Fatherhood and Work–Family Balance in Academia: A Round Table Discussion

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The purpose of this round table discussion is to address the evolving role of fatherhood and impacts on career and family for the sport management academic. In the last 50 years, fathers have seen a change in their role. They now commonly take on a larger share of the family workload, while also sharing financial responsibilities with their spouses. LaRossa (1988) credits this change to the evolving influence of a mother’s role as a parent, thus a “cross-fertilizing” to the father has occurred. As the importance for both parents to work outside of the home has increased, more of a demand has been placed on the father as caregiver and nurturer. The culture of fatherhood is changing as investigations have indicated an increase in time spent by fathers in both child care (up 160% since 1975) and domestic duties (a three-fold increase) (Sullivan, 2000). In response to these changes, President Clinton issued an executive order in 1995 that directed federal agencies to support fathers and their positive involvement in their families. The resulting report outlined seven Core Learning areas for developing present, nurturing, and involved fathers. Because while fathers have become more involved in childcare and domestic duties, it has been argued that these changes do not necessarily in quality time and nurturing behaviors (Wall & Arnold, 2007).

As with the policy and practical implications around work and fatherhood in recent years, academic interest has also grown. And while the influence and importance of the father on child development has been historically understudied, research in this area has begun to grow. To meet this interest, several journals have dedicated special issues to the fatherhood, including Journal of Family History, Journal of Men’s Studies, and Journal of Family Issues, to name a few. Recent research has shown how the role of a father can contribute in a unique way to the development of a child compared to the role of a mother (Rohner & Veneziano (2001). As such, we believe it is important to expand the conversation and the research around work and family to include fathers.

Focusing specifically on the demands of academia, most of the challenges related to parenting have been centered on women in the professorate. As fathers continue to understand the importance of their involvement in the lives of their children, they are experiencing increased pressures, similar to those women employed in high-status careers. The incongruence of work and family role demands, and the tensions that arise between the two, is termed work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Conversely, emerging work in this area also suggests that focusing solely on the negative aspects of multiple role participation does not account for positive effects one role may have on another. In fact, partaking in one role (i.e., parent or professional) may enhance participation in the other role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). And while much of the research into work-family conflict in sport has addressed coaches or sport organization professionals, the focus of this round table will be instead on sport management academicians.

Involvement in the academy may allow a parent or spouse fewer afternoon and evening work hours, greater work-hour flexibility, and fewer set hours for work on weekends, as compared to expectations for coaches and sport industry professionals. This would suggest lower work-family conflict. However, we must also be willing to recognize that working within academia also brings about challenges regarding work-family issues. Therefore, the purpose of this roundtable discussion is to a) explore the changing role of fathers in households with at least one academician, b) identify cultural forces that seek to constrain the nurturing role of fathers and ways some individuals blur culturally accepted gender roles c) review current literature on fatherhood and work-family balance and enrichment. Specifically, the group will address the following questions; What are the unique concerns for fathers who are partners in academic couples? How do others cope with the evolving role of parenthood and balancing work? What are the new demands on fathers as mothers increasingly work outside of the home? What are the cultural disconnections that exist between the nurturing father and work? How does fatherhood impact tenure and promotion? What are the differences between academicians and professionals with respect to work-family conflict/enrichment? The panelists have been chosen based on their recognition as contributors to the field of work-family balance in sport management. Each member will present research as it relates to the focus of this roundtable discussion. In addition each member will discuss his or her personal challenges and successes with work-family balance. The session will conclude with questions and discussion, as well as addressing issues that may pertain to a variety of family structures.