The Pursuit of Work-Life Balance by High School Sport Practitioners in the Athletic Director-Head Coach Dual Role

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With wide-reaching benefits afforded to student-athletes through their participation and communities investing time and resources into the promotion of meaningful athletic programs, leaders within a high school athletic department face substantial expectations in their role. For those who decide to embrace a dual role of athletic director and head coach, the increased responsibilities facilitate greater levels of role conflict and role overload that can negatively impact the ability to achieve work-life balance if not properly addressed. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine how these high school sport dual role practitioners pursue work-life balance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants represented across school classification (i.e., 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A) and sport coached, and a thematic analysis yielded three main themes (i.e., recognizing the challenge, setting boundaries, and incorporating family into work) that detail the efforts implemented for work-life balance. From a theoretical perspective, findings add further insight into the influence of role conflict and role overload on work-life balance, especially in the context of high school athletics, while practitioners in the athletic director-head coach dual role can use the perspectives shared by participants to ensure they are effectively balancing their professional and personal life amidst these role demands.

Keywords: role conflict, role overload, work-life balance, athletic administration, high school athletics, athletic director, head coach

High school sports intersect with society on a number of levels as communities and school districts invest substantial time and resources to help ensure effective athletic programs (Miracle & Rees, 2010). Further, given the positioning of these athletic programs within the context of an educational setting and the wide-reaching benefits afforded to student-athletes through their participation, expectations of success stretch beyond simply winning and losing (Grant, 2021). As such, leaders within an athletic department take on enhanced responsibilities as they prioritize outcomes within each program that ensure academic, personal, and life-skill development. These increased time and work demands can elicit greater role conflict and role overload, which, if not properly addressed, can lead to negative consequences in all facets of life for those working in high school athletics.

High school athletic directors represent the person responsible for leading the athletic department and guide how programs should be managed through the culture that is established (Forsyth et al., 2022). Head coaches, who represent another leader in high school sports, are at the center of an individual athletic program and make specific decisions aimed at creating meaningful experiences for those involved (O'Boyle, 2014). Within each of these individual positions, practitioners face long work hours and notable work demands that can facilitate conflict and overload leading to harmful outcomes (Creary & Gordon, 2016; Duxbury et al., 2018; Rafique, 2022) and stress and turn-over intention (Conant, 2017; Lee et al., 2020). Research has highlighted how these stressors are further compounded for those who also serve in a teaching position through the increase in duties that must be managed (Conner & Bohan, 2018; Ha et al., 2011). However, a gap in the literature exists related to understanding the experiences of those embracing the high school athletic director-head coach dual role. The reasons for fulfilling these specific roles simultaneously within an athletic department are vast, such as a passion for leading the school's athletic programs on multiple levels, a head coach wanting to serve in an administrative role within the high school, or an athletic director needing to fill a head coaching vacancy. Regardless of the motivations behind the decision to take on this dual role, the wide-reaching tasks necessary for each position can contribute to increased challenges of navigating role conflict and role overload.

One area that is often jeopardized by those serving as both athletic director and head coach is the ability to achieve work-life balance. These practitioners face vast responsibilities tied to the expectations of leading the athletic department and their individual athletic program. As such, experiences in one's personal life are ultimately sacrificed (Graham and Dixon, 2017; Martin, Kelley, & Dias, 1999; Miller et al., 2012). This can harm relationships within an individual's life and result in negative perceptions related to the dual role. Therefore, this research aimed to identify how practitioners embracing the athletic director-head coach dual role achieve work-life balance by minimizing the impact of role

conflict and role overload. The following research question guided this effort:

> RQ1: How do high school sport practitioners in the dual role of athletic director and head coach pursue work-life balance?

Literature Review

Previous work has examined the impact of role conflict and role overload, especially in the context of establishing work-life balance (Deery et al., 2017; Duxbury et al., 2018; Kossek & Lee, 2017; Montani & Dagenais-Desmrais, 2018). The ability to manage role conflict and role overload is dependent on the occupational and organizational socialization factors present within one's work (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019; Lawson, 1986; Park and Curtner-Smith, 2018; Richards, 2015) and the ability of individuals to exercise their own agency by pushing back against adverse conditions in the work setting to pursue their own desires (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). Within high school athletics, these stressors have been found to negatively influence the experiences of both athletic directors and head coaches when not appropriately addressed (Graham and Dixon, 2017; Martin, Kelley, & Dias, 1999; Miller et al., 2012). These areas of focus related to the pursuit of work-life balance by those embracing the high school sport athletic director-head coach dual role are more thoroughly considered below.

Role Conflict

Through responsibilities in both work and life, individuals face issues via conflicting demands that negatively impact experiences within these various roles. This role conflict reflects incongruent, overlapping roles that impede the successful completion of tasks (Creary & Gordon, 2016), as the expectations and needs within each role interfere with the ability to fulfill these responsibilities simultaneously (Eys et al., 2007). Early research considered how the presence of role conflict affected job performance (Katz & Kahn, 1978), as well as its contribution to decreased job satisfaction, lower trust in the organization, and increased levels of job-specific tension (Kahn et al., 1964). As the understanding of this conflict has grown over time, Kossek and Lee (2017) emphasized the importance of focusing on this issue as it pertains to an individual's life outside of work to address work-life role conflicts that arise.

Work-Life Conflict

Balancing work responsibilities with one's personal life has proven to be a challenge that can elicit harmful outcomes for employees stretching across work and non-work aspects (Kossek & Lee, 2017). For many, the pursuit of success in one's profession can lead to choosing work over personal life. Bolino and Turnley (2005) highlighted how employees who prioritize going the extra mile at work tend to possess higher levels of conflict at home. Adding to this, Deery et al. (2017) examined the relationship between work tasks and work-family conflict, finding that an overcommitment to the organization directly contributed to conflicts with one's family that resulted in adverse consequences. In the context of collegiate

coaching, managing one's athletic program necessitates an investment that can generate conflicts impacting areas including work, family, and life. To address these conflicts, specific coping mechanisms, including self-awareness, time management strategies, and sacrificing specific work responsibilities, have been employed (Bruening & Dixon, 2007). Given the impact on family well-being, health, and stress, promoting work-life balance has been viewed as an important aim to address role conflict (Kossek & Lee, 2017).

The presence of work-life conflict has been the focal point of previous research specifically aimed at sport employees. In a comprehensive review of existing literature on the work-life interface, Graham and Smith (2022) noted the nearly universal experiences shared by those within sport regarding the prominence of this conflict, including the struggles faced in pursuing work-life balance. Work-life conflict has been found to be especially prominent for those working in a demanding culture that facilitates role incongruence (Singe et al., 2023), as well as in employees who had children (Taylor et al., 2022). Although work-family conflict can negatively impact the experiences of the individual, this stressor has also been found to serve as a buffer that prevents one from transitioning into a workaholic (Huml et al., 2021). Intentional coping mechanisms have been employed by those working in sport to address this conflict, including integrating work and personal life, establishing family-friendly work environments, and setting work boundaries (Graham & Smith, 2022).

Role Overload

Although often used interchangeably, role conflict and role overload represent different sources of stress faced by an individual in work and life contexts (Coverman, 1989). As employees embrace roles and responsibilities in their work, while also having duties at home, there are times where an overload of expectations can be detrimental. Creary and Gordon (2016) posited that role overload exists when one takes on an overwhelming number of tasks at once, which leads to excessive time demands or psychological demands. When present, this overload has been found to contribute to negative perceptions toward an organization and its leadership (Rafique, 2022), elicit higher levels of adverse health outcomes, such as fatigue and personal problems (Shultz et al., 2010), and be a significant predictor of stress (Duxbury et al., 2018). However, when organizations give employees greater job control over handling work responsibilities, Jensen et al. (2013) found that individuals demonstrated lower levels of role overload and its associated consequences.

Work-Life Overload

Role overload stretches across several areas of one's life, including family, work, and overall role. Duxbury et al. (2018) highlighted how when present, this overload generates increased stress and impacts the ability to establish a balance between work roles and non-work roles. Especially when one exerts greater time and energy to enhance work performance (Montani & Dagenais-Desmrais, 2018),

this creates an overload in responsibilities as an individual takes on an excessive workload, which harms relationships at home (Bolino & Turney, 2005). Yip et al. (2008) posited that by intentionally distancing oneself from work responsibilities when the burden becomes too great, individuals can address the burnout and personal strife experienced from role overload. Further, given the strain that can be placed on work-life balance through this overload in roles and responsibilities, Creary and Gordon (2016) identified intentional strategies that should be implemented to minimize these negative outcomes, including prioritizing specific roles and establishing and maintaining boundaries.

Sport represents one industry where the work required of employees can create an overload that diminishes time spent at home. For those who are unable to fulfill familial duties given these wide-reaching professional responsibilities, burnout and negative perceptions toward work increase over time (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Mazerolle et al. (2015) examined the impact of role overload on work-life balance for collegiate athletic trainers. Results highlighted how this overload persists and has an adverse effect on achieving work-life balance. To minimize this negative impact, support from others, a strong network, and time away from the professional role were all found to be essential. Further, when a sport employee fits the identity of a workaholic, the overcommitment to their work elicits greater levels of stress and exhaustion that can interfere with one's home life (Lundkvist et al., 2016).

For example, coaches in college athletics have acknowledged that the investment perceived as necessary to be successful consumes most of their time and energy. As a result, they have a limited personal life that includes a lack of involvement with family and few relationships outside of work given the focus on their professional role (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012).

Occupational and Organizational Socialization

Role conflict and role overload's impact within one's experiences is dependent on key elements related to work itself and the agency employed by individuals to push back against factors that facilitate these stressors. Lawson (1986) described occupational socialization as the social influences (e.g., societal, sport, professional) that affect the practices and perceptions of an individual in their role. As such, the roles embraced in an organization are framed by these social contexts that contribute to how an employee is prepared for and views their work (Richards, 2015). Park and Curtner-Smith (2018) specifically analyzed how occupational socialization influenced adapted physical educators within a school setting. Adapted physical educators who were committed to providing high quality programming in their role demonstrated a stronger commitment to their values and approaches.

In sport, the factors commonly present in occupational socialization can affect how individuals navigate dual roles simultaneously (Richards & Templin, 2012). Mellor et al. (2020) compared the perspectives of a veteran and a novice

teacher-coach within a high school to analyze their perceptions toward the dual role. The time viewed as necessary for navigating each role, the relationships that had been established, and the perceived value of their roles were each found to affect experiences in the teacher-coach role. Thus, these socially constructed and contextually bound elements factor into how the roles are embraced.

One of the social influences identified in Lawson's (1986) analysis of occupational socialization was organizational socialization. This concept focused on the organization in which the individual takes on their roles, including the knowledge, values, and skills prioritized in the work environment. Over time, this socialization has continued to evolve in understanding how roles are navigated. As a result, greater attention has been placed on both the influence that individuals play when assimilating into the organization, as well as how they embrace new or changing roles (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). Within a school setting, the culture and conditions in which employees work have been found to directly support or negate their efforts (Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018). Deenihan and MacPhail (2017) examined how an organization can affect the development of teachers, noting that those who embraced a supportive environment perceived an innovative setting that allowed them to feel appreciated and encouraged in their roles. Thus, the organization in which one works can enhance or inhibit the development of effective practices that allow teachers to flourish.

Sport professionals are similarly reliant upon their organizational settings in shaping their ability to embrace work roles successfully. Eason et al. (2020) interviewed collegiate athletic trainers to examine factors that influence their experiences. Areas connected to the organization (e.g., staff size, work hours, autonomy given) were found to have the biggest effect on job satisfaction, which played a role not only in navigating the professional role, but also how work-life balance was affected. When organizational factors are seen as adversely impacting these positions, work-family conflict and work-family guilt are almost universally experienced (Rynkiewicz et al., 2022). In many instances, these negative organizational influences are unavoidable and a natural part of the sport role. However, specific cultural elements can help address these potential consequences, including supervisor support, expectations of job sharing among fellow employees, and an ability to establish time away from work (Mazerolle & Eason, 2013). Furthermore, sport organizations must be cognizant to not establish unrealistic expectations for employees within their work roles. Through realistic expectations, work-family conflicts decrease, the risk of workaholism is reduced, and burnout becomes less of a concern. This can contribute to a lasting and positive perspective being instilled within the individual toward how they view the organization and their roles (Taylor et al., 2019).

While occupational and organizational socialization affect the experiences of

employees within their roles, individuals who exhibit personal agency in these settings can push back against adverse factors. In doing so, they contribute to an environment that enhances their own needs. Known as personalization, the individual shapes the organization to better align with their desires (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). Adding to this, Park and Curtner-Smith (2018) found in their examination of high-quality adapted teachers an ability to exert personal values and pedagogies on the school culture. Thus, individuals who demonstrate their influence on the socialization factors present within an organization can address elements that conflict with their work-life balance pursuits.

High School Athletic Directors

High school athletic directors are responsible for leading athletic programs by establishing a culture, offering guidance and insight, and making decisions related to the organization's operations (Forsyth, 2021). Four overarching categories (i.e., managerial activities, human resources, communications, and networking) represent the efforts and responsibilities of athletic directors in leading the athletic department (Forsyth, 2021). As the expectations for success have grown in high school sports, so too has the pressure to ensure that teams are performing at their highest potential both in athletic performance and in student-athlete development. Given this competitive and demanding environment, the high school athletic director role necessitates substantial time commitment to achieve desired outcomes (Judge & Judge, 2009).

Given the pressure and demands associated with this role, these practitioners have been found to experience greater levels of role conflict and role overload, both of which elicit stress and burnout (Martin, Kelley, & Dias, 1999; Martin, Kelley, & Eklund, 1999). In the context of role conflict, Conant (2017) demonstrated how this stressor has generated higher levels of strife between responsibilities, which decreased job satisfaction and led some to leave the profession altogether. Looking specifically at those working in a dual role of high school teacher-athletic director, Ha et al. (2011) found role overload to directly impact emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. With increased emotional exhaustion, overall well-being and job satisfaction have been found to decrease (Lee et al., 2020).

High School Head Coaches

The head coaching role in high school sports has experienced an increase in performance expectations, which has contributed to greater role conflict and role overload. When conflict and an overwhelming number of demands are present, this can lead to strain within one's profession (Sage, 1987). Recent work has examined strategies utilized to address these stressors, such as ensuring relationships with stakeholders (Westfall et al., 2018) and being given greater job control over the management of responsibilities (Lu et al., 2022). This strategy implementation has been found to be especially important for high school coaches who also work as a teacher (Konukman et al., 2010), as creating balance between the roles (Ryan, 2008) and identifying men-

tors and support from others (Conner & Bohan, 2018) have both been found to help practitioners take on multiple roles and decrease stress.

By not addressing role conflict and role overload through strategies to minimize their impact, coaches have recognized the sacrifices made by not spending enough time with their family and prioritizing work over life (Miller et al., 2012). Through intense and consistent role conflict and overload, balancing work and family responsibilities continues to be a challenge (Conner & Bohan, 2018). Graham and Dixon (2017) interviewed head coaches to examine their pursuit of work-life balance, with findings emphasizing the challenges faced in this aim due to role strain and tension between professional and personal responsibilities. Through specific coping strategies, including relying on their family, compartmentalizing and integrating roles, and utilizing time efficiently, participants noted how these multiple roles could be brought together to create enriching experiences for themselves and their family.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how those serving in the high school athletic director-head coach dual role pursue work-life balance. Those who embrace multiple roles within a high school setting take on additional responsibilities and time demands at work that create further role conflict and role overload impacting one's personal life (Conner & Bohan, 2018; Graham & Dixon, 2017; Ha et al., 2011). While previous research has considered the impact of these

stressors on the athletic director and head coach positions individually (Conant, 2017; Miller et al., 2012), this study provided the first in-depth analysis that considered how work-life balance is achieved by practitioners who take on both positions simultaneously. Therefore, findings aimed to detail the specific strategies and considerations employed by those in this dual role through deeper context into their experiences and perspectives within this pursuit. In doing so, findings advance understanding on the approaches implemented for work-life balance, especially in the context of high school athletics and the dual role of athletic director and head coach.

Methods

To secure in-depth context related to the pursuit of work-life balance by high school sport practitioners embracing the athletic director-head coach dual role, a qualitative approach was implemented. Given the design of this study, it is necessary to identify how the author affects and is affected by the research process. Through a positionality statement, the researcher can be intentional in identifying biases and assumptions that could contribute to the study's findings and consider personal backgrounds and beliefs ahead of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This not only helps the researcher develop an awareness for potential bias, but it also provides key context for the reader in understanding how findings were interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The following positionality statement was developed for this research by the author: In addition to participating as a high

school student-athlete, I have interacted professionally with high school athletic directors and head coaches in a myriad of ways. For example, while working in a high school athletic department, I was responsible for assisting in day-to-day operations and event supervision. This allowed me to develop relationships with athletic directors and head coaches through the consistent communications and interactions that took place. Further, I have served as an assistant coach on a high school coaching staff, which gave me an in-depth look at the time and commitment necessary from coaches to maintain successful and meaningful athletic programs. These experiences and others could imply that I solely focus on the elements in this research that position practitioners in a favorable way given the positive perspectives I have toward those who fulfill the athletic director and head coach roles. However, I believe it has instead provided me with a level of knowledge for the field, its realities, and its challenges that allows me to effectively embrace and understand the data compiled. As such, I strive to interpret findings in a deeper context to advance this field and improve the experiences for those working within it.

Representation within school classification (i.e., 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A) and sport coached was ensured to capture a range of experiences from those working in various school sizes and athletic programs. A nonprobability sampling technique, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described as the most common for qualitative research, was utilized to develop a sample that was reflective of the two categories (i.e.,

school classification and sport coached) prioritized. Participants represented a single Midwestern state whose athletic association governs more than 10 boys' sports and 10 girls' sports and who ranks in the top 20 nationally in participation numbers (NFHS, 2023).

A full list of potential participants was developed by identifying each individual in this state who worked in the athletic director-head coach dual role and whose high school belongs to the state athletic association's membership. In total, 67 high school sport practitioners were included as potential participants and contacted to participate. Email communications were sent requesting participation, which included a description of the study's purpose and a study information sheet, with 15 practitioners accepting the invitation and thus representing the study's sample.

When securing participants, attention was dedicated to ensuring that the final sample represented the two categories prioritized (i.e., school classification and sport coached). For school classification, the state association relied upon most commonly utilizes a four-class system (i.e., 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A) for dividing high schools within specific sports. This classification is predominantly based on enrollment size, although tournament success can also impact this classification assignment and result in an athletic program moving up a class based on consistent postseason performance. As such, the most frequently appearing classification for a high school's athletic programs was used, as this is the most accurate description of enrollment. All four classifi-

Table 1

Dual Role Participant Information

Participant	School Classification	Sport Coached	Gender
Participant 1	2A	Baseball	Male
Participant 2	3A	Football	Male
Participant 3	3A	Baseball	Male
Participant 4	4A	Softball	Male
Participant 5	2A	Baseball	Male
Participant 6	4A	Girls' Volleyball	Female
Participant 7	2A	Girls' Basketball	Male
Participant 8	4A	Boys' Basketball	Male
Participant 9	2A	Girls' Cross Country and Track & Field	Female
Participant 10	3A	Baseball	Male
Participant 11	3A	Football	Male
Participant 12	1A	Baseball	Male
Participant 13	1A	Softball	Female
Participant 14	1A	Boys' Soccer	Male
Participant 15	4A	Girls' Basketball	Male

cations were captured within the study's participants to include insight across school sizes. A variety of sports coached (e.g., baseball, football, softball, girls' volleyball) was also ensured to secure experiences from a range of perspectives within high school athletics. Please see Table 1 for details about each participant, including their school's classification and the sport they coached.

Semi-structured interviews were completed with each participant in either an in-person or virtual video setting depending on the preference of the individual. An interview protocol was developed based on the elements outlined by Carspecken (1996), which include a topic domain reflecting the main focus of the study, a lead-off question to begin the dis-

cussion (i.e., "How do you achieve work-life balance outside of high school athletics?"), covert categories that needed to be addressed (e.g., difficulty achieving work-life balance, setting boundaries, spending time with family), and potential follow-up questions representing anticipated directions that the conversation might go (e.g., "How difficult is it to achieve this balance?" "What type of boundaries, if any, do you try to put up for work-life balance?" "Looking specifically at your family, how have you incorporated your dual roles within your personal life?"). This protocol was utilized to lead interview interactions in an effort to ensure consistency during data collection, regardless of how the interview took place, and pursue depth within participant responses (Cre-

swell & Guetterman, 2019). The average interview lasted approximately 30 minutes (29:41), with a long of 45 minutes and eight seconds (45:08) and the shortest one at 18 minutes and five seconds (18:05).

Data Analysis

Utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six recommended phases (i.e., familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report), a thematic analysis was employed to highlight the shared themes present among participants. An inductive approach was relied upon to develop themes that were based in codes identified during analysis efforts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In doing so, findings reflected the data compiled related to the pursuit of work-life balance by those in the high school athletic director-head coach dual role.

Interviews were transcribed and reviewed upon completion to give the researcher a sense of participant responses. Member checking was also employed, as participants were asked to review their specific interview transcript and provide any necessary edits or clarifications before offering approval of the transcript (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An initial coding process was then conducted by the researcher to identify words and phrases consistently appearing across the transcripts. A set of codes was developed to help categorize text within the transcripts to identify patterns in the data. These codes were built and combined into larger concepts that embodied a list of potential themes for this research. The themes were further

reviewed to identify which ones appropriately represented the codes that had been developed and connected to the overarching data set. This effort resulted in three main themes, with sub-themes also present where appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition to member checking, further efforts were employed to pursue credibility within the findings. When beginning interviews, the researcher aimed to establish rapport with participants to secure a trust that would elicit honest and meaningful responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This included sharing personal experiences working in high school athletics, learning more about the participant, and attempting to demonstrate an understanding of their roles. Furthermore, by pursuing rich, thick descriptions of the data, findings offered detail for each theme through the quotations and perspectives shared by participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Ensuring trustworthiness in the developed themes necessitated intentional considerations when analyzing data. Nowell et al. (2017) outlined four criteria (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) that were at the core of this aim. Credibility was achieved by establishing a fit between the responses of dual role participants and the interpretation of the study's findings, while transferability was represented by building themes from individual cases to demonstrate commonalities from those across school classification (i.e., 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A) and sport coached. Dependability is demonstrated by outlining the steps employed in the data analysis process (i.e.,

thematic analysis), and finally, confirmability describes findings that come directly from the compiled data. In this research, findings can be traced directly back to the perspectives provided by the study's participants when discussing their experiences in the high school athletic director-head coach dual role. These elements embody the steps taken to establish trustworthiness within the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Through the thematic analysis, it was also determined that saturation had been met, as the research question was fully answered, and further participant recruitment was unnecessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Findings

This study aimed to detail how those working in the high school sport athletic director-head coach dual role pursue work-life balance. Given the additional responsibilities that come with fulfilling both positions simultaneously, practitioners face enhanced role conflict and role overload that can make this balance with one's personal life more difficult to achieve. Three main themes (i.e., recognizing the challenge, setting boundaries, and incorporating family into work) from the thematic analysis reflect the approaches employed by high school sport practitioners within this dual role for work-life balance, which are discussed in greater detail below.

Recognizing the Challenge

The pursuit of work-life balance within the high school athletic director-head coach dual role is a challenge that many participants recognized needing to address. Participant 5 called achieving this balance "the toughest part of the job" and added that "if I was single or if I was married with no kids, that would be a lot easier." One participant (2) found the work-life balance piece to be "really hard," especially when being an "AD and head coach in a different school system than your family," while another (15) described how not only was finding this symmetry between work and life "extremely hard" when starting the dual role, but "it's still a challenge because I think you have to be intentional about it or…your job can consume you." As Participant 14 reflected, "You look at how much time you're going, and with me coaching as much as I do, then I'm gone all the time. Finding that work-life balance with personal stuff, your personal life takes a hit big time."

Participants detailed one of the challenges to be putting work aside while at home given the responsibilities of being both an athletic director and a head coach. This was outlined by Participant 11, who noted, "I think one thing you asked about that I probably need to do better at is being able to shut it off whenever I'm not here." Participant 8 further echoed this perspective, calling life outside of work "an area I need to get better at. It's an area that there's not enough time in the day to do it, but there's value to it from a family standpoint of staying connected." The additional time demands of the dual role further complicates being able to get away from work. Participant 2 gave the example that "summer is another one that gets hard because most athletic directors have

the majority of summer at least to refresh or recharge." However, since they are also coaching, "that's when it's really starting to heat up, especially when you coach a fall sport, so I miss out on that a little bit."

For many participants, having to miss their children's activities is a sacrifice that has come with taking on the dual role. "There's a part that you will look back… and go I missed out," Participant 8 admitted. "I missed out on certain things that your sons and daughters did. In retrospect, that's been difficult." Another participant (5) pointed to this as a major contributor for those who leave the dual role. "As I talk with other people, and I see the constant turnover, I think that's probably the number one reason why people either get out, or it's a short career path for them," they started. The practitioner continued that this "is because their kids get involved in activities or things like that, and they reach a breaking point. That is a challenge." Participant 3 has personally felt this impact, noting that they constantly "reevaluate is this going to be sustainable next year?" They recognized that soon "it might be too much of a burden…It would be doing the school, the baseball players, my kids, and my family a disservice to try to spread myself that thin."

In identifying the challenge that comes with navigating work-life balance in this dual role, participants were reflective in discussing how this continues to be an issue for them. One participant (12) was preparing to attend a national conference for athletic directors and indicated that the session they were most looking forward to focused on work-life balance.

They added, "The whole balancing work and life and things like that, I'm still trying to figure that all out." When asked what advice they would have for new practitioners embracing the athletic director and head coach positions simultaneously, Participant 8 offered, "They've got to be willing to accept the added timeframe of commitment of time and work."

Setting Boundaries

Knowing how difficult it can be to achieve work-life balance, participants discussed how they have worked to set boundaries aimed at prioritizing their personal life. Participant 8 posited that boundaries are important because "you need to have that balance for your family and for your own peace of mind…Ultimately, as an AD and basketball coach, you've got to leave." Something that Participant 1 "established a long time ago" is that "once I pull into the driveway, it's time to leave (the dual role) there and move on to the next thing." When Participant 5's principal joked with them that "you need to set some boundaries" with others in the athletic department, this individual acknowledged, "That's probably something I need to do a better job of." Two sub-themes (i.e., minimizing after-work communications and finding time away) provide context into examples of boundaries described by participants.

Minimizing After-Work Communications

Finding a way to not allow work communications to permeate time at home was emphasized as necessary. Participant 8 summarized this thought. "You've got

to just turn your phone off and disconnect…you've got to take time to do that just for your own mental health and to recharge your batteries," they stressed. Participant 13 called this the "do not disturb" function, and "that's my peace. My phone's not going to ring. Nobody's disturbing me. I can just unwind." For one participant (15), they have implemented the approach of "around 8:30, I need to be a dad, so from 8:30 till about 7:30 in the morning when I come in for work, I typically don't check my emails." They felt this has "helped me balance life along with being these other two" roles. This perspective was echoed by Participant 2, who outlined, "In the last couple of years, I have made just a very conscious decision that it can wait until morning. A lot of things can wait until morning."

Working to minimize this communication outside of work has also been achieved through establishing clear expectations with others. "Setting those guidelines early has been very, very helpful," explained Participant 3. This sentiment was shared by another participant (15) who believes that "it's important to be intentional about be available when you're available…but also, when you're not available, have people respect that as well." One participant (13) recalled an example of "one coach in particular who would call me at all times of the day." They ended up having to tell the coach that "I'm here for you, but I got to be here for me…Unless it's an emergency, you're going to have to wait." Participant 11 indicated that they have had to establish communication boundaries with their football parents

who want to complain about other sports. "They feel like I'm a person they can vent to, and I'm not," they asserted. "That's probably been one boundary where I'm like we're not having that conversation."

Finding Time Away

To be the best version of themselves within the athletic director-head coach dual role, participants stressed the need to find opportunities to prioritize their time outside of work. Participant 8 emphasized, "You've got to get off the grid because if not, the grind of the position will just completely consume you." This could be going "to a concert, or you go to a game, or you go to something that… you're just going for fun, or it's a family vacation." Participant 15 expressed how "sometimes, you just got to say you know what, I need a break from this." For Participant 4, they have tried to utilize certain times during the year "where I won't come in for three days. I'll go have some fun." By prioritizing one's personal life, participants felt this ultimately benefits them within their dual role. "I'm going to do this for me," Participant 3 shared. "This will help me be better in the long run."

Practitioners described how they will identify specific days where they make sure to put life outside of work first. This strategy has allowed them to ensure consistency in achieving personal time. For example, Participant 10's family will "do a lot of stuff together on Sundays and other nights when there's openings," while another (3) has established a specific day of the week where they will have others supervise evening events. Some partic-

ipants work in a school district that has structured its schedule to have certain days that are free of sports. Participant 9 feels "very lucky" that "we don't have Wednesday events and Sundays" because "it gives me a good break midweek, and then it gives me a nice break on the weekend. It allows me to reflect, rebalance, get ready for the next tasks." Having Wednesday nights free of events is also the experience of Participant 7. "I know that's a night when…I can go home, and I can take advantage of that," they said. "That's the big night at my house."

Incorporating Family Into Work

Since the dual role often prevents practitioners from spending as much time with their family as they would prefer, participants detailed finding ways to incorporate their family into work. As Participant 7 stressed, "If you have a family, make sure that they're a priority within that realm as well." By marrying these two worlds together, there are opportunities to spend time with family while also accomplishing tasks related to the athletic director and head coach positions. This has been the experience of Participant 5. "Luckily, my wife and my kids enjoy athletics and being around," they explained. "Everybody at the school knows them because they're around all the time." Two subthemes (i.e., involvement in the school and attending events) reflect the ways in which participants' families have been incorporated into their work to navigate work-life balance and create meaningful experiences with family members.

Involvement in the School

Spending long hours at the high school due to athletic director and head coaching responsibilities can negate the amount of time available for family. As a way of combining the two worlds, participants discussed how their children have become immersed within the school. Participant 3 detailed their approach. "What I do is at the end of the school day, up until the baseball season, they come right over here immediately," they began. "They come and hang out. They can do their homework. We can hang out a little bit while I'm working, and they go run around here." One participant (7) saw it as a positive that "my kids grew up in the school," while another (4) reflected on how "it's been a family environment" and valued "the fact that my kids have been able to grow up on it." They continued that by incorporating their children into the school, "we are together. That helps because I know other ADs don't have that, aren't that fortunate to have their kids running around."

Having a spouse who is involved within the school can also allow for more time spent together. Participant 6 noted how for their family, "sports is a family thing." With their husband also being a coach at the high school, "that has helped…It's part of our family culture, so that's been huge." One practitioner (15) expressed appreciation for a spouse who understands the investment necessary to be successful within athletics. "My wife played college basketball, so she knows what it's like to be committed to athletics, and she loves

athletics," they shared. This individual was also grateful that their spouse would bring their child to practice when possible. "Being at a practice for an 18-month-old being around 18-year-olds is an experience, so we just try to embrace it every day and enjoy the best that we can," they reflected. For another participant (7), they felt "lucky to have a patient wife. I think she enjoys it, too. She's involved with the school. She's a secretary at the elementary. She's part of our booster program." Through this willingness to combine these two areas of life, "it's just who we are as a family," they concluded.

Attending Events

Whether it is supervising a game as athletic director or leading their team as head coach, evening events represent a substantial investment of time for those in this high school sport dual role. Thus, having a family who is willing to attend these events allows practitioners to spend quality time with their spouse and children while still upholding work responsibilities. One participant (5) emphasized that the family of those in this dual role must be accepting of "when they spend time with you, it's going to have to be at athletic events…I'm blessed that my son enjoys sports." Participant 6 further proposed, "I can't imagine not having a spouse or kids who loved what I love. That would be really hard." Participant 7 found the times where their family could join them at athletic events to be "a positive part of it as well. It's been a positive experience for me."

Participants valued having their children and grandchildren attend athletic events to be able to experience special moments with them. Participant 11 explained, "I think one of the nice things is my oldest…he likes coming to the events. So, there's another way, the work-life balance. We get to spend a lot of that time together." For some, their earliest moments with their kids can be connected to an athletic setting. Participant 10 reflected, "I remember my first grandson, I was holding him out there when he was three days old at a freshman basketball game."

Establishing a setting in which their children enjoy being present contributes to creating meaningful memories. Participant 5 stated, "I've lucked out because they've enjoyed being around," while participant (3) shared how "my kids, they're in athletics, so it makes it really easy. Hey, you want to go to the basketball game tonight? Sure. So, we're hanging out at a basketball game." Thinking back to when they were younger, this participant further recalled, "I used to love going to work with my dad, so we're just going to build it right in." In summarizing the joy their children now have for being around athletics, they concluded, "They love it. That's how we do it. So, yeah, we try to incorporate them into the high school athletics as much as we can."

Participant 15 felt grateful to have a spouse who "Friday night, not only does she know she's going to be at a football game, she would probably be at one anyways." This was further outlined by Participant 6, who described how their husband will travel to away games with them and say to them, "Yeah, I'll go just so you don't have to drive an hour by yourself." Given the responsibilities with supervis-

ing an event, there are times in which practitioners can be pulled away from talking to their spouse at any moment. "When she's (Participant 3's wife) there, she also understands, hey, at any given moment, I might have to stop in the middle of the conversation…so she understands that that's part of it," detailed Participant 3. For some participants, their spouses volunteer to work events as needed. Participant 10 noted how their spouse "comes in and is a ticket taker for me every now and then to help me out here," while Participant 7's wife "works a lot of the concession stands." By being intentional about ensuring these times together, participants stressed how they are able to incorporate their family into their dual role.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how those in the high school athletic director-head coach dual role pursue work-life balance. Given the responsibilities that come with embracing both roles simultaneously, enhanced role conflict and role overload can complicate the ability to achieve this balance (Conant, 2017; Graham & Dixon, 2017). Findings from this research are represented by three main themes (i.e., recognizing the challenge, setting boundaries, and incorporating family into work) that provide deeper context into the influence of role conflict and role overload on work-life balance and analyze them through a new lens (i.e., high school athletic director-head coach dual role). Through the key considerations and strategies employed by these dual role practitioners, findings advance

understanding on these stressors within the context of work-life balance, including ways to minimize their influence and create meaningful experiences within each area of life.

The need to focus on the relevance of role conflict and role overload on an individual's pursuit of work-life balance has grown in importance over time (Kossek & Lee, 2017). Within the context of high school athletics, recognizing the challenge of pursuing work-life balance was stressed by dual role participants in this study to be an essential first step in addressing role conflict and role overload. Previous research on these stressors has demonstrated their influence on work-life balance (e.g., Bolino & Turney, 2005; Duxbury et al., 2018; Kossek & Lee, 2017). Specifically in sport, employees have expressed their concern over the struggles faced related to work-life balance (Graham & Smith, 2022), especially those in a collegiate setting (Huml et al., 2021; Singe et al., 2023). This study emphasizes the value in individuals who not only acknowledge the challenge of work-life balance, but then also use these intentional considerations to implement strategies aimed at addressing it. For the influence of role conflict and role overload on work-life balance to be minimized, findings highlight how recognizing the challenge is paramount.

The second theme (i.e., setting boundaries) embodies efforts employed by high school sport practitioners to address the work-life balance challenge they have identified within their dual role. Setting work boundaries has been a consistently demonstrated approach to addressing role

conflict and role overload (Creary & Gordon, 2016; Graham & Smith, 2022; Yip et al., 2008). Thus, the two specific strategies commonly implemented by high school sport dual role practitioners (i.e., minimizing after-work communication and finding time away) represent approaches found to be effective in this specific segment. When setting these boundaries, individuals need support from leadership and other stakeholders in the organization, which can facilitate positive perceptions (Jensen et al., 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Rafique, 2022). Participants in this study further confirmed these perspectives, as the ability to rely on others to follow established boundaries allowed those in the dual role to feel empowered to pursue work-life balance.

By setting boundaries that facilitate work-life balance in this dual role, practitioners are also demonstrating the agency they possess within their organization. The occupational and organizational socialization factors commonly present in a work environment can affect the pursuit of work-life balance (Richards & Templin, 2012; Rynkiewicz et al., 2022) and an individual's experience (Eason et al., 2020; Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018). Participants in this study emphasized the importance of work-life balance and detailed specific approaches to pursue it. From minimizing after-work communication to being intentional about the time they set aside for family and personal interests, those in the athletic director-head coach dual role have exerted their influence on the organizational structure to better position themselves to achieve work-life balance.

As such, findings from this research provide specific context into understanding the intersection of socialization factors and role conflict and role overload, especially as it pertains to the individual and their strategies that contribute to the pursuit of this desired balance.

Knowing the difficulties that the dual role can bring in trying to find time outside of work, the third theme from this research (i.e., incorporating family into work) embodies how practitioners marry together these areas of their life to achieve work-life balance. Sport represents a unique setting in which this intersection can exist (Graham & Smith, 2022), as the strategy of bringing family into the work environment has not been a common approach within previous research aimed at minimizing role conflict and role overload in other industries (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Creary & Gordon, 2016). This finding suggests that in the right setting, an effective way to pursue work-life balance is by fulfilling both work and family responsibilities simultaneously. As role conflict and role overload often force individuals to sacrifice time spent with family (Bolino & Turney, 2005; Deery et al., 2017), participants demonstrated how incorporating family into their work addresses the work-life balance concerns elicited from these stressors.

Integrating family into work also offers greater insight into the role of organizational and occupational factors, as the culture and conditions of the work environment can directly affect one's experiences (Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018). Supportive environments elicit enhanced

feelings of appreciation within employees (Deenihan & MacPhail, 2017), whereas those in environments that conflict with their needs must exhibit personal influence to shape the organization in a way that produces a more conducive setting (Berkelaar & Harrison, 2019). In the context of this research, when the high school represents a space where families feel welcome to attend sporting events and become immersed in the school, work-life balance becomes easier to achieve for dual role practitioners. Those in this study expressed the value they perceived for working in this type of environment, as it has created a strengthened connection to the school and contributed to their work-life balance.

Practical Implications

Those working as a high school athletic director or head coach face potentially harmful outcomes tied to the vast responsibilities within their role (Conant, 2017; Creary & Gordon, 2016; Duxbury et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Rafique, 2022). These stressors can become further compounded when embracing both positions simultaneously. Thus, the findings from this study offer important guidance to high school sport practitioners as the first known study to examine how individuals in the athletic director-head coach dual role pursue work-life balance. Prior to being intentional about achieving this balance, individuals must first appreciate the challenge that exists in this pursuit through the presence of additional conflicts and greater responsibilities. Echoing the work of Bruening and Dixon (2007) and Taylor et al. (2022), this study demonstrates how those in the athletic director-head coach dual role recognize the importance of understanding the difficulties associated with achieving work-life balance, especially for those who have a family. This reality requires those in a similar dual role to appreciate the additional stressors that come with both positions to be able to then address how they resonate in this context.

Establishing specific strategies aimed at addressing role conflict and role overload has been identified as necessary for individuals pursuing work-life balance. One approach includes setting boundaries to ensure time away from the professional role (Creary & Gordon, 2016; Graham & Smith, 2022; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Yip et al., 2008). Practitioners can use the perspectives of participants from this research to consider boundaries found to be effective for those in high school athletics. This includes implementing clear communication expectations outside of work hours and prioritizing specific time away from work. However, knowing that boundaries cannot always be achieved, finding opportunities to bring together work and family has consistently been found as an effective way to minimize work-life issues in the sport setting (Graham & Smith, 2022). Findings from this study highlight how this can be accomplished by those who encourage family members to attend high school sporting events and find ways to get involved within the school. In doing so, those working in this dual role can maintain relationships and time with family while still fulfilling necessary work responsibilities.

Practitioners must also be aware of the influence that individual roles and the overarching organization can play on the ability to pursue work-life balance. Lawson (1986) described the social influences that affect perceptions and practices within one's position. As an employee develops a stronger understanding of their role and how to navigate each role, they demonstrate greater commitment to the values and approaches they prioritize, such as work-life balance (Mellor et al., 2020; Park & Curtner-Smith, 2018). Thus, findings encourage those in the dual role to cultivate relationships and learn to establish boundaries and expectations that facilitate this pursuit. From an organizational perspective, the culture established related to support and expectations can affect how one perceives their role and ability to spend time with family (Deenihan & MacPhail, 2017; Mazerrole & Eason, 2013; Taylor et al., 2019). For practitioners using this research to help in their efforts, participants detailed their appreciation for leadership that encourages finding time to get away from work and fulfill family responsibilities, as well as establishing an environment that welcomes one's family into the school and athletic setting.

Given the substantial responsibilities required within the high school athletic director-head coach dual role, the pursuit of work-life balance can be a challenge for those who are not intentional in achieving it. Findings from this research provide practitioners who take on both of these work roles with specific approaches and strategies that can help in pursuing a balance between professional expectations and personal needs. In doing so, role conflict and role overload can be better addressed to prevent the negative outcomes often associated with these stressors from stretching into one's personal life. Those working in this high school sport dual role can utilize findings to self-evaluate their efforts aimed at work-life balance and ensure that they are promoting this balance within the professional and personal roles they embrace.

Limitations

A limitation related to data collection warrants additional discussion. This research utilized multiple types of environments (i.e., in-person and virtual video) for completing interviews with participants. With different settings can come different experiences for those sharing their perspectives, which can potentially influence responses and affect compiled data and main findings. To address this limitation, strategies were implemented to ensure interviews reflected a consistent flow and relied on the same questions. One example of this was a reliance on an interview protocol that aimed to establish consistency and guide interactions. Despite this tool, the different interview settings reflect a limitation of the study.

Future Research

This study aimed to detail how high school sport practitioners in the athletic director-head coach dual role pursue work-life balance by implementing approaches and strategies aimed at addressing role conflict and role overload. While these findings capture how professional

and personal roles are navigated by dual role practitioners to achieve this balance, additional research is needed to consider how these two work-related roles are managed simultaneously. Given the conflicts and overload in responsibilities that can emerge for those who embrace the high school athletic director-head coach dual role, role conflict and role overload influence professional experiences and elicit negative outcomes that must be minimized. Therefore, examining how those in this high school sport dual role perceive these stressors and the specific strategies implemented to address them can provide further insight into each of these roles individually, as well as the two roles simultaneously.

Conclusion

The expectations for effective athletic programs within high school athletics necessitate substantial responsibilities for athletic directors and head coaches. For those who embrace both roles simultaneously, increased role conflict and role overload can further complicate achieving work-life balance, which requires intentional efforts aimed at addressing these stressors. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how athletic director-head coach dual role practitioners pursue work-life balance. This research offered the first known analysis of the perspectives of those in this high school sport dual role regarding the strategies they implement to focus on their personal life in spite of the conflict and overload that exist.

Semi-structured interviews with 15 high school sport dual practitioners were completed for data collection. Through a detailed thematic analysis, three main themes (i.e., recognizing the challenge, setting boundaries, and incorporating family into work) represent the strategies employed by those in the athletic director-head coach dual role to achieve work-life balance. From a theoretical and practical lens, findings capture the specific approaches utilized in addressing role conflict and role overload to pursue this balance across different responsibilities, while also providing a guide for leaders in the high school sport dual role of athletic director and head coach to ensure they are taking the necessary steps for investing in both their personal and professional lives.

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