that individuals without a choice or input toward setting their work schedules/hours may be more susceptible to work-family conflict. Previous studies highlight that workers exposed to stressor agents incur increase costs for their organization related to inefficiency, absenteeism, turnover and reduced job satisfaction and productivity.\textsuperscript{8} Additional negative health effects of work family-conflict were discovered by Pisarski \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{9} are anxiety, depression, burnout, somatic complaints, raised cholesterol levels, and substance abuse.

\textbf{Causes of Conflict: Health Care Professionals}

Professionals in several health care fields have experienced low job satisfaction, high or conflicting job demands and work overload. These factors increase stress and burnout, and retention/attrition issues.\textsuperscript{4} Various studies have researched the reasons for the persistent struggle with work life balance with physicians and nurses. Prior studies have shown that there are various causes of conflicts that lead to work-family conflicts. Common factors with high probability contribute the greatest challenge in achieving balance; they include work overload or stress, irregular or inflexible works schedules, and long work hours.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, 24/7 coverage is expected which further challenges health care professionals against a balanced work schedule. According to the literature,
workload and emotional involvement in one’s job complicate activities in daily life, which increase work-family conflict.\textsuperscript{8}

There are many challenges to work life balance of physicians’ lives. Frequently, physicians are expected to work 50 or more hours per week. Patients need to be seen in real time in the office or hospital and hospitalized patients need to be cared for around the clock.\textsuperscript{5} Their personal needs are usually pushed aside in favor of professional commitment particularly early in their careers. In previous studies, physicians state, “we feel we must always put our patients first, even if this leads to personal neglect.”\textsuperscript{5} It is a constant juggling act for physicians to achieve work life balance. Some physicians have tried to only work part-time. However, negative perceptions and a stigma about part-time individuals arises. Their professional work ethic and commitment to medicine are doubted compared to full-time physicians.\textsuperscript{5}

Nurses are another health care profession significantly researched to find their reasons for attrition and the ability to find a positive work life balance. Webster et al have identified both low job satisfaction and high-perceived conflict between work and family as primary causes of nursing personnel turnover. Much like physicians, nurses experience the same causes of conflict with work life balance. The propensity for nurses to experience work-family conflicts is high due to irregular, inflexible, or long hourly, limited choice in work schedules, and personal or family demands.\textsuperscript{10}
Figure 1: Common causes of work-family conflict in health care professions.

**Causes of Conflict: Athletic Trainers**

These common causes of work-family conflict in health care professions relate to the athletic training professionals especially at the Division I level. Athletic trainers at work responsibilities begin before practice or games with pre-treatments and require post practice and game treatments. This cycle is the routine. Pre and post treatments are the bookends to long work hours. Inflexible work schedules complicate these longer than normal workdays. Athletic trainers have limited control over their work schedules. Unfortunately, coaches make unplanned adjustments to practice schedules placing athletic trainers at their mercy. Beyond the preparation for the athlete’s participating in practice and games, the athletic trainer has the full responsibility to return the injured
athletes to the field of play. This responsibility comes with heightened expectations when key players are involved, playoffs are looming, or the team is performing less than expected. In addition, the physical requirement of the job is intertwined with emotion, competing opinions, and a will to win without jeopardizing a player’s well-being. This becomes the perfect example for high job demands with the passionate desire to achieve beyond administrators, coaches, and athletes expectations, while placing their own personal needs at risk. These struggles are the factors that lead to work-family conflict. Life balance issues have been found to influence retention of female athletic trainers in the Division I clinical setting. Both Mazerolle et al. and Goodman et al. found that life balancing was a major contributing factor to keeping a female athletic trainer in their position at the college level. Attrition has impacted the collegiate setting, especially for the female, as the demands of the job limited the time available to parent, among other roles assumed by the athletic trainer. Demographic data can support this claim, as studies by Mazerolle et al., Kahanov et al., and Milazzo et al., reveal a limited number of married female athletic trainers with children employed in the clinical setting.

Mazerolle et al. found that organizational factors such as work hours, travel, and work schedules as major catalysts to work-family conflict. More specifically, lack of control over work schedules and inadequate staffing patterns have been associated with work-family conflict within the Division I clinical setting. Also, the demands of this profession summarized by the hours and travel related to the job and the coaches’ expectations impact experiences of work-family conflict. The continuance of coaches making last minute changes to practices and workouts affects an athletic trainer’s ability
to manage their personal life. Ultimately, work-family conflict pressures further complicates and contributes to female athletic trainers’ decisions to seek employment-setting changes.

![Figure 2: Common causes of work-family conflict in the athletic training profession.](image)


**Gender Issues**

Gender equity continues to be an issue in career opportunities. In some professions it has slightly started to improve but in regards to fairness and justice in structuring professional opportunities, i.e. further career steps and prestigious positions, is far from being realized. It has been established that females often do not plan their career in the same goal-oriented way as their male counterparts. Women seem to be more focused on creating a balance between work and family. American society stereotypes the “traditional” women’s role as the primary caregiver to the immediate family and
caretaker of the home, therefore; making it harder for women to advance in their career. Research shows females are less career oriented. They aspire for more balance between work and personal life, with a greater inclination to consider part-time work or continue their professional career following a leave of absence to start a family.\textsuperscript{12} It is often assumed that women’s traditional role patterns will have reduced salaries and not climb the corporate ladder. In contrast, women who reach the position of medical specialist have already broken traditional patterns of gendered work division.\textsuperscript{13}

These same gender issues exist in the profession of athletic training. In 2006, 97.5\% of all NCAA institutions employed ATCs, yet less than one third of those institutions had female ATs.\textsuperscript{4} Even though the number of female ATs has significantly advanced over the years to 49.5\% of the NATA certified membership; females are still underrepresented in the collegiate setting, comprising only 27.4\% of full-time staff.\textsuperscript{4} The ongoing obstacles for females leaving the profession are salary, parental issues, and childcare. The majority of pressure females experience comes from family demands rather than work demands especially when their family has children. A previous study found that 50\% of the workforce is female and 81\% of those individuals desire to parent or participate in parenting.\textsuperscript{4} Therefore, these perceived barriers for female ATs remain related to gender equity, and life balance issues, particularly in the NCAA D-I setting.\textsuperscript{1}
Family Status

The acknowledgement of family status is an important aspect to take into account regarding work life balance. Recent organizational research suggests that working professionals, regardless of marital status, will experience conflicts between their professional and personal lives. Goodman et al.\textsuperscript{1} found that single former Southeastern Conference athletic trainers (F-SECATs) with no children struggled with personal time whereas married/partnered F-SECATs with or without children primarily experienced work-family conflict. It has been acknowledged the work life balance issue seems to be particularly pressing for parents. For example, specific stages in family responsibilities

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*Figure 3: Traditional views of gender issues in the professional setting.*

will increase workload at home, but the time spent on tasks in the home domain depends on the level of resources at home, especially in respect of childcare assistant. Studies have shown that married ATs find it necessary to have a spouse with a more flexible work schedule. Without this flexibility they would have the harder time with achieving a positive work life balance. This reinforces why family was identified as the portion of life often neglected by both parents and non-parents.

**Strategies to Promote a Balance**

Strategies to promote a balance are easier said than done. Everyone is searching to achieve this balance. Positive strategies can be spilt up into these broad categories: set your priorities, always be a student, learn to say “no”, be a disciplined doer and decider, have fun, support network, and teamwork. It is far more productive to think of it more as a process rather than viewing work life balance as a goal.

Getting your priorities clear is the first and most essential step towards achieving a well-balanced life. Mazerolle’s study looking at athletic trainers setting priorities was defined as setting aside time during the day for non-work related activities such as exercising, going to lunch with a friend, or doing laundry. It is important to set aside this time for yourself and your family. It has been suggested that it’s never too late to spend more time with your family and loved ones. Many must learn to recognize the things that do not have much impact on their life and learn to let them go. A helpful hint is to make this list of priorities into a personal mission statement. A personal mission statement is a brief description of what you want to focus on, what you want to accomplish, and who you want to become over the next one to three years. It is not
enough just to set your priorities it is imperative that you live by and demonstrate what you say.

For any profession it is vital that everyone continues to be a student. New technologies, advancements, and research regularly occur. It is important to stay up to date. Baum et al. found that balance is achieved if you continue the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Challenging yourself with the new ideas will not allow those overwhelming feelings when things change. Embrace and use change to benefit yourself and others.

Learning to say “no” is probably the hardest strategy to utilize especially in the health care profession. Many feel that need to always be the one to help even if they have something else scheduled. They will squeeze the time in to make it all work. This leads to constant conflict and unneeded stress. It is okay to say “no” as there is no faster road to burnout than taking on too many projects and accepting too many responsibilities.

In every profession and job employees are asked to take on tasks even if they are not fully prepared. These tasks become overwhelming when they continue to accumulate and not get done. An effective work life balance tool is to list everything you do during the day and assess your life through project management. Baum et al. suggests it is beneficial to break these tasks down into smaller projects and make a calendar marking off the completion of these little projects. However, when tasks cannot be eliminated, delegate, ask for help, or relax your standards. Less procrastination and faster decisions facilitate a disciplined doer to lead to a more well-balanced life.

Lastly, the best advice to achieve balance is to take your profession seriously, but not yourself. It is always important to have fun. If you love what you do and are surrounded by a supportive network of co-workers it only helps create a work life
balance. Hills et al.\textsuperscript{6} advocate that fun and relaxation are an essential part of a well-balanced life. Cortese et al.\textsuperscript{8} found that job satisfaction was higher in the presence of organizational support. In addition, support and structure within the team environment are further elements of occupational support that facilitate the effective management of flexibility.\textsuperscript{7}

![Figure 4: Strategies to promote work-life balance in the health care profession.](image)


General strategies have been found to help working professionals. Flexibility in timing and location of work, whether full time or part-time has been shown to promote
work life balance in the business world. Pisarski and Bohle developed a model that highlights the importance of interventions to enhance social support from various sources, maximize control over work schedules, and encourage appropriate coping. Midwives and nurses found that having choice and control over one’s working life is one way to achieve work life balance. Part-time work can give physicians the opportunity to shape careers in ways that meet individualized personal and professional needs. The Association of Specialty Professors task force has produced a consensus statement and a series of recommendations, including allowing flexible time as well as part-time work and countering negative perceptions about part-time faculty. Promoting work place flexibility, legislating short-term and extended time off; and addressing discrimination against employees with family responsibilities will help create work life balance.

Specifically for athletic trainers, some strategies from previous studies have been found to promote work life balance. The NCAA’s Task Force on Life and Work Balance in Intercollegiate Athletics’ recognizes that the continued growth, success, and spirit of the NCAA views life balance efforts as not the sole responsibility of the individual.

As depicted by the schematic above work-life balance is an integration of institutional and individual efforts. Mazerolle et al. discovered that for many ATs the key to their ability to find a balance was related to the teamwork atmosphere fostered by their co-workers, the administration, and themselves. Relying on family and friends are a key component to success as well as the ability to include family in the workplace when appropriate.
Figure 5: Strategies to promote work-life balance in the athletic training profession.
References


Introduction

Traditionally, working females endure more challenges balancing career demands and family responsibilities than working males, which is often; due to their mothering philosophies and traditional gender stereotypes. Surprisingly, gender differences have not been found in the occurrence of conflicts between work and life in the athletic training profession. This finding is perplexing due to the continued departure of female athletic trainers (ATs) from the profession. Hypothetically, the decline of female-ATs in the profession has been linked to the desire to strike a balance between work responsibilities, personal interests, and family obligations.

Fulfillment of work-life balance (WLB) has been found to be an important retention factor for female coaches within the collegiate setting, thus providing some supporting evidence to the suppositions that motherhood can be a mediating factor in retention of ATs in the collegiate setting. Additional support can be garnered from a study by Mazerolle et al. which found that only twenty-two female-ATs with children were employed at the collegiate setting; a statistic supported by Kahanov et al. in which only about a quarter of all full-time ATs at the collegiate setting are female.

The issue of retention, particularly of female-ATs, has become increasingly popular within the athletic training literature, with attention focused on the collegiate clinical setting. This setting is not only one of the largest employment settings for the AT but is recognized as a time intensive, demanding work environment. Consequently, scholars have focused their attention on this clinical setting. Issues with WLB and time for parenting have been found to influence decisions to persist within the collegiate levels, as often the job responsibilities include long hours (>40 hours) and travel, which can impede time spent at home with family. It is an unfortunate reality
that female-ATs only comprise approximately 28% of the full-time collegiate staff.\textsuperscript{5} There appears to be a relationship between balancing professional responsibilities with parenthood and retention factors, especially as it relates to those leaving the collegiate clinical setting for more favorable family life clinical settings.

Female-ATs in the Division I setting experience great challenges in maintaining WLB due to the demands of the setting.\textsuperscript{1} In recent studies, the primary reasons female-ATs continued in the Division I setting were enjoyment of the job/atmosphere, increased autonomy, positive athlete dynamics, and the social support network.\textsuperscript{1} It is important for female-ATs to have support at work and home to persist in the collegiate or athletic training clinical setting. However, long work hours and the inability to find WLB can stress this support network. Mazerolle and colleagues first proposed that motherhood plausibility could lead to departure from the profession due to a myriad of factors, but mostly due to a lack of time and control over work schedules.\textsuperscript{2,3} Further investigations have supported this theory and found other reasons for leaving the profession are unsatisfactory WLB issues, supervisory/coach conflicts, caring for children, and role overload.\textsuperscript{1,4,5}

The purpose of our study was to gain the perspective of female-ATs, regardless of marital status, to evaluate their WLB, career intentions, and family goals. This is necessary, as the trend for females to leave once starting a family appears to be a critical issue facing the profession of athletic training. Although there are plenty of empirical data regarding WLB for the AT, limited attention has been given to female-ATs. Specifically, those employed at the collegiate level despite remarkable decline in their representation within the collegiate clinical setting. Furthermore, this study will be the
first to gain the perspective of the female-AT on the life experiences spectrum (single, married, married with children), as each stage of life can have its own set of obstacles and challenges that may influence their experiences. This study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the factors that contribute to female-ATs WLB in the NCAA Division I setting? (2) What strategies do female-ATs capitalize on to fulfill a sense of WLB? and (3) What are the career and family aspirations of female-ATs and do they see a lifelong career in athletic training?

Methods

Participants

A total of 27 female-ATs employed in the Division I collegiate setting volunteered for our research study. Descriptive statistics of the demographic data illustrated the female-ATs who were married with children were slightly older and possessed more Division I work experience (Table 1) than the single and married female-ATs. Only 26% (n=7) of female-ATs at the Division I setting who participated in our study had children, and of those, 4 females had more than 1 child (0.6±0.98). The majority of all participants had attained a Master’s degree (89%, n=24) and is currently employed as assistant ATs at their respective institution (78%, n=21). Primary sport coverage responsibility was women’s basketball (9 female-ATs) followed by women’s soccer (7 female-ATs) and football and volleyball (3 female-ATs). Table 2 provides additional background information on our participants. The majority of female-ATs were contracted for 12 months and worked 58±19 hours a week. Table 3 highlights average workweek responsibilities.
### Table 1. Participants’ Ages and Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Participants (n=27), y Mean± SD, Range</th>
<th>Single (n=14), y Mean± SD, Range</th>
<th>Married (n=6), y Mean± SD, Range</th>
<th>Married with Kids (n=7), y Mean± SD, Range</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>35±9, 26-57</td>
<td>32±5, 27-48</td>
<td>34±11, 26-57</td>
<td>41±9, 30-54</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BOC Certified (years)</strong></td>
<td>11±8, 3-35</td>
<td>9±6, 3-26</td>
<td>13±11, 4-35</td>
<td>14±10, 4-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division I experience (years)</strong></td>
<td>7±8, 1-30</td>
<td>5±5, 2-20</td>
<td>8±11, 1-30</td>
<td>12±10, 3-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Participants Demographic Data, n(%)  

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Participants (n=27)</th>
<th>Single (n=14)</th>
<th>Married (n=6)</th>
<th>Married with Kids (n=7)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Degree</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
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<td>1 (7)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1 (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Athletic Trainer</td>
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<td>9 (64)</td>
<td>6 (100)</td>
<td>6 (86)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Head Athletic Trainer</td>
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<td>1 (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Assistant Athletic Trainer</td>
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<td>1 (7)</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Primary Sport**    |                         |               |               |                         |
| Women's Basketball   | 9 (33)                  | 4 (28)        | 3 (50)        | 2 (29)                  |
| Women's Soccer       | 7 (26)                  | 4 (28)        | 1 (16)        | 2 (29)                  |
| Football             | 3 (11)                  | 2 (24)        | 0             | 1 (14)                  |
| Women's Volleyball   | 3 (11)                  | 1 (7)         | 2 (33)        | 0                       |
| Track & Field        | 2 (7)                   | 1 (7)         | 0             | 1 (14)                  |
| Women's Gymnastics   | 1 (4)                   | 1 (7)         | 0             | 0                       |
| Women's Ice Hockey   | 1 (4)                   | 1 (7)         | 0             | 1 (14)                  |
Table 3. Work Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Participants (n=27), y Mean±SD</th>
<th>Single (n=14), y Mean±SD</th>
<th>Married (n=6), y Mean±SD</th>
<th>Married with Kids (n=7), y Mean±SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Contract (months)</strong></td>
<td>12±1</td>
<td>12±1</td>
<td>12±1</td>
<td>12±1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Week (hours)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-season coverage</td>
<td>58±19</td>
<td>60±17</td>
<td>66±7</td>
<td>56±13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-season coverage</td>
<td>36±15</td>
<td>38±12</td>
<td>44±7</td>
<td>31±19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel load (days per month)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-season coverage</td>
<td>10±6</td>
<td>11±5</td>
<td>11±8</td>
<td>7±6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-season coverage</td>
<td>1±4</td>
<td>1±1</td>
<td>5±8</td>
<td>1±2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Design**

Our qualitative study utilized online, asynchronous in-depth interviewing, specifically using journaling as the primary method to collect data. The advantages of the asynchronous interview include cost effectiveness, efficiency with scheduling interviews, and confidentiality. Additionally, this medium, allowed our participants flexibility to complete the interview questions at their leisure; an important option for a population whose time is limited. Though lacking in participant and researcher interactions, online communication can still produce rich, insightful data due to the participants’ sense of confidentiality and time to reflect upon posed questions posed as opposed to the immediate responses required in one-on-one interviews.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted online using QuestionPro, a secure data tracking website designed specifically for research purposes. Prior to data collection, a peer review and content analysis was completed. Initially the interview guide was reviewed by an athletic training researcher with knowledge of the topic of WLB and two female-ATs
employed in the Division I setting to validate survey content. Upon completion of review edits included grammatical edits, rewording of a few questions, and additional questions. Prior to data collection, the interview guide was piloted by a panel of experts (n=3) for clarity in order to decrease chances of misinterpretation or miscommunication of the material. The panel included female-ATs employed in the collegiate clinical setting, and represented the categories of marital/motherhood status: single, married, married with children.

After securing IRB approval participants were purposefully recruited using a convenience and snowball sampling procedure. Female ATs employed in the Division I clinical settings were recruited as the overall aim of the study was to gain a holistic picture of issues facing female-ATs employed in the collegiate setting regarding WLB. Each female-AT was emailed a detailed description of the study and a direct link to the survey. Consent was implied upon completion of the online questionnaire. Female-ATs were asked to provide information regarding basic demographic information (i.e. age, marital status, years in the profession, children, etc.) and then were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions via journaling. The questions were derived by the researchers borrowing from previous published work in athletic training regarding WLB, retention in the workplace, and motherhood in athletic training. Participants who had not finished the survey were sent one reminder email to ensure study completion. Data was transferred from online survey database to a word document for data analysis.
Data Analysis

We utilized a general inductive process, a common method used in health and social science research as described by Creswell\textsuperscript{13} and Thomas\textsuperscript{14} to analyze the textual data. This systematic method of analysis was chosen to help uncover the most dominant themes from the data as it related to the specific aims of the study. Our research questions guided analysis. Initially transcripts were read in their entirety to gain a sense of the data; this holistic evaluation of the data is the foundation to the general inductive process. “Read-throughs” continued multiple times and during second and third “read-throughs” data was assigned categories [labels]. These labels were descriptors of the main thoughts and findings of the transcripts. Once categories were assigned to the data, they were organized into more specific dominant themes to reduce the redundancy of the categories.

Establishing Trustworthiness of the Data

Data credibility was established by employing member checks, peer review, and multiple analyst triangulation. One female from each subgroup [single, married, married with children] was contacted for brief follow-up interviews. The purpose of our member check or stakeholder verification\textsuperscript{14} was to present the initial findings from data analysis to the participants for their confirmation. This method of member checking was selected due to the online data collection procedures, which limits interactions between researchers especially when follow-up is necessary.\textsuperscript{10} The peer review was completed by an athletic training scholar with experience in qualitative methods and strong knowledge in WLB and retention of ATs. The peer helped establish credibility by reviewing all data collection procedures and final themes. Two researchers, independently, completed the data collection procedures as outlined above to establish multiple-analyst triangulation.
Results

Research Question 1: What are the factors that contribute to female-ATs WLB in the NCAA Division I setting?

Our analysis of participants’ experiences revealed 3 main themes as factors influencing issues to female-ATs WLB in the NCAA Division I setting (Figure 1): (1) hours worked and travel, (2) inflexibility and lack of control over schedules, and (3) communication with coaches. These themes were identified by analyzing responses to the following questions, “Does working in the athletic training profession provide a suitable working environment to achieve a balanced life style?” and “Have you experienced challenges finding a balance between your personal and professional life?”

Figure 1 Factors that Influence Female-ATs WLB in the Division I Setting
**Hours Worked and Travel.** Hours worked and time spent traveling with their teams was also discussed by our female-ATs as influential with their WLB. For example a single female-AT Hannah stated,

> I think you can achieve a balanced life style working as an athletic trainer depending on the setting. At a high level Division I university I do not think a balanced life style is possible. I think it’s expected to sacrifice your personal life for your work life.

Hannah continues to explain her rationale behind the inability to find WLB by sharing this thought

> Yes, I have experienced challenges [between my work responsibilities and my home life] mostly due to the amount of time expected at work. It is difficult to have a life outside of work when you’re constantly ‘on-call’ and travel is considerable during season.

Others female-ATs shared similar sentiments regarding WLB in the collegiate setting. They believed finding WLB was challenging at the Division I level specifically due to the number of hours they need to work coupled with the extensive travel requirements associated with medical coverage. Shelly when discussing WLB said, “When working a lot of hours it is difficult to find family time or being a part of events [not work related].” Annie added, “The hours I work are too long and unpredictable to be able to plan much around.”

Several of the female-ATs discussed the influence of impending motherhood or motherhood on the possibility of WLB. Molly wrote, “With the unpredictable extensive hours required to work as an AT I do not think that I would be a mother and an AT.” While Julie reflected,

> There is no possible way that I see for me to be a mother and continue to keep the job I currently have. I would not feel comfortable based on the amount of time I
travel and the hours I put in during the season allowing someone else to raise my child.

Our participants highlighted the difficulty of achieving WLB in the collegiate setting due to the hours necessary to meet work related responsibilities as well as the travel associated with her positions. Limited time for non-work responsibilities was an issue for the female-AT regardless of current marital and family status; however, motherhood did appear to cause more concern for our participants.

**Inflexibility and Lack of Control Over Schedules.** Our female-ATs identified unpredictable practice schedules and last minute schedule changes as factors that can negatively impact their ability to achieve WLB. An ATs workday is not defined by the typical “9am-5pm” shift and sudden time changes for practices and games make it challenging to attain WLB. Samantha shared: “The college environment is not conducive to balance with travel and schedules that change at the last minute regularly.” While Julie said, “There are so many times that I don’t feel like I can ‘say no’ to work, or times that practices/games/travel get changed or moved on a moments notice.” Athletic trainers at the Division I level, as discussed by this group of female-ATs, struggled with WLB due to a lack of autonomy over the work schedules, which was often at the hands of the coaching staff.

**Communication with Coaches.** The relationship between the AT and the coach was recognized as a facilitator for issues with WLB. For instance, Samantha explained that, “the type of coaching staff you have will dictate your quality of life as an AT.” Another female-AT discussed the lack of teamwork between the AT staff and the coach, as Julie shared: “Our head coach does not seem to value anyone else’s time, as she expects us to drop plans on a moment’s notice to change or alter for her.” Molly, illustrated frustrations
with planning time away from the role of the AT due to coaching issues. She said, “coaches do not tell me the schedule for practice and travel ahead of time so I am unable to plan things in my personal life such as vacations, dates, concerts, etc.”

Communication was discussed as a catalyst for issues with WLB. Specifically, a lack of communication between the AT and the coach precipitated issues with WLB, particularly in the form of a lack of control over their work schedules. Both Samantha and Nancy, respectively mentioned issues with their coaches and the impact it had on their WLB. Samantha, an assistant AT, shared,

We have a staff that is always in disarray. I never know what time practice is day to day or what our travel plans are. The dissemination of information to staff is poor at best so I have to guess when to come to work and when I am leaving day to day.

While Nancy wrote,

When coaches don’t communicate well about their practice/competition schedules, it is hard to plan my schedule. Some of my coaches communicate well and others do not. When coaches don’t communicate well about their practice/competition schedules, it is hard to plan my schedule. This makes it hard to balance life if I don’t know when I’ll have time to run errands, meet friends for dinner, etc. This can be stressful.

Jane’s experiences were similar to other female-ATs,

In fact they [coaches] schedule practice times around themselves instead of taking into consideration the other people it affects, often spreading my day out longer covering an early practice in the morning and a late one in the afternoon as well since I am primarily responsible for more than one sport.

Issues with communication permeated throughout the discussion for our participants and affected those who were single, married, or married with children. The coach who did not include the AT in scheduling placed them at a disadvantage in regards to WLB. Single female-AT, Susan shared,
[My] coaching staff can make finding a balance difficult based on the fact of the lack of communication that exists at times. It is not the hours of work that bother me but if the schedule is not available then I am unable to make plans for myself in terms of activities outside of work.

Female-ATs at the collegiate level feel that most coaches live for their job and forget to be considerate of other people involved in their program. They seem to forget there is a life outside of sports, which complicates others trying to achieve WLB. Hannah shares, “[they] make it difficult as they have no significant other/family and live, breathe, and die for their jobs.”

**Research Question 2: What strategies do female-ATs capitalize on to fulfill a sense of work-life balance?**

Four themes surfaced to highlight strategies used by female-ATs to promote a balance between their personal and professional life including (1) **support systems**, (2) **prioritizing family time**, (3) **ability to separate work and home**, and (4) **exercise** (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Strategies Female-ATs Capitalize on to Achieve WLB**
**Support Systems.** Regardless of marital status, the most commonly found strategy was having a support system. Support systems for the female-AT are comprised of family and friends, co-workers, and supervisors.

*Personal Support.* Our female-ATs expressed the importance of having very understanding family and friends. Their understanding was focused on the obscurity of the hours and lack of flexibility associated with the collegiate setting. For example, single female-AT, Susan revealed,

> My parents are a huge support system in terms of understanding my schedule and making time for me in terms of phone calls and visits. Most of my close friends have a good understanding of what my job entails and the hours I work and they are extremely respectful and understanding.

Paula shared similar thoughts on finding WLB through support networks saying, “my family is willing to accept, adjust to, and supports the sometimes-off hours that are required to do our jobs as athletic trainers well.” Supposial support, as reflected by Caitlin statement, is also necessary, “having a very supportive spouse is very helpful in managing stresses and realizing what is important.” Julie added, “my husband is very supportive of myself and my job. He attends every home game that he can and comes with me for treatments on ‘off days’ so we have more time together.” While Samantha includes her appreciation of having a supportive spouse by stating,

> My husband is extremely supportive in sharing home duties like cleaning, dog walking/care, laundry, and bill paying. This team effort puts my mind at ease when I am doing a lot of traveling and spending a lot of long days at work. He also reminds me to say ‘no’ to extra tasks that aren’t my responsibility.

*Co-Worker Support.* A cohesive work environment that promotes and utilizes teamwork is also important to facilitate WLB for the female-AT. Several of the female-ATs
mentioned the role their colleagues played on finding WLB, as illustrated by Caitlin

comments regarding the significance of staff support,

Having supportive co-workers I feel is a godsend. When a staff as a whole helps each other out, we can take turns with coverage to allow everyone a chance to leave early, or get to a family event they might not otherwise have been able to go to. Doing this I think eases the stress of balancing life and work because you can depend on others to help you get that balance.

Samantha’s comments support Caitlin as she shared,

My co-workers are amazing. Each of us is always ready to support the other when unexpected time off is needed. Knowing this makes it a little easier to get away for family emergencies or health issues.

Jaime included that co-workers can add to balance outside of their usual work setting sharing. “when we all are free we tend to all go out to either have dinner and/or a drink. We are like our own little family so we will have fun together.”

**Supervisor Support.** Supervisor support has also been identified as helpful for an AT to fulfill WLB and was discussed by this group of female-ATs as necessary. After working a full year at her current university married female-AT, Julie wrote, “he [my head AT] is supportive of us [our staff] ‘not being in the office if we don’t have to’ and giving us the opportunity to have some extra down time.” Danielle, married with 3 children, added, “My boss lets me take the necessary time off to take care of my children. Also the kids are able to come to work.” Paula highlighted the importance of the Head AT’s personal and professional philosophy regarding family time, WLB, and managing work roles. She wrote;

[My supervisor’s role in WLB is] crucial. He believes that family is most important. He has a family of his own for which his wife was/is the primary care giver and traditional mom. He saw a department need that could be filled with a schedule that worked for me.
Support networks that encompassed a female-AT’s personal life and work life are important facilitators of WLB as it allows for increased time to address responsibilities associated with either role.

**Prioritizing Family and Personal Time.** Another key strategy identified to help achieve WLB was one’s ability to prioritize time for family or personal interests. Although marital status was not a significant factor, the strategy was mentioned more often by most married and married with children female-ATs. They indicated that both prioritizing the multiple tasks at work was needed but essential for family time and personal time. For the majority of female-ATs, family interaction was extremely important to them. However, they missed out on family events/occasions because of their work schedule. Nancy wrote, “I’ve learned to ask off from work if there is an important family/friend event I would like to attend.” In order to keep their free time sacred Beth, a mother of 3 children, shared:

> I tell my athletes when I will be available to them and then stick to it unless an emergency is involved. I use my spare time for me and my family.

While Shelly, who is married with 2 children, added:

> I have a house cleaner so I don’t spend time doing that when I do get out of work. I have Thursday mornings off which helped when my children were little and then when they went to school it was my time to get anything I needed to get done such as shopping, picking up, volunteering in their school, etc.

Time management, specifically of personal and family time was discussed as a means to find WLB. Samantha, a married female-AT, shared her method,

> Learning to say ‘no’ is crucial. Portability of work so that I can catch up on simple paperwork out of the office where there are less distractions (shared office makes this difficult). I also try to schedule rehabs and treatments around the practice schedule to consolidate the day as best I can and spend less time in the office.
A single female-AT also utilized ‘saying No’ as a means to create more available time. Co-worker support, a previously mentioned finding, was also helpful as highlighted by Jane as a means to create more time.

Taking time for myself and ‘saying NO’ when I have to. Also I have been more open to a co-worker covering when available so I can make it to more weddings/funerals and important family/life functions.

Time management outside of the workplace was discussed Hannah, as important factor in prioritizing personal time. She said, “[I am] really good about time management so when I am away from work I know what I need to get done (errands, etc) in order to utilize.”

**Separation of Work and Home.** As a mediation to the challenges of not bringing work responsibilities home, our female-ATs try to establish boundaries between work and home. Single female-AT, Mary shared, “A cut-off each day [is helpful for me] and [I] continue the next day where I left off. I do not return text messages in the off-season if they are after hours unless an emergency.” Kristen’s comment supports Mary as she reflected, “trying to turn off what may have happened during the day when I get home and just focusing on my family.”

Hailey’s tactic was simple: “[I] let things go, and as long as I am taking care of my responsibilities at work [I leave it there].” Keeping a separation was not easy as pointed out by Sarah, but attempted as a means to create WLB, “I try to leave work at work and home at home. Not always easy.” Using commute time was one-way to navigate a separation as Beth shared, “I use my one-hour commute to decompress before/after work. I try not to bring work home and home to work.”

**Exercise.** Many female-ATs found it important to make the time to work out. They expressed that it gave them the personal time needed to de-stress and rejuvenate. Sarah
wrote, “I have an established workout schedule daily. My athletes and coaches know that’s my time and it’s not to be invaded.” While Julie explained, “I try to get in a workout daily for a bit of time away from the office.” Susan shared, “taking time for myself. I make sure that I workout 5 times per week.” Workout time was cited as important for the single and married female-ATs in our study, however none of the married with children female-ATs mentioned the use of exercise as a WLB strategy.

Research Question 3: What are the career and family aspirations of female-ATs and do they see a lifelong career in athletic training?

Figure 3 Influences on Career Aspirations of Female-ATs in the NCAA Division I Setting
Three major themes emerged regarding the career planning of female-ATs in the Division I setting as articulated in Figure 3. The first theme, financial rewards, speaks to the lack of compensation received by the female-AT working in the Division I setting. The second theme, family planning departure, refers to the female-ATs plan to leave the profession or at minimum make a setting change to balance their responsibilities as a mom and AT. The final theme, family planning persist, recognizes that some female-ATs plan to remain in their positions as female-ATs in the Division I setting regardless of their marital or family status.

**Financial Rewards.** Generally, the current salary of female-ATs in the Division I setting does not seem to fairly compensate for the actual amount of time-spent working, as assessed by our participants. Long hours and high job demands without sufficient compensation was a concern for our female-ATs. Hannah shares,

>This [Division I] setting has influenced my professional commitment in a negative way. It has made me not want to do this profession anymore because of the constant demand and lack of financial compensation for that demand.

While single female-AT, Molly highlights, “I don’t think that women in this profession get paid enough to make this a lifelong career.” The current economic environment was discussed as problematic for an AT, as the lack of compensation impacts family resources. Yolanda shares the challenges specifically for female-ATs who have a family and reflects this perspective stating, “it might be hard to stay working in the college setting because of childcare situation and money situation.”

**Family Planning Departure.** For this group of female-ATs the Division I setting was viewed as demanding and not conducive for success as a female-AT and mom. For some
the clinical setting itself was the concern, as highlighted by Samantha a married female-AT,

I may need to change the setting that I work in to be able to balance work and family so that I have time to actually be a parent. My husband and I are already making plans for this. In several months I will be leaving the Division I-A athletics setting. I’m looking into jobs as a physician extender, personal training, or per diem work. I am at peace with it and am ready for new challenges that allow me to have weekends, no travel, and be able to take vacation when I want. I have had a good 10-year career and have climbed the ladder as high as I feel I can go short of being a head athletic trainer. I’m ready to start a new chapter that allows for both career and personal goals to be attained.

Several other female-ATs spoke of making a setting change including Nancy and Kristen. Nancy, a married female-AT, wrote, “I will likely have to change settings to ensure that I can be around for my children as much as I want to be” while Kristen said, “I love my job and love working with athletes at this level, but with the hours required and the lack of support from administration with understanding the need for more staff, I’m not sure I can sustain this level of work and be a good mom.”

Many of the single female-ATs were also planning a setting change to balance motherhood and the professional responsibilities associated with athletic training. Jaime shared, “Yes [I hope to remain], but [I] may change the setting I am employed, if I decide having a family is too difficult to balance.” Mary, a single female-AT, discussed taking a position outside the Division I setting in order to be an active parent as model by her childhood. She shared, “[In college athletics there are] more sacrifices personally, less family time with children. [Especially] for their sports [as they] grow up and that [sports] was a huge part of my family life. [I was] coached by my parents. I may take a high school job or a part time job to spend more time with my family.” Katie said, “I will not
want to travel as much and feel like I am missing my own children’s life to raise someone else’s.”

Departure away from the profession was also discussed by several of the female-ATs as necessary in order to succeed in their role as a mother. Molly, a single female-AT, recognized that one day when she has a family it may be necessary to change careers. Molly said, “I may have to change careers if I decide I want to have children.” Julie shared, “I believe that once we [my husband and I] have a family that I will end up giving up my professional career as an AT to pursue a ‘normal’ 9-5 job to better support my family.” Regardless of marital or family status, the role of mother and the role of AT can be demanding of time and resources, which often impact one another. As a result, female-ATs recognize the need to sacrifice one role over the other, often the role of collegiate AT.

**Family Planning Persist.** For this cohort of female-ATs, the reason to remain in the collegiate work setting was due to the fulfillment of WLB because of support networks and the ability to put family first. Yolanda, who is married with 2 children, said, “I think my work has more supports system than anywhere else. That’s why I think I can stay here and work.” Support from co-workers is necessary in athletic training⁸, however in addition to peer support this group of female-ATs discussed the importance of the coach and coaching staff support of family and the demands of college athletics and parenting. Claire, a mother of 1 child, shared, “having a coaching staff with young children helps because they understand the importance of time with family as well so they prioritize the same way.” Beth illustrates the role of the coach in a female-ATs ability to successfully balance both roles. She says,
One of the head coaches I work with wants a family of her own so she is trying to find balance in her own life which helps me. The other coach is my age with no kids and no life outside of coaching. She has no concept of balanced life style.

Like Claire and Beth, Paula, married with 1 child, stresses the importance of the coach in the fulfillment of WLB, which allows the female-AT to persist in the college setting.

I guess the fact that 1/2 of them [coaches] have children is helpful and the fact that the others work closely with other people who have children makes them all more understanding.

Support networks was one aspect of persistence for the female-AT, but also the need to at times, prioritize family needs was deemed as important. Claire discusses,

Professionally I’m going to have to acknowledge that there are times that I’m going to have to miss work, and depend on my co-workers in order to do what is needed for my family.

Claire has no intentions of leaving collegiate athletics because of motherhood. In fact her career goals include “remaining at the college setting” while her personal goals include “to have healthy children and be able to spend quality time with them.”

**Discussion**

Work life balance has become a central focus for Americans as indicated by the growth of research in the area, development of the Sloan Work and Family Network, and the number of hours worked weekly by most Americans, which often exceeds 40 hours.\(^{16}\)

It is not surprising then that WLB has emerged as a key issue for health care professionals and ATs. Several researchers have linked the attrition of female-ATs in the profession of athletic training, to the desire to find a balance between work, personal interests, and family obligations.\(^{1-3,5,8}\) As a result, the objective of this study was to expand insights into female-ATs’ perceptions of WLB in the Division I setting. The interest behind this study was driven by a multitude of factors including limited research
regarding females’ perceptions of their career intentions combined with the factors that influence their decision to stay or leave the athletic training profession. Previous research shows a negative trend for females to leave the athletic training profession once starting a family.\textsuperscript{1-3,5,8} Our results indicate that female-ATs, regardless of marital status, view WLB as possible with a combination of positive support system, two way communication, and time management. In addition, suitable work and home boundaries or rules need to be set and adhered to. However, many female-ATs say it is very hard and recognize that sacrifices will need to be made in both work and home life. Often these ongoing compromises lead to the eventual sacrifice of their role as an AT to allow success as a mother.

**WLB Factors**

The female-ATs in our study experienced a combination of factors influencing their ability to maintain WLB; many of which have been identified in previous research.\textsuperscript{1-3,5,8} Our participants identified the daily hours worked and travel over weekends as a major facilitator for imbalance, which is comparable to work of Mazerolle and colleagues.\textsuperscript{2,3,8} On average in-season hours worked by our participants’ was over 50 hours per week and on average they traveled 10 days per month. We found no differences between hours worked per week in-season or hours worked out-of-season regardless of marital status. Additionally, in-season and out-of-season travel requirements were similar for all female-ATs despite marital status. Time away from home due to long work hours and travel has been reported previously as a major source for work-life imbalance for the AT.\textsuperscript{2,3,8} Typical hours worked by many NCAA Division I ATs are a minimum 45 hours per week, but often amass 60 plus hours a week.\textsuperscript{8} which significantly impacts the time
available for non-work interests and obligations. The demands placed upon the AT working in the NCAA Division I setting, specifically the expectations and often the need to work long hours has not only been recognized as a concern for WLB, but also retention in the workplace.\textsuperscript{1,5} For the female-AT, working long hours can reduce the time available to meet parenting roles, which seems to be the stimulus for departure for many female-ATs once they become mothers. Our group of female-ATs supports the assumptions of Kahanov and colleagues\textsuperscript{4,5} regarding female-ATs job departure reasons. Many of our participants were greatly concerned about their futures related to life balance issues, kinship responsibilities, and role conflict/overload.

Previous studies\textsuperscript{6,8,17} provide limited research on how coaches affect an ATs WLB. Our results present a unique perspective regarding the impact of coaches’ ability to communicate on female-ATs WLB. Our study identified that the dynamics of communication with coaches is a significant issue that affects female-ATs WLB in the collegiate setting. A recent study by Mazerolle et al.\textsuperscript{8} found that the coaches’ control over schedules directly influence ATs WLB, especially last minute practice or game changes. The communication with coaches and ATs is insufficient or too unbalanced to allow for compromise. Our participants revealed that continuous negative and/or lack of communication with coaches makes ATs’ jobs more difficult. This aligns with the findings of several researchers who identified role conflict with coaching staffs and coaches’ expectations as factors that affect ATs quality of life.\textsuperscript{1,8} When the coach’s opinion is the only one that counts, it not only leads to decreased job satisfaction, but establishes a lack of order in ATs’ work schedule. The female-ATs in our study who experienced a lack of teamwork with their coaches were not able to sense compromise or
partnership in WLB. They could not foresee how a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities would ever be achieved. Approximately fifty percent of our single female-ATs reported their coaches lack consideration for staffs’ schedules. They identified their coaching staff made satisfying WLB more complicated due to the lack of communication regarding schedule changes. However, female-ATs married or married with children found coaches’ that wanted to have a family or had children were better at communicating schedule changes. Previous research discovered that female college coaches leave their profession because of number of hours worked, lack of WLB, recognition, and support along with inclusivity.\textsuperscript{6,18} Most likely these coaches were also looking to find WLB themselves and this coincides with Pastore’s findings that coaches’ leave the collegiate setting because of decreased time with family and friends.\textsuperscript{18}

Autonomy over one’s work schedule has often been linked to a professional’s ability to find WLB\textsuperscript{15} but for the AT this is often lacking or limited.\textsuperscript{2,3,8} All female-ATs found the hours worked, travel, inflexibility and lack of control over schedules limited their personal time or ability to raise a family with a spouse or partner. These requirements coupled with the unpredictability of practice and game schedules due to weather or other less tangible decisions make it difficult to achieve WLB. According to the literature, other medical professions such as physicians and nurses also find their long work hours and inflexible work schedules to be amongst their greatest challenges in achieving balance.\textsuperscript{19} We know from previous and current research that health care professionals consider part-time work, changing their setting, or leaving the profession because of these challenging factors.\textsuperscript{20,21} Unfortunately, part-time work is not an option for ATs who desire to work in the Division I collegiate setting. Overall the majority of
our female-ATs’ professional goals were to remain in the athletic training profession, seek promotion for greater responsibilities, and be successful in their careers. However, the need for female-ATs to satisfy a positive WLB more frequently outweighed their intended career aspirations.

**Strategies to Promote WLB**

The female-ATs in our study expressed personal strategies they utilized to promote WLB including a strong support system, prioritizing family time, separating work from home responsibilities, and exercise. Female ATs want to find consistent ways to achieve WLB. Previous research indicates work family conflict can be reduced in the presence of supportive management.\(^1\)\(^-\)\(^3\)\(^-\)\(^5\)\(^,\)\(^22\) Kahanov et al.\(^5\) looked at perspectives/stages of parenthood and working female-ATs and discovered that both parents and non-parents identified the presence of an adequate support system as a significant factor in maintaining work and family life. Our results coincide with previous literature\(^23\) and found a support system to be the critical element in achieving WLB. This support system includes co-workers, supervisors, and family and friends. A recent study by Mazerolle and Goodman et al.\(^24\)\(^,\)\(^25\) found Head ATs play a critical role in creating WLB for ATs. Supervisors are the gatekeepers to establishing a family-friendly atmosphere in the workplace and help their employees realize WLB. In addition, these supervisors are responsible for enforcing the organization’s WLB policies. Recent research discovered that supervisors influence and emphasize this support by possessing personal WLB strategies and visibly implementing them into their daily lives.\(^24\)\(^,\)\(^25\) Particularly, the need for this support system is further enforced when children are involved. With the often irregular and long hours incurred, an understanding family is crucial to survival at home.
The support network encourages female-ATs in their job responsibilities, but serves as constant reminders between importance of professional and personal life. Women in our study who had a well-rounded support system viewed WLB as possible in the Division I setting.

Previous research has established that personal strategies, such as time management or establishing boundaries, can help achieve WLB especially for ATs in a variety of clinical settings.\textsuperscript{26} Our female-ATs identified prioritizing family time as important to achieve WLB. Several researchers found that the use of the word “no” to extra responsibilities is a highly effective method to help WLB.\textsuperscript{8,26-28} Athletic trainers know the importance of teamwork and compromise to help WLB, but it does not mean saying “yes” to every short notice schedule change.\textsuperscript{26} Lack of control over schedules and long hours increase female-ATs needs to possess sound time management skills. This efficiency with time is essential to complete all required responsibilities at both work and home. Our results agree with several studies that have identified time management and prioritizing personal and family time as key strategies to have a balanced life style.\textsuperscript{5,8,26}

As the demands of the Division I level require ATs to be “on-call” for their student-athletes in addition to their 40 plus hour work weeks, it can be very challenging to not bring work responsibilities home.\textsuperscript{2,3,8} Many of our female-ATs stated the importance of maintaining separation from work and home. This priority makes them leave work issues at work and home issues at home. This is a challenging task. However, previous research discovered that making a clear distinction between work and home life leads to greater satisfaction within each role.\textsuperscript{26} Mazerolle et al.\textsuperscript{26} discovered that finding time to get away from the athletic training professional role was an important attribute to
create WLB. Exercise has been found to be a stress reduction strategy\textsuperscript{8} and utilized by ATs in the collegiate setting to create WLB. For example, a majority of our single female-ATs found exercise to be their outlet. This personal time to “work out” is considered a critical success factor for stress reduction.

**Career Intentions**

Work life balance is difficult for most ATs to imagine and actually feel achievable. However, it has been discovered to be particularly hard for female-ATs. Previous research has found that women are increasingly exiting the collegiate setting after the age of 30.\textsuperscript{5} Issues related to WLB and parenting has been documented as a reason to leave the Division I setting or the profession entirely.\textsuperscript{1,5} Many of our single female-ATs indicated the increased potential to change their job setting or leave the profession once they have decided to start a family. Our female-ATs’ priorities became realigned to raise their children and uncertain that a proper WLB would be achieved by staying in the Division I setting. This agrees with prior studies,\textsuperscript{1,4} which concluded that female-ATs leave the profession or change job settings because of the conflicting time required for parenting expectations and athletic training obligations.

According to previous research in related health care professionals job setting flexibility, which allowed for parenting, is a crucial factor in the decision to change work settings and work hours.\textsuperscript{5,29,30} Persistence in the collegiate setting can be significantly influenced by the fulfillment of WLB.\textsuperscript{6} Frequently, this WLB is facilitated by the ATs’ support networks and prioritization of responsibilities.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, female-ATs thought they would persist in the Division I setting if they found the right “family-work” environment. Our results found that the majority of our married with children female-
ATs would remain at their particular job setting and in the profession. These female-ATs found that with the right working environment and overall support system that they are able to achieve WLB. However, our single female-ATs indicated once they decided to start a family they would leave the Division I setting or exit the profession all together. They believe, from observing others, that the athletic training profession will require more time caring for someone else’s children with less quality time for their own children. Married female-ATs with the intentions of starting a family in the near future had already found themselves making plans to change their job settings. Most of these married female-ATs acknowledged that this was their solution to have the capability and opportunity to be there for their children.

Previous research identified that salary can impact the longevity of ATs. In today’s economy, basic costs of food, rent, and insurance are continuing to increase. The demands to cover these expenses are only further complicated when adding the economic demands of supporting a family. Despite the majority of female-ATs not being in athletic training for financial reward but rather their desire to keep athletes on the playing field, our participants identified unsatisfactory salaries in relation to their daily responsibilities and hours. Salary is an additional negative factor to leave the profession when assessing their WLB. Similar studies show that female-ATs starting a family do not foresee enough financial reward to continue at the Division I setting or stay in the profession to support their family. Overall, salary is not the deciding factor for female-ATs leaving the profession but a significant contributing factor.
Limitations and Future Directions for Research

As our study only gained perspectives from female-ATs in the Division I setting, we recognize that the contributing factors, applied strategies, and potential career intentions resulting from this study may not pertain to all clinical settings or ATs. Per this disclaimer and to compliment this study, it would be beneficial for future research to determine perceptions from a more diversified group of female-ATs and other clinical settings. Furthermore, it would be helpful to solicit the perceptions and perspectives from senior administrators. These individuals are the decision-makers and can exert greater influence to make needed or agreed changes happen. For example, obtaining and analyzing the athletic directors’ perception of ATs’ WLB to determine their concerns and priorities related to retention, suggested improvements, and the need to create policies for WLB. Table 4 provides additional considerations for athletic directors, supervisors, and colleagues. Other potential and important factors to pursue and survey are the roles of an AT’s spouse and how an ATs’ particular sport assignments impact their ability to achieve WLB. In addition, the method of online asynchronous in-depth interviewing was advantageous for our population, but it also provided a data capture limitation. It did not permit personal communication for follow-up interaction with the participants. Our study was piloted to limit confusion and increase clarity however; female-ATs perceptions could have been expanded if phone interviews were conducted.
Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to attain a greater understanding of female-ATs’ perceptions on WLB in the Division I setting and recognize the strategies for achieving their desired WLB. The contributing factors that influence a female-ATs’ WLB include managing long work hours, travel, changing schedules, and communication with coaches. Our study showed an unfavorable combination of these factors builds negative perceptions against their desired WLB. These factors along with short and long term career aspirations, evaluating financial rewards, and plans to have a family will strongly contribute to female-ATs potentially changing job settings or leaving the profession entirely. Overall, the importance of support systems, prioritizing family time, ability to separate work from home demands, and opportunities for outlets such as exercise were influential for female-ATs to create a sense of WLB. These strategies were even more

Table 4. Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicable Findings</th>
<th>Athletic Directors</th>
<th>Supervisors/ Head ATs</th>
<th>Colleagues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Consider policy changes regarding coverage. For example: ~ 48 hour rule to change practice ~ AT coverage 6am-6pm</td>
<td>*Establish strong teamwork and support system</td>
<td>*Use personal and organizational strategies to achieve WLB</td>
<td>*Need proactive not reactive plan to address WLB issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Ensure sufficient number of staff *Ensure regular communication with all staff (ATs, coaches, etc.)</td>
<td>*Exemplify positive WLB role model *Enforce and evaluate WLB policies</td>
<td>*Communicate needs to support system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Enforce policy rules and monitor compliance for accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Ensure regular communication with staff especially coaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
significant for the female-ATs with children. Whether female-ATs will definitely leave the Division I setting or the profession remains unclear. However, this study provides a better understanding of the connection between female-ATs’ career intentions and perceptions of WLB. Their decisions are significantly influenced by WLB when making a decision to remain or leave the athletic training profession. In addition, our findings may help establish better retention strategies and policies to retain female-ATs in the profession especially when starting a family.
References


Appendix 1.
Background Questionnaire

**Directions:** Please complete the following demographic information. Type your answers in the space provided.

1. How old are you? _______
2. Number of years as a BOC ATC? _______
3. Number of years at your current position? _______
4. Are you currently an assistant AT? If other, please specify:______________
5. Have you ever worked in other clinical settings in addition to the college setting?
6. Indicate your highest level of education. ______________________
7. How long is your contract? [i.e. 9 months, 10 months, 12 months]
8. Do you have summer work hours or expectations? Please explain.
9. Average work week (hours): In-season coverage_______
10. Average work week (hours): Out-of-season coverage_______
11. Average travel load (days per month): In-season coverage_______
12. Average travel load (days per month): Out-of-season coverage_______
13. What are your sport coverage assignments during the year?
14. How many full time staff members do you have at your institution?
15. How many full time staff members are female?
17. While at work, who is the primary caregiver for your child?
Appendix 2
Interview Questions- NCAA Division I Female Athletic Trainers

**Directions:** Please answer the following open-ended questions according to your marital status [single, married, or married with children].

1. What are your professional goals? ~*^  
2. Have they changed since you started a family? If so, how?^  
3. What are your personal goals? ~*^  
4. Based upon your goals do you envision a lifelong career in athletic training? ~*^  
5. Discuss if working in the athletic training profession provides a suitable working environment to achieve a balanced life style. ~*^  
6. What if any, organizational policies are in place to help you as a female athletic trainer with children to help maintain a balanced life style?^  
7. Do you feel that since starting your family you have had to make sacrifices personally and/or professionally? Please describe.~^  
8. Do you feel as though you will be able to persist in your current position with your current job and family responsibilities?^  
9. What role does your gender play in your response?*^  
10. What role does your current marital and family status play in your response? ~*^  
11. What role does your personality play in your response? ~*^  
12. Describe your personality.~^  
13. Have you experienced challenges finding a balance between your personal and professional life? If so, what factors have contributed to the challenge? If not, why haven’t you had challenges? ~*^  
14. Has being a female athletic trainer influenced your experiences of work and life balance issues? ~*^  
15. Has a female with children influenced your experiences of work and life balance issues? If so, how?^  
16. Discuss how your work/life balance has changed from being a single professional to being a married professional to being married with children? Were the challenges different at each stage for you?^  
17. Do you have a support system that helps you maintain a healthy balance between your personal and professional life? Please describe your support system. ~*^  
18. What personal strategies do you capitalize on to maintain or promote a balance between your personal and professional life? ~*^  
19. What role does your family play in your ability to find a balanced life style? ~*^  
20. What role does your spouse play in your ability to find a balanced life style?*  
21. What role do your co-workers play in your ability to find a balanced life style? ~*^  
22. What role does your coaching staff play in your ability to find a balanced life style? ~*^  
23. What role does your supervisor play in your ability to find a balanced life style? ~*^  
24. Is your supervisor male or female? ~*^  
25. Do they have a family of their own? ~*^
26. Would they be supportive of your family pursuits/needs? ~*^ 
27. What personal strategies do you utilize to sustain your professional enthusiasm? ~*^ 
28. Will this change once you have a family? If so, how? ~*^ 
29. Has this changed since you got married?* 
30. Will this change based upon your personal goals? If so, how? ~*^ 
31. Describe for me how your work setting has influenced your professional commitment. ~*^ 
32. Do you believe, once you have a family, that you will have to make sacrifices personally and/or professionally? Please describe. ~*^ 
33. As a young female, have you had a role model/mentor, who has helped you grow professionally? Please elaborate [why, what role they played, etc.] ~*^ 
34. Was your role model male or female? ~*^ 
35. In your opinion could having more female role models [those who remain in the profession with children influence retention rates for other female athletic trainers? Please explain. ~*^ 

~=Single Female-AT  
*=Married Female-AT  
^=Married with Children Female-AT
Appendix 3
Initial Recruitment Email to NCAA Division I Female Athletic Trainers

Dear Female Athletic Trainer,

You are invited to participate in a research study examining female athletic trainer's views on motherhood, work life balance, and the collegiate setting. Stephanie Mazerolle, Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut and Elizabeth Ferraro, Graduate Student at the University of Connecticut are conducting this study.

Fulfillment of life balancing has been found as an important element in retention of athletic trainers at the collegiate setting. Although gender differences have not been identified as a factor in finding work life balance for the athletic trainer, it appears motherhood plays a role in career decisions and fulfillment of a balance. Currently, there is limited empirical data regarding motherhood and the feasibility of a sustainable career in athletic training. The purpose, therefore, of this study is to gain the perspective of the female athletic trainer, regardless of marital status, to evaluate their work life balance, career intentions, and family goals.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions, which evaluate your professional goals, strategies used to promote a balanced life style, views on motherhood, and your workplace environment. If you are interested please journal to each question posed at the following link: Completion should take approximately 30 minutes of your time. The completed surveys will be stored on the researchers password protected computers and participant names and identifying markers will not be revealed; you will only be referred to by an assumed name to protect your confidentiality. After data analysis, all transcripts will be destroyed.

Participation is confidential and optional. If you have questions about this study, you may contact Stephanie at stephanie.mazerolle@uconn.edu, 860-486-4536 or Elizabeth at elizabeth.ferraro@uconn.edu, 860-617-7639. This research study was approved by the UCONN IRB, Protocol #H11-269.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Mazerolle, PhD, ATC
Assistant Professor, Primary Investigator
University of Connecticut

Elizabeth Ferraro, ATC
Graduate Student, Student Investigator
University of Connecticut