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Situating Work–Family Negotiations Within a Life Course Perspective: Insights on the Gendered Experiences of NCAA Division I Head Coaching Mothers

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Abstract Despite the progress women have made since the inception of Title IX, many still face discrimination in the sport workplace. Given the assumption that time-use is gendered, the traditional culture of US intercollegiate sport stands in sharp contrast to the evolving notion of work-life balance. This study employed a qualitative life course perspective to examine the experiences of seventeen head coach mothers in NCAA institutions. Results focus on the participants' historical/social context, biography, relationships, interplay between these factors, and most importantly the role of administrators as life linkages. The results suggest that it is insufficient for managers to view the employee in isolation or to neglect the organizational culture in athletics. Supervisor attention to this, while time and effort-intensive, can impact employee well-being.

Keywords Work-life balance · Employee well-being · Gender · Sport management

Introduction

Investigation into work-family conflict in the sport industry has been somewhat limited, in spite of its potential influence on experiences and retention of female coaches.

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The current study utilizes human development theory to examine the complex gendered web of relationships operating within the lives of seventeen NCAA Division I coaches who are mothers. Using a qualitative approach of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the participants explained their life trajectories, including common threads, turning points (e.g., career choices, relationship milestones, arrival of children, etc.), and important life linkages (e.g., spouse/partner, children, employer, staff) as they progress along their life course pathways (Sweet and Moen 2006). This contributes to the literature by demonstrating how the complex, gendered evaluations interact with sport workplace structures and cultures to impact the lives of individuals in the sport industry (Shaw and Frisby 2006).

When addressing sport management scholars, Frisby (2005) borrowed from Alvesson and Deetz (2000) to explain her contention that the majority of management research has focused on financial gains for managers and organizations and little has directed attention to "those affected by managerial actions, such as workers [and] marginalized populations . . ." (Frisby 2005, p. 6). In doing so, research highlighting the predominantly male supervisors rather than the subordinates has facilitated the reproduction of the gendered culture of athletics. Even as employees have expressed their desire to work fewer hours with more autonomy over those hours, "high degrees of institutional inertia ensure that the structure and culture of work are not responsive to workers' changing preferences" (Clarkberg and Moen 2001, p. 1120). In college athletics, as with other corporate settings, the concepts of work and career trajectories have become institutionalized. For instance, working excessive hours has commonly translated into a sign of "commitment, productivity, and motivation for advancement" (Clarkberg and Moen 2001, p. 1116) and rarely have employees been asked their preferences for their

work schedules. Additionally, the institutionalization of this culture has established a barrier that limits employees from expressing their preferences without being asked, as they have perceived a risk to their career progress by doing so (Golden 2001).

Work and Family: Realities and Complexities

A demanding organizational culture, or what scholars term the "greedy workplace" (e.g., demanding of long hours, excessive travel, and "face time;" see Bruening and Dixon 2007; Coser 1974; Dixon and Bruening 2007; Hochschild 1997; Nippert-Eng 1996) has, and continues to, characterize many sport environments. As a result, those who work long hours (particularly when those hours are visible to supervisors and co-workers) and travel constantly for competition and recruiting have been viewed as ideal workers. These work patterns have come to be seen as "normal" and expected in order to be successful.

Beyond the structural factors that affect the work–family experiences of employees highlighted above, previous research specific to the sport context has also demonstrated the role of individual factors on the experience of work and family (Dixon and Bruening 2005, 2007). The growing trend of dual career couples and working single parents, particularly those engaged in high-powered careers such as sport, has resulted in a "broad range of coping strategies" (Becker and Moen 1999, p. 995). Some have been grounded in individual choices, such as scaling back work commitments and/or career progression to reduce work–family conflict (Becker and Moen 1999).

Socio-cultural norms have also played out in work–family coping strategies as gender roles and hegemonic definitions have shaped and constrained choices. In fact, researchers have explained that individual level behaviors (e.g., stress and guilt) and choices (e.g., sacrificing family time for work obligations or vice versa) have not solely reflected micro level negotiations of working parents, particularly mothers, but also interrelated macro level socio-cultural and organizational realities influencing those choices (Dixon and Bruening 2005, 2007; Kanter 2006; Kay 2003).

Following the assertion that socio-cultural and organizational factors shape and constrain individual behaviors, Dixon and Bruening (2005) also argued that these factors impact organizational behaviors, ultimately influencing managerial perceptions of work and family and, as a result, workplace diversity. Traditionally during the child bearing years, "full-time employment has not been established as a norm for mothers" (Fagan 2001, p. 1209). As a result, those who do work full-time and raise children have represented a minority position in the workplace. Additonally, both in the general workplace and in athletics specifically, women

historically have been underrepresented in managerial roles (Acosta and Carpenter 2006; Shaw and Frisby 2006), placing them further in the minority. Consequently, since workers in managerial roles tend to have more control over both the number of hours worked and the scheduling of those hours (Fagan 2001; Golden 2001), women have found themselves less likely to be in control of their own schedules. As "work-time intensity" has increased, however, even those women who have attained managerial positions (e.g., head coaches), have found that increased autonomy has also meant increased pressure to succeed and increased hours in order to do so (Capelli et al. 1997; Fagan 2001; Hochschild 1997).

urthermore, women with full-time jobs and preschool-aged children have been faced with negotiating child care and, in some cases, additional domestic help (Sullivan 1997) in order to manage daily demands. Often, among these mothers, "child care arrangements are as important as job requirements for working nonstandard [hours]" (Fenwick and Tausig 2001, p. 1182), whereas among men, the presence of children of any age has been shown to be of little consequence in their ability to work nonstandard hours (Presser 1995). Typically when mothers with young children work evenings and weekends, such as in coaching, they have relied on their partner/spouse to provide childcare (Fagan 1996, 2001; Martin and Roberts 1984). As these families have scheduled what amounts to shift work for childcare (i.e., daytime care responsibility falls primarily to the mother or paid childcare providers and evening/weekend care falls to the father), the time couples and families spend together has been greatly reduced in many cases. The result has been that mothers and couples "gain less satisfaction from their own time away from employment" (Fagan 2001, p. 1206) than they would if that time was spent together or as a whole family. This lack of satisfaction eventually impacts employees' well-being (Golden 2001) characterized by negative health outcomes (e.g., stress-related heart, gastrointestinal, and neurotic disorders; Bohle and Tilley 1990; Coffey et al. 1988; Costa et al. 1989), increased work family conflict, decreased marital satisfaction/happiness, and decreased family satisfaction (Fenwick and Tausig 2001).

In summary, the combination of full-time employment in a managerial role and attempting to raise young children has placed certain women in unique positions. These women have been impacted in both their career and family lives—often facing stress, guilt, and other negative health outcomes and sometimes facing marital difficulties, career loss or both. They are confronted daily with the individual, socio-cultural, and structural factors that have, and continue to, affect their work and non-work decisions (Dixon and Bruening 2005) as "gender differences remain in working-time schedules and domestic responsibilities"

(Fagan 2001, p. 1208). So potentially, promoting the managerial presence of women who have young children can add to the diversity of the workplace, and even begin to reshape gender relations (Shaw and Frisby 2006). In reality, the current "traditional" workplace culture has equated to increased pressure to work excessive hours and/or travel frequently. This pressure has made it difficult for women in dual career relationships to survive, let alone compete in male-dominated careers (Fagan 2001).

How, then, do managers approach employees who represent the combination of being female, having a demanding workload and maternal responsibilities? Very little previous research has acknowledged the complexity, or the tendency, of work and the management of work to be "messy, ambiguous, political, and fragmented" (Frisby 2005, p. 5). In addition, the attention paid to the "impacts of existing (often outdated) institutional arrangements" (Sweet and Moen 2006, p. 190) and how employees and the significant people in their lives cope with and maneuver through the challenges of daily life have set the stage for further investigation (Elder 1985; Moen 2003a, b; Moen and Wethington 1992). In particular, the findings of previous studies have revealed how "individual attitudes and behaviors reflect larger structural and social forces at work, not simply individual choices" (Bruening and Dixon 2007).

The Life Course Perspective

Over time, scholars have struggled to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework through which to examine the interactive and dynamic nature of human behavior (Giele and Elder 1998; Hagestad and Newgarten 1985). Eras of intense social change (e.g., The Women's Liberation Movement, the Civil Rights movement, the Title IX era) "seemed especially consequential in altering the life course of individuals and age groups" (Elder 1985, p. 23). Yet researchers traditionally utilized methods analyzing the social situation or impact of environment on the individual (Bronfenbrenner 1979) or focusing on groups or individuals over extended periods of time or life histories without successfully integrating the two. As life course theory and research gradually evolved, a shift toward investigations built on the model that "life course change is bidirectional" (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 8) occurred. This shift highlighted the ways in which socio-cultural and organizational level elements affected individual choices and pathways, as well as the ways in which individuals responded to socio-cultural and organizational expectations with either conformity or resistance (Giele and Elder 1998).

Life course theory, then, has come to reflect "how society gives social and personal meanings to the passing of biographical time" (Hagestad 1990, p.153). Historical and socio-cultural contexts have influenced this time

(Featherman 1983; Moen 2001) as social change and political events in addition to gender, age, social class, and race/ethnicity affect individual pathways, or the choices presented to individuals and their subsequent decisions and outcomes. As such, transitions, or major turning points in the life course (e.g., entry into school, becoming a parent), and trajectories (e.g., educational trajectory, career trajectory, family trajectory) have become central concepts in life course theory (Elder 1985, 1998a, b). And as transitions are "always part of social trajectories" (Elder 1998a, p. 1), so are all aspects of the life course "linked" to other lives. Social networks whether through family, school, or church, form the foundation of the life course as "lives are lived interdependently, and social and historical influences are expressed" through the linkages of individual lives (Elder 1998a, p. 4).

In summary, life course theory examines "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 22). The life course paradigm (see Fig. 1) incorporates individuals' historical and socio-cultural contexts, their social networks, and the life choices, or transitions. The components of the paradigm present themselves or are created, then intersect to form the various trajectories of the life course (Giele and Elder 1998).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Based in the somewhat limited investigation into work–family conflict in sport, the current study expanded into human development theory in order to examine the complex gendered web of relationships operating within the lives of a specific group of women in sport careers. In focusing on "the ways that gender shapes the choices and life chances" (Moen 2001, p. 97) of individuals, the current study is framed in the career and life trajectories (Moen 2001) or the "threads of continuity" (Moen 2001, p. 105) the participants follow as they progress along their life course pathways. In doing so,
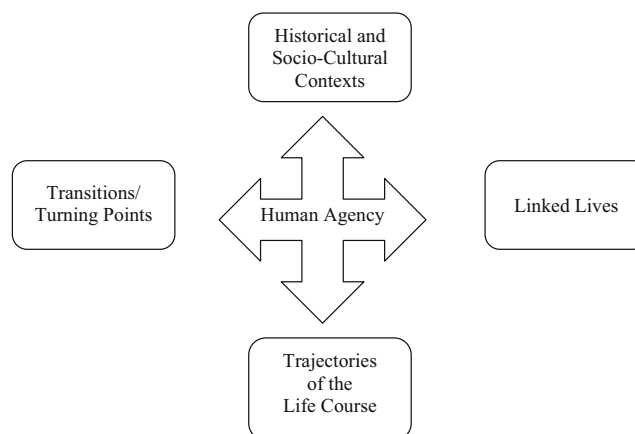

Fig. 1 Life course model (adapted from Giele and Elder 1998).

this investigation positions the lives of the participants in context within their biographies, which include gender, age, culture, and historical/social influences. Next we focus on transitions or "turning points" (Claussen 1995, 1998) within the lives of the participants such as career choices, relationship milestones, and the arrival of children while acknowledging the role of human agency (Elder 1985) in the decisions the participants have made at these critical junctures. Embedded in these transitions are relational contexts (Moen 2001; Sweet and Moen 2006) or those to whom the participants have "linked lives" (Elder 1998a, b). Specifically, the current study focuses on the following research questions, while acknowledging that all operate within a gendered context:

1. What objective and subjective evaluations by both the participants and others to whom their lives are linked (e.g., family of origin, spouse/partner, employers) determine the trajectories of the lives of the participants?
2. How did "turning points" redirect the participants and their life courses?
3. How did these turning points highlight the gendered nature of the sport context?

Rather than placing emphasis on organizational efficiency and effectiveness, this inquiry makes a significant contribution to the literature by examining the lives of the coaches themselves and how complex, gendered evaluations impact the lives of individuals in the sport industry (Shaw and Frisby 2006). Such discussion can aid in understanding how individuals who do not 'comply' with workplace norms and structures face sizeable obstacles in gaining full access to the sport workplace (Frisby 2005).

Method

Participants

The participants in the current study (see Table 1 for a summary) were 17 NCAA Division I head coaches who were also mothers. They represented the sports of rowing, volleyball, soccer, lacrosse, tennis, basketball, and gymnastics and hailed from multiple geographic regions. As we sought to examine the experiences of women who had

Table 1 Biographical and social context of division I coaching mothers.

Pseudonym	Sport	Age	Years as head coach	Spouse/partner occupation	Marital status	Ages of children	Fathers' occupation	Mothers' occupation
Casey	Lacrosse	33	3	Sport management	Married	2	Mathematician	Stay-at-home mom
Karen	Basketball	37	6	Finance	Married	6, 4, 16 months	Trolley Driver	Stay-at-home mom
Melanie	Gymnastics	37	8	Higher education	Married	2, 6 months	Engineer	Hairstylist
Margaret	Volleyball	30	2	Real estate	Married	3	Construction	Nurse
Darlene	Tennis		5	College athletics	Married	4, 2	Scientist	Real estate
Danielle	Soccer	34	7	Real estate	Separated	4, 21 months	Carpenter	Optician
Karla	Volleyball	37	10	Engineering	Married	7, 6, 4, 2	Labor negotiator	Teacher
Andrea	Soccer	34	7	College Athletics	Married	2	Computer analyst	Nurse
Nikki	Volleyball	36	10	College athletics	Married	8, 5	Real estate	Stay-at-home mom
Jane	Basketball	39	12	Higher education	Married	10, 5	Pilot	Travel agent
Jaden	Softball	36	9	Stay at home	Partnered	2	Sales manager	School clerk
Jessica	Volleyball	38	11	College athletics	Married	4, 2	Consultant	Nurse
Denise	Soccer	38	11	College athletics	Married	3.5	Purchasing	Personal business
Desiree	Softball	34	7	College athletics	Married	3.5	Professional	Stay-at-home mom
Susan	Rowing	32	5	College athletics	Married	2, 4 months	Not given	
Stacy	Soccer	38	11	Professional	Divorced	4, 2, 2	FBI agent	Stay-at-home mom
Sarah	Volleyball	31	4	College athletics	Married	4, 1	Coach	Teacher

grown up as athletes in the Title IX era, our criteria specified participants should be 40 years of age and younger. The women in the study were at most 8 years old when Title IX was first passed in 1972, so their formal or organized athletic involvement had spanned the entire life of the statute. Division I head coaches were selected to focus on a group of women who would be under particular pressure to succeed in the workplace and have high expectations placed on them professionally.

Participants were identified via snowball sampling. Initial contacts were made through the authors' personal networks and then those women identified others who fit the criteria for the study. Potential participants were then informed of the study via email. Upon a response from the potential participants indicating interest in taking part in the study, the researchers telephoned the women to explain the study in further detail and make formal consent and interview arrangements.

Interviews

The coaching mothers gave voluntary consent to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews took place on the participant's campus or at a neutral site (e.g., coaching convention) and lasted from 45 min to 2 h. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for a more balanced exchange between the researcher and respondent (Neuman 2000) where the participants could express information in their own terms, not in ones imposed by the researchers. The researchers divided the interview administration based on their geographic proximity to the participant. One researcher conducted ten interviews, the other seven. Prior to each interview, the researchers discussed the interview guide and research questions to assure they were conducting the interviews in similar manners. Following each interview, the researchers again discussed the course of the interview to debrief the other. This communication throughout the data collection phase served to connect the researchers, helped align their interviewing styles, and revealed any trends in the collection process as well as with emerging themes.

Questions followed an interview guide (see Appendix A) that was developed from previous literature in the areas of life course theory (Sweet and Moen 2006) and work–family conflict (e.g., Allen et al. 2000; Dixon and Bruening 2005, 2007; Dixon and Sagas 2007; Netemeyer et al. 1996), and gender studies in sport (Inglis et al. 2000; Knoppers 1992; Shaw and Frisby 2006). Participants were first asked a range of biographical/social context questions including tracing their own and their family of origin's involvement with sport and their own career progression. The women were then asked to trace their spouse's career progression and their relationship/family progression, while identifying key decision points in career and family lives for both partners. Next, they were asked to detail their individual, work, and other factors that they thought impacted their work and family lives.

While all questions were covered in each interview, following a semi-structured approach, not all were necessarily asked in the same order and participants could stray from the format to explore areas that were of interest and importance to them. Probes such as, "How did that make you feel?", or "How did your spouse/partner, children, or athletic director respond to that?", or "Where did that decision lead you?" were particularly helpful for eliciting rich information from the participants especially as they described key decisions and turning points. Interestingly, the participants often stated that they had never given much thought to how their decisions impacted other decisions, yet in explaining them, they could easily trace one event's linkages to another. This is certainly consistent with a life course perspective (Sweet and Moen 2006), and also served to increase the participants' interest and investment in the project as some began a post hoc analysis of their life decisions.

The conversations were digitally recorded and each interviewer also took detailed field notes. The interviews and accompanying notes were then professionally transcribed. Using a transcriber who was not a part of the interview process assisted the researchers in assessing what was actually said, not what they inferred from the conversation (Neuman 2000). Following transcription, the participants were given the opportunity to check their interview document for accuracy of recording and meaning (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Neuman 2000).

Data Analysis

Once the member check process was completed, the data were coded using an open-coding process (Altheide and Johnson 1994). Using open-coding, "the researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories" (Neuman 2000, p. 421). Both researchers participated in this process by using two interview transcriptions as test cases. We independently coded each transcription, and next composed a collective master coding scheme based on what each of us had test-coded. After discussion, we agreed upon which themes could be condensed, which needed to be expanded, and finally definitions for each theme. In this study, most of the themes utilized were derived from the existing literature, with allowance for flexibility and openness to other potential themes (LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Neuman 2000). For example, the themes of "career trajectory," "sibling and parent sport involvement" (i.e., biographical context), and "administrator support/life link-

ages," and "spouse/partner practical life linkages" were derived from previous literature, whereas other themes such as "spouse/partner career trajectory" and a more developed emotional life linkage to spouses/partners emerged from the data. After the coding scheme was agreed upon, we again independently coded a third transcription. We then merged our individual files in order to evaluate the degree to which their codes aligned. Further discussion ensued leading to the establishment of the final coding scheme and definitions.

To further aid in interpretation, we also created a composite matrix of all participant demographic information as it related to their coded thematic responses in order to assess any additional trends in the data (e.g., was there a relationship between sport coached and organizational support? Were there noticeable differences in responses from participants with older versus younger children?). Using this information, we have noted throughout the reporting of results any relevant trends to aid the reader in gaining an appreciation of the participants' background situations and representativeness of the data to the entire participant group (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Next, the data were analyzed using the NVIVO 7 software package. The method of agreement (Neuman 2000) was utilized to examine similarities in the data. The method of agreement focuses on what is common across cases (see also LeCompte and Preissle 1993), such that patterns can be observed, without overlooking critical exceptions. One of us took the lead role in coding the data, or became the primary analyst. The other was consulted throughout the coding process on specific cases or instances that needed to be clarified. This secondary analyst then reviewed the coding and discussed any sites of disagreement with the primary analyst in order to increase the credibility of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

In presenting the results of the study, it must be noted that not all participants' views can be expressed on every theme, especially as the nature of qualitative research is to elicit "rich descriptions" (Creswell 1998). We also acknowledged the need to accurately represent the data from an individual and/or group standpoint (Miles and Huberman 1994). Thus, we have been careful throughout the presentation of results to note when the sample quotation is representative of other such comments by participants and when the comment is unique to a particular participant.

We first present an overview and description of the participants themselves (see Table 1) to place their lives in biographical and social context (Elder 1985). Then, following the research questions, we trace the participants'

career and life trajectories (Elder 1998a, b; Moen 2001) according to their subjective and objective evaluations. Third, we examine critical turning points (Claussen 1995, 1998; Sweet and Moen 2006) as identified by the participants, the relevant linked lives associated with those turning points, and the short-term outcomes of decisions made at those turning points. Particular emphasis will be placed on the birth of a child as a turning point, as this was the most often mentioned by the participants. Finally, we examine how the participants' evaluations of their trajectories and turning points reveal some of the gendered assumptions regarding the sport context.

Biographical and Social Context

The coaching-mothers in this study ranged in age from 30 to 39, with a mean age of 35 years. They had been head coaches for an average of 7.5 years. Fifteen of the participants were married (one currently separated), while one was partnered, and one divorced. The participants had an average of two children, with a range of one to four. The children ranged in age from 4 months to 10 years, with the overwhelming majority (27 out of 32) being under the age of 6, 13 of those being 2 years old or younger. One participant reported that her partner was a stay-at-home mom, one participant's husband worked part-time during her competitive season, and the remainder of the participants' spouses/partners was employed full-time, representing a variety of professions from finance to coaching to academia.

Full-time, outside-the-home childcare centers were the most often cited means of childcare support mentioned by the participants, although two had hired a full-time nanny, one had a part-time stay-at-home spouse, and one a full-time stay-at-home partner who assumed the bulk of childcare responsibilities. Interestingly, the participants who had full-time nannies said that their favorable financial situation was what allowed them to utilized that form of childcare and several of the participants noted that they wanted to utilize a full-time nanny, but could not afford one.

In terms of familial and social background, the most notable feature of the group was that there was almost no consistency or trend to their families and backgrounds. These coaching mothers came from a variety of economic and social backgrounds, with parents occupied in a wide array of jobs and professions. Several of the coaches' mothers stayed at home when they were young, but others were involved in nursing, real estate, teaching, and small business ownership. There were a couple of noticeable trends, however. One was that all the participants were White. A second was that the vast majority of the mothers was married, with full-time employed spouses, and, since all were employed in the same profession, was generally of the same socioeconomic class. Of note, the coaching

mother who was partnered represented the only couple with a full-time stay-at-home situation.

Trajectories in Coaching and Motherhood

As evidenced by the participants' athletic and early career backgrounds, sport and family had both been a passion and core defining feature of their lives. This next section in our life course dialogue with the coaching mothers traces their career and family paths to the current point. What we illumine in this dialogue is that before children, the women embraced the lifestyle of Division I college coaching without question. Their spouses/partners were supportive of the lifestyle and their careers, often making career sacrifices themselves to assist their wives/partners' career progression. However, a major turning point, the birth of a child, brought to the forefront structural incompatibilities between the coaching lifestyle and the needs of young children. For the participants, this turning point led to an examination of the support they were receiving from their spouse/partner and their athletic administration, particularly their athletic director, and highlights the role of linked lives within these turning points, and, ultimately, the women's career and life trajectories. While the participants reported that spouses/partners remained supportive, both practically (i.e., child and home care) and emotionally, administrator support was more varied. In fact, the amount of flexibility and support from their athletic director was probably the most critical factor in determining the direction of the coaching mothers' career trajectory after the birth of their children.

Career Trajectories Before Children: The Collegiate Coaching Lifestyle

Of the 17 participants, 12 entered coaching almost immediately following their undergraduate education, or as part of their graduate education. The other five, interestingly, all entered the sales or finance corporate world, finding within 2 years that they "hated it" and wanted to pursue something that was more involved with people. For example, Jaden said; "I really wanted to teach and coach because I loved the interaction between the player, and the learning, and the teaching. That's what I really enjoy." All entered the coaching profession with the aspiration of becoming a head coach. They pursued opportunities and institutions that would help them achieve that goal.

Regardless of their entrance into coaching, they all spoke of "falling in love" with the career—the athletes, the challenge, the excitement. Further, they not only did not mind the long hours and travel, they actually thrived in fast-paced environment. Consider the following representative quote from Darlene. She said, "So I put all my other plans on hold

and really just fell in love with coaching. My salary was $15,000 a year and I was single, I loved the traveling. None of the stuff that's difficult now even phased me, I actually enjoyed that part of it." Melanie's remarks show another example of this acceptance of a demanding lifestyle. She said:

> I was working unbelievable hours. I enjoyed it; I wanted to; it wasn't a 'I have to.' And it was fun, exciting, new. I was building a program . . . and it took a lot of time to put things in place. And I was able to go in at 9 in the morning and go to 8 at night without even a concern.

Jane's comments further indicate the passion for coaching that these women possess. She explained about her first head coaching job, "It really was a wonderful thing. We had six straight NCAA appearances. We sold out the place. We beat [some top ranked teams]; we had a great run. Coached some amazing players there and loved it, absolutely loved it."

In spite of the passionate pursuit many of the coaches described above, Nikki, was one of fourteen coaches quick to point out that while they did not mind the travel and the crazy hours, they felt that the college athletic system was built for men. Specifically, Nikki said, "this profession is for single males or males whose wives don't work. . . . and they just do their job and never come home." She did concede that it was those coaches' choice to be "workaholics," but that it was difficult to continue to compete in a system where many of the coaches had no external obligations.

In fact, five of the participants (Karen, Nikki, Jane, Stacy, Margaret) argued that while they felt they had been successful competing in this "male-model," they also felt that they had garnered their successes during their "childless" years when they had more time to build programs and work relentless hours. They felt that they were able to obtain some of the resources they had now due to the "ridiculous" hours they spent recruiting and coaching prior to having children, especially if they were able to attain head coaching status prior to children.

Life Linkages: Spouse/partner Support Before Children

Spousal/partner support was one of the ways that these coaches were able to reach head coach status and to be successful in their careers. It was informative to hear the passion in the coaches' voices when they spoke of how their partner/spouse supported their careers, often sacrificing all or part of their own careers in the process. The following quotes illustrated this sacrifice:

> My husband followed my career from Louisiana to Washington D.C. (Danielle)
> I have learned how important it is to have a spouse who supports me and also understands the nature of the job.

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If they don't understand what coaching a division one sport is, it's really hard. And he does; he knows because he is one. (Jessica)

He took a [lower level position] to move [to a university] with me and it took five years to regain it. (Jane)

You have to have a [spouse/partner] that is very confident and very supportive. If you don't, it won't work; your [relationship] won't work; your career won't prosper, and I think [that person] is so key. (Karen)

[My spouse/partner] understands the time commitment and recruiting . . . understands the passion and the wins and the losses and the passion you invest in general in the program. (Melanie)

[My spouse/partner] actually changes jobs according to where I've been. (Margaret)

Thirteen coaches found their spouse/partner's support to be a key ingredient to their successful navigation of a coaching career and many are quick to point out that they "could not be doing this without that support" (Sarah).

Turning Points: The Intersection of Coaching and Motherhood Trajectories

One of the most valuable aspects of the life course perspective is that it allows individuals to highlight turning points or critical incidents in their lives that seem to have changed their life course. In the case of coaching mothers, by far the most often pointed-to turning point was the birth of a child. As demonstrated in the above quotations, the coaching mothers were largely satisfied with their careers and happy to spend the time and energy to be successful in coaching and in building their athletic programs. Their spouses/partners also appeared to be satisfied with the lifestyle, some of them being coaches themselves and others making career adjustments to support their spouse/partner's career. As these couples began their families, however, they were confronted with the reality of a lifestyle in coaching that requires many nights and weekends as it conflicted with the needs of their new families—particularly in the area of childcare. It appears that each of them had to confront the issue of whether or not their "crazy" work lives were compatible with their new family lives. In examining the area of work–family balance, the participants spoke of two main support systems: their spouse/partner and their athletic administration.

Life Linkages: Spouse/partner Support After Children

Just as their spouses/partners were supportive before children in that they understood the lifestyle and/or made certain career sacrifices, the participants indicated that their

significant others remained supportive after children, although the nature of that support changed somewhat to be more focused on helping with the children. For example, Susan's husband moved toward a seasonal position so he could take full-time care of the children while she was in her competitive season. Margaret's husband worked from home and assumed childcare responsibilities especially during heavy travel times. Darlene commented on her husband's assistance, "He's great, he's so helpful and wonderful and takes great care of our kids when I am not available." Desiree said, "I'm so lucky because he's just such a good person; he loves being a dad." Karla described how her husband took his vacation time to travel with their children to her matches; "He and I and the baby traveled in the car behind the bus . . . he is so supportive. The fact that he would take this [as his] vacation . . . that he is encouraging me in my job . . . and full support all the way around."

As a group, the coaching mothers were careful to point out that they made the decision to have children as a couple and therefore generally shared responsibility and sacrifice in their careers to raise their children, demonstrating the role of human agency purported in life course theory (Elder 1985). While the participants pointed out the difficulties in dividing labor and meshing schedules, 13 of the 17 coaches referred to their spouse/partner as being a tremendous asset and a key to making balance a possibility.

Life Linkages: The Role of Administrators

While spouse/partner support was critical to maintaining balance particularly on the home front, 13 coaching mothers also strongly argued that the environment and expectations set at their workplace were critical for surviving as a mother in coaching. The women pointed out, however, that they really never gave a thought to this prior to children, but it became a central discussion point after children thus indicating the intersection of career and life trajectories. In fact, the mothers speak of their athletic director's support as nearly as important as their spouse/partner's support. The overall issue is captured by Nikki who discussed the role of administrators in supporting coaching mothers:

I think more male ADs, who I guarantee you have wives not working. They have kids and their wives run around and take care of everything, need to be understanding of what we go through. I will never forget when my AD who hired me at [previous university] left for another job . . . and I said, "Hey how's [your wife] doing with the move and everything?" He's like, "Oh she's really stressed out about the schools and the kids and selling the house and blah

blah blah." And I just kind of let him go on for a few minutes and he stopped and I said, "What [your wife] is going through is everything I go through with my family and I am also the head coach of this program so remember that when you hire female head coaches." And . . . he finally got it, I mean how much of a juggling act it is and just because it is double stress. You have the same stresses that a mom or a wife that doesn't work has for a family . . . more ADs [need to] understand that and be supportive of that.

As Sarah indicated, it is a massive juggling act and, while spouses and family can be supportive, the administration at the university can play a tremendous role in whether or not the coaching mother can successfully navigate the multiple roles. Through what we learned in our discussions, the participants can generally be placed in two groups—those who found their workplace, particularly in the person of their athletic director, to be supportive and those who did not.

One of the first issues confronted by women at the "first child turning point" was how the administration at their university was going to handle their work responsibilities surrounding the actual birth of their child. In non-supportive environments, this was the first indication that the mothers' would have difficulty attempting to add children to their coaching careers. One poignant example was that of Danielle who explained her return to work after the birth of her son:

I knew it would be more cut throat [at current university], and so it's business; it's not a family environment. At [former university] I had [my son] with me everyday. And now, I don't bring my children to work. Two weeks after I had [my second son] in an emergency C-section, I started to go back to work, I started going in for a couple of hours, working from home . . . but I couldn't afford to take the time off during recruiting season.

She explained that the pressure to maintain the pace at work, while not taking a tremendous toll on her children or her work, has probably taken a large toll on her marriage, as she was separated from her husband.

Karen faced a similar issue when she had a baby in January, right in the middle of basketball season. She said:

He was born on Monday and I was back at practice on Wednesday and then coached on Friday. He came with me because I was breast feeding and he wasn't too far out of my sight. He spent a lot of time as a baby at work.

Although she acknowledged her choice (i.e., human agency) in returning to work so soon coupled with feeling supported to bring her baby to work, she also felt that she

could not take the time off from her struggling team nor was the university willing to allow her time off in the middle of her playing season.

Two other coaches found that although their maternity process was manageable, they faced difficulties when attempting to balance the travel aspects of their careers. For example, Casey, a newly appointed head coach, found her travel responsibilities nearly impossible with a new child. She reported that her son had flown on 40 flights before he turned 1 year, which was not ideal but manageable. She maneuvered by having family members, players' parents, and/or managers watch the baby during games. However, she had no provision for future travels and was very concerned that she would soon have to start paying for her child to travel with her. She said, "It's gonna be a whole other story, because if we're flying, like I said, [my son] flew 40 flights when he turned one, I mean 20 round trips is a lot for anyone in a year, let alone paying for 20 tickets." Casey, subsequently left coaching altogether, in large part due to the tremendous travel burdens.

Jaden echoed these sentiments. She said,

It's hard, and you can't do it unless you feel that administrative support. You feel like you've got the resources [but] one of the things that is leading me to look at potential other positions is that travel is out of control . . . I'm gone...in March, I'm gone three weekends, and an entire week . . . I'm gone at least two weekends in April. In June I went to Pennsylvania, they went with me on that one trip. Then I went to California this past week for four days, and on Tuesday I leave for Colorado for five days. You know, and there's more to come for the summer . . . I'll work long hours. I just want to be around if something happens. Because when you're just gone, that's really hard.

Even though she was allowed to bring her partner and child on some trips, she was concerned about being gone much of the time. She was looking to her administration for support to ease the travel burden, or looking to leave coaching to spend more time with her family.

In sum, the coaching mothers emphasized the need for the administrators to provide some support to help them balance their responsibilities. The coaches indicated they had no problem working long hours and, in fact, were internally driven to succeed. They just needed some additional support from their administration to understand their situations and provide assistance. This leads to the question, then, of what kind of support is necessary and helpful? What supports can administrators provide that helps coaching mothers balance their roles?

The participants indicated a number of ways that administrators can and have been supportive of them after

they had children, and how that impacted their work–family balance and their desire to remain in coaching as a profession as well as at their current institution. In reflecting on this support from their athletic directors, the participants indicated some surprise at the extent to which the quality of their family life had become linked to the athletic director and how grateful they were when he/she was supportive and understanding. The types of supportiveness fell into three general categories: (a) overall consideration, (b) flexible scheduling, and (c) staffing.

The first area that administrators demonstrated support was in having an overall understanding and consideration of the lives of coaching mothers. As indicated previously in the quote by Sarah, coaching mothers can be supported simply by little things such as acknowledging one's family responsibilities and taking time to understand other's situations. Consider the following two examples. First, Jane described her recruitment by her current institution and how she has felt supported by the consistent message from this school that her family mattered. It is important to note that she talks about "we" being recruited, not meaning her staff, but her family:

> We had been recruited by about eight other schools prior to [current university]. It was old hat to us and we were like this is another school we are going to say no to. Because the other schools didn't show interest in [my husband] and they just talked to me, they sort of acted like they didn't know I had kids. They talked to me only as a basketball coach and I was immediately turned off. . . . [Current university] did a very broad based 'we want you to coach our team. We want you in our community. We want you here' kind of recruiting. . . . By looking out for [my husband] and having him be priority, and basically the tuition . . . for our kids, and the travel and flexibility of the family traveling and all that . . . you want to go with it, nanny traveling and just an overall package that was very strong.

The support for this coach obviously paid off as she has since been a national finalist and brought their school into national prominence in women's athletics.

Karla made similar comments to Jane's. When asked about the specific things her boss did or said that made her feel so strongly that her work was supported, she replied,; "Just the little things. He asks about how are the kids? Do you have enough time with them? And when they were babies, when I was back he would say, 'Are you ok? Do you need more time? It is ok to go home.' Just wonderful, he is wonderful." She also noted that, while she has been very successful in terms of team performance, her administration has evaluated her on her whole program, not just wins and losses. She felt this was important and that she was viewed holistically, not simply as a volleyball coach. This motivated her to remain at her current institution.

A second way that administrators demonstrated support mentioned by nearly every coach was granting a flexible schedule. Given the long hours and travel involved in coaching, the coaches mentioned that having flexible work hours was a critical factor in achieving balance. Consider the following representative comments by the participants:

> We don't have to check in and be in here at a certain time. And if we bring the kids in, nobody ever says anything. . . . I can come and go as I please. So it's kind of nice because as long as we're doing our job, then they leave us alone, and so that works out. (Denise)
> At the time I was an assistant I was kind of at the whim of the head coach's schedule. So, I mean having kids as a . . . head coach, it definitely helps because we can schedule things around what works for our child care situation. (Nikki)
> The flexibility and the schedule is huge. I mean, the fact that it's like, "Here, write your program." Like you're tied to your practice and competition, but when you do your paper work, it's up to you. And that's, that's really nice. You can get it done at home. (Jaden)
> My boss is really good too, and if I have to bring [my daughter] in the office in a pinch or occasionally he is absolutely fine with it. And say [my daughter] got sick and I needed to work from home especially when the student-athletes aren't around, he's more than ok with that. He's really understanding. (Andrea)
> [When I got the job at my current university], I wanted the first month at home with the baby so I just wouldn't come. I did all my work from home. I hired my staff from home. Matter of fact they met my staff, the [university representatives], the media met my staff before they met me. (Jane)

These statements certainly reflected the importance of flexibility and the consideration given to the coaching mothers by their athletic directors. Interestingly, the statements also show how these women fought for time with their children (i.e., human agency) by modifying not the amount, but the place and time of work.

A final area of administrator supportiveness that participants identified related to the birth of their children was to grant them additional assistants. For example, Darlene recalled her progression to garnering an assistant:

> Tier B sports are separate from that so we did not have an assistant when we first came here . . . the fall [my son] was born I had someone coming out and helping with practice when I was on maternity leave. I took a

few weeks off and came out here with [my son] quite a bit to practices, but then we had November and December off . . .in January, when I had to come back full time, I had a volunteer assistant who was a good friend of mine and she was here on and off to help. That was when I realized it was such a difference to have an assistant. So then actually that fall I was pregnant again and went to speak to the AD and said I need some help this year. So we had a great assistant . . . He was actually the assistant for the whole year.

Similarly, Melanie explained that after her children were born not only did she garner additional assistants, but she also started utilizing them more. She said, "So I'm really fortunate the university supports me and that I have two full-time . . . assistant coaches, which is not typical."

A third example is Sarah who did not gain additional assistants, but hand-picked those she did have to fit her family needs, which was yet another example of human agency. She explained:

> I have a tremendous support structure at work from Diana, our director of operations, who does literally almost everything else except for coach the team. She handles all of our administrative responsibilities, our financial things . . . I have really two terrific hardworking assistants who are willing to travel and spend some time on the road and identify things and narrow some recruiting activities so I don't have to be out there all the time.

In these cases, not only were the administrators supportive, but also the other staff members became part of the network of linked lives and positively impacted the critical "first child turning point" for the coaching mothers.

In summary, a life course perspective traces these coaching mothers' career and life trajectories, turning points, and linkages as they have progressed through sport participation, entered their coaching careers, navigated the birth of their children (particularly the first), and now attempt to balance the intersection of their work and non-work lives. Prior to children, the coaches' subjective and objective evaluations reveal the importance of spouse/partner support and the passion and intensity these women have for their profession. Second, the participants' responses reveal how a critical turning point—the birth of a child—illuminated life linkages with their spouse/partner and their athletic administrators as well as taken-for-granted assumptions of the coaching lifestyle. And, although spouse/partner support was important prior to children, that support was often in the form of geographical movement to pursue jobs and emotionally supporting her endeavors. After children, spouse/partner support was discussed in terms of care for children and support in the daily negotiating of work and life issues. The

coaches did not even mention athletic directors prior to children, but the birth of child often revealed the importance of this person as a linked life to the coaches and their families. Finally, the participants' evaluation of their career trajectories and turning points reveals the gendered nature of the sport workplace. Fourteen of the 17 participants argued that it is ultimately built on a male-model that assumes a coach either has no children or a full-time child care support system. Prior to children, this lifestyle was not an issue, but after children the assumptions came into question as the coaches reached out for support from spouses/partners and administrators.

Conclusions

In revisiting the research questions for the current study, our conclusions first focus on the large scale, or big picture, concept of career and life trajectories (i.e., coaching and motherhood) and the linked lives inherently a part of those trajectories. First, as a consistent with life course theory, we have come to understand the role of specific life linkages. Through the words of the participants, we have learned how these influential others have helped and/or hindered these women surviving and thriving as coaches and mothers. Certainly they see themselves as part of a larger team of processes and supports. Second, and more important to the current discussion, is that none of these supports was even a consideration before children. As demonstrated in earlier representative comments, the participants indicated that they worked and traveled day and night before children and did not consider the difficulties or sacrifices. Having children, however, highlighted the need for additional support which needed to come not only from their families, but also from their employers. In large part, those who found support from their athletic director stayed not only in coaching, but also at their current university. Those who did not find such support either left their university or left coaching altogether.

Next, we highlighted the critical turning point of the birth of the participant's first child. This turning point demonstrated the role of human agency on the part of the coaching mother, and her spouse/partner, in the timing of the birth (i.e., at what point in the career trajectory). The coaching mother's pursuit of support at this point in time also demonstrated human agency, but her role was not an isolated means of pursuing support. The birth of the first child also highlighted the support, and human agency, of her spouse/partner and her employer. Spousal/partner support was seen in instances such as Stacy, Casey, Karla, and Jaden, where husbands/partners assumed at least a shared, if not more than their share, of the childcare responsibilities, to even putting their own career trajectories on hold or at least redirecting these plans to assume a

prominent role in the new family trajectory (e.g., Margaret, Jane, Danielle).

The coaching mothers' employers also played a role during the "first child turning point" in how they exercised their own human agency. Previous research (Allen et al. 2000; Bruening and Dixon 2007; Dixon and Bruening 2005, 2007; Kanter 2006) has shown that many employers have viewed the family trajectory and related turning points as individual level concerns for the employee. Yet this study highlights the importance of the employer in work–family balance. The participants in this study shared examples of their individual efforts (e.g., Sarah, Nikki, Jessica, Karen, Danielle) to transition through the birth of their first child, although some of them (e.g., Casey, Margaret) admitted that they had limited knowledge on which to base these efforts. However, other participants (e.g., Darlene, Melanie, Karla, Jane) highlighted examples of how their employers took the initiative and approached them with supportive words, and even measures (e.g., flexible scheduling, additional staff) to ease the transition. This type of initiative would certainly be an example of what Fink et al. (2001, 2003) call "proactive diversity management strategies" (Cunningham and Fink 2006, p. 459) that can lead to both positive individual and organizational outcomes (see also Dixon and Sagas 2007).

Finally, we examined the ways in which turning points, particularly (as the participants agreed) the dramatic life changes associated with the birth of the first child, illumined the gendered nature of the sport industry. Most salient was Nikki, who pointed out to her male athletic director the responsibilities a female head coach has outside of work, as she felt that he failed to consistently acknowledge and understand since his wife was a stay-at-home mother. Other women (e.g., Karen, Jane, Stacy, Margaret) also shared their opinion that they were working in an environment based on a "male-model." While it is not a novel observation that sport is largely built on a male model, nor is it new to suggest that the sport workplace and those who supervise it assume males have someone who takes care of all "home life" obligations (Knoppers 1992), this study certainly highlights the impact of the sport model on the lives of individuals who live and work within those assumptions (cf., Frisby 2005; Shaw and Frisby 2006). In direct and indirect ways, ignoring coaching mothers' realities as coaches and mothers, serves to influence many of them to exit the profession prematurely.

In addition, it is imperative to note that even minor considerations would considerably alter these mothers' experiences. In their own words, adjustments or accommodations like acknowledging their family lives, granting flexible scheduling, and staffing improvements can go a long way in supporting a group of employees during critical turning points in their lives. The first step in being able to make such

adjustments requires time and effort on the part of mangers (i.e., athletic directors) in understanding the lives of their employees. As Frisby and her colleagues pointed out, it is necessary to look "at those on the outside rather than the inside . . . and how policies, practices, and structures can be made more inclusive" of them (Frisby 2005, p. 7; see also Frisby and Hoeber 2002; Shaw and Frisby 2006).

Future Directions

The current study highlighted the importance of capturing the big picture, or the career and life trajectories of the participants, and well as the influence that turning points, intersections of trajectories, and life linkages have on those trajectories. It demonstrated the value of such a life course perspective as opposed to survey data taken at one point in time. Future research should continue to follow these women in a longitudinal sense to examine intersections at varying phases of their family path and at varying times of the year (i.e., in season, out of season, summer; Sweet and Moen 2006). This would help us to see how people make choices and how they interpret them based on subsequent experiences to garner the richness of the coaching mothers' experience.

Future research should also examine more representatives from different racial groups. Although there are much fewer coaches of varying races represented in college athletics, particularly women's athletics (NCAA 2006), there is evidence in the work–family literature that the intersection of work and family may be experienced differently by race, therefore it would be important to examine this issue (Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006). It would also be valuable to gather the life course stories of women who have left coaching as a comparison group to the women who have stayed. Insights from those who have chosen to leave may shed light on how individual in nature trajectories, turning points, and life linkages are in how they impact a decision to leave coaching. Finally, it would be valuable to garner insights from the various lives linked with these participants (e.g., athletic directors, spouse/partners, children) to assess their perceptions of the coaching–family balance within these women's lives and to continue uncovering limiting assumptions within both realms that could lead to valuable individual and social change.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Individual Interview Guide

1. What was your family situation as your grew up? Number of kids, parents' employment, sport involvement.
2. Trace your college and post-college athletic participation and career path for me.

3. Where did family enter into the mix? Timing, number of children, etc.
4. What does your spouse/partner do for a living?
5. How do the two of you manage the day-to-day balancing of work and family? Who helps? What helps?
6. How is this working? Are you doing the things you want to do at work? As a spouse/partner? With your family?

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