

A Qualitative Examination of the Work-Life Interface of Coaching Fathers

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The interaction between work and family continues to have important implications for both employees and management across many industries. The outcomes from work-family interactions can be both positive or negative, including: increased status security (Sieber, 1974), enhanced overall well being (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), improved role functioning (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006), increased personality enrichment (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002), increased life stress (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997), increased adoption of unhealthy lifestyles (Reddick, Rochlen, Grasso, Reilly, & Spikes, 2012), increased job dissatisfaction (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996), and reduced overall life quality (Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992). Recent research has argued that the work-family interaction is also relevant in the sport industry, which may demonstrate particular nuances or challenges distinct to this industry. For example, the sport industry is characterized by a masculine culture, a sacrificial nature, and long work hours including nights and weekends, which together increases the potential for strain on the work-family interaction (Dixon & Bruening, 2005).

Three main theoretical frameworks inform the study of work and family. These include: (1) scarcity theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003), (2) role theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and (3) rational choice theory (Allison, 1999). Scarcity theory influences work family interaction by arguing that time, energy, and attention are finite resources. When these resources are spent at work they cannot be spent at home, and vice versa, resulting in role conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). Role theory argues that society is constructed of individuals fulfilling roles (Goode, 1960). As the demands of the family role conflict with the obligations of the work role, individuals feel a strain between the two roles. Further, the interaction between roles is bi-directional with work impacting family and vice versa (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Also, contrary to scarcity theory, role theory suggests that although multiple roles can conflict, they can also enrich each other (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Finally, rational choice theory states that individuals make decisions to enhance the benefits in their life, and strive to decrease the costs associated with obtaining those benefits (Allison, 1999). By navigating work and family demands, individuals make rational choices to maximize the benefits from one role, while reducing the negative consequences of obtaining those benefits.

Utilizing one or more of the above theoretical frameworks, sport management scholars have investigated the interaction between work and family. For example, Dixon and Bruening (2005, 2007) used a multi-level theoretical design to investigate how coaching mothers negotiated the role of mother and coach. Their model showed how societal, organizational, and individual influences impacted the interaction between work and family. Palmer and Leberman (2009) studied the interaction between work and family with elite athletes who were also mothers. They found that support networks and extensive planning were important factors in negotiating the role strain felt by these women. Schenewark and Dixon (2012) furthered the work by questioning the one-sided nature of work family interactions. They found that the work-family interaction also provides enrichment, not strictly conflict. This finding confirms the claims of role theory, and depicts a more accurate picture of the work family interaction.

One area that has not yet been fully investigated in the work family interaction is the role of fathers. Although the role of fathers is acknowledged, much of the research in the sport management literature focuses on how mothers are affected by the work-family interaction. However, research in the broader work-family literature shows that balancing work and family roles is not a concern only for women (Pleck, 1985; Reddick et al., 2012). The societal expectations of fathers have shifted in the last fifty years (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). While earlier in this century "good fathers" provided financially for their children, now "good fathers" not only provide financially for their children but also emotionally and developmentally (Goldberg, Tan, & Thorsen, 2009); supporting research indicates that fathers play an important part in the development of their children (Lamb, 2010; Pleck, 2010). For example, studies show that children with involved fathers have higher cognitive abilities, are more empathetic, have fewer sex-based stereotypical beliefs, and have greater self-control (Lamb, 2010). As a result, examining how fathers

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experience the conflicts and enrichments of work and family roles in sport will contribute to theory and practice in sport management.

This study investigates the experiences of full-time employed coaches who are fathers. This in-progress study follows an inductive design, patterned after Dixon and Bruening (2007). Semi-structured in-depth interviews are being conducted with 20-25 full-time high school coaches who are fathers. Snowball sampling techniques are being utilized to identify participants. Although previous research has largely focused on college coaches, it is expected that full-time high school coaches also experience high levels of work-family interaction, yet are more accessible for in-depth investigation. Interviews are being conducted both in-person or via Skype. The interviews thus far have lasted approximately 40 minutes. They are professionally transcribed and hand-coded to assess themes. Themes are derived from previous literature (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007) with openness to the emergence of new themes (Neuman, 2009).

The data is still being collected, but initial results have been examined. The results indicate that coaches who are fathers perceive high work to family conflict, but little family to work conflict. The coaching role's time requirement is emerging as the strongest conflict-causing element. Activities like scouting, reviewing film, game planning, practicing, traveling, and interacting with parents are all time-consuming activities that take coaches away from their families. Additionally, some of the coaches reported that they have teaching duties on top of their coaching responsibilities, resulting in two full-time work roles. The coaches explained that they depend on their spouse during the season to take care of family, childcare, and household duties. They explained that only in the off-season were they able to help with family obligations.

The coaches also indicated high levels of enrichment from their jobs and families. For example, Coach A (who had been coaching for three years) explained that his ability to relate to his own children improved because of his time working with the athletes. Coach B (a coach for over thirty years) explained that he could better motivate his children after he began coaching. Coach B also discussed how his family enriched his coaching role. He explained that their support, regardless of performance, was comforting and helpful for his confidence and self-esteem when coaching duties became overly stressful. The coaches also related how positive and negative spillover affected their family life. While winning boosted the coach's morale at home and enhanced family interactions, losing reduced morale, and had the potential to create conflict.

These initial findings indicate that coaches who are fathers experience both work-family conflict and enrichment (cf. Schenewark & Dixon, 2012). They also show that fathers actively work through individual and organizational means to negotiate the role strain that comes from balancing their coaching and fathering roles, although fathers tended to use personal rather than organizational supports to accomplish this. This result contrasts Bruening and Dixon's (2007) findings regarding the support systems utilized by coaching mothers. The results indicate that coaching fathers are concerned not only about being breadwinners for their families but also about the development and well being of their children. Further research in this area, particularly with a larger and more diverse sample, will provide greater insight into the challenges and rewards coaching fathers experience, and how they work to navigate their different roles.