

Perceptions of Occupational Stress and Strategies for Avoiding Burnout: Case Studies of Two Female Teacher-Coaches

Diane Drake and Edward P. Hebert

Abstract

While stress and burnout are well documented as significant issues for the teacher-coach, their levels of burnout are relatively low when compared to other occupations. This suggests teacher-coaches successfully use strategies to reduce job stress and avoid burnout, yet little research has investigated such coping strategies in this population. In addition, most of what we know about teacher-coach burnout is based on studies examining the phenomenon in males, and existing data suggest female teacher-coaches are exposed, perceive, and respond to stress differently. Two experienced, female high school teacher-coaches were purposively selected for participation in the study, and participated in interviews over a 4-month period. They described conflicts and stressors similar to those reported in previous studies, highlighted by intra-role conflicts associated with coaching multiple sports with overlapping seasons, and inter-role conflicts related to time demands. In addition, participants also described a cyclic pattern of stress over each academic year as well as over a career, particular characteristics of their schools affecting their stress, issues related to the pressures of balancing a career and personal life, and strategies they used to manage stress and avoid burnout.

The problematic dual role of the teacher who also coaches interscholastic athletic teams has been the focus of research for years. Initiated by Locke and Massengale's (1978) survey-based

study of teacher-coaches, pedagogical researchers during the late 1970s and early 1980s explored the difficulties associated with occupying this common two-part occupation, using as a basis for their work two constructs from occupational sociology: role conflict and role strain. The stress associated with teaching and coaching was further examined in the 1980s and 90s by sport psychologists who grounded their research in the concept of burnout. Data resulting from this set of studies has helped to describe the relationships between job stress and burnout, and examine factors that contribute to the stress-burnout phenomenon.

Role Conflict and Role Strain

Pedagogy research examining the stress associated with the dual teacher-coach position has primarily focused on *role conflict* and *role strain* (for a review, see Bain, 1983). These two sociological concepts attempt to explain the potential causes of stress experienced by those who occupy two professional roles simultaneously. Individuals experience role conflict when their occupation exposes them to contradictory expectations (Getzels & Guba, 1954), for example, one set of expectations for their teaching job, and a different and conflicting set of expectations for their coaching position. Role strain, also called role overload, is defined as being exposed to greater demands in terms of time, energy, and/or commitment than the individual possesses or is willing to devote to the role (Goode, 1960).

Several studies (e.g., Locke & Massengale, 1978; Sage, 1989b; Templin, 1989) have documented that teacher-coaches perceive both role conflict and role strain as a result of their dual roles. In addition, these studies described specific aspects of role conflict and strain in this population. Teacher-coaches have been found to experience (a) role overload related to the extensive time and energy demands of their dual position, (b) teacher-coach inter-role conflict caused by incompatible expectations of others (e.g., administrators, parents, students) for the teacher role and the coaching role, and (c) coach-family inter-role conflict caused by demands and expectations placed on the individual by their workplace which are at odds with those of their families. Sage (1989b) described that, as a result of these stressors, many teacher-coaches are forced to favor one occupational role over the other in terms of commitment, or to resolve the stress by leaving the profession.

Burnout

This work was expanded in the 1980s and 90s, by sport psychologists, who have based the majority of their work in the concept of *burnout*, a state of emotional exhaustion caused by excessive psychological and emotional demands (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986). Burnout is a chronic condition occurring when demands exceed an individual's abilities to cope, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed, and resulting in psychological, emotional, and physical withdrawal from the stressful activity (Smith, 1986). The term, burnout, was introduced by Freudenburger (1974) to describe the stress response observed in staff members in the mental health-care field. The study and conceptualization of burnout was extended by Maslach (1976) who focused on individuals working in "helping professions" (e.g., teachers, social workers).

Maslach and Jackson (1986) developed the contemporary notion of burnout, defining it as composed of three separate components: (a) emotional exhaustion—feeling overextended or

emotionally exhausted by work; (b) depersonalization—characterized by a lack of caring for clients or those under one's services; and (c) lack of personal accomplishment—failure to perceive a desired level of competence and achievement in one's work. Corresponding to this three-component model, these authors developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, a scaled questionnaire, that researchers have used to quantitatively measure the levels of burnout of individuals in a number of professions, including coaches (Kelley, 1994), teacher-coaches (Kelley & Gill, 1993), athletic trainers (Hendrix, Acevedo, & Hebert 2000), and medical staff (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Smith (1986) added to the theoretical conceptualization of burnout by proposing a causal model suggesting that personal and situational variables affect one's stress appraisal (the subjective perception of stress), which affects the level of burnout.

Maslach's (1976) three-component model, and Smith's (1986) framework have been used as the conceptual underpinnings for the majority of burnout research in sport psychology (e.g., Capel, 1986; Hendrix et al., 2000; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Vealey et al., 1992). In general, this work has provided data supporting theoretical predictions, and a number of factors have been found to be related to stress and burnout. Several of these factors have been categorized as situational or work context variables (e.g., facilities, number of clients/students with which one works, administrative support), personality characteristics, (such as satisfaction with social support), and hardiness (how one handles stressful events).

The role of gender in stress and burnout. In addition to these workplace and personality characteristics, gender has been shown to be related to stress and burnout. In their study of college coaches, Cassesse and Mayerberg (1984) reported that female coaches had higher scores on the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout than did male coaches. Similar findings have been reported in male-female comparisons of coaches at both high school and college levels (Pasture & Judd, 1993; Quigley, Slack, & Smith, 1987;

Vealey et al., 1992). In their study of role conflict and burnout in high school coaches, Felder and Wishnietsky (1990) also reported gender differences, particularly in terms of the teacher-coach inter-role conflict, where female teacher-coaches reported greater conflict. Seeking to explain these gender-related findings, Kelley (1994, Kelley & Gill, 1993) explored factors related to burnout in male and female college coaches, and reported that, compared to male coaches, females appraised their levels of job-related stress higher. Unfortunately, however, the majority of the data on stress and burnout in teachers and coaches has examined these variables in males, with relatively fewer studies focusing on females. Further research into gender differences, and studies examining the perceptions of female teacher-coaches on stress and burnout issues are needed.

Coping With Stress and Avoiding Burnout

Issues related to teacher-coach role conflict, stress, and burnout have existed in the physical education pedagogy and sport psychology literatures for years, and teacher-coaches do indeed report role conflict and strain, and aspects of their work and workplaces which are stressful. There are also occasional press reports of nationally-recognized coaches leaving the profession due to burnout. However, there is little empirical data indicating that teacher-coaches experience high levels of burnout. In fact, the findings of Sage (1989b), Kosa (1990), and Capel, Sisley, and Desertrain (1987) indicate that burnout levels in coaches and teacher-coaches are low to moderate, and lower than those of other professions. This suggests coaches and teacher-coaches develop and use coping strategies to deal with job-related stress and avoid burnout. As described earlier, two coping strategies these individuals report using are leaving the profession, or favoring one role over the other (termed "differential commitment") (Bain, 1983; Sage, 1989b). These, however may be viewed as extreme or negative coping mechanisms, and it is logical to presume that these individuals have developed strategies to

resolve and deal with stress in ways that allow them to function and remain in their chosen profession. This aspect of the stress-burnout phenomenon has yet to be examined. In this study, we sought to examine the perceptions of stress, factors influencing these perceptions, and coping strategies used by female teacher-coaches.

Methods

Design and Participant Sampling

The research design selected for this investigation was the interview-based, qualitative case study. The case-study, characterized by in-depth investigation of individuals, provides a means by which a general problem can be illuminated and understood by the examination of a specific instance or instances (Merriam, 1988). Our goal was to describe and reconstruct the thoughts and perceptions of female teacher-coaches about job-related stress, and strategies for managing stress and avoiding burnout. We acknowledged the limitations of this approach, in that it relies heavily on the subjective understandings and descriptions of the participants under investigation, as well as their memory of distant events. However, it appeared appropriate for this study because it allowed us to understand, from the participants' point of view, factors related to stress and burnout in their lives. The study followed a review of the pedagogical and sport psychology literature on teacher-coach role conflict and burnout. While these provided conceptual background for the study, we allowed our participants to guide, to a certain extent, the direction of the study and the nature of data collected, and themes to emerge from the data rather than screening it through a-priori categories. We did, however, seek to compare our findings to those previously reported, and ground our findings in the terminology used in earlier work.

Participants in the study were Jane Brown and Mary Smith (these names are pseudonyms as are the names of the schools at which they worked).

A description of these two participants is provided in the results section. Our sampling technique was purposive, as we sought to locate participants who were experienced and successful, female high school teacher-coaches, who exhibited low levels of burnout, and therefore had presumably managed to resolve the stress associated with the dual teacher-coach role. Due to our professional positions (a coach of a female university athletic team, and a university faculty member involved in physical education teacher preparation), we were in contact with many teacher-coaches in a large city in the southeastern United States. On the basis of these professional relationships, we contacted 15 female high school teacher-coaches in the area as potential participants.

Eight agreed to be considered and completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as a means to quantify burnout levels. The MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) is a paper-and-pencil survey composed of 22 items to which participants respond using a scale ranging from (0) has never occurred, to (6) occurs every day. Items are grouped into three burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Example items include: (a) I feel emotionally drained from my work (emotional exhaustion subscale), (b) I really don't care what happens to some students/players (depersonalization subscale), and (c) I feel I am positively influencing other people's lives through my work (personal accomplishment subscale).

Jane Brown and Mary Smith met the criteria we sought: high ratings of their teaching by school administrators, winning coaching traditions, and consent to participate in the study. In addition, their scores on the MBI indicated low to moderate levels of burnout as compared to scores reported in previous studies (for a review, see Maslach & Jackson, 1986), another criterion used for participant selection. Jane Brown's MBI scores averaged 3.00 on the emotional exhaustion subscale, 2.60 for depersonalization, and 3.62 for

personal accomplishment, while Mary Smith's average scores were 2.56, 2.00, and 4.75.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via interviews over a four-month period, beginning at the start of the academic school year and extending through the competitive season. Interviews with each participant were conducted by the lead researcher twice a month, with most lasting approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in participant's offices at the schools where they worked, and were audio-taped. The first interview followed a semi-structured format focusing on educational and professional background information, and descriptions of current teaching and coaching schedules. The remaining interviews were primarily conversational in nature, but directed by four major issues: (a) sources of job-related stress, (b) assessment of stress and burnout, (c) strategies used to manage stress, and (d) future predictions of a career in teaching and coaching.

Most of the interviews were conducted immediately following classes or team practices, which provided the opportunity to observe the participants teaching and coaching. Both participants were observed teaching on three occasions, and coaching on three occasions. These observations provided some context for interviews and occasionally a class or practice event, related to the focus of the study, to discuss. In addition to this conversational approach, as a result of ongoing data analysis, we often revisited something said in a previous interview, asking for clarification, or attempting to perform "member checks" of the accuracy of our interpretations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Merriam, 1988).

Data analysis was conducted both during and after data collection, and followed guidelines recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Merriam (1988). Audio-tapes were transcribed immediately after each interview, and read by the lead researcher. After three interviews, transcripts

were shared with, and read by the second researcher, at which time the two investigators discussed themes, similarities and dissimilarities of the participants, and identified topics for subsequent interviews. As the completion of data collection neared, all transcripts were re-read, themes discussed and modified, and the accuracy of our interpretations discussed with participants. We sought to ensure the accuracy of our data and interpretations using a number of strategies including conducting multiple interviews over a long period of time, triangulating findings using two researchers, and independently reading and analyzing transcripts and developing our own interpretations before discussing them. In addition to these strategies, two types of member checks were conducted. During the data collection phase of the study, interpretations and themes were presented to participants, quotes supporting themes read to them, and participants were asked for clarification. In addition to these member checks during data collection, at the completion of the study the two participants were provided a draft of the written manuscript, and asked to further agree or disagree with what was written.

Results

Description of Participants

Jane Brown teaches and coaches at Beavercreek High School, an academic magnet school enrolling approximately 1200 students, located in the center of a large city. The school administration and faculty maintain an academically-centered atmosphere, and students must meet high scholastic standards to enroll. Jane Brown, called "Miss Brown" by her students and athletes, is single, teaches social studies and physical education, and is the head coach of the girls' soccer and volleyball teams. She has taught and coached for 7 years, 5 at Beavercreek High, and her soccer teams are recognized as the best in the area, often winning the league championship.

Mary Smith teaches and coaches at Zakota High School, which also has an enrollment of

approximately 1200 students, located in a suburban community adjacent to the city where Beavercreek High School is located. "Coach Smith," as she is called by her students and players, is an 8-year veteran (all at Zakota High School), is married and has two children. She currently teaches biology and physical education, and is the head coach of the girls' basketball team. Her basketball teams consistently finish the regular season in first or second place in the district, and go on to post-season play. In past years, Coach Smith has also been involved in coaching the girls' volleyball and tennis teams.

Common Role Conflicts and Sources of Stress

Data analysis yielded several issues that participants described similarly. These were sources of stress and conflict we categorized as intra-role conflicts (stress and conflict within a single role) and inter-role conflicts (stress and conflict between teaching and coaching roles). Two types of intra-role conflict were reported, both within the coaching role: those caused by coaching multiple sports, and those related to parental expectations. Inter-role conflicts between teaching and coaching were described in relation to time, energy, and commitment.

Intra-role conflicts due to coaching multiple sports. The first type of intra-role conflict within the coaching role was a result of being responsible for coaching multiple sports. Both participants, at some point in their careers, had occupied the head coaching position for more than one sport, which created conflicts primarily related to time and energy, causing role overload. For these two women, coaching more than one sport was perceived as a contingency on which their initial employment at the school was based. That is, they believed they would not have been hired if they did not agree to coach at least two sports, even though they recognized this would be a source of stress. The stress associated with this arrangement was exacerbated when participants were coaching two sports simultaneously for which the seasons overlapped. This resulted in

work days beginning at 7:00 a.m. and ending at 8:00 p.m., that involved teaching classes, followed by afternoon practices and games for two sports. Both Miss Brown and Coach Smith described these times as of the most stressful of their careers.

“As soon as volleyball ended, I went straight to basketball, and then directly to tennis . . . The tennis [practices and games] started right after basketball, and all of the paperwork had to be done prior to the season starting.” (Mary Smith)

Intra-role conflicts as a result of parental expectations. Both participants also described a form of intra-role conflict related to parental expectations. These centered around parents of athletes who expressed differing and conflicting sets of expectations for the coach. For example, one parent may express the expectation that the coach should provide playing time for all team members, while another parent expects the coach to play only those players who will maximize the team’s chance of winning. The following interview excerpt from Coach Smith illustrates this source of stress:

“I had two parents who caused problems, but I told them it was my job and I was hired to do it, and this is how I chose to do it. I have found through watching other coaches you can open a can of worms as far as everyone has their opinion who should be playing.”

As a result of parental interactions, both participants revealed they had made conscious decisions on how they approached dealing with parental concerns and expectations. They also indicated their approaches changed over the course of their careers, often as a result of specific events.

“I had an incident occur with a parent and it really changed how I deal with them . . . I was almost beat up by a parent . . . It made me more cautious . . . I call a parent now about everything and document everything.” (Jane Brown)

Teacher-coach inter-role conflicts: Time, energy, and commitment. Both Coach Smith and Miss Brown described inter-role conflicts characteristic of their dual teaching and coaching positions. Their descriptions were very similar, and centered on the positions competing for their time, energy, and commitment. As described in previous research (e.g., Templin, 1989), one feature of the teaching and coaching position is a long workday filled with multiple responsibilities. Both participants described 10-to-12 hour workdays as the norm, which rendered them physically and emotionally fatigued. This source of stress was more intense during the first years of teaching and coaching, when their time and energy were stretched to a maximal point. These induction years, when Coach Smith and Miss Brown were first hired, were inundated with decisions, “learning the ropes” of their workplaces and jobs, planning classes, raising money, organizing team practices and game schedules, learning school rules and regulations, and developing a sense of their teaching and coaching competencies and philosophies. Both participants had a difficult time adjusting to their new positions and described feelings of being overwhelmed.

“I would not repeat my first year for a million dollars! It was school from the time I got up to the time I went to sleep . . . There was never any break. It was constant . . . I taught 5 biology classes and coached 2 sports.” (Mary Smith)

In addition to time and energy, occupying the dual teaching-coaching role created an inter-role

conflict and competition for these individual's commitment. Both women expressed a high level of commitment to both roles, and did not view themselves as primarily teachers or coaches. In fact, they indicated taking great pride in performing well in the classroom as well as on the playing field/court, setting aside different times to plan for classes and practices, and described conscious attempts to achieve a sense of balance between the two. However, they did indicate that, at particular times during the year, they found their time and energy did not meet that required of the dual role, and one role suffered at the expense of the other, with the coaching function often given higher priority.

“Normally [at times] during the season . . . I am preoccupied with coaching . . . There is a big conflict, making phone calls . . . There are days when admittedly I have to give my class things to do . . . so it becomes a give and take situation. What's done is not always right, and I don't necessarily pride myself in it . . . that I take away from my classes to take care of my basketball team.” (Mary Smith)

“I get very stressed, for example on big game days, and I do not lecture as long . . . I try to have an activity for them to do on their own for at least part of the period. I don't put up with students who are not prepared for class on these days. I don't have a lot of patience.” (Jane Brown)

Individual Differences in Perceived Stress and Conflict

The data reported to this point address similarities in the stressors and conflict of Jane Brown and Mary Smith, and indicate that there were several areas which were common ground for these two teacher-coaches. However, data analysis also yielded aspects of their schools and personal lives which differentiated these two women's interviews. These were divided into two

categories: school characteristics and work-family conflict.

School characteristics. The schools where Jane Brown and Mary Smith were employed were characteristically different, and the contextual differences affected the nature of stress experienced by participants, particularly in terms of managing teacher-coach inter-role conflict. Two differentiating aspects of the schools where they worked were the emphasis of the administration, and characteristics of the students. As described earlier, Beavercreek High is an academic magnet school where education is given high priority. It was not unusual to observe students there studying individually or in small groups during lunch hour and scheduled breaks, and Miss Brown remarked that her students were highly-motivated learners who expected her to be prepared and challenge them in the classroom. In contrast, the emphasis at Zakota High School, described by teachers there, was discipline. The school administrators focused their teachers' attention on maintaining a structured, disciplined school environment, and in contrast to Miss Brown, Coach Smith indicated that motivating students academically was a challenge.

These two schools, and their administrations also differed with respect to the emphasis placed on athletics and expectations for winning athletic programs. While both participants enjoyed successful coaching careers, Coach Smith reported a greater level of pressure and higher expectations to win, with these expectations communicated by other coaches at the school, administrators, and parents. In contrast, Miss Brown indicated she was given clear indications that academics took priority over athletics, and while winning games was a plus, it was not expected. These differences in school context and expectations for academic and athletic performance, resulted in differing perspectives on the teacher-coach inter-role conflict, and what they perceived as appropriate or expected ways to balance their time, energy, and commitment with respect to teaching and coaching.

“The administration makes it very clear to me that sports comes second in your priorities . . . If you work here, you accept what you are given [in terms of athletic funding, etc.] . . . It has to have equal weight [teaching and coaching] even during the season . . . If you don’t do your job, they will call you on it.” (Jane Brown)

Work-family conflict. The second characteristic distinguishing these two women’s descriptions of work-related conflict pertained to the stress created by attempting to balance career and personal life. Jane Brown was single, had no children, and had moved to the area for the teaching-coaching position. She had limited family nearby, and due to these characteristics, Miss Brown indicated that conflict between her work and personal life was minimal, and she was able to devote a considerable amount of her time and energy to teaching and coaching.

“I don’t get to spend as much time with my family as I probably would have, but as far as anything else, it does not really affect it [stress] a whole lot.” (Jane Brown)

Mary Smith, in contrast, was very dedicated to her husband and children and close to her extended family, many of which lived in nearby communities. With increasing years of teaching and coaching, and the birth of her children, Coach Smith experienced higher levels of work-personal life conflict, and she discussed this in several interviews as a major source of stress. This conflict had reached a peak one year prior to the time of data collection, at which time she chose to take a one-year sabbatical leave to spend more time with her family.

“It is at times very stressful . . . It creates a stressful situation when I am not home even two nights a week . . . When the season gets into play, it becomes more of a juggling act . . . There was a time when my husband and

I, we could do our thing . . . Now, he’s not particularly interested in coming to girls’ high school basketball games . . . and we really need to focus to do things together . . . it’s getting harder and harder.” (Mary Smith)

Burnout and Coping Mechanisms

According to theoretical models, high levels of job-related stress will lead to burnout, unless individuals successfully develop and use coping mechanisms to reduce stress. Despite describing aspects of their teaching-coaching positions which were causes of stress, these two women reported relatively low levels of burnout at the start of the study (via the Maslach Burnout Inventory). During interviews, both participants described points during their careers when they exhibited early signs of burnout, and expressed uncertain beliefs about a future in teaching-coaching. While neither perceived a high level of burnout at the present time, both women entertained thoughts about leaving the profession early in their careers.

“The class sizes were large. It was overwhelming as far as that is concerned. It was to the point after my first year I was about ready to leave.” (Jane Brown)

In addition, both participants were unsure how long they would remain in a teaching-coaching position. When asked if they were experiencing burnout at this point, both pondered the question before answering, and indicated that their level of burnout, while still at low to moderate levels, were increasing, and foreshadowed a point in the future when they would seek an alternative career. However, at this point, both continued to enjoy their work and remain in the profession.

“If I had to say right now, I would still be in coaching . . . Because of the fact that my children’s demands will be a lot greater . . . If I could get a break for a year [I’d remain in teaching and coachings]. I am just tired

... it's hard carrying a dynasty for 8 years ... the pressure ... I enjoy coaching more than I originally did because of the competition and experiences with success ... I get tired of fighting the same classroom stuff ... That kind of numbed me and my interest in teaching itself." (Mary Smith)

These conversations about burnout and stress often led to questions about coping mechanisms, or strategies they used to reduce job-related stress and role conflict, and avoid burnout. Both participants were able to identify specific strategies they had developed over time, and these were grouped into three categories: (a) personal releases, (b) organizational skills, and (c) mentors.

Both participants described mechanisms they used at times when acute stress levels reached extremely high points. At these times of intense stress, the preferred strategy was a "personal release," or means to separate themselves physically and/or mentally from work. Jane Brown, an avid exerciser, elected to spend time alone either running or listening to music. She described these as ways to close off the outside world. Mary Smith also described "getting away from work," but found her best stress-reducer was creating time to spend with family. At these brief "family reunions," she was able to keep her mind off work and return to it recharged.

While these short-term strategies were used intermittently, both women recognized early in their careers that avoiding burnout would require a plan, and they would have to acquire specialized skills to lengthen their teaching-coaching career. They described means by which they developed a plan for avoiding burnout. The first was *learning to be organized*. Coach Smith claimed staying organized was crucial to her survival, and a skill she had to acquire. Miss Brown, whose workspace always appeared meticulously organized, shared this same philosophy.

"A lot of stress in coaching is that you are doing seven million things at one time ...

Which means you do them one at a time ... It is kind of in my strategy to just do it and not put it off." (Jane Brown)

The second part of the long-term plan for avoiding burnout was described as *learning from mentors*. Both participants described significant teacher-coach mentors who had helped them achieve success and maintain the desire to remain in the profession. They had learned by observing these mentors at work and talking to them about work-related problems. From this apprenticeship, our participants developed their own teaching and coaching philosophies, garnered effective teaching ideas, and learned how to find happiness in working with students and players. In the following interview excerpts, Miss Brown and Coach Smith describe aspects of their mentorship experience.

"What she did for us was as people, not just swimmers ... We were part of her life. And the atmosphere that she created." (Jane Brown)

"She [a science teaching mentor] is an excellent teacher as far as planning, disciplining, effective ways of teaching ... She probably had the most impact" (Mary Smith)

"He [a former basketball coach] had a system that worked ... He genuinely cared about us. He was probably more of a coach than a teacher, but he used a lot of good methodologies." (Mary Smith)

Discussion

The nature of conflict and burnout in teacher-coaches has been examined for some time, and has resulted in descriptions of role conflict and role strain, theoretical development of the burnout concept, and factors which contribute to stress and burnout in this population. One factor, shown to impact stress perceptions and burnout in

teacher-coaches is gender, yet the majority of research, specifically that following the case-study tradition, has focused on males. A second limitation of the existent research has been the failure to study coping strategies used by teacher-coaches to reduce job-related stress and role conflict, and avoid burnout. In this study, we examined the perceptions and experiences of two experienced female high school teacher-coaches with respect to sources of stress, level of burnout, and coping strategies. Analysis of interview data yielded stress issues common to both participants, as well as differences attributable to school context and personal life, and three common strategies for reducing stress and avoiding burnout.

Factors Related to Role Conflict, Stress, and Burnout

Paralleling previous findings (e.g., Felder & Wishnietsky, 1990; Locke & Massengale, 1978; Sage 1986b), these two women indicated a major source of job-related stress was the role conflict associated with occupying two distinct roles in their schools. Characteristic of teacher-coach positions is a competition for an individual's resources, and those who occupy this dual role are forced to make decisions about how much time, energy, and commitment to devote to each role (Donovan, 1997). In addition to teacher-coach inter-role conflict, these participants also described two forms of intra-role conflict within the coaching role, which resulted from coaching multiple sports and parental expectations. These also parallel previous findings. For many physical education teachers, coaching is a contingency for gaining a teaching position, and most coaches at the high school level are expected to coach more than one sport (Chu, 1984). In addition, day-to-day "hassles," such as working with athletes' parents, have been found to relate to one's appraisal of stress and level of burnout (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993).

In addition to these descriptions, the nature of the data from this case study provides a deeper

understanding of the unique characteristics of individuals and situations which contribute to teacher-coach role conflict and burnout. In this study, several factors were located which impacted stress and burnout, such as years of experience, point of time during the academic year, school context, and personal life.

The cyclic nature of stress and burnout. Both of these participants held that their level of stress and burnout changed over the course of their career, as well as during each academic year, data suggesting that stress and burnout are somewhat cyclical in nature. For Jane Brown and Mary Smith, the level of stress and burnout were at high levels during the first few years of employment, decreased with experience, then rose again. These perceptions of high stress and burnout levels during the early years of teaching and coaching parallel the results of Locke and Massengale (1978) and Kelley and Gill (1993) who reported greater role overload and higher levels of burnout in less-experienced coaches. In addition, these findings add to a plethora of research on novice teachers which indicates the induction years are the most stressful in a teaching career (e.g., O'Connell Rust, 1994).

In addition to these career changes, our participants also reported a cycle of increasing and decreasing stress over each academic year, with the highest levels of stress during the season and at points when they coached two sports simultaneously. This type of seasonal stress cycling is similar to that reported by Kelley (1994) who found increasing levels of depersonalization over the course of a season in college coaches.

The impact of school context. A second noteworthy set of factors impacting the stress and burnout reported in this study were characteristics of the school context in which these female teacher-coaches worked. The school settings, and their associated administrative expectations and emphasis on academics in relation to athletics, provided one critical difference between the two teacher-coaches in this study. These contextual

factors provided a framework within which Jane Brown and Mary Smith worked as they sought to manage the teacher-coach inter-role conflict associated with their jobs.

Both revealed that, at times, the time and energy required of their jobs was greater than that they possessed, and coaching duties interfered with their teaching performance. However, the degree of this “differential commitment” (Bain, 1983; Sage, 1989b) and the extent to which it was accepted by school administrators and students was different at the two schools. For Miss Brown, this aspect of role conflict was of greater concern, for it was an unacceptable practice, due to the academic emphasis of her school. In contrast, at Zakota High School, it was a more common and accepted practice due to the greater expectation for athletic success, and was a lesser source of stress when it occurred for Coach Smith.

The relative emphasis on academics and athletics at the two schools also impacted the extent to which “pressure to win” was a source of stress. For Coach Smith, the pressure of “carrying a dynasty” was a significant source of stress, whereas, Miss Brown felt little pressure to meet high athletic expectations despite similar coaching success. The weight of this expectation was a major factor in Coach Smith’s decisions about the future length of her career, and the extent to which her level of burnout was increasing. These findings parallel that of Kelley (1994) who reported greater levels of burnout in coaches more concerned with winning and losing.

With regard to differential commitment, while both participants indicated that it occurred at more stressful times during the year, neither espoused the philosophy of favoring coaching over teaching in terms of time and energy. In contrast, they indicated being committed to both roles, taking great pride in performing well in the classroom as well as on the playing field. Our two participants were both female teacher-coaches who taught academic courses (social studies and biology) as well as physical education. Previous researchers have reported that the extent to which

differential commitment occurs varies according to gender, with males favoring coaching over teaching more than do females (Bain & Wendt, 1983), and subject taught, with physical education teachers reporting it more than teachers of academic subject areas (Locke & Massengale, 1978). Our findings tend to add corroborating data to these conclusions.

The impact of family life. The third factor contributing to stress and burnout levels in these two female teacher coaches was the extent of family involvement and the degree to which work-family conflict occurred. The stress associated with balancing family and work has been recognized in previous studies. Marital status has been shown to impact two aspects of burnout, emotional exhaustion (Quigley et al., 1987), and personal accomplishment (Dale & Weinberg, 1989), and Sage (1989a) described coach-family conflict as a source of stress in male teacher-coaches. This source of conflict may be expected to be higher in female teacher-coaches, particularly those who have immediate families, as the female traditionally occupies the familial role of primary care-giver to children. In our study, Mary Smith, who was married and had two children, reported work-family stress at higher levels than Jane Brown, who was unmarried and had no immediate family nearby. The stress associated with this conflict was also a major contributing factor for Coach Smith’s future career decision and her subjective assessment of burnout.

Coping Strategies

Despite the recognition that role conflict and stress are key issues for the teacher-coach, the existent data suggest that few actually experience the levels of burnout which causes them to leave the profession. This suggests that these individuals have developed and use relatively effective strategies for managing job-related stress and avoiding burnout. Yet, to this point, few researchers have investigated coping strategies in this population. In their work, Bain (1983) and

Sage (1989b) found that, other than electing to seek work in another field, the primary stress-reducing mechanism in teacher-coaches was differential commitment, a strategy of favoring one role over the other in terms of time, energy, and commitment, with the coaching function given higher priority.

In this study of successful, experienced, female teacher-coaches who expressed relatively low levels of burnout, we sought to examine strategies they used to manage job-related stress. The strategies they described centered around developing a vehicle for temporarily escaping job-related thoughts, developing time management and organizational skills, and learning from mentors. Despite these strategies, and the relatively low levels of burnout these women reported, both held that their levels of burnout had increased over recent years, and entertained thoughts about leaving the profession.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

One conclusion we derive from this study is that, while stress and role conflict are indeed common ground for most, if not all, teacher-coaches, there is a need to examine it beyond the surface level. While the existence of role conflict, role strain, and burnout are perhaps similar across individuals, the context in which these individuals work is not. Contextual factors such as school and personal characteristics impact the extent of these problems and drives, to a certain extent, the nature of job-related stress in teachers who also coach. The relative emphasis on athletics and academics at specific schools, expectations of parents and administrators, and the accepted practices of school cultures are factors which have, to this point, not been examined as influences of stress and burnout in teacher-coaches.

We also find the cyclical nature of stress and burnout to be an interesting factor worthy of further study. Previous research on teacher-coach stress and burnout (Locke & Massengale, 1978; Kelley & Gill, 1993) as well as that examining the troublesome induction years of teachers point to

higher levels of stress and burnout at the beginning of a career. To our knowledge, Kelley and Gill's (1993) study is the only investigation which, to date, has examined burnout levels over the course of a season. Our data indicate stress and burnout in our two participants operated in a cyclical manner both over a career as well as during an academic year. Future research should be aware of these fluctuations, and incorporate them into their designs.

Finally, the notion that teacher-coaches develop and use coping strategies to reduce stress, avoid burnout, and remain in the profession has yet to be investigated to any extent. Examining such stress-reduction approaches in individuals who exhibit high and low levels of burnout is a needy area of study, with the potential to help teacher-coaches prosper and remain in their career choice.

REFERENCES

- Bain, L. L. (1983). Teacher/coach role conflict: Factors influencing role performance. In T. J. Templin & J. T. Olson (Eds.), *Teaching in physical education* (pp. 94-101). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bain, L. L., & Wendt, J. C. (1983). Undergraduate physical education majors' perceptions of the roles of teacher and coach. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 54, 112-118.
- Chu, D. (1984). Teacher/coach orientation and role socialization: A description and explanation. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 3 (2), 3-8.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Newton, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Caccese, T. M., & Mayerburg, C. K. (1984). Gender differences in perceived burnout of college coaches. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 6, 279-288.

- Capel, S. A. (1986). Psychological and organizational factors related to burnout in athletic trainers. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 57, 321-328.
- Capel, S. A., Sisley, B. L., & Desertrain, G. S. (1987). The relationship of role conflict and role ambiguity to burnout in high school basketball coaches. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 9, 106-117.
- Dale, J., & Weinberg, R. S. (1990). Burnout in sport: A review and critique. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 2, 67-83.
- Donovan, M. (1997). Role overload and role conflict: Teacher or coach. *British Journal of Physical Education*, 17-20.
- Felder, D., & Wishnietsky, D. (1990). Role conflict, coaching burnout and the reduction in the member of female interscholastic coaches. *The Physical Educator*, 47(2), 7-13.
- Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff burnout. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1, 159-165.
- Getzels, J. W., & Guba, E. C. (1954). Role, role conflict, and effectiveness. *American Sociological Review*, 19, 164-175.
- Goode, W. J. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 483-496.
- Hendrix, A. E., Acevedo, E. O., & Hebert, E. (2000). An examination of stress and burnout in certified athletic trainers at Division I-A universities. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 35, 139-144.
- Jackson, S. E., Schwab, R. L., & Schuler, R. S. (1986). Toward an understanding of the burnout phenomenon. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, 630-640.
- Kelley, B. C. (1994). A model of stress and burnout in collegiate coaches: Effects of gender and time of season. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 65, 48-58.
- Kelley, B. C., & Gill, D. L. (1993). An examination of personal/situational variables, stress appraisal, and burnout in collegiate teacher-coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 64, 94-102.
- Kosa, B. (1990). Teacher-coach burnout and coping strategies. *The Physical Educator*, 47, 153-158.
- Locke, L. F., & Massengale, J. D. (1978). Role conflict in teacher/coaches. *Research Quarterly*, 49, 162-174.
- Maslach, D. (1976). Burned-out. *Human Behavior*, 5, 16-22.
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1986). *Maslach Burnout Inventory: Manual* (6th ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Connell Rust, F. (1994). The first year of teaching: It's not what they expected. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10, 205-217.
- Pastore, D. L. (1993). Gender differences in burnout among coaches of women's athletic teams at 2-year colleges. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10, 205-212.
- Quigley, T. A., Slack, T., & Smith, G. J. (1987). Burnout in secondary school teacher coaches. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 33, 260-274.
- Sage, G. H. (1989a). Becoming a high school coach: From playing sports to coaching. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 60, 81-92.
- Sage, G. H. (1989b). The social world of high school athletic coaches: Multiple role demands and their consequences. In T. J. Templin & P. G. Schempp (Eds.), *Socialization into physical education: Learning to teach* (pp. 251-268). Indianapolis, IN: Benchmark.
- Smith, R. E. (1986). Toward a cognitive-affective model of athletic burnout. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 8, 36-50.
- Templin, T. J. (1989). Running on ice; A case study of the influence of workplace conditions of a secondary school physical educator. In T. J. Templin & P. G. Schempp (Eds.), *Socialization into physical education: Learning to teach* (pp. 165-197). Indianapolis, IN: Benchmark.

Vealey, R. S., Udry, E. M., Zimmerman, V., & Soliday, J. (1992). Intrapersonal and situational predictors of coaching burnout. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 14*, 40-58.

Diane Drake is a Head Women's Soccer Coach at Georgetown University and Edward Hebert is a member of the Kinesiology and Health Studies Department at Southeastern Louisiana University.