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Bridging Boundaries Between Life and Sport:

Exploring Sports Coaches' Micro Role Transitions

Paul A. Davis,¹ Faye F. Didymus,² Scott Barrass,³ and Louise Davis¹

¹Department of Psychology, Umeå University, Umea, Sweden; ²Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, United Kingdom; ³Department of Sport, Exercise, and Rehabilitation, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.

Author Note

Correspondence about this article should be sent to Paul A. Davis, Department of Psychology, Umeå University, Umea, Sweden. Email: paul.davis@umu.se. Telephone: +46 90 786 68 24.

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Abstract

Coach education notes the importance of effective transitions between life and sport, yet research evidence supporting coaches to make such transitions is lacking. The present study used a mixed methods design to explore 41 highly qualified coaches' perceptions of how responsibilities in life beyond sport spill over to coaching practice. Additionally, we examined coaches' transitions between roles in life and sport and the implications for their health and coaching practice. Coaches completed questionnaires measuring perceived stress and emotion regulation, and a writing task about how roles outside of sport impacted their coaching practice. Linguistic analyses using LIWC software revealed that coaches with lower levels of perceived stress expressed more positive emotions when writing about the influence of life commitments on their coaching practice. The findings also suggest that coaches' perceptions of the coaching process can be both positively and negatively influenced by life commitments spilling over into sport. Further, coaches reported challenges with the process of undertaking micro role transitions and highlighted implications for their mental health, coaching effectiveness, and relationships in both sport and life. Integrating organisational and sport psychology research, we offer guidance to optimise coaches' transitions between roles to promote health and optimal performance.

Keywords: coaching effectiveness, coping, emotions, stress, fatigue.

Bridging Boundaries Between Life and Sport: Exploring Sports Coaches' Micro Role Transitions

Transitioning between different contexts is an inherent part of life, particularly for sports coaches who often fulfil multiple roles both within and outside of sport (Didymus et al., 2021). Making effective transitions is important for maintaining a state of balance between work and home. Transitions can support efforts to separate work and home contexts through segmentation and can facilitate attempts to align resources and demands through integration (Kreiner et al., 2009). Transitions are most commonly described as one or more specific events that bring about “a change in assumptions about oneself” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5) and a social disequilibrium (Wapner & Craig-Bay, 1992) that goes beyond the changes of daily life (Sharf, 1997). This conceptualisation historically focused on transitional processes and emphasised major life events (e.g., retirement, moving from adolescence to young adulthood, developing new relationships, and transitioning to higher education or a professional occupation) as key periods of transitions (Wylleman et al., 2004). Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletic Career model of transitions faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, psychosocial, as well as academic/vocational, financial and legal levels epitomises contemporary thought about transitions in athletic populations. No such model exists for coaches and limited research has examined coaches' transitions within and beyond the context of sport. The few studies that have been conducted predominantly focus on significant life events, including transitioning from athlete to coach (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022; Chroni et al., 2020) and exiting the coaching profession (e.g., Knight et al., 2015).

In addition to major life events that are typically infrequent and permanent (Ashforth et al., 2000), micro role transitions permeate individuals' everyday lives. Micro role transitions refer to psychological and physical movement between roles, including role exit (i.e., disengagement from one role) and role entry (i.e., engagement in another role; Burr,

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1972). Ashforth and colleagues note three major domains in which everyday role transitions are undertaken: work-home transitions (e.g., commuting and commencement of working from home), work-work or transitions at work (e.g., between roles or across teams/subgroups; between multiple/second jobs), and work-"third place" transitions (i.e., between work and other social domains not including home, such as stopping at a restaurant after work or going to the gym). These types of transitions can recur frequently in coaches' lives and can include commuting between home and work (e.g., McAlpine et al., 2022; Jachimowicz et al., 2021) or between different work venues as can be the case for sports coaches who are often employed on part-time contracts (Potts et al., 2019) and can occupy multiple coaching roles at a given point in time (e.g., Didymus et al., 2021; Potts et al., 2021). Research in occupational (e.g., Allen et al., 2021) and organisational psychology (e.g., Wu et al., 2021) has identified factors influencing the outcomes of micro role transitions (Desrochers et al., 2005) that can guide the development of research and strategies to facilitate effective transitions in sport coaching.

Transitioning from one role to another requires boundary work: "strategies, principles, and practices . . . to create, maintain, and modify cultural boundaries" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 7). Boundary work refers to how individuals engage in constructing, dismantling, and maintaining the work-home or work-work borders (Kreiner et al., 2009). Maintenance of these borders is important for many reasons, not least to achieve balance in one's life and to minimise stress associated with role conflict that may be experienced by coaches who work unsociable hours (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Sisjord et al., 2022). Predominantly, boundary theorists (e.g., Clark, 2000) have focused on behavioural, temporal, physical, and communicative tactics for the maintenance of effective boundaries (Kreiner et al., 2009). Behavioural tactics, for example, can include prioritisation of important tasks whilst physical tactics can involve the adaptation of physical boundaries. More recently, psychological

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factors (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, emotion regulation) have been highlighted for the prevention of emotional exhaustion and the promotion of role engagement (Gerpott et al., 2023; McAlpine et al., 2022). During transitions between the boundaries of work and home, opportunities for psychological recovery (Sonnentag, 2012) and relaxation can be accessed (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) in support of coaches' attempts to reduce stress related to work life-interference (Lundkvist et al., 2016a).

Coaches' experience of stress both within and across contexts is the result of the transaction between the coach and his or her environment (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that pivots on appraising; the process that determines the outcomes of stress transactions. Relatedly, cognitive reappraisal can be a useful emotion regulation technique for coaches' experiencing stress and can be implemented during periods of transition (Gross & John, 2003). For example, a coach may use time during a commute from home to the training ground to undertake cognitive reappraisal of an interpersonal conflict that occurred at home, facilitate an effective transition between environments, and prevent spill over of emotions across roles. Emotion regulation can be used by coaches to influence the onset, offset, magnitude, duration, intensity, or quality of their emotional responses and, thus, inhibit unhelpful spill over and optimise micro role transitions (see Davis & Davis, 2016; Lane et al., 2012). This suggests that exploring psychological factors that influence spill over and micro role transitions may offer a useful starting point for establishing a body of knowledge with sports coaches. Doing so can elucidate opportunities and/or challenges offered by transitionary periods (e.g., commuting) and provide preliminary understanding of how best to develop coaches' skills for managing daily transitions. To kickstart research on coaches' micro role transitions and develop an evidence base for boundary work, we explored coaches' perceptions of how responsibilities in life beyond sport spill over to their coaching practice. We also examined how coaches transition between roles in sport and life, and the

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implications of these transitions for coaches' health and practice.

Methods

Study Design

Although qualitative and quantitative methods have been used in the study of both coaches' life stress and coaching practice, the use of mixed methods research (MMR) is limited despite acknowledgement of its usefulness (Thelwell et al., 2017). In consideration of the focus of the present study, specifically the multidimensionality of coaches' life commitments and the dynamic nature of transitioning across the boundaries of life and coaching practice, a MMR study design was deemed appropriate (Moran et al., 2011). The present study gathered quantitative data in the form of coaches' responses to validated questionnaires analysing perceptions of psychological stress and emotion regulation, in combination with a qualitative prompted writing task devised by the researchers to explore coaches' perceptions of how responsibilities in life beyond sport spill over to their coaching practice. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated by scoring the survey data and linguistic analyses that quantified the use of specific words in the qualitative writing task. In accordance with our constructivist and post-positivist epistemological standpoints, and the multidimensional nature of the research question, an inductive content analysis was undertaken to identify categories within the data and gain an understanding of the participants' perspectives using mixed methods (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Through an ongoing process of comparing and contrasting the various analyses (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007), a more comprehensive understanding of coaches' perspectives of the spill over of life commitments to coaching practice and their experiences of micro role transitions across contexts was sought.

Participants

Participants were 41 coaches (15 women; $M_{age}=41.43$, $SD=4.12$) who were working

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in the United Kingdom. The coaches' qualifications were UKCC Level 3 (n=36) and 4 (n=5) and their years of coaching experience ranged from 3 to 33 years ($M=11.23$ years, $SD=9.51$) in the sports of athletics (n=36), netball (n=2), gymnastics (n=2), and football (soccer; n=1). Coaches worked with athletes at youth fundamental (aged 5-11, n=4), youth participation/regional (aged 12-18, n=11), youth competition national/international (aged 12-18, n=17), senior participation/regional competition (aged > 18, n=2), and senior competition national/international levels (aged > 18, n=6).

Measures

Perceived Stress

The Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ; Fliege et al., 2005; Levenstein et al., 1993) was used to measure coaches' perceptions of stress over the last four weeks. The 20 items are completed using a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = usually) to measure individuals' overall level of perceived stress; for example, items ask respondents to indicate the degree to which, "you feel tense." Previous research has supported the validity and reliability of the PSQ, factor structure, and internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$; Kocalevent et al., 2007). The internal consistency of the PSQ in the present study was acceptable ($\alpha = .83$).

Emotion Regulation

The 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John 2003) consists of two dimensions that asks participants to respond with reference to emotional aspects of their life on a seven-point Likert scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The first dimension of "cognitive reappraisal" contains six items (e.g., I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in) that capture the tendency to alter perceptions of the emotion-eliciting situation in a manner that augments its emotion impact. The second dimension "expressive suppression" contains four items (e.g., I keep my

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emotions to myself) that reflect the tendency to inhibit on-going emotion-expressive behaviour. Evidence to support the validity and reliability of the instrument has been provided by Gross and John (2003), including factorial structure (confirmatory factor analysis) and internal consistency ($\alpha = .68-.76$). The internal consistency of the ERQ in the present study was adequate ($\alpha = .73$).

Prompted Writing Task

Participants completed a 10-minute qualitative writing task wherein they were invited to outline how they perceived their life commitments beyond sport spill over to their coaching practice. A brief prompt was developed to guide coaches' recall; key phrases commonly used in the instructions of the Written Emotional Disclosure expressive writing protocol (Pennebaker, 1997) were integrated to promote the retrieval of stored thoughts and feelings associated with the coaches' roles in sport and life. Careful consideration was given in the formulation of the instructional prompt to limit potential biases being inferred or influence recall and subsequent writing. The instructions for the writing task were:

We would like you to write for the next 10 minutes about your life commitments outside of the coaching context. Feel free to choose any aspects of your life to write about and how you feel they impact you and your coaching practice. Do not worry about your writing style, spelling, or grammar. Please write about your thoughts and feelings that come to mind when you think about your life commitments and their influence on your coaching practice. Please write for the full 10 minutes; until you are told to stop.

Procedure

Following institutional ethical review board approval, information outlining the nature of the study was sent via email to local sport governing bodies (e.g., football, gymnastics, netball) as well as a national level sport organisation (i.e., UK Athletics). Additionally,

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coaches were approached and recruited during UK Athletics professional development courses, as well as at national championship events held at three venues across England (i.e., Gateshead, Sheffield, Birmingham).

Coaches that expressed interest in participating in the study were met in person by the third named author and were provided with an information sheet outlining the study's protocol. Participants were verbally reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that confidentiality would be maintained. After providing written informed consent participants were provided with a pen for writing as well as a participation booklet that included the writing task, demographic questions, and the perceived stress and emotion regulation questionnaires. Once participants indicated that they had read the instructions for the prompted writing task the researcher instructed them to begin writing and started a stopwatch. Following 10 minutes of elapsed time the participant was informed that they could stop writing. Participants then completed the demographic questions as well as the perceived stress and emotion regulation questionnaires. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were thanked for their involvement in the study.

Data Analysis

To explore the range of emotions associated with life commitments, sport coaching practice, and transitions, participants' prompted writing statements were transcribed into a text document to be analysed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software (Pennebaker et al., 2001). A paired samples *t*-test was performed on the LIWC analysis of the use of words reflecting positive and negative emotions. The data generated from LIWC was also used in conjunction with participants' perceived stress scores. Specifically, a 2 (emotion: positive, negative) X 2 (stress: high, low) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor and a median split on the stress data was undertaken to examine whether coaches' levels of perceived stress influenced their use of positive and negative emotion

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words when writing about their perceptions of how life commitments influence coaching practice. Next, the transcribed writing texts were subject to coding by way of inductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to explore participants' perspectives of their roles in life and sport as well as their experience of transitioning between roles.

Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

The transcripts generated from the prompted writing task were analysed using LIWC software (Pennebaker et al., 2001); LIWC undertakes a process of counting words in the text files and quantifying the use of specific words in relation to an internal dictionary of over 2300 words and stems. The frequency of the appearance of the specific words are then grouped into purposely assigned linguistic categories. For the purpose of the present study, the use of words reflecting emotions were examined via the emotion process categories of the LIWC (Pennebaker et al., 2001). The LIWC software inspects written texts for emotion processes in relation to 615 affect-based words including both positively valenced (i.e., pleasant) and negatively valenced (i.e., unpleasant) connotations. The positive emotions category comprises 261 words that reflect positive feelings (e.g., happy, good) and words associated with positive judgements. The negative emotions category is comprised of 345 words indicating negative judgements and feelings (e.g., hate, anger). The outputs generated through the categorising and quantifying of word use report their frequency as a percentage of the total number of words in the writing text; thus, variation in the length of the written transcripts (i.e., word count) is controlled for across texts and permits the researcher to make comparisons across participants.

Coding

An inductive content analysis of the texts generated through the prompted writing task was conducted. Inductive content analysis has been used previously in the context of sport to analyse data collected from participants in the form of written text (e.g., Wallace et al., 2011).

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In the present study, this approach to data analysis was deemed appropriate as it allowed the specific contextual experiences of the coaches to be identified (e.g., life commitments, coaching practice, transitions). In the first stage of content analysis, two members of the research team immersed themselves in the written transcripts to familiarise with the data and begin open coding. This involved extracting raw data quotes related to the coaches' roles and potential spill over across contexts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, the first and third authors independently made notes on the transcripts to identify segments of text for further review and to facilitate coding of the data regardless of the context. Quotes from the coaches that indicated related experiences were grouped and labelled to demarcate categories that were subsequently combined to create higher order categories (Aronson, 1995). The organisation of the composite categories allowed a comprehensive picture of coaches' collective experiences to be identified (Patton, 2002; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The first and third named authors initially conducted the coding process and developed the higher order categories, which were then debated and agreed among the research team as a whole. Furthermore, in the role of critical friends (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), colleagues of the investigators who possessed expertise in teaching and research of coaching science and sport psychology, questioned and discussed the proposed categories that were identified from the analysis. Minor amendments were made to the terminology and labelling of three subcategories. The codes comprising the categories were deemed appropriate. The applied and theoretical implications of the findings were also debated with colleagues to identify and clarify the results of the study through peer review.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 1. Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were positively correlated $r = .43, p < .01$. Coaches'

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perceived stress scores were not correlated with the use of either emotion regulation strategy.

Emotions Associated with the Impact of Life Commitments on Coaching Practice

The LIWC software (Pennebaker et al., 2001) was used to determine the word count arising from the prompted writing task. The sum of words across all 41 writing texts totalled 5982 ($M_{word} = 145.90$; $SD = 75.44$). The LIWC software also examined the extent of positive and negative emotions that were expressed by the participants when considering the influence of life commitments on coaching practice. A paired samples *t*-test indicated that coaches used significantly more words reflecting positive emotions ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.88$) than negative emotions ($M = .94$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(40) = 5.98$, $p < .001$. Additionally, a 2 (emotion: positive, negative) X 2 (stress: high, low) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor and a median split on the stress data (Median = 4.83) revealed a significant main effect for the emotion condition, $F(1, 35) = 46.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .57$ indicating coaches used more positive words than negative words. Of more central interest, the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between emotion and stress, $F(1, 35) = 6.08$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .15$, which confirmed that emotions associated with the influence of life commitments on coaching were viewed significantly more positively and less negatively for coaches with lower levels of perceived stress.

Perceptions of Life Commitments Influencing Coaching Practice

The qualitative data analysis of the written texts generated 96 distinct raw-data quotes, which were organised into 11 subcategories, and four higher order categories: life commitments beyond sport, micro role transitions, implications for coaches' physical and mental health, and perceived consequences for coaching effectiveness. See Table 2 for a summary of higher order categories, subcategories, and example quotes.

Life Commitments Beyond Sport

Coaches identified several life commitments beyond sport; the most frequently

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reported commitments were organised into three subcategories: education, work, and relationships. Regarding education, 10 coaches identified university studies as an activity they were engaged in for professional development and learning. University commitments had both positive and negative consequences for coaches. Three coaches identified that they were undertaking coaching related higher education and that these courses facilitated the attainment of coaching qualifications (P3) and provided opportunities to learn coaching theory that was subsequently used in practice (P7). Coaches also commented that studying degrees in disciplines beyond sport offered lessons that could improve coaching practice:

...studying for a degree in special educational needs has given me the knowledge to look at athletes with a different outlook. This aids me to support my athletes and plan appropriately differentiated sessions to ensure all athletes are challenged and at the same time can achieve set agreed goals (P22).

In contrast, university studies were also noted to negatively influence coaching. In particular, time spent commuting between home, campus, and training venues was highlighted by multiple coaches as a factor that negatively impacted both life and sport. Almost all coaches reported having work commitments outside of sport, including those coaches who reported undertaking university studies. Two coaches noted that they were retired, yet most indicated that they worked full-time outside of sport. Two coaches indicated that their main employment was related to sport: one was employed at an English Institute of Sport and the other at a university as a coach educator. Participant nine noted:

The biggest influence on my coaching practice is my work commitments. My role as a coach educator enables me to continually refresh and develop my knowledge and understanding of coaching practice whilst being able to question my own practice. My role as a lecturer at [University] also enables me to spend time researching aspects of coaching practice and to engage in critical debate (of) best practice. Having said this,

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time pressures of both roles means the amount of time I can spend coaching is limited.

It was noted by several coaches that, on occasion, time spent at work precluded the opportunity to coach: "I work unreasonable hours, so there are some weekends and evenings where I am unable to coach" (P13).

Family and social relationships were highlighted as the other predominant life commitment outside of sport. Social relationships related to a variety of connections, including family (e.g., partners, children) as well as organisations in the community (e.g., volunteering, church). Social connections in organisations outside of sport could enhance their coaching and relationships in sport:

...my life skills and interactions with people help me to talk to the young athletes and enable me to value what they do . . . whether that is to compete at competition level or simply to enjoy the activity for what it is: fun and social (P24).

Coaching was also noted as an opportunity to enhance relationships with family members through time spent with children; six coaches indicated that their children participated in the sport they coached. However, relationships with children could suffer due to time spent coaching: "At times, conflicts occur between some of my children's interests, which requires a discussion from me to prioritise my time/attendance at these events (championships) which may impact negatively on one of my daughter's planned activities" (P16). Challenges managing expectations from family members was not reserved to children, five coaches reported difficulties with partners:

My boyfriend lives in [city] which makes me split my life between his home and mine. We are also dealing with the recent death of his brother. This has put a lot of stress and pressure on me which, at the time, made coaching very hard to deal with, although it did give me some release (P19).

Taken collectively, coaches outlined that life commitments outside of sport were

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undertaken both for themselves and for others. Further, these commitments were viewed as being both facilitative and debilitating for their coaching practice.

Micro Role Transitions

Coaches identified a range of challenges that were experienced in attempts to transition across the boundaries of life and sport. Specifically, eight coaches reported that the process of physically and psychologically moving from one domain to another (e.g., from sport to life) was a challenge that had implications for health as well as functioning in both contexts. We categorised the data relating to recurring micro role transitions into two subcategories: implications for coaching effectiveness and implications for relationships.

Coaches reported that time was an important factor when undertaking the transition from life to coaching. Specifically, they reported that, when time was limited, the transition was ineffective and resulted in a spill over of thoughts and emotions that interfered with coaching practice:

...I have to allow more time to get to facilities and find it hard to travel 25 miles back home from University to get ready to coach. This often leaves me feeling stressed and feeling a great deal of anxiety when coaching a session. I feel my patience is short when dealing with particular situations and feel angry easily (P39).

As a result of undertaking recurring micro role transitions coaches indicated that they gained experience and awareness of the challenges and solutions that can be explored to facilitate more effective transitions. For example, upon arriving at training sessions coaches recognised that they must be proactive in identifying time and space to facilitate an effective transition and limit spill over: "I often arrive at sessions thinking about work and sometimes go home to more work. What is useful is the time before a session, which allows me to assess the group and focus on the requirements for that session" (P18).

Coaches reported that emotion regulation was challenging at intrapersonal and

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interpersonal levels within relationships in both sport and at home. During coaching related activities, coaches acknowledged that emotions related to stress and fatigue resulting from the necessity to transition between roles could impair attention and engagement with athletes. Additionally, coaches noticed that unpleasant emotions could arise when attempting to detach from relationships in one context. An ineffective transition across contexts can lead to feelings of internal conflict and mixed emotions in the present domain:

I have to admit my relationship is bad with regards to my coaching, as my partner does not have an interest in my athletics. So most of the time I feel unhappy coaching when leaving her at home, however I love coaching (P7).

In the context of life beyond sport, coaches' partners were also noted to impose boundary management techniques in attempts to facilitate transitions and curtail the spill over across domains which can result in negative implications for relationships: "...all I would talk about is my sport. I was given a curfew on talking about this, but I found coaching sport has enormous pressure on relationships and time and expense" (P25).

Implications for Coaches' Physical and Mental Health

In consideration of the spill over of life commitments to the domain of sport, coaches reported a variety of implications for physical and mental health. Two subcategories represent these implications: fatigue and stress.

Coaches reported aspects of both mental and physical fatigue. Specifically, eight coaches used the word "tired" when describing the effects of life commitments and coaching in combination: "In summary, due to my work pattern and life/work commitments, I often feel tired and distracted from focusing on coaching" (P41). Reports of feeling tired were often associated with factors such as travel, late nights, poor eating habits, and demands related to both work and coaching. Coaches also indicated that these factors can operate in combination to induce exhaustion and degrade mental and physical health:

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It can be really difficult at times trying to fit everything in. A lot of running about trying to get my dinner at a reasonable time, sometimes not being able to eat after work, just a quick shower, and straight out again to my coaching, and then not getting home until 21:00. I sometimes feel so exhausted and lethargic that sometimes I don't eat because all I want to do is sleep (P37).

Ten coaches described feeling stressed when attempting to manage life commitments and sport coaching. Two concepts represent coaches' reports of stress: time and balance.

Participant 39 outlined "Overall, I feel time management around university, coaching, friends, and family, has a massive negative impact on my coaching and can often cause me a great deal of stress." Time was noted to be a limited resource that was required for the execution of numerous tasks associated with both life commitments and coaching: "I generally feel rushed most days! And time is in short supply due to all my demands" (P5).

Coaches highlighted that time was required for travel, eating, sleeping, work, family, coaching, and leisure. They indicated an awareness that time spent on one activity limited the amount of time that could be allocated to another activity: "I often need to spend time talking to the other coaches and parents, reducing the time I have to coach even more" (P30).

Coaches recognised that finding a balance between sport and life commitments was important and they reported taking proactive measures (e.g., adjusting behaviours in other aspects of life) to do so: "I find it very difficult to balance my social life and running a club. I'm often thinking about keeping myself right because I am coaching the next day, so I try not to have too much to drink" (P25). Those coaches who reported finding balance noted the benefits:

If anything, my coaching has affected my life...better planning, greater appreciation of the human condition and nutritional intelligence...and appreciation of how to deliver a product, project, or advice to a multitalented group with diverse ethnicities

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and different learning skills because of the balance I have. I feel able to deal with any challenge in any area of my life (P36).

Consequences for Coaching Effectiveness

Participants reported that life commitments outside of sport impacted aspects of their coaching and the perceived effectiveness of their efforts. Coaches highlighted specific factors that we categorised as: knowledge, planning, delivery, and reflection.

Coaches outlined that being involved in multiple roles offered opportunities to develop their sport knowledge by improving interpersonal interactions and developing skills that enhanced their connection with athletes: “My University degree has had a big impact on my coaching practice because I am always learning new methods and gaining knowledge in how to communicate or work with athletes to get the best out of them” (P33).

Many coaches highlighted that the planning aspect of coaching was impacted by life commitments; predominantly the issues of time constraints and subsequent fatigue were noted to limit opportunities to plan. Thirteen coaches reported that planning was not done as extensively as they would like and/or was done under time pressure, which required them to develop strategies to enable its completion: “Planning is often done in a rush although I have a dedicated notebook and memory stick for this purpose” (P5). It is worth noting that four coaches indicated that the requirement to balance life commitments with coaching promoted creativity and developed their time management skills.

Coaching delivery was perceived to be both positively and negatively influenced by responsibilities beyond sport. Again, stress and fatigue played roles in coaching delivery:

...sometimes a tough week at University, and late nights at work, affect my coaching.

After a late Friday night finish with little sleep to recover, I was coaching on a Saturday morning...I recall waking up very tired...although the session was good, my performance could have been better, the amount of constructive feedback to improve

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specific aspects to athletes was poor and to a bad standard (P1).

To realise the benefits of coaching as a break from life, coaches noted they did have to maintain their focus during delivery: "I am learning to adapt to balancing my life and adjust to concentrate fully on my coaching when I am there" (P19).

The process of learning associated with coaching was most often related to evaluation and reflection. Evaluation of coaching practice was central to the development of coaching effectiveness: "...ultimately, the most important thing to me is learning from my experiences through self-reflection and athlete feedback..." (P33). However, time pressure and fatigue often inhibited reflection: "I feel too tired to reflect and evaluate my sessions. This makes me feel guilty and added to all the other pressures I often feel stressed and worry constantly that there is something important I have forgotten to do" (P5).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore coaches' perceptions of how responsibilities in life beyond sport spill over to their coaching practice. The study specifically focused on transitions between the boundaries of sport and life as well as associated implications for coaches' health and practice. Based on the combined use of questionnaires and a prompted writing task with highly trained coaches, we add to extant knowledge by offering the first empirical study of coaches' recurring micro role transitions. The quantitative data highlight a significant interaction between emotion and stress, such that emotions associated with the influence of life commitments on coaching were viewed significantly more positively and less negatively for coaches with lower perceived stress. The qualitative insights highlighted that coaches had various life commitments (e.g., education, work, relationships) beyond sport and that micro role transitions associated with moving across contexts had implications for health and functioning in both sport and life. Additionally, it was noted that coaches often experienced stress as well as physical and mental fatigue when attempting to manage life

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commitments alongside coaching; these commitments outside of sport both positively and negatively impacted their coaching knowledge, planning, delivery, and reflection.

In line with established theories of emotion in sport (e.g., Lazarus, 1999), emotions associated with the influence of life commitments on coaching were viewed significantly more positively and less negatively for coaches with lower levels of perceived stress. Failure to manage life commitments can create a conflict in which an individual perceives stress and negative emotions at work due to unfulfilled needs at home (Geurts et al., 2005; Montgomery et al., 2006). Previous research by Lundkvist and colleagues (2016a) highlighted that work-home/home-work interference is associated with coaches' experience of exhaustion. Coaches' depletion of both physical and emotional capacity can be a result of experiencing stress over an extended period of time (Maslach et al., 2001), wherein strain is experienced by coaches both at home and in the sport context. As such, promoting healthier home situations (i.e., less stress) can improve coaches' perceptions of life commitments on coaching (i.e., more positive and less negative emotion), which in turn can reduce conflict and increase opportunities for recovery (Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017). Despite increasing research examining the issue of coach burnout (see Lundkvist et al., 2016b; Olusoga et al., 2019), the current study is the first to examine associations between stress and emotion in the context of spill over between coaches' sport and home lives.

Turning more specifically to coaches' micro role transitions across the boundaries of life and sport contexts, space and time that is purposefully directed toward making effective transitions between roles appeared to be important for coaches. Boundary theory, which is concerned with how people manage different work and non-work roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), offers useful explanatory potential of coaches' movement between roles and contexts. Boundary theorists suggest that transferring between roles is facilitated by rites of transition, which provide opportunities for an individual to

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prepare psychologically for role entry (e.g., into the role of coach from the role of parent). To facilitate an effective conversion, a transition script can be used to organise the “transition tasks in a temporal flow, thereby guiding the individual and providing a sense of predictability and control” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 485). Transition scripts can include a set of thoughts and behaviours that form a sequenced routine that becomes automated and thereby less effortful (Nolan et al., 2023). During time spent commuting, for example, coaches may have space to adopt an appropriate cognitive frame (e.g., by paying attention to the upcoming role entry) and engage in emotion regulation strategies (e.g., mindfulness; Davis & Davis, 2016) to foster an appropriate state of arousal for the upcoming role.

Researchers have highlighted that an enjoyable commute can offer individuals time to think and relax (e.g., Gerpott et al., 2022; Kluger, 1998), optimise stress and recovery (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; McAlpine et al., 2022), co-activate home and work roles (Jachimowicz et al., 2021; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009), as well as engage in role-clarifying prospection (Jachimowicz et al., 2021; Szpunar et al., 2014), and serve as a useful rite of transition (Nolan et al., 2023). Other researchers (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2014) have implied that people who are higher in trait self-control may be better able to regulate their thoughts during their commute, thus facilitating a smoother and more efficient role transition (Gerpott et al., 2023). Taken together, boundary theory and related empirical research help to explain why coaches in the present study reported that they value space and time to work through their micro role transitions to promote optimal health and functioning across contexts.

During the writing task, coaches reflected on spill over of life commitments to their coaching role and reported experiencing stress as well as physical and mental fatigue when attempting to manage non-sport commitments alongside coaching. This finding lends additional support to previous research outlining the potentially stressful nature of coaching (Didymus, 2017), the multiple and varied roles that coaches fulfil (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et

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al., 2021), and theoretical propositions (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) positing that individuals have a finite capacity to manage stressors. The coaches in this study also reported that life commitments outside of coaching both positively and negatively impacted their coaching effectiveness in terms of knowledge, planning, delivery, and reflection. Some interesting parallels can be drawn here between our findings and those reported in leadership and organisational psychology (e.g., Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Eldor et al., 2020). For example, research on positive spill over (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Rothbard, 2001) and work/nonwork enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) has demonstrated the positive influence that work can have on individuals' other roles, including the transfer of resources from one role to another, which can improve functioning in the other domain. Our findings echo these sentiments and suggest that positive spill over may also occur from life to work because the coaches reported that their roles outside of sport afforded opportunities for knowledge and skill development. This is the first study to examine coaches' work (sport) and non-work (life) roles in this way and to begin to shift focus from coaching being an inherently stressful occupation to a narrative that embraces the potential benefits of coaching for functioning and well-being in both work and non-work contexts.

The findings of this study should be considered in light of its potential limitations. Although the sample in the present study is representative of male and female coaches currently active in the United Kingdom and offers the opportunity to gain insight into the underrepresented experience of women coaches (Gosai et al., 2023), it fails to elucidate the complex and dynamic aspects of race and ethnicity that influence the experiences of sport coaches in life and sport (Rankin-Wright et al., 2019). Future cross-cultural comparisons of the experiences of sport coaches may highlight how state and employment policies (e.g., parental leave; Jowett et al., 2022) can influence sport coaches' spill over of life commitments and navigation of micro role transitions across the boundaries of sport and life.

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Previous research examining sport coaches' job stress and wellbeing has appealed for greater use of qualitative methods to identify and explain factors influencing coaches' experiences (Didymus et al., 2021); the present study answers this call by integrating coaches' qualitative reports with objective quantitative measures to gain a broader perspective of coaches' experiences (Thelwell et al., 2017). However, the nature of the methods required coaches to recall their past emotional experiences and interpersonal interactions within and beyond sport. The remembering of affective responses and emotions within the sport context are noted to be prone to changes over time (e.g., Slawinska & Davis, 2020), as such the development of instruments to assess observable emotions (e.g., Allan et al., 2016) has advanced knowledge beyond the use traditional retrospective self-reports of coaches' experiences. Future studies may consider the use of experimental experience-sampling design (e.g., Rumbold et al., 2020) and/or ecological momentary assessments to capture coaches' experiences in naturalistic settings (e.g., home, sport) to better understand patterns of change that occur across contexts (e.g., Reifsteck et al., 2021) and transitions.

To underline the importance of the current topic and the potential impact of the work, we now consider the implications of our findings for research and practice. Since this is the first study of its kind, we encourage researchers to continue with holistic explorations of poignant research questions that sustain a focus on the implications of coaches' life and sport roles. We also encourage mixed-methods research with larger sample sizes. Prompted writing tasks can be used in future studies to produce rich data that can be collected in a time efficient manner and offer nuanced insight into coaches' experiences (e.g., Oblinger-Peters et al., 2020). Moreover, single case and/or longitudinal research designs may facilitate the study of coaches' commuting experiences, for example, and help to identify the factors that support and/or impede effective micro role transitions.

The findings of the present study can underpin coach education programmes and

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continuing professional development opportunities offered to practitioners in attempts to support coaches' transitions between roles in sport and life. Sport national governing bodies and policy makers would do well to focus interventions directly on optimizing coaches' micro role transitions given they have a duty of care to coaches and the management of workplace stress (Didymus et al., 2021). Despite recognition of coaches as performers (e.g., Davis, 2016; Frey, 2007) and the importance of physical and mental health for effective coaching (Kegelaers et al., 2021), limited evidence-based guidance about how to navigate micro transitions is offered to coaches. Coaches are encouraged to manage their mental health and prepare themselves for peak performance (Carson et al., 2018); pre-performance preparation can be well served by targeting effective micro transitions. For example, rites of transitions (e.g., commuting) and transition scripts can be used to detach from one role (limit rumination), promote effective emotion regulation and mindfulness (enhance stress management), prepare for role entry (goal setting), and cope during coaching practice (reduction of role conflict; Lundkvist et al., 2016a; Pawsey et al., 2021). Previous studies have indicated the effectiveness of mental skills use (e.g., imagery, relaxation, cognitive restructuring) to enhance coaching practice and wellbeing (e.g., Olsen et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2014). Thus, incorporating mental skills into rites of transition may support coaches' boundary work. Further research is warranted to investigate how specific mental skills can be optimally overlaid and implemented across temporal aspects of micro role transitions.

In summary, this study explored coaches' perceptions of their commitments in life beyond sport and the spill over of non-sport responsibilities to coaching practice. We quantitatively examined factors (i.e., emotion regulation, perceived stress) that can influence said spill over and qualitatively explored coaches' perceptions of how non-sport commitments influence their coaching practice, relationships, health, and wellbeing. In doing so, we put forward the first empirical study of coaches' micro role transitions. Findings

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reported in the study advance understanding of the work-life interface among coaches and can serve as an impetus for the investigation of applied strategies to create a sense of work-life integration and/or segmentation for coaches who occupy various roles and operate in sometimes ruthless and performance driven cultures. The current work makes progress in this space, but further research is needed to develop a robust body of evidence that can be used to optimise role-to-role spill over and facilitate effective micro role transitions.

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