

ATHLETIC TRAINING PROFESSIONAL ATTRITION AND THE MILLENNIAL  
GENERATION

by

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The field of athletic training is projected to grow 21% from 2012 to 2022, which is faster than average for all occupations examined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>1</sup> The demand for athletic trainers has the potential to increase as people become more aware of the benefits of athletic trainers in all settings. However, the increase in job opportunities is met with a growing problem with professional attrition in clinically practicing athletic trainers.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, a study by Kahanov and Eberman found that the largest decline in the athletic training workforce occurs within the first 10 years after an athletic trainer becomes certified.<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon, known as attrition, is a component of turnover. Turnover can include changing fields or leaving a profession, while attrition more commonly refers to only leaving a profession.<sup>3</sup> The use of the term professional attrition for this study eliminates those who left a profession due to disability or some other crisis not related to the nature of the profession.

Burnout in “helping professions” like athletic training has long been identified as an indicator of job satisfaction<sup>2,4-13</sup> and is only one of many factors that have been suggested leads to professional attrition.<sup>2,6,9,10,12,14</sup> Given the number of factors that can contribute to professional attrition, the search for causation that only investigates burnout is woefully shortsighted. Research in athletic training regarding attrition is very limited<sup>2,14,15</sup> but similar high-demand fields, such as nursing, have far more research that attempts to understand professional attrition.<sup>9,16-19</sup> Leiter & Maslach’s Mediation Model

of Burnout for the nursing profession illustrates the complexity and variability of factors that lead to a nursing professional's intention to leave the field.<sup>9</sup> This model has three factors of burnout—exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy—as mediators between six worklife factors and a nurse's intention to leave the profession. However, it recognizes that all worklife factors do not relate to all aspects of burnout, and that all three factors that constitute burnout combined do not always lead to a professional's intention to leave their profession.

Kahanov et al., the most recent study on professional attrition in athletic training, used survey methodology to describe some commonly cited factors by athletic trainers who had left the profession.<sup>14</sup> Participants in this study spanned a wide range of ages covering three generations. This study surveyed all ages, settings, and generations. The only limitation was that the former athletic trainers had let their certification lapse within five years of the study. Some factors identified as leading to professional attrition were burnout, role strain, ethical strain, social strain, feeling sad and hopeless, and decreasing sleep consistently.<sup>14</sup> This study was an important first step in understanding current factors for professional attrition. However, a new generation of athletic trainers are entering the workforce and the need to understand attrition factors related to this generation specifically. Generational attitudes and expectations vary; therefore, it is important to understand experiences of the millennial generation workforce to help build programs to increase retention.

The millennial generation is the largest, most technologically advanced generation to ever enter the workforce.<sup>19-21</sup> They are goal oriented, optimistic and driven to succeed.<sup>20,22,23</sup> However they are also considered the most indulged generation, full of

entitlement and narcissism.<sup>22-24</sup> Studies that have endeavored to understand the belief systems of Millennials have found that they believe they deserve a certain lifestyle and will seek out professions that provide it immediately.<sup>22</sup> The stark differences between the Millennial generation and previous generations have left employers scrambling to find strategies to understand and retain their workforce. Before strategies can be applied to retain the athletic training work force there must be an understanding of the generation's values and goals, as well as how they interact with others and their profession in general. Descriptions of the experience of Millennials who have left athletic training and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that led to their professional attrition could provide some important insight into this generation as athletic training professionals.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of millennial generation individuals that chose to leave the athletic training profession and to identify common themes cited by the participants that they describe as attributing to their professional attrition.

### **Significance of the Study**

The experiences of Millennial athletic trainers that have chosen to leave athletic training is a vital component to understanding how this emerging generation feels about and deals with the factors that are inherent to our profession. This study is significant because it will provide rich description of the experiences of Millennial athletic trainers who have left the profession and identify themes that are unique to this emerging

generation, which has not been previously studied. These descriptions can lead to a better understanding of the Millennial generation in the athletic training workforce, as well as shed light on attrition issues that may be specific to this emerging generation. Armed with a better understanding of this generation, educators, mentors, and employers may be able to address some potential issues before they lead to professional attrition.

### **Operational Definitions:**

1. Athletic Trainer- A healthcare professional who has passed the Board of Certification exam and/or state licensure exam for athletic training.
2. Millennial generation-A person born between the years 1980 and 2000.
3. Burnout- a reaction to chronic stressors that results in negative psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses.<sup>11</sup>
4. Professional attrition- an athletic trainer who ceases to practice athletic training in any capacity due to incongruence with the profession, not circumstances outside of their control.
5. Intention to leave- planning on leaving current job within the next year, and/or currently seeking different employment.<sup>9</sup>

### **Delimitations**

1. This study is delimited by recruitment of former athletic trainers who were born between 1980 and 2000 and practiced athletic training for at least two years.
2. This study is delimited by recruitment of former athletic trainers who are no longer practicing athletic training in any capacity.

## **Limitations**

1. This study is limited by phone interviews so non-verbal cues will be unavailable.
2. This study uses a limited number of participants so the understanding of professional attrition in the young professional Millennial athletic trainer is somewhat limited.

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research in the area of athletic training professional development has focused on issues such as role strain,<sup>1</sup> burnout,<sup>2-5</sup> and gender based<sup>6,7</sup> attrition patterns in athletic training however professional attrition in millennial generation athletic trainers is largely unstudied. This study seeks to describe the experiences of millennial generation athletic trainers that have left the athletic training profession through first-hand accounts of those who have chosen to leave. For those experiences to be understood we must first have an understanding of the issue of professional attrition, previous studies that have investigated professional attrition in athletic training and healthcare, and the Millennial generation. The following is an overview of the athletic training profession, attrition in athletic training, potential models for describing attrition and its causes in young professional athletic trainers, and a review of the literature regarding characteristics of the Millennial generation.

#### **Context of Athletic Training Clinical Practice**

Athletic training is a unique healthcare profession that requires a wide range of skills in injury/illness prevention and wellness protection, clinical evaluation and diagnosis, immediate and emergency care, treatment and rehabilitation, and organizational and professional health and well-being.<sup>8</sup> Athletic trainers are defined by the National Athletic Trainers' Association as "highly qualified, multi-skilled healthcare

professionals” who “collaborate with physicians to provide prevention, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic interventions and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions.”<sup>9</sup>

Athletic training as a profession is projected to grow at an above average rate of 21% from 2012 to 2022.<sup>10</sup> The predicted professional growth can be credited to the increase in awareness regarding the advantages of having access to an athletic trainer outside of the traditional setting, as well as an increase in schools adding or increasing their athletic training staff. The mean annual pay for an athletic trainer is \$44,010 which is outside of the top twenty allied healthcare annual wages.

To become certified, an athletic trainer must obtain a degree from an accredited entry-level athletic training program and pass a rigorous Board of Certification exam.<sup>8</sup> Additionally most states require an athletic trainer to be additionally licensed or registered to practice within the state.<sup>9</sup> Once certified, an athletic trainer must earn continuing education credits in a variety of subjects in order to retain their certified status.<sup>8</sup>

An athletic trainers’ wide skill set allows them to work in a variety of settings including, but not limited to, middle and high school, university, amateur and professional sports, physician clinics, hospitals, physical therapy clinics, as well as industrial, public service, and military settings.<sup>9</sup> The most common setting is the more “traditional” school athletic setting, be it middle school, high school, college or university.<sup>9,10</sup> Within a traditional setting an athletic trainer is responsible for the medical coverage of several if not all of the sports at the institution as well as teaching responsibilities. Typically an athletic trainer would be available during the day for

treatment and rehabilitation, in the afternoons for practice coverage and on some nights and weekends for game coverage. In the secondary school setting an athletic trainer can be responsible for most if not all of the student-athletes, while in the collegiate and university setting it is more common that one athletic trainer is responsible for 1-2 specific teams. Also at most college and university settings the athletic trainer accompanies the team when they travel. Both settings commonly require an athletic trainer to evaluate, treat, rehabilitate and prepare for activity several athletes in a short period of time. For example, the athletic trainer for NCAA Division I soccer can provide treatment for 10-15 people in the hour before practice. This volume is commonly combated by scheduling rehabilitation during other times of the day, but it can still be difficult for one athletic trainer to manage alone.

The most common model of supervision at both the collegiate and secondary setting involves the athletic trainer being employed by the athletic department and the physician being employed externally.<sup>11</sup> The athletic trainer in turn is under the administrative supervision of the athletic director, principal, or superintendent (depending on the setting). In addition to direct care of athletes, athletic trainers commonly must also serve an academic role teaching or supervising athletic training students. Outside of the administrative hierarchy, athletic trainers must deal with the pressures and expectations of coaches and administrative staff, while maintaining the ethical and proper treatment of the athletes in accordance with the practice standards set by the Board of Certification, NATA, and state regulatory boards.

## **Attrition from the Profession**

Professional attrition refers to the process in which a person decides to leave a specified profession because of some incongruence or dissatisfaction with the profession. Professional attrition is an issue in many healthcare fields outside of athletic training including nursing,<sup>12-14</sup> and EMT/Paramedics.<sup>15</sup> For example, nursing has an average turnover rate of 14.7% and this rate is expected to rise as the economy improves and nurses feel that they are financially capable of leaving the profession.<sup>12</sup> A recent study of the athletic training labor force numbers in the collegiate, secondary school, and clinical settings revealed an overall decline in practicing athletic trainers whose age was in late 20's and early 30's.<sup>16</sup> The reason for the decline is not known. In addition, it is not known whether this is an isolated phenomenon or a sign of some systemic problem in the profession.

While the profession is projected to grow an estimated 21% by 2022,<sup>10</sup> but that percentage could increase dramatically. For example, a recent announcement by President Obama introduced a collaboration between the NFL and NATA to increase youth sports safety, which includes the goal of increasing the number of athletic trainers in the high school and youth sports settings.<sup>17</sup> However, there still remains an issue of retaining young professionals in a profession that has a potential of conflict with the characteristics and values of that particular generation. While there may be an increase in jobs, there is a potential for a shortage of professionals to fill those jobs.

The phenomena of "burnout" has been widely studied in both nursing and athletic training<sup>1-5,18-21</sup> but linking burnout to professional attrition or an intention to leave the profession is less common.<sup>13,19</sup> Burnout refers to a person's reaction to chronic stressors

that result in negative psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses.<sup>4</sup> Research tends to examine the effect of burnout on quality of care,<sup>18</sup> life satisfaction,<sup>5</sup> and job satisfaction.<sup>5,20</sup> However, many people who could be classified as “burned out” do not ever leave their profession. While burnout has the potential to lead to attrition and must be considered, burnout and attrition are unique and complex constructs.

### **Descriptive Models of Burnout and Attrition**

Given the high rates of professional attrition in the nursing profession, there is a large body of research addressing this issue in nursing.<sup>13,14,18-24</sup> Some of the work to understand professional attrition has resulted in models that are used to describe and understand the factors that contribute to nurses leaving the profession.<sup>18,19,21</sup> While there are studies in athletic training that aim to describe burnout, the descriptors do not adequately establish the link between burnout and professional attrition nor are the factors adequately described.<sup>3,25</sup> However, nursing is a healthcare profession that resembles athletic training in several key areas such as high stress, high workload, and a lack of compensation/respect. There are three primary models identified as describing factors that lead to burnout and professional attrition in nursing.

The first model identified in the nursing literature was the Nursing Worklife Model.<sup>21</sup> (Fig 1) The model was originally developed to describe how organizational influences affect nurses in the workplace and whether these influences contributed to or mitigated burnout. The model was established through a survey of 292 Canadian nurses working in acute care hospitals. The model begins with strong leadership as the driving force, which in turn impacts participation in hospital affairs, collegial RN/MD

relationships, and adequate resources. Those factors influence the nursing model of care, as well as three commonly accepted aspects that lead to burnout: exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

This model has subsequently been used to describe issues beyond burnout, such as job satisfaction<sup>20</sup> and patient safety,<sup>26</sup> and has shown to be applicable to American nurses.<sup>20</sup> This model was not chosen for this study because it only described the effect of organizational factors to burnout. While important, this study sought to explore intrinsic factors as well. Also the high specificity to nursing as well as the lack of a direct correlation of any of the aspects to professional attrition or intention to leave a profession contributed to the decision to omit this model.

The next model identified was the Nurse Practice Environment and Outcome Model.<sup>18</sup> (Fig 2) The model was first established using questionnaires returned by 401 hospital nurses in Belgium. This model had three distinct sections: 1.) nurse practice environment, which includes RN/MD relationship, nurse management at the unit level, and hospital management and organizational support, 2.) the three previously mentioned aspects of burnout identified in the Nursing Worklife Model, and 3.) outcome variables, which included nurse-assessed quality of care and job outcomes. The results of the survey found that both the nurse/physician relationship (Path coefficient = -0.19) as well as hospital management and organizational support (Path coefficient = -0.26) had a direct effect on emotional exhaustion, which in turn had a direct effect on nurse assessed quality of care (Path coefficient = -0.22). Nurse management at the unit level directly affected quality of care (Path coefficient = 0.61). Emotional exhaustion had a direct effect on depersonalization (Path coefficient = 0.49) which in turn has a direct effect on both

personal accomplishment (Path coefficient = -0.15) and job outcomes (Path coefficient = -0.31). The model has since been used as a basis of describing job outcomes and quality of care in a number of different populations.<sup>27,28</sup> While this model is more closely aligned with the purpose of this study because it uses burnout as a mediator as well as addressing job outcomes (job satisfaction, intention to stay), it was still too specific to nursing.

The third model identified was the Mediation Model.<sup>19</sup> (Fig 3) This model examined burnout as a mediator between six worklife factors and turnover intention. This model links the three aspects of burnout, which they describe as exhaustion, cynicism (detachment from the job), and efficacy (a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment) to six worklife factors that contribute to burnout, as well as a potential outcome of burnout, turnover intention.

The Mediation Model was originally theorized with all worklife factors except workload relating to all three aspects of burnout through value congruence, and all three burnout factors leading to intention to leave. However the research conducted in an attempt to confirm this theory surveyed 667 Canadian nurses and found that the relationships were not what was originally theorized.<sup>19</sup> The aspects of this survey were measured using several instruments. Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Scale, which is a 16 item measure addressing the three dimensions of burnout; exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy. Worklife factors were measured using the Areas of Worklife Scale composed of statements addressing each of perceived congruence and incongruence with the job which the participants rated on a 1-5 Likert scale. Turnover intention was measured using the Turnover Intention measure in which the participants rated on a Likert scale three statements regarding their intention to quit.



The following is a description of the model as modified by the findings of their survey and the path coefficients between various components of the model as determined from the study by Leiter and Maslach.<sup>19</sup>

The model begins with six worklife factors, with the first two, control and workload, being derived from Karasek and Theorell's demand/control model of job stress.<sup>29</sup> The demand aspect of this model refers to the physical and psychological demands of the job, labeled "workload," while control refers to the decision latitude of the working individual. If a job has high demands but low decision latitude, there is potential for job strain.<sup>29</sup> A healthy demand/control relationship is rooted in the capacity of a person to work according to their values, make the decisions they deem appropriate and develop a healthy sustaining worklife.<sup>19,29,30</sup> Control and workload together (Path coefficient = -0.55) are the foundational worklife factors found to influence burnout, but cannot fully describe the influences on burnout without the remaining four factors: fairness, community, reward, and value congruence.

Alongside the effect on workload, control has a direct influence on fairness (Path coefficient = 0.69), community (Path coefficient = 0.63), and reward (Path coefficient = 0.40). Fairness addresses issues such as equality and social justice and with its influence on value congruence (Path coefficient = 0.64) it becomes an important mediator between control, burnout, and eventually intention to leave. Fairness in the workplace has been linked to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intention.<sup>31</sup> Perceived unfairness has a broad scope of causes, which includes everything from gender discrimination to favoritism to compensation for work done to overall fairness of

administrators. Also, it has been shown that perceived status in an organization is linked to what an employee deems as “fair.”<sup>31</sup>

When a person has a high level of control and decision latitude in their workplace, they have a greater potential to have healthy social support and fewer conflicts with those outside the workplace.<sup>19</sup> The community aspect of this model addresses a person’s social support and interpersonal conflict, and is directly influenced by control (Path coefficient = 0.63) but does not have a significant influence on the aspects of burnout or intention to leave. While for this particular study it was not highly predictive of intention to leave, it is a factor that could potentially be relevant when studying the Millennial generation due to their increased need for social interaction outside of work.<sup>32-35</sup>

Of the six worklife factors, reward had the most direct influence on intention to leave, only mediated by its influence on cynicism (Path coefficient = -0.39).<sup>19</sup> Reward was defined as the power of reinforcements to shape behavior.<sup>19</sup> While also having a broad scope of possible applications, it primarily addresses the concept of being adequately compensated and includes psychological and emotional rewards and reinforcements.<sup>19</sup> Reward also has an influence on fairness (Path coefficient = .21),

The one worklife factor that has a direct influence on all three aspects of burnout is value congruence. This worklife factor has a negative influence on exhaustion (Path coefficient = -0.15) and cynicism (Path coefficient = -0.13), and a positive influence on efficacy (Path coefficient = 0.38). Value congruence addresses the cognitive and emotional power of job goals and expectations<sup>19</sup> and is directly influenced by fairness (Path coefficient = 0.64) and indirectly by reward and control’s effect on to fairness.

Value conflicts are a common struggle for healthcare professionals and it makes sense that it is one of three worklife factors that directly relate to burnout and intention to leave.

Following the six worklife factors are the three factors of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy. Exhaustion can refer to either physical or psychological exhaustion, cynicism refers to detachment from the job, and efficacy refers to a sense of effectiveness or accomplishment.<sup>19</sup> Within the factors of burnout, exhaustion influences cynicism (Path coefficient = 0.54) while cynicism negatively influences efficacy (Path coefficient = -0.38). There were three factors found that directly influenced at least one factor of burnout: workload on exhaustion (Path coefficient = 0.65), reward on cynicism (Path coefficient = -0.39), and value congruence on all three burnout factors (Path coefficient exhaustion = -0.15, cynicism = -0.13, and efficacy = 0.38).<sup>19</sup> Conceptually, this makes sense as the more physical and psychological demands a job has, the potential for exhaustion for an employee increases. If a professional has their goals and values challenged they have a higher potential of becoming cynical, emotionally exhausted, and losing their sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, if they feel they are not being adequately rewarded, there is potential for detachment from the job.

The only factor of burnout that directly influenced turnover intention was cynicism (Path coefficient = 0.60). Cynicism indicates a psychological withdrawal from the job and is directly associated with the physical withdrawal of leaving the job,<sup>19</sup> indicating that the primary influence on turnover intention was the extent that a nurse was invested in their work. The fact that reward, exhaustion, and value congruence directly influenced cynicism indicates issues of workload, value conflicts, compensation, and appreciation in turnover intention. The model depicts burnout as a mediator between

worklife conflicts and turnover, suggesting that it requires a combination of conflicts, values, and circumstances to reach the point of turnover intention.

Research supports the six worklife factors and their influence on burnout;<sup>36</sup> however, expanding the model to predict turnover or turnover intention has not been studied beyond this original study. While this model is relatively new and no published research has used this model in nursing or other healthcare fields, this model was chosen because the worklife and burnout vocabulary was similar to those used in the limited athletic training literature. The model, though applied to the nursing environment, is not specific to nursing in its factors or definitions, which makes it easily applicable to our study. The Mediation Model is a sound example of the influences a wide range of worklife conflicts can have on job satisfaction, burnout, and intention to leave. It also examines turnover intention, which is essential since this study will endeavor to understand the experiences of those who have chosen to leave the athletic training profession.

### **Millennials in the Workforce**

For the first time in recent history, the workforce consists of three generations: The Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the newest working generation, the Millennials.<sup>22,24</sup> The Millennial generation consists of those people born between 1980 and 2000 and is the largest since the Baby Boomers, numbering more than 81 million.<sup>37</sup> The literature has differing names for this generation such as the Nexters, the Net Generation, and Generation Y,<sup>14,37,38</sup> but for this study they will be referred to as the Millennial generation or Millennials. It is becoming more and more apparent that a

failure to understand this generation can directly impact an organization's ability to recruit and retain this generation in a profession.<sup>14,38-42</sup>

The Millennial generation has experienced the world in a very different way than those before them. Their world has always had AIDS, microwaves, answering machines, and video games. They have no recollection of the Reagan administration, Cold War, or a divided Germany. Millennials also have been exposed to a more global world, via school as well as technological advances that allowed them to have friends all over the world, making them the most multicultural generation yet.<sup>14</sup> Two iconic technological advances that define the millennial generation are cell phones and online social networks.<sup>38</sup> These technological advances led to a generation that craves stimulation, are highly adaptable, processes new information quickly—particularly visual information-- and are skilled at multitasking.<sup>38</sup> Negatively, these technological advances also lead to them being poor at face-to-face interaction as well as becoming bored easily. They crave new approaches and challenges and prefer to work in teams.<sup>14,38</sup>

Millennials, as children, tended to be raised by “helicopter parents” and are considered the most pandered to and spoiled generation.<sup>14</sup> The hovering nature of their parents led to them being highly protected, rarely left unsupervised, and shielded from conflict. The Millennial generation was taught that their opinions matter, the world loves them, and they deserve this love.<sup>40</sup> These ideals have led to a generation with a high sense of entitlement and narcissism.<sup>39-43</sup> A study of college students in 2006 showed a 30% increase in narcissism compared to college students of the late 1970's-early 1980's.<sup>43</sup> In addition, this generation was pushed to achieve, avoid risk, and take advantage of opportunities.<sup>38,40</sup> Such an upbringing has led to a generation of workers who are

confident in themselves and their future, motivated, goal oriented, competitive, optimistic, assertive, and have a tendency to believe they are “right.”<sup>14,35,37,40</sup> These characteristics along with their sense of entitlement leads to a tendency to feel pressured to succeed, with the thought that others should be flexible with them when resolving conflicts, as well as an expectation to move quickly into leadership positions.<sup>14,40</sup>

The Millennial generation has also shown a strong need for supervision and structure in new situations. They require expectations and desired outcomes to be clearly communicated and a support structure in place to help them reach those expectations.<sup>14,22,37,38,42</sup> They are not likely to stay in a workplace where they are not inspired, encouraged, and supported.<sup>14,37</sup> This also leads to conflict with older generations who get frustrated with the “hand-holding” the Millennial generation requires when entering a new situation.<sup>38</sup>

Another characteristic of the Millennial generation is a higher emphasis on quality of life. They want an improved work/life balance and are not willing to work the hours that their parent’s worked.<sup>14,38,42</sup> These values are demonstrated in the workplace as a strong desire for flexible hours.

The optimism, narcissism, entitlement and high value of family and social life leads to the one characteristic that most separates the Millennial generation from previous generations: they will simply leave a workplace if it does not provide the flexibility and support for their desired lifestyle.<sup>14,37</sup> They need to be stimulated, respected, and noticed or they will seek “greener pastures.” It is indicated that the Millennial generation could change professions 5-8 times in their life.<sup>37</sup> This startling statistic begs the question, can

anything be done to retain the Millennial generation in a profession that seems to be ill suited to their characteristics?

The literature suggests that strong mentoring programs, appropriate financial compensation, opportunities for professional advancement, and an overall supportive work environment are essential for creating a workplace that will retain this generation.<sup>14,33,38,40,44</sup> Mentoring provides the guidance and instruction that the millennial generation desires as well as emotional support from someone who has “been there” while appropriate financial compensation ensures that they feel they are being treated fairly and are appreciated. If an employer provides opportunities for professional advancement, it gives the millennial a hope for the future with that employer—it helps avoid them feeling “stuck” in their work environment. The underlying theme needed in the workplace to retain the millennial generation is support. The millennial must feel that their employer cares and is on their side, or they will seek employment elsewhere.<sup>14,33,38,40,44</sup>

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## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Research Design

This is an exploratory descriptive study using qualitative methods to describe the experiences of millennial generation athletic trainers that have left the profession after working clinically for at least two years. The purpose is to describe the factors cited by the participants that contributed to their professional attrition. In addition to the descriptors, emerging themes will be described that may will help to understand the potential expectations of a millennial generation workforce and their congruency with the profession. We will approach our research question using interpretive analysis within the constructivist paradigm as described by J Amos Hatch.<sup>1</sup> The constructivist paradigm allows for the forming of each participant's reality using a step by step interpretive analysis that includes getting feedback from the participant during the interpretation process. This feedback process assures that the interpretation is an accurate representation of the participant's reality within the context of their situation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Participants

Eight participants (women = 5, men = 3; age =  $27.07 \pm 3.54$ ; athletic training clinical experience =  $4 \pm 2.07$  years) were recruited using the snowball approach, in which social media (Twitter and Facebook) and personal connections were utilized to create a pool of potential participants. Potential participants were contacted via e-mail to ascertain

their interest in participating in the study. They were then informed of the purpose of the study and asked basic demographic questions to determine their eligibility for the study. We then used purposive criterion sampling to identify the information rich cases that most closely fit with the purpose of our study.<sup>30</sup> We chose participants if they met four criterion: 1.) were born in or after 1980, 2.) practiced athletic training clinically for at least two years, 3.) left the profession and were no longer working as an athletic trainer (even part-time), and 4.) had no intention of returning to athletic training. We included graduate assistantship experiences in the two year minimum experience criteria as long as the assistantship included a clinical assignment. A description of the participants is included in Table 1.

All participants were informed of the expectations of the study and gave consent prior to the interview process. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions they were not comfortable with and could terminate the interview at any point without negative consequences. All participants were informed that no personal identifiers would be used and all gave verbal consent to being audio recorded. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the host institution.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate discussion regarding the factors and experiences leading to the participant's decision to leave the athletic training profession. (Document 1) Probes were used to further encourage the participants to elaborate on their experience. A semi-structured interview guide was used so that the principal investigator (GS) would be free to follow and probe any potential

themes that surfaced during the course of the interview. The guide consisted of open-ended questions that sought to explore the participant's experiences leading up to their decision to leave the profession, the process in which the decision was made, and in retrospect whether the participant would have sought athletic training as a profession given their experiences. Along with the questions regarding their decision to leave, we also questioned their original motivation for becoming an athletic trainer, their view of an "ideal job," and the employment that they currently hold and why. The probes were drawn from factors identified in the Mediation Model<sup>3</sup> and were incorporated to clarify and expound on any factors mentioned as influencing their decision to leave athletic training.

The probes helped us identify potential emerging themes so that we could encourage further explanation of factors that impacted the participant's decision to leave athletic training. It is necessary to note that the intent of this study was not to invent nor confirm a model of professional attrition. We sought to let themes emerge unfiltered from the data collection, only using the model as a compass for our interview guide.

The interview guide was pilot tested for question clarity with 5 Millennial generation athletic trainers (3 men, 2 women; mean age =  $26.6 \pm 2.61$  years; mean work =  $3.8 \pm 1.3$  years) that were not included in the interview portion of the study. Each pilot test participant was given the interview guide and asked to either answer the question or describe what they believed the question was asking for. Changes were made to the wording of the interview guide based on the suggestions provided by the pilot test group and changes were made prior to formal participant interviews. No questions were added or deleted.

Interviews were conducted via a phone call and were audio-recorded for transcription. The interviews ranged in length from 12 to 32 minutes ( $17.25 \pm 6.34$ ) and were all conducted by the same investigator (GS). After analysis, participants were contacted for follow-up interviews, which were audio-recorded for transcription. These follow-up interviews served as a member check for analytical trustworthiness, as well as a time to ask more specific questions to expound on or clarify any themes noted during analysis of their interview. Follow up interviews ranged in length from 3:50 to 9:30 ( $6.6 \pm 2.48$ ) and were all conducted by the same investigator (GS).

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. Two investigators (GS and LV) analyzed the data separately using an interpretive analysis<sup>1</sup> approach and then met to discuss findings and agree on themes. We used interpretive analysis to generate explanations of the phenomena (professional attrition) and make sense of the situation (choosing to leave the profession).<sup>1</sup> We thoroughly read the entire interview to get a sense of the whole. This allowed us to be immersed in the data and build a context in which to base our interpretations. We then reviewed any notes gathered from the literature and interview process to aid in our search for relevant impressions and explanations in the data. At this time we returned to the interview data, highlighting impressions and recording them in memos, and then those memos were analyzed for interpretations relevant to our study. We then scoured the interview data to see if our interpretations were supported by the data, ensuring that we did not make any leaps in reasoning, and then created a summary to bring together all of the interpretations



into a meaningful whole and test the logical consistency of our interpretations. The next step, member check, was crucial to ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness. We completed member check interview with the participant to share our interpretations and ensure that it accurately accounted for their experience. This also allowed for any follow-up questions to clarify any potential themes that were not fully vetted originally. After the member checks we made any necessary revisions to our interpretations then scoured the interview data for excerpts to use in support of our interpretations. The steps to interpretive analysis can be found in Table 2.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established using analyst triangulation and member check. Analyst triangulation served as a way to increase validity by eliminating any potential bias arising from one analyst's personal interpretations.<sup>2</sup> We achieved this by both investigators (GS & LV) applying the interpretive analysis separately, and then meeting to discuss and agree on themes and interpretations. We additionally established trustworthiness by performing a member check, in which we brought our interpretations back to the participant, asking them to confirm we have accurately interpreted their experience.

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## CHAPTER IV

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction

The field of athletic training is projected to grow 21% between 2012 to 2022, which is faster than average for all occupations examined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>1</sup> The demand for athletic trainers has the potential to increase as the public becomes more aware of the benefits of athletic trainers in all settings. For example, a recent announcement by President Obama introduced a collaboration between the NFL and NATA to increase youth sports safety, which includes the goal of increasing the number of athletic trainers in the high school and youth sports settings.<sup>2</sup> However, the increase in job opportunities has been met with a growing problem with professional attrition in clinically practicing athletic trainers.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, a study by Kahanov and Eberman found that the largest decline in the athletic training workforce occurs within the first 10 years after an athletic trainer becomes certified.<sup>3</sup> Research in the area of professional attrition has been completed in an attempt to better understand this phenomenon. Kahanov et al.<sup>4</sup> completed a cross sectional study including athletic trainers from a variety of setting and spanning three generation to describe some commonly cited factors that prompted athletic trainers to leave the profession. Some commonly cited factors included burnout, role strain, ethical strain, social strain, feeling sad and hopeless, and decreasing sleep consistently.<sup>4</sup> The study was an important first step in understanding

current factors for professional attrition. However, since a new and highly unique generation of athletic trainers has entered the workforce, there is a need to understand professional attrition as it relates to this generation specifically. A failure to understand this new generation can directly impact an organization's ability to recruit and retain this generation in a profession.<sup>5-10</sup>

The Millennial generation consists of persons born between 1980 and 2000 and is the largest generation since the Baby Boomers, numbering more than 81 million.<sup>11</sup> They have also been referred to as the Nexters,<sup>11</sup> the Net Generation,<sup>6</sup> and Generation Y.<sup>5,8,11</sup> However, most research labels this generation as the Millennial generation, or Millennials.<sup>9,10,12-14</sup> The Millennial generation is the largest, most technologically advanced generation to ever enter the workforce.<sup>5,11,15</sup> They are goal oriented, optimistic and driven to succeed.<sup>6,8,11</sup> However they are also considered the most indulged generation, full of entitlement and narcissism.<sup>6,8,9</sup> Those that have endeavored to understand the belief systems of Millennials have found that they believe they deserve a certain lifestyle and will seek out professions that provide it immediately.<sup>8</sup>

While the research on professional attrition in athletic training is limited, other healthcare fields have studied this phenomenon. The most robust body of research on professional attrition is found in the nursing literature. Nursing is a high-demand healthcare profession that suffers from a high turnover rate and has an extensive body of research regarding attrition.<sup>5,16-27</sup> There were several models identified as addressing job satisfaction and turnover, including the Nursing Worklife Model<sup>25</sup> and the Nurse Practice Environment and Outcomes Model<sup>18</sup> and the Mediation Model.<sup>22</sup> The Mediation Model specifically addresses the connections between worklife factors, burnout, and intention to

leave, while other models only examine organizational factors or only consider burnout as the main outcome. These models have helped describe factors that influence job satisfaction, job outcomes, burnout, and intention to leave in the nursing world. The job demands in nursing and athletic training are similar, but research specific to athletic trainers needs to be completed to create similar models that fully encompass the concerns of practicing athletic trainers

The stark differences between the Millennial generation and previous generations have left employers scrambling to find strategies to understand and retain their workforce. While serving as a good foundation for understanding this generation, the research that has been completed on this generation as employees has not addressed those who have chosen to leave a profession, nor is it specific to athletic training.<sup>5,6,9,10,13,15,16,21,28</sup> Before strategies can be applied to retain the athletic training workforce, there must be an understanding of the generation's values and goals, as well as how they interact with others and their profession in general. Once this understanding is reached, there must be serious consideration of changes to the profession in order to attract and retain the Millennial workforce.

The purpose of this study is to provide descriptions of the experience of Millennials who have left the athletic training profession and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that led to their professional attrition. The Millennial generation is the largest generation to enter the workforce since the Baby Boomers, and they have the power to impact it much like the Baby Boomers.<sup>11</sup> Our study is significant because it will describe the experiences of Millennial athletic trainers who have left the profession and identify common themes expressed as causing their professional attrition, which has not been

previously studied. These descriptions can lead to a better understanding of the Millennial generation in the athletic training workforce, as well as provide insight as to what is causing their incongruence with the profession.

## **Methods**

### Research Design

This was an exploratory descriptive study using qualitative methods to describe the experiences of millennial generation athletic trainers that have left the profession after working clinically for at least two years. The purpose was to describe the factors cited by the participants that contributed to their professional attrition and identify any themes that emerge throughout the interview process. We approached our research question using interpretive analysis within the constructivist paradigm as described by J Amos Hatch.<sup>29</sup> The constructivist paradigm allowed for the forming of each participant's individual reality using the steps of interpretive analysis.

### Participants

Eight participants (women = 5, men = 3; mean age =  $27.07 \pm 3.54$ ; athletic training clinical experience =  $4 \pm 2.07$  years) were recruited using the snowball approach, in which social media (Twitter and Facebook) and personal connections were utilized to create a pool of potential participants. Potential participants were contacted via e-mail to ascertain their interest in participating in the study. They were then informed of the purpose of the study and asked basic demographic questions to determine their eligibility for the study. We then used purposive criterion sampling to identify the information rich cases that

most closely fit with the purpose of our study.<sup>30</sup> We chose participants if they met four criterion: 1.) were born in or after 1980, 2.) practiced athletic training clinically for at least two years, 3.) left the profession and were no longer working as an athletic trainer (even part-time), and 4.) had no intention of returning to athletic training. We included graduate assistantship experiences in the two year minimum experience criteria as long as the assistantship included a clinical assignment. A description of the participants is included in Table 1.

All participants were informed of the expectations of the study and gave consent prior to the interview process. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions they were not comfortable with and could terminate the interview at any point without negative consequences. All participants were informed that no personal identifiers would be used and all gave verbal consent to being audio recorded. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the host institution.

### Data Collection

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate discussion regarding the factors and experiences leading to the participant's decision to leave the athletic training profession. Probes were used to further encourage the participants to elaborate on their experience (See appendix). A semi-structured interview guide was used so that the principal investigator (GS) would be free to follow and probe any potential themes that surfaced during the course of the interview. The guide consisted of open-ended questions that sought to explore the participant's experiences leading up to their decision to leave the profession, the process in which the decision was made, and in

retrospect whether the participant would have sought athletic training as a profession given their experiences. Along with the questions regarding their decision to leave, we also questioned their original motivation for becoming an athletic trainer, their view of an “ideal job,” and the employment that they currently hold and why. The probes were drawn from factors identified in the Mediation Model<sup>22</sup> and were incorporated to clarify and expound on any factors mentioned as impacting their decision to leave athletic training. In the Mediation Model (fig 3) there are six worklife factors that affect, either directly or indirectly, the three elements that comprise the burnout construct and eventually cause turnover intention. Most probes were based on the six worklife factors, though there was one regarding efficacy and one addressing burnout if that was mentioned. Table 3 includes a description of the operational definitions for burnout and each worklife factor we used as probes in this study.

The probes helped us identify potential emerging themes so that we could encourage further explanation of factors that impacted the participant’s decision to leave athletic training. It is necessary to note that the intent of this study was not to invent nor confirm a model of professional attrition. We sought to let themes emerge unfiltered from the data collection, only using the model as a compass for our interview guide.

The interview guide was pilot tested for question clarity with 5 Millennial generation athletic trainers (3 men, 2 women; mean age =  $26.6 \pm 2.61$  years; mean work =  $3.8 \pm 1.3$  years) that were not included in the interview portion of the study. Each pilot test participant was given the interview guide and asked to either answer the question or describe what they believed the question was asking for. Changes were made to the wording of the interview guide based on the suggestions provided by the pilot test group



and changes were made prior to formal participant interviews. No questions were added or removed.

Interviews were conducted via a phone call and were audio-recorded for transcription. The interviews ranged in length from 12 to 32 minutes ( $17.25 \pm 6.34$ ) and were all conducted by the same investigator (GS). After analysis, participants were contacted for follow-up interviews, which were audio-recorded for transcription. These follow-up interviews served as a member check for analytical trustworthiness, as well as a time to ask more specific questions to expound on or clarify any themes noted during analysis of their interview. Every participant was asked two specific follow up questions based on themes that were not clarified in the original interviews. These were 1.) If your compensation had been on par with other healthcare professionals, would that have impacted your decision? and 2.) Did you have a mentor? If not, do you think having one would have impacted your decision? Any other follow up questions were specific to what needed to be clarified for each participant's interview. Follow up interviews ranged in length from 3:50 to 9:30 ( $6.6 \pm 2.48$ ) and were all conducted by the same investigator (GS).

### Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy, and all participants were given pseudonyms. Two investigators (GS and LV) analyzed the data separately using an interpretive analysis<sup>29</sup> approach and then met to discuss findings and agree on themes. We used interpretive analysis to generate explanations of the phenomena (professional attrition) and make sense of the situation (choosing to leave the

profession).<sup>29</sup> We thoroughly read the entire interview to get a sense of the whole, as well as building context. We then reviewed any notes gathered from the literature and interview process to aid in our search for relevant impressions and explanations in the data. At this time we returned to the interview data, highlighting p impressions and recording them in memos, and then those memos were analyzed for interpretations relevant to our study. We then scoured the interview data to see if our interpretations were supported, ensuring that we did not make any leaps in reasoning. We then created a summary to bring together all of the interpretations into a meaningful whole and test the logical consistency of our interpretations. The next step, member check, was crucial to ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness. We completed member check interview with the participant to share our interpretations and ensure that it accurately accounted for their experience. This also allowed for any follow-up questions to clarify any potential themes that were not fully vetted originally. After the member checks we made any necessary revisions to our interpretations then scoured the interview data for excerpts to use in support of our interpretations.

### Trustworthiness

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back to the participant, asking them to confirm we have accurately interpreted their experience.

## **Results**

The participants in this study were asked to describe their experiences within the athletic training profession that led them to their decision to leave the profession. Five themes emerged from the interviews and were confirmed through the follow-up interviews: 1.) control of schedule, 2.) quality of life conflicts, 3.) realizations, 4.) professional support, and 5.) change of career perspective. (Fig. 4) The following is a description of these experiences from the participants' perspectives.

### Control of Schedule

The most prevalent theme that emerged from the participants as influencing professional attrition was the overall lack of control of their schedule which led to a high number of hours worked. The participants verbalized dissatisfaction with their work schedule being entirely at the mercy of others, particularly coaches. Interestingly, none of the experiences described by the participants demonstrated an aversion to working hard. Rather, many were frustrated by the seeming inflexibility of the job.

Nancy mentioned the impact that the lack of control had on her job satisfaction, saying "...that was a struggle for me personally just not having control over my own schedule and always being at the whim of these other people that I didn't necessarily see as organized as I was. So it just led to a little bit of resentment on my part." Emily noted the nature of her schedule and how it began to impact her job satisfaction, saying:

“...if the football team doesn’t do well on Friday night the coach wants to have practice on Saturday morning and you’ve got to be there whether you made plans to go out of town or do something or not. Since I was the only [athletic] trainer there, I had to be there for everything. So, I didn’t like the fact that I couldn’t really handle my own schedule/life. I was very much at the mercy of the team in addition to any spontaneous practices, camps whatever. So, I started to really not liking not having the freedom and flexibility of to make my own schedule. I just didn’t enjoy being on someone else’s schedule and not being able to set my own hours and set my own schedule and be able to plan for things, whether it be with family or friends or anything like that.”

Ryan noted his frustration with the nature of his schedule, saying “You’re kind of a slave to everyone....every aspect of the athletic program...They wanted to work at 6 am. I was in at 6 am. and if they wanted to finish practice the same day at 7 pm. I was going to be there from 6 am. to 7 pm. Monday through Sunday.”

The participants also noted the lack of control of their schedule as the main thing they would have changed about their situation, as well as an important aspect of their ideal job. Megan valued the ability to have separation between work and home, stating her ideal job would include “...being able to not think about work while I’m not at work and not having to constantly be on call, so to speak.” Ryan showed similar values, saying he would like to “...have a little more control of my own time, have set hours.” and “I wanted a job with more steady hours. You know where I could go to work and then go home.” He also mentioned what he would have changed about his situation that might have influenced his decision to leave was “[If] I could change one thing it would be to

have a little more control over the hours. If I could be like ‘hey, let’s practice from 8:00-5:00 and get everything done and go home,’ I would’ve enjoyed it a lot more.” Nancy noted a similar desire of knowing when work would end, saying, “Just to be able to have a schedule that was set by you or you could see there was a light at the end of the tunnel you know?”

### Quality of Life Conflicts

All of the participants linked their sense of lack of control in their employment situation as creating a sense of “conflicting desires” in their lives. Many participants seemed to have an enjoyment of the athletic training work in itself (helping people, the challenge and reward of rehabilitating injuries, the people, etc...). Ryan noted this saying “I guess I personally enjoyed more of the clinical part of athletic training, like actually getting time to work on someone who had injury.” and Nancy mentioned similar feelings, saying “But I really do miss the clinical side of athletic training and not so much athletic training in general but just you know, dealing with patience or clients or athletes and you know having a goal and seeing them through that.”

Even though they had an enjoyment of certain aspects of athletic training, the schedule and, to a lesser extent, compensation left them with an internal conflict between the enjoyment of the work itself and the desire to have a certain quality of life outside of work. The desired quality of life varied in description among the participants, but the three main areas described were family life, social life, and personal wellness. Gale put it simply saying, “...it was working 80-85 hours weeks with no days off so...it’s just a lot of work. I just don’t have a life and I want a better quality of life.”

## *Family Life*

The encroachment of work into family life was an important issue cited by several participants as a primary contributing factor to their professional attrition. Both Nancy and her husband worked as athletic trainers, and they realized quickly it wasn't going to work: "...then I started having kids, or had my first child, and the schedule didn't work out any more." Sara also noted that the schedule was not conducive to raising children, saying, "When I have a kid in school is when I would like to work where athletic training doesn't fit into that time frame," and then went on to say that the schedule as well as the lack of compensation was just too many obstacles for her desire to raise a family:

"It (the compensation) was enough to live off of, but it wouldn't be enough to support a family off of....you just don't see them (family) because you work in the evenings and all weekend...So, I would say that family aspect is what made me for sure quit."

Brooke went so far as to say that if she knew then what she knows now, she may have chosen something different, saying "if I'd known where my life would be right now, I probably would have chosen a different major just because this doesn't mesh too well with family life."

Interestingly, not all work-family conflict arose from the reality of their circumstances (actually having children) but from not being able to see a future where they would have time for children. Megan spoke about what she wanted for her future, though she currently has no children, saying "I want to be able to get home to my kids at night and not be gone on the weekends, be able to go to their games and their events and not be like 'oh, can't go cause I have a game that I have to be at.'" Emily also noted that

athletic training was a very difficult profession for women looking to raise a family, saying, “I started to get a feeling that athletic training is a great job for men and for young women who don’t have families.”

There were those participants whose conflicts with the schedule were not related to raising children but rather just being able to have the freedom to see family. Megan noted, “In regards to being able to visit family, my family is pretty spread out across the country, so it’s having to arrange holiday plans and stuff like that around practice schedules.” Nancy also mentioned how the schedule and the inability to take time off was an issue, saying

“...and so when I had something that’s going on personal in my life, like I don’t get to say ‘I’m not coming to school today’ or ‘I have this event’ or ‘my sister’s getting married’ because we have games and we have practices and some of them are set last minute or some of them are affected by changes in weather and you have to show up for those.”

Gale also noted an example of how the demanding schedule impaired his ability to attend family function, saying “...we were in the middle of playoffs. [I had] my grandfather’s funeral, I had to cover practice the day before, drive all night, get to it, attend the funeral then head back, make it back for practice that evening. It just, I couldn’t do anything. Basically I was there 24/7.”

### *Social Life*

The next aspect of quality of life cited as conflicting with their work and therefore leading to the desire to leave athletic training was social life. The nature of their work schedule as well as a lack of expendable funds arose as the biggest impediment to

participants' social life. Emily stated bluntly "I wasn't happy in my personal life." Gale and Jacob were also very straightforward about how athletic training was affecting their social life, with Gale saying, "There just wasn't time to do anything. I couldn't date because I didn't have time, I was always out of town, or I was getting phone calls at all hours," and Jacob noting "I wasn't able to do anything outside athletic training...no social life, none of that stuff." Megan mentioned a time when she struggled to find someone to cover for her, saying "...in a normal job, you could just do PTO and go be in your friend's wedding and not have to make a major ordeal out of it."

Others noted that the schedule not only limited whether they could socialize or not, but even who they were able to socialize with. Emily noted problems with both, saying

"I did make a small group of friends, and they say "hey, we're going to go and do this Friday night" or "we're going to go do this whatever" and I frequently couldn't go because of football games or because of basketball games or whatever it was. So it really wasn't easy what I could do and it limited the type of friends I could meet. I couldn't meet people at work except for a very small group of you know pretty much like coaches and maybe teachers."

Emily also noted that the social aspect was one of the things she enjoyed about her new employment outside of athletic training, saying

"I got this whole different social group and I've got a completely different schedule and I can go out on Friday nights and I don't have to get up early Saturday morning for weights and I interact with people other than 16-year-old football players..."



Gale mentioned that when there were rare moments of down time, the compensation didn't allow for the type of activities that he would have wanted, saying "...whenever I did get a free moment, because of bills from student loans and house, rent, food, all that other stuff, there was not much left to do extra-curricular activities, to enjoy what little free time you got. So what it ended up being was I didn't have enough money to go to things that you would consider relaxing or enjoyable."

### *Personal Wellness*

A somewhat less prevalent aspect of quality of life cited as in conflict with athletic training work was personal wellness. There was some mention of the impact of athletic training on fitness and the overall priority of taking care of oneself, though less so than family and social factors. Emily mentioned a story she had heard regarding a female athletic trainer whose "water broke" while working football practice 9 months pregnant and she finished working practice before going to the hospital:

"...and I think there was an article written about it in one of the magazines and they were like applauding her like "oh this woman is amazing" and I was thinking "that's completely irresponsible and your priorities are all screwed up" and I was like "those aren't my priorities." So, if that's what it takes to be a successful female athletic trainer then I'm not in it for that." Adding later, "There's absolutely no way we should be celebrating that. She shouldn't have been on the field in the first place."

Ryan cited a downturn in his personal fitness as a factor in his decision, as well as the fact he was not pleased with the apparent lack of personal health shown in veteran athletic trainers:

“My second year I kinda took on more responsibilities athletic training wise. I wasn’t able to work out so my fitness was going down... I wasn’t as happy as a guy...I was looking at other people in the profession and the guys that I wanted to be—the positions I wanted—those guys were old, they looked super weathered, they were old and they were fat.”

### Realizations

The next phase of their decision process described by the participants, after experiencing conflicts with control of schedule and quality of life, was a realization about the job of athletic training as well as some personal realizations. These realizations remained remarkably consistent throughout our participant pool, and included the realizations that reward in athletic training was not equal to workload, it was not an ideal job for them, they didn’t see the profession changing, and it wasn’t something they could see themselves doing for the long run.

### *Compensation*

While most participants noted that they entered the profession with full knowledge of the range of monetary compensation, they didn’t realize just how disproportionate it was to the number of hours worked. This increased their frustration with the hours worked. Ryan stated simply “The compensation was not there for the hours that you work” Gale noted this discrepancy between wage and hours worked by

saying “The worst thing you can ever do as an athletic trainer is to divide the hours you work into your salary and figure out what your hourly wage is.” When Ryan was asked why he chose his current job, he echoed all other participants who were still employed saying “I have stable hours, I have paid vacation, and higher pay.”

For most, the compensation was a compounding factor rather than a deciding factor to leave the profession. When asked if she was paid on par with other healthcare professionals, would that have changed her decision, Nancy replied:

“I think that it would have been harder to make the decision but ultimately the decision would’ve still been the same. I mean, if the schedule could’ve been better, then that probably would’ve helped out a lot, but ultimately the money...I mean it would have been nice to get paid more. It wasn’t a huge deciding factor.”

Megan also noted “the pay was part of it...but other things like schedule flexibility and the independence. If it was just pay, I don’t think so.” Most participants replied similarly, that it might have made the decision harder but they would have eventually made the same choice. Megan had an interesting viewpoint regarding compensation for athletic trainers compared to her current compensation as a tech in a clinic, saying

“I feel like they (ATs) should make more money than what I do in a clinic. I’m making more money than they do when I realistically don’t work hard. I feel that for that amount of time that the hours they put in, plus the travel and constantly being on call when somebody trips and sprains their ankle at 10:00 in the night, that they should be better compensated for it.”

There was also a realization regarding the level of difficulty to achieve what they desired in life with the salary they were receiving. Megan stated "...looking at the salaries, if I had wanted to stay working the college.....that would have been hardly able to pay back the student loans with that." And Ryan said that if he had persisted in athletic training "I felt like I would have been financially stressed for like the rest of my life."

### *Ideal Job*

With the schedule, quality of life, and compensation all playing a part in their decision to leave athletic training, the participants also described a realization that they were not in the "ideal job" they envisioned as an undergraduate student, and they were unsure if the ideal job in athletic training even existed. Megan mentioned her realization saying, "I think I was fairly well prepared going into it and I always knew what the hours and the workload were going to be [in athletic training] as a student and everything that it was, and the actuality of it. Once I actually did it, it became a little more real." Sara noted "I was considering that I wasn't going to be going for a professional team..." which was something that was mentioned a few times, the dream of working for a professional team, and the realization that it was not an easy or attainable task.

### *The Profession Won't Change*

The next realization described by participants was that the conflicts they had with athletic training were not going to change, so there was no incentive to persist in the profession. Emily echoed this sentiment saying, "Most AT's aren't going to get more money and they aren't going to get to set their own schedules, or at least not right away" Sara noted that regarding her decision "I'm not sure that athletic training could change in a way that would work for my family to be honest." Megan noted about what she was

looking for in a job "...ultimately the job that I was looking for, wanting to go Monday – Friday, 9:00-5:00 type of thing, is unrealistic for someone working in athletics."

There was an interesting perspective brought to light by Emily regarding what would need to happen to bring change to the profession. She stated "Maybe if the profession had a little more respect from the general public and a better understanding about what we did, then we would have...we could get better pay...you could get better hours." She went on to say:

"I think the potential to make it a better profession is there but there has to be a lot more acceptance, not only within other medical communities but with athletic trainers themselves. I think a lot of us don't stand up for ourselves and we kinda let ourselves accept the conditions even though we're not happy. I had a lot of friends in school do it and hate it and they don't have any other options, so they're just stuck. And it's like if you stood up for yourself a little bit more, I think you could get some of these things you want."

### Support

A lesser cited theme that emerged was the idea of the lack of mentorship or some measure of professional support. A few participants mentioned the lack of advancement opportunities in athletic training as problematic. They also expressed a desire to have someone, like a mentor, to challenge and encourage them in their work. Emily worked in a PT clinic with a high school outreach component, and she mentioned the lack of support from her PT bosses, saying

“...not only were you not encouraged to do well [or] rewarded for doing well, there was literally no advancement options at all. So there was kind of no reason to push yourself and expand your knowledge. They never really encouraged me to do and continuing education or anything like that so...I mean here I am straight out of school and I'm young and I want to learn and get better and there was no encouragement to do that and no motivation.”

Nancy noted how such support would have impacted her, saying

“It would have made me feel like what I was doing was maybe a little more important ya know? It's kinda like in college you're just learning constantly and I really enjoyed that aspect and then once you get into the real world you're not necessarily intellectually challenged every single day.”

However, Nancy went on to add “But I don't know that it would have ultimately changed the big picture.” When faced with the question of if strong mentorship would have impacted her decision, Emily noted

“It might have been nice to have somebody to talk to that had been in the profession for more years to say ‘hey, it gets better’ or you know ‘here's how you can make your situation better’ but again a lot of those things are inherent and you can't change them...if someone would of come to me and said ‘hey listen, what if you did this and this and this and you could try this down the road and it would give you all these things that you're looking for’ then yeah...it might of changed my mind. Possibly. It's hard to tell though.”

Similar to Emily's description, those who had no mentor also seemed to have difficulty comprehending what their professional life would have looked like with one. While they

noted that it would not have had a crucial impact on their decision, it seemed as though they did not have a great understanding of what a mentor could have done for them.

There was also mention of an overall lack of professional support from peers, supervisors, and employers. Jacob mentioned frustration with the lack of review at the high school he worked at, as well as the fact that his boss (the Athletic Director) was not suited to judge his performance, saying “he has no healthcare experience and has no basis for judging your performance or your choices.” Gale mentioned the constant questioning and lack of respect from coaches regarding his medical judgment, saying, “I didn’t feel like I was empowered to keep my athletes safe, and so basically it became any time we gave an opinion on an injury I was questioned all the time about it, was questioned over and over and over again whether it was legitimate or that bad.” Interestingly, Gale was the one participant that noted this lack of support and respect as the foundation of his decision to leave, with the schedule and compensation being compounding factors.

### Changing Career Perspective

With all the previous factors in play, the final realization settled in: athletic training is not something they see themselves doing for a career. Sara said, “What it came down to was: what’s my ultimate career that I want to do? And it wasn’t athletic training anymore.” Emily mentioned her disillusionment about athletic training as a long term option, saying “...I just kinda thought about it and I thought what kind of job is athletic training for 40-year-olds?” She also stated “I knew very few women who were past the age of 30 who still did athletic training.” Ryan mentioned looking at veteran men in the athletic training profession and not wanting to end up like them, saying “I don’t want to

be like this like washed up like beaten up old dude and just totally letting everything go...just to be in this cool athletic training job”

These factors brought our participants to a point in their life where they decided it was no longer possible for them to persist in the athletic training profession. For those who didn't leave to become a stay-at-home mother, it came down to being at a point in their career that they pursued a career opportunity different field when it arose. When asked about the point in time when he transitioned from thinking about leaving the profession to the time when he actually changed professions, Ryan said “I finally got the job and opportunity to leave.” Emily noted similar circumstances, saying “...timing has a lot to do with it. The timing of the new job being available...” Nancy mentioned “I had been teaching at the same time and I really enjoyed teaching, and it was only natural that I kind of moved to just straight teaching.” The participants were presented with an opportunity divert from their current career path, and these factors along with the presented opportunity led them to their choice.

## **Discussion**

With limited research on Millennial generation athletic trainers, it is imperative to develop an understanding of the values and motivations of this generation in order to retain the workforce. Once more is understood about athletic trainers of this generation, strategies can be developed to better address the issue of professional attrition. Our purpose was to provide descriptions of the experiences of Millennial athletic trainers who had chosen to leave the profession and to identify key factors attributed to their professional attrition. We found 5 themes that emerged from the interviews: 1.) control of



schedule, 2.) quality of life conflicts, 3.) realizations, 4.) professional support, and 5.) changing career perspectives.

Several of the factors cited by these former athletic trainers as leading to their decision to leave have similarities to previous athletic training research regarding job satisfaction and retention, as well as what is known about the Millennial generation's desires for their professional and personal life. While there are factors and values that transcend generations, there are some factors that are very particular in this new generation of workers.

### Control of Schedule

Our study revealed flexibility and control of schedule were the deciding factor across gender, setting, and circumstance, which may support the research that indicates flexibility and control of schedule are of much greater value to Millennials than any previous generation.<sup>5,6,8,10,31</sup> However, control of schedule has been previously established as a conflict for all workers.<sup>31</sup> A study by Harvard Business Review completed across a variety of workplaces and generations found that employees have a deep desire for flexibility and the ability to define when and where they get their work done.<sup>31</sup> When given more choice regarding their work, employees showed increased engagement and job satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> Flexibility and control of schedule have also been previously noted as primary contributors to work-life conflicts in athletic trainers as well.<sup>32,33</sup> Several studies completed on NCAA Division I athletic trainers noted schedule control as a primary work-life conflict.<sup>32,34,35</sup> This may be due to the difficulty of making the organizational changes at the Division I level needed to allow athletic trainers to

resolve this conflict.<sup>32</sup> Five of our participants worked at the collegiate level, and spent at least a year at the Division 1 level.

Though many of our participants conveyed doubt that the nature of the athletic training schedule can change, there have been instances where an overhaul of the model of care greatly reduces the hours worked and gives more control to the athletic trainer. The University of North Carolina was the first to implement this shift by changing the supervisory role from athletics to the campus health system.<sup>36</sup> Other universities have since made this change, including Princeton and Boston University. The shift has allowed more efficient care of patients, and BU's AT staff averaged 45 hours a week in '09-'10, compared to the typical 50-70 hours of work a week for an athletic trainer depending on setting and time of year.<sup>37</sup>

The model of care also allows the athletic trainers to set boundaries with athletics without fear of repercussion. In fact, the National Athletic Trainers' Association recently released a consensus statement on best practices for sports medicine management that supported the transition of athletic training services outside of where they are traditionally housed in athletics to avoid conflict of interests in patient-centered care.<sup>38</sup> However, the current athletics model of care is highly ingrained in the culture of universities and high schools and it has been suggested that only during a shift of administration could this change be possible.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, this is an important area of research and development that may be a critical linchpin in changing the culture of athletic training and addressing the concerns of athletic trainers within the profession.

Other practical recommendations have been made where a change in healthcare model is not an immediate reality. Mazerolle and Eason<sup>39</sup> suggested flexible work

practices (FWP) to encourage a healthier work-life balance. Some FWP suggested include: 1.) mitigating schedule conflicts by setting boundaries and communicating with coaches, and 2,) creating a family friendly environment by encouraging job sharing, time away, and accepting the notion of spillover.<sup>39</sup> These practices may be even more vital among Millennial generation athletic trainers as they value working as part of a team and feeling supported in their workplace.<sup>5,6</sup> Future research and work should be done to understand how changing models of care or using FWPs affects athletic training practice patterns and concerns regarding burnout and attrition.

### Quality of Life Conflicts

Our previous theme, control of schedule, greatly influenced the quality of life conflicts that arose in our participants. The work-life conflicts experienced by our participants, caused by a lack of flexibility and control of their schedule, clashed with the quality of life that they desired. Whether their desired quality of life centered on family life or social life, they felt unable to balance their desires with the reality of their job.

### *Family Life*

The impact that athletic training has on family life is a well-documented concern,<sup>33-35,39-41</sup> particularly regarding females who have or desire to have children.<sup>33,35,40,42</sup> Females tend to show the greatest rate of attrition from the profession, and at the earliest age.<sup>3</sup> Mazerolle & Gavin<sup>33</sup> sought to understand female athletic trainers' perspectives on what it took to be a successful female athletic trainer with children. They found that setting, mentorship—particularly by a successfully balanced mother and athletic trainer—and work-life balance strategies were common themes cited

as necessary to be successful as a mother and athletic trainer. Male athletic trainers have also expressed concerns with work-life balance and parenting concerns.<sup>42</sup> A recent cross-sectional survey of athletic trainers working in a variety of settings revealed that male athletic trainers who were also parents expressed stronger concerns than females with finding balance as a working parent. Both genders responded that their work environments were not tolerant of parenting responsibilities and athletic trainers who chose to have children typically transition to non-traditional settings to accommodate their desired quality of life.<sup>42</sup> Settings varied but no participant mentioned a mentor who modeled successful family-life balance, and all noted the difficulty of having quality family time while in athletic training.

### *Social Life*

Along with family life, the value of social life, or more commonly stated as “having a life”, was cited by both male and female participants and a quality of life conflict. The ability to separate work and social life, to have non-work outlets, has been established as vital to achieving work-life balance and avoiding burnout.<sup>32,39</sup> Our participants seemed unable to find or create these outlets, but it was unclear if this was due to a disconnect in mentorship, education, or personal factors. More research needs to be done to explore this issue.

Our findings regarding quality of life are similar to existing research, as most females in this study cited family or the desire to have children as a deciding factor, and all but one participant cited the inability to “have a life” as impacting their decision. It is worth noting that the one participant who did not state this concern worked in a hospital outreach setting with a 40 hour workweek. The research regarding the Millennial

generation also supports this, as the Millennial generation is known to desire a certain quality of life, particularly family and social life, and are typically not willing to make type of sacrifices their parents made to achieve that life.<sup>5,6,10</sup> In 2013 during “Ask a leader” series on YouTube, renowned speaker and author Timothy Keller commented on this generation, saying that the Millennial generation has such a strong desire for community, but is lacking in the intentionality to cultivate and maintain it.<sup>43</sup> So while the quality of life conflict is not a new phenomenon in athletic training, how acutely this generation feels this conflict and how they are equipped or willing to handle the conflict requires further investigation.

This conflict of schedule and desired quality of life is depicted in the Mediation Model as *value congruence*. Value congruence refers to the cognitive and emotional job goals and expectations. It is at this juncture that the demands of the job clash with the desires of the person, and if this conflict persists burnout and turnover intention may occur.<sup>22</sup> Burnout, as described by most research, is composed of three constructs: 1.) exhaustion, 2.) cynicism (or depersonalization), and 3.) efficacy. Few participants used the term “burnout” nor the components of burnout to describe the factors that led to their attrition.

### Realizations

Another theme noted in our participants’ experience was an optimistic—some might argue unrealistic—view of their future and possibilities in the athletic training profession and in their personal life. Nancy made this point after her realization that she wanted to be a mother but was concerned that the job schedule wasn’t conducive to being

a parent saying “being a student athletic trainer in high school I knew what the schedule was. But I guess at 14-15-16 you’re not really thinking about having kids.” Other realizations occurred and came in the form of the recognition that their ideal job wasn’t as attainable as they had once thought. For example, there were several participants who mentioned wanting to work for a professional team before realizing that it was a difficult dream to achieve. There seemed to be a reluctance to wait, work, “pay dues,” and put in the time necessary to reach their original career goals. Although most participants stated they felt they were prepared for the nature of the job stating that they “knew what they were getting into,” there still seemed to be a disconnect between their conceptual idea of what the job required and the reality of its requirements. How this disconnect formed was unclear and will require more study into the preparation and professional socialization of young professionals in athletic training.

The Millennial generation has grown up in an environment that cultivated a sense of optimism and fearlessness, as well as the mindset that they can do anything they set their mind to.<sup>5,8,11,14</sup> The Millennial generation is also the most technologically advanced generation,<sup>6</sup> which has allowed them to have immediate access to just about anything at any time. This has led to a value of immediacy, or a direct return on their investment, leading them to a tendency to be impatient when it comes to career advancement.<sup>5,8,44</sup> While this mindset is not harmful, unrealistic expectations of the profession and the eventual realization of their situation can have detrimental effects on their career perspective. Research suggests that a mentor, particularly one who has established a healthy work-life balance, can impact young athletic trainers’ desire to persist in the profession by showing that it is possible to have a family and be a successful athletic

trainer, as well as provide insight as to how to achieve this balance.<sup>33</sup> The potential impact of a positive mentor can be seen in our participants when they noted that when they looked at older generation athletic trainers, they saw what they *did not* want to become. More research needs to be conducted regarding the Millennial generation's view on veteran athletic trainers.

The decision to persist in the profession has been investigated in undergraduate athletic training students.<sup>45</sup> Students who intended to persist in the athletic training profession after graduation cited professional growth, faculty and clinical instructor support, and marketability as reasons for persisting. Interestingly, the theme professional growth had two subthemes: real-world experience and career goals. In the study students stated that they intended to pursue a graduate education as a means to attain real-world experience. They also articulate the pursuit of the “dream” position as part of the reason to persist.<sup>45</sup> All but two of our participants attended graduate school, but the realization of a value incongruence still occurred in their career.

### Professional Support

Another theme that emerged in our study, the desire for professional support, mirrored factors that influenced the undergraduate students' intention to persist in the profession.<sup>45</sup> Some of our participants verbalized concern regarding the lack of challenge, feedback, and overall professional support in their workplace. As mentioned previously, FWP are vital to being able to maintain a work-life balance, but it can be difficult if coworkers are unwilling to be flexible or there simply are no others present to cultivate FWP.<sup>39</sup> While only cited by one participant as a direct influence on his decision to leave,

there was only one participant who didn't cite professional support as lacking in some way. However, the participants seemed to struggle with grasping the idea of having a mentor and how that would look in their professional life. The presence of a mentor could have potentially mediated the impact of the "real world" and helped them process their realizations.

Support factors are very important to the Millennial generation, as they tended to have been raised by "helicopter parents" who pushed them to achieve and were very supportive.<sup>5,8</sup> Technology also plays a part in these values, as it has made them highly adaptable, easily bored, and accustomed to immediate feedback.<sup>6</sup> The Millennial generation also is known for enjoying collaboration and working in groups,<sup>5,6</sup> which can be difficult for a young athletic trainer working alone or with others unwilling to work as a team. However, if this type of group environment that provides support, feedback, and a push to succeed can be established, there is great potential for the Millennial generation to thrive.

The NATA has begun to address this issue by starting "transition to practice" initiatives aimed at mentoring young athletic trainers as they transition from student to clinician in an attempt to stave off the shock of "real life" in the profession and help them become better clinicians.<sup>46</sup> More research needs to be conducted to understand how these realizations come to fruition and ways that professional socialization and transition to practice initiatives can be used to retain Millennial generation athletic trainers.



### Changing Career Perspectives

Interestingly, there were three alternatives that the participants chose not to pursue, instead choosing to change careers. These were: 1.) sticking with their position until they became burned out, 2.) seeking different athletic training employment or otherwise seeking to change their circumstances within the profession, or 3.) changing/compromising their view on desired quality of life. With the exception of Ryan who mentioned burnout, our participants chose not to follow any of these options, but rather terminate their career in athletic training. It has been suggested that the Millennial generation could change careers 5-8 times in their lives,<sup>5,11</sup> which speaks to this generation's tendency to seek "greener pastures" with little hesitation if not having their values met in a certain career. Within the context of the Mediation Model, our participants showed a tendency to "skip" from the worklife factors straight to turnover, without allowing themselves to become truly burned out.

The sentiment among the participants regarding the inability of the profession to change could provide insight to their unwillingness to seek a change in their circumstances within athletic training. Our participants described a feeling that the profession could or would not change, and therefore they found little incentive to persist. The feeling of being "stuck" is felt acutely in a generation that values meaning and purpose in their work.<sup>44</sup> Emily made several poignant points on this topic, referencing the lack of respect for the athletic training profession as well as calling out athletic trainers for not standing up for themselves, setting boundaries, and working for better conditions. The evidence to support flexible work practices, setting boundaries, finding non-work outlets, finding work-life balance, etc. mean little to the Millennial generation if they do

not see it in practice in the profession. Though usually willing to take on a challenge, it may be difficult to convince the Millennial generation to take up athletic training's pursuit of respect in the healthcare industry if they do not see that pursuit in their mentors or examples of success.

It is important to note that these participants did not show an aversion to working hard, as the Millennial generation has been accused of by older generations.<sup>44</sup> There is a tendency in the older generation to judge Millennials as lazy and non-committal in the workplace. However, while older generations tend to value hard work itself, this new generation of workers tends to value it only as much as it creates results or carries them towards their goals.<sup>44</sup> They value finding meaning and purpose more so than simply work for work's sake.

A somewhat unexpected underlying theme among our participants was a sense that they were "at peace" with their decision to change careers. We expected that the participants might display a variety of emotions like frustration, sadness or regret when discussing their reasons for leaving the profession. However, this was not observed in this pool of participants. Many participants seemed to have accepted their change in life course and have moved on. This may speak to the nature of this generation to value results and personal growth over work itself.<sup>44</sup> Older generations have labeled this generation lacking in loyalty and tend to resent them for their tendency to change careers. However, it seems this generation is loyal, but to themselves and will pursue a life that fulfills their values, wherever it may lead.<sup>44,47</sup>

## **Future Directions**

The Millennial generation is known to struggle with conflict and face-to-face interaction, which increases the difficulty of gaining control of their schedule as well as seeking out/accepting mentorship. There is much more research needed regarding the Millennial generation's values and goals in athletic training, including how conflict resolution and work-life balance is taught to undergraduate athletic training students as well as young professionals.

Regarding the realizations described by the participants, there must be consideration of how much optimism in students is tolerable before it becomes naïveté. There needs to be a balance between encouraging dreams and goals and being straightforward about what it takes to get there. These realizations could also reflect the amount and nature of clinical experience being garnered at the undergraduate level, but more research is needed. The new transition to practice initiatives are an encouraging step to helping this new generation of athletic trainers, but there needs to be more study on how to effectively reach those who might not otherwise have a support system.

## **Limitations**

This study had several limitations, which should be considered for future improvements on the study of professional attrition in the Millennial generation. This study was limited by the number of participants identified and interviewed within the given time for this study. When the change of careers is made, it was difficult to identify potential participants as they have a tendency to fall out of the athletic training network. Other limitations include the fact that all interviews were conducted over the phone so the

ability to note non-verbal cues were limited. It was also limited by the length of the interviews, though it could be a generational attribute as Millennials are known to struggle with verbal communication.<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to provide rich description of the experiences of Millennial generation athletic trainers who chose to leave the profession with no desire to return. After conducting an interpretive analysis, we identified several themes regarding their decision to leave the profession. These themes were control of schedule, quality of life conflict, realizations, support, and changing career perspectives.

While these conflicts cited by our participants are nothing groundbreaking in the realm of athletic training, what seems to make this generation unique is their lack of tolerance for them. The average time our participants worked clinically before leaving the profession was 4 years. Emily's reference to the female athletic trainer who went into labor at football practice speaks to the Millennial generation's unwillingness to sacrifice their life for this, or potentially any, profession. Athletic training is faced with the potential to lose a large number of this generation for that reason. It may be found that the previously tolerated level of personal sacrifice will not suffice for the retention of the Millennial generation workforce, but much more study on this topic is needed.

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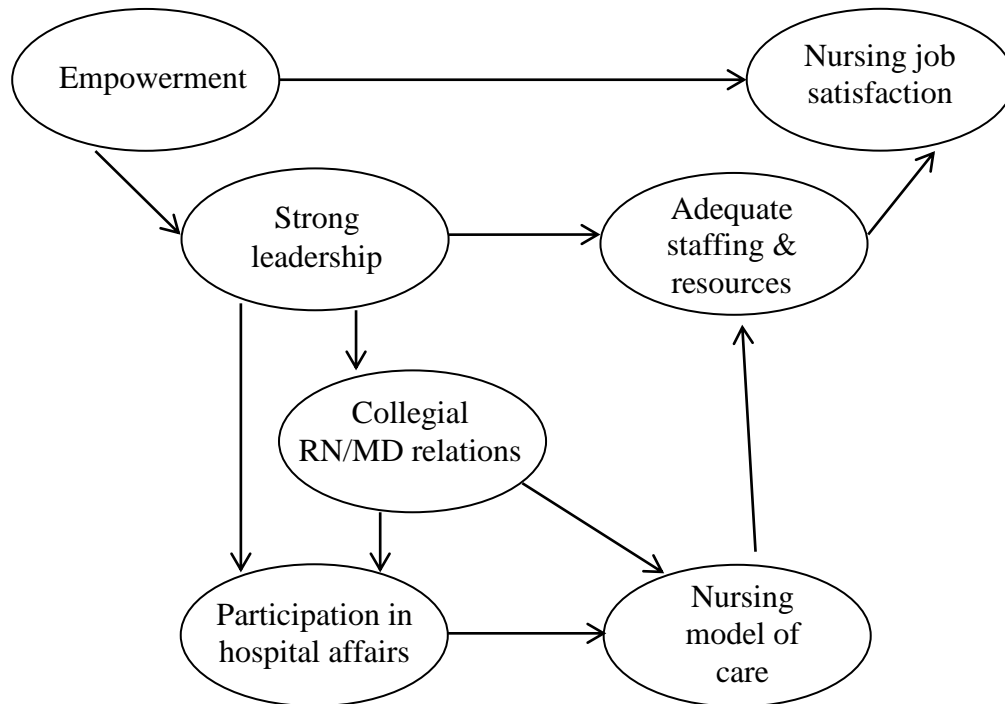
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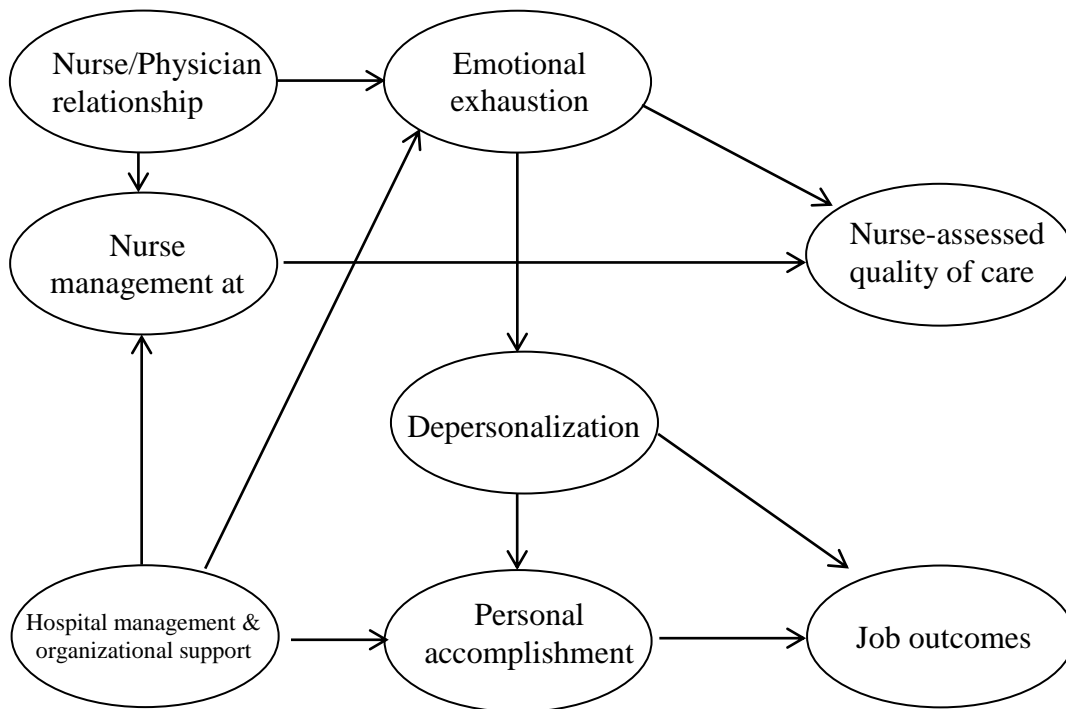


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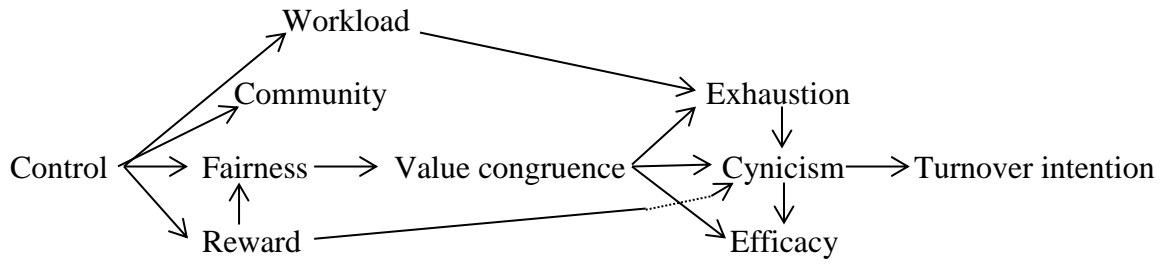
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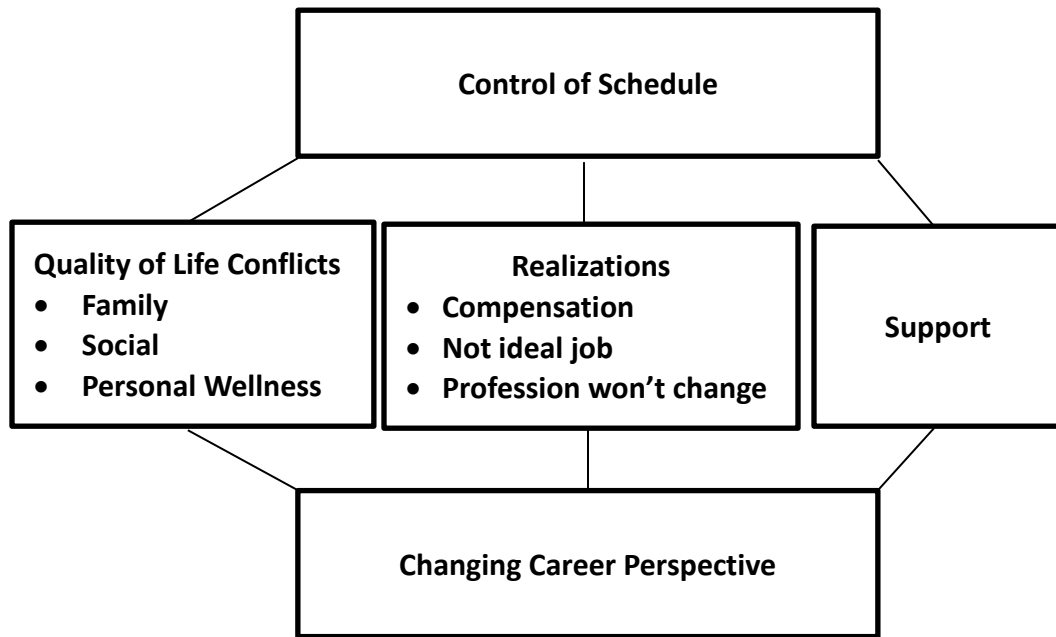
**Figure 1 Nursing Worklife Model**



**Figure 2 Nurse Practice Environment and Outcomes Model**



**Figure 3 The Mediation Model**



**Figure 4 Results**

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Degree Earned	Years of AT Work	Employment Settings	Current Employment
Ryan	29	Masters	4	Collegiate/HS	Clinic technician
Sara	34	Masters	4	Collegiate	Stay-at-home mom
Megan	26	Masters	2	Collegiate	Clinic technician
Brooke	24	Bachelors	2	HS	Stay-at-home mom
Emily	32	Masters	5	HS/Clinic	Event planning
Gale	33	Masters	8	Collegiate	Clinic technician
Nancy	30	Bachelors	5	HS	Health science teacher
Jacob	27	Masters	2	HS	Clinic technician

Table 2 Steps to Interpretive Analysis

<p><b>Step 1-</b> Read entire interview for a sense of the whole</p>	<p>This allows the researcher to be immersed in the data and to build a context in which interpretations can be built. The researcher must have an understanding of what is and is not present in the data to avoid jumping to conclusions and making erroneous interpretations.</p>
<p><b>Step 2-</b> Review any notes and impressions gathered while researching the literature and collecting and processing data</p>	<p>This process captures potentially relevant explanations, finds relationships between them, and forms new impressions and explanations. This will potentially influence the impressions looked for and highlighted as interview data is analyzed.</p>
<p><b>Step 3-</b> Re-read the interview data, find impressions and record them in memos</p>	<p>Memos become the building blocks for forming formal interpretations. This step brings meaning to the data.</p>
<p><b>Step 4-</b> Analyze both the memos from research and data collection as well memos from the interviews</p>	<p>These memos should be analyzed for interpretations that are relevant to the research question. This organized collection of memos builds a framework for displaying the findings of the study.</p>
<p><b>Step 5-</b> Re-read interview data and code where interpretations are supported or challenged</p>	<p>This process helps the researcher be assured the interpretations made are supported in the data and therefore suitable for reporting.</p>
<p><b>Step 6-</b> Draft a summary of interpretations</p>	<p>This brings together all parts into a meaningful whole. The summary should make the interpretations clear to someone unfamiliar with the context of the study. This writing tests the logical consistency of the interpretations and can expose any gaps in the argument. It provides a layout for how ideas are structured and communicated and is an aid to the final writing of the manuscript.</p>
<p><b>Step 7-</b> Review the interpretations with the participant</p>	<p>This is especially crucial for this study since we are operating under the constructivist paradigm, which relies on collaboration with participants for the building of interpretations. Feedback from participants on the interpretations made by researchers is necessary for establishing trustworthiness in the study. This will preferably be done using video chat and an interactive web document. Data can still be used if participants are not available for collaboration, but it would be a limitation of the trustworthiness of that data.</p>
<p><b>Step 8-</b> Revise summary as needed to most accurately reflect the participant's reality, and search for excerpts that support the interpretations made</p>	<p>The revisions should result in a summary that closely reflects what would be put into the manuscript.</p> <p>The search for relevant excerpts acts as another check to assure the interpretations made are supported in the data.</p>

Table 3 Operational Definitions of Mediation Model factors

<b>Worklife Factors</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Control	Decision latitude in workplace
Workload	Physical and psychological demand in workplace
Fairness	Perceived status in workplace; equality and social justice in workplace
Reward	Emotional and/or monetary reward in workplace
Community	Personal and professional support
Value Congruence	Cognitive and emotional goals and expectations
<b>Burnout</b>	
Exhaustion	Physical or psychological
Cynicism	Psychological detachment from the workplace
Efficacy	Will/ability to do the job

## Document 1

### Interview Guide

**Major bulleted questions will be asked while sub-bullets are prompts that may be used to facilitate discussion.**

- Please state your name and tell me about yourself.
- Describe your ideal job in detail.
- Why did you become an AT?
- Describe in detail some **examples** of times where you thought that you wanted to leave the profession.
- What specific events or factors made you transition from thinking about leaving the profession to actually leaving the profession?
  - Could you be more specific about the personal and employment needs that were not being met that contributed to you making this decision?
  - Talk more about XX event/factor/need and why you think it pushed you “over the edge” to leaving the AT profession.
  - If mentioned control/organizational influences: Can you talk more about XX and how that effected your work environment? Job satisfaction? What would you have changed if you could?
  - If mentioned efficacy: Given your job requirements, did you feel that you were capable of being successful at your last AT job? Why or why not? Describe if not.



- If mentioned reward/pay: Did you feel you were adequately emotionally rewarded? Why/why not? Do you feel you were appropriately compensated? How did that income affect your life?
- If mentioned workload: Describe your typical daily workload. How would you have changed that, if you could? If you had control to change the workload would that have changed your decision to leave the AT profession?
  - If mention having to work outside JD: Describe some examples of having to work outside your job description and how did that impact your AT work?
- If mentioned values/community/fairness: What would you have changed about XX and how/if that would have impacted your decision?
- If mentioned being “burned out” Describe what you mean by “burned out” and was there anything that you feel could have been done to avert that?
- What are you doing now and why?
- Is there anything else you would like to say regarding your decision?