A Little Help from My Friends: A Relational Health Communication Competence Approach to Social Support for Forensic Educators

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A Relational Health Communication Competence
Approach to Social Support for Forensic Educators

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The purpose of this study was to examine factors that impact forensic educators' perceived social support, including communication competence, job stress, and job burnout. Communicatively competent educators reported higher levels of administrative and family support than forensic educators who did not report high levels of communication competence. Educators who reported high levels of stress and burnout report lower levels of support from supervisors, coworkers, and family compared to educators who reported low levels of stress and burnout. Female coaches reported lower levels of support from supervisors, coworkers, and families, compared to male coaches. Educators with a large coaching staff reported high levels of coworker support; educators with small or no coaching staff did not report high levels of coworker support. These findings offer insight into the support networks of forensic educators and the impact of these networks on stress and burnout.

Workplace stress and its implications at all organizational levels has been intensively studied for decades (Burgess, Irvine, & Wallymahmed, 2010; Miller, Ellis, Zook, & Lyles, 1990; Miller, Zook, & Ellis, 1989; Ray & Miller, 1991), focusing on a variety of professions, including managers, police officers, nurses, doctors, human service professionals, and important for this study, teachers (Ray, 1983; Wright, Banas, Bessarabova, & Bernard, 2010; Zhang & Zhu, 2007). Communication plays a pivotal role in stress and coping experiences because interactions with others help to mitigate and, in some cases, eliminated burnout feelings in individuals across professions (Schneider, 1997; Smeltzer, 1987). Organizational members who have a solid social support system at work are more effectively able to buffer the negative effects of stress (Baker, O'Brien, & Salahuddin, 2007). Additionally, the quality of perceived social support from family and coworkers is influenced by an individual's level of communication competence (Kreps, 1988; Query & Kreps, 1996).

A unique mix of educator and coach, forensic coaches might be asked to teach, coach students, mentor, judge at tournaments, and promote their teams to their department and university administrators. The fact forensic coaches are juggling multiple roles and responsibilities makes them prone to stress and burnout (Carmack & Holm, 2013). Although scholars have explored the job stressors, burnout, and social support for teachers and athletic coaches (Dale & Weinberg, 1989; Kertz-Welzel, 2009; Lealand, 2004; Nikolaos, 2012; Raedeke, Granzyk, & Warren, 2000; Tashman, Tenenbaum & Eklund, 2010; Zhang & Zhang, 2012; Zhang & Zhu, 2007), researchers have remained relatively silent about job stress and burnout in forensics, focusing on theoretical discussions or causes of stress (Gill,1990; Littlefield & Sellnow, 1992; Preston, 1995; Richardson, 2005). Turning to a more empirical approach called for by Richardson (2005), Carmack and Holm (2013) previously found that forensic educators report high levels of emotional exhaustion as their primary type of burnout. Sex also played a role; female coaches reported higher levels of stress than their male counterparts.

The next step in understanding forensic educator stress and burnout is examining social support networks and the impact of these networks on educators' perceived stress and burnout. Social support is often framed as one of the major communicative solutions to mitigate stress and burnout (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Developing and maintaining multiple support networks at work and at home is crucial for successfully negotiating these stressful roles and responsibilities. Additionally, being able to competently explain workplace stressors to a variety of stakeholders might help educators find support strategies to reduce stress and burnout. The quantity and quality of social support opportunities is heavily influenced by an individual's communication competence (Kreps, 1988; Query & Kreps, 1996; Query & Wright, 2003). To date, forensic scholars have not addressed issues forensic coaches' perceived organizational and social support and its impact on stress and burnout. In order to address the growing concern about stress and burnout in the forensic community (Richardson, 2005), we must examine the perceived supportive networks available to forensic educators.

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that impact forensic coaches' perceived work and social support for coaching and teaching, specifically focusing on communication competence, job stress, and job burnout. We begin with a discussion of the key variables of this study: social and work support, job stress, job burnout, and communication competence. After explaining the study's methodological design, we present the findings of different factors that impact coaches' perceived support. Finally, we discuss the findings and the implications of these results for forensic educators.

Factors Influencing Work and Social Support

Education is a stressful environment (Farber, 1991), where increases in workload, increases in students in their classrooms, and low pay contribute to instructors becoming frustrated with work. Subsequently, instructors become burnt out as a result of institutional, organizational, and individual factors, such as dealing with inconsistencies between teaching goals and learning outcomes or volunteering for multiple service opportunities. Stress and burnout are major problems for educators because they feel they are often overworked and underappreciated (Farber, 1991). College professors and instructors might also have the added pressures of research and service requirements. For

forensic educators, the stresses of teaching might be compounded by the stressors of coaching, an increased pressure to win, decreased budgets, and difficulties with students (Dale & Weinberg, 1989).

Job Stress and Burnout

Forensic educators experience a variety of job stressors as they juggle obligations to teach, coach, publish, and engage in service requirements. A number of job stressors may impact coaches' work environment, including behavioral, attitudinal, emotional, interpersonal, and physical stresses (Kahill, 1988). Behavioral stress includes increased absenteeism, high turnover rates, and excessive and unhealthy consumption behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse (Baker, O'Brien, & Salahuddin, 2007; Kovoacs, Kovoacs, & Hegedus, 2010; Lemaire & Wallace, 2010). Attitudinal stressors appear as negative thoughts and hostility towards others (Marshall & Kasman, 1980). Workers experiencing emotional stress become frustrated, irritable, anxious, depressed, and feel a sense of helplessness (Quattrin et al., 2006; Schneider, 1997). Workers encounter interpersonal stress when they have to have difficult conversations with others. Finally, physical stress is common, including headaches, stomach aches, elevated blood pressure, and chest pain (Chipas & McKenna, 2011).

Constantly dealing with the stresses of managing coaching, teaching, publishing, and providing service can lead to burnout. Burnout is the physical and emotional reaction of prolonged exposure to stress at work (Isaksson Ro et al., 2010). Burnout in workers is the result of a variety of elements, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, loss of personal accomplishment, and ultimately, cynicism (Williams, 1989).

Emotional exhaustion occurs when workers feel worn out, fatigued, and have a loss of energy and empathy (Maslach, 2003). Emotional exhaustion may be the result of role overload and uncertainty in work responsibilities (Wu, Zhu, Wang, Wang, & Lan, 2007), both of which may be major stressors for forensic educators. Workers experiencing depersonalization often find themselves treating others as less than human, feeling emotionally distant, treating others like objects (Zhang & Zhu, 2007; Baker et al., 2007). Loss of personal accomplishment is accompanied by feelings of failure and work inadequacy (Baker et al., 2007). This may be especially problematic for forensic coaches as they may begin to question their ability to successfully coach and teach students. The combination of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and loss of personal accomplishment ultimately leads to worker cynicism (Williams, 1989), where workers develop a negative and unsympathetic view of the job, co-workers, and organization (Maslach, 2003). This element of burnout is important when talking about burnout among forensic coaches and support, as coaches who experience burnout may seek out support from family, coworkers, and supervisors. Coaches who do not receive support might, over time, become cynical and leave forensics.

Social Support

The high levels of stress and burnout associated with interpersonal interactions can be mitigated by social support from co-workers, supervisors, and family. Social support is defined by Feeley, Moon, Kozey, and Slowe (2010) as "information to an individual that communicates that one is cared for, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (p. 171). Social support includes both verbal and nonverbal forms

of communication and influences how individuals perceive themselves, others, and their relationships (Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994). The support individuals receive from trusted friends and workplace colleagues reassures them in times of crisis or concern. For workers, social support is crucial because support increases emotional affirmation and provides solutions for problems (Park, Wilson, & Lee, 2004).

Social support is an inherently interpersonal communication phenomenon (Burleson, Albrecth, Goldsmith, & Sarason, 1994), where individuals can give and receive a variety of different types of social support. These different types of social support include informational support (providing information or knowledge), instrumental support (tangible help and assistance), network support (developing a group of people to turn to for any kind of support), esteem support (bolstering of self-esteem) and emotional support (offering warmth, caring, and other appropriate emotions) to their coworkers (du Pre, 2009; Zimmermann & Applegate, 1994). Social support is composed of three components: (1) support schemata, the mental maps of a social support network, (2) supportive relationships, and (3) supportive communication encounters (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1996). Although all of these are important for perceived social support; for this study, we have identified the social support network commonly associated with being a forensic educator. This network is unique because the workplace relationships between educators and colleagues, supervisors, and administration may be specific to forensics, specific to their work outside of forensics, or a combination of both.

Segrin and Passalacqa (2010) clarified the difference between social *integration* and social *support*. Social integration "entails participation in a range of social relationships within one's social network" whereas "social support is an interpersonal process in which the provider's communication helps the recipient manage uncertainty and difficulties associated with the situation that she/he is in" (p. 313). This distinction is important because it underscores the fact that while one can be fully integrated into a work environment and have outside interests, unless an individual's interpersonal communication interactions include reassuring messages or bolstering messages that help us deal with concerns and troubles, he or she is not receiving social support. Knowing the difference between integration and support is also important because social support has been shown to decrease stress and burnout (Babin, Palazzolo, & Rivera, 2012; Feeley et al., 2010; Wright, Banas, Bessarabova, & Bernard, 2010), provide a buffer from a variety of physical and psychological problems (Pauley & Hesse, 2009), and increases loyalty to the organization (Feeley et al., 2010).

An important factor which may impact perceived support is the sex of the individual (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988). Research on sex differences and social support is somewhat uneven, primarily because of the conflating of sex and gender. Gender, not sex, is often correlated with positive social support (Reevy & Maslach, 2001). Gender (although it was operationalized as sex) played a significant role in how individuals made sense of social support, with females reporting feeling that there were more support opportunities (Hanasona et al., 2011). Reevy and Maslach (2001) argued this was the result of social support being socially constructed as an overall feminine experience. However, different types of support were framed as more masculine, such as tangible support (Reevy & Maslach, 2001). Previous research found that sex differences existed regarding stress among forensic educators (Carmack & Holm, 2013); this, coupled with

the belief that social support is framed as a solution to stress and burnout, leads to the possibility that male and female coaches will perceive support differently.

H$_1$: Female forensic educators will report higher levels of perceived support than male forensic educators.

Forensic educators have a variety of social support networks from which to turn; however, these can be separated into two categories: work and family. Work social support networks include other organizational members, including colleagues/co-workers, supervisors, and administrators. Positive workplace interpersonal relationships help to reduce stress and burnout (Ray, 1987) and these interpersonal relationships may help forensic educators to develop productive social support networks. Workplace social support is not a blanket support network. The importance of supervisor support and coworker support are widely known to help workers decrease workplace stress (Albrecht, Irey, & Mundy, 1982; Blau, 1981; Miller et al., 1990; Ray, 1991; Ray & Miller, 1991). Supervisors primarily provide instructional or instrumental support, often in the form of information, changes in workload, or structural programs to help deal with stress (Ray, 1987). Conversely, coworkers primarily provide emotional support, with communication focusing on venting or providing empathy for stress (Miller et al., 1990). What is missing is the distinction between supervisors and administrators. For forensic educators, supervisors are their immediate superiors, such as department heads. Assistant coaches might also have a director of forensics or debate as a supervisor. Forensic educators might also interact with a number of administrators, such as deans, provosts, and presidents, as they celebrate the successes of their teams as well as when they deal with budget issues.

Forensic educators might be presented with a number of support opportunities from supervisors and administrators to help with the workload associated with directing and coaching. Two of the more popular opportunities are course releases and coaching staffs. Course releases are commonly assigned to educators who serve in an administrative capacity and are meant to be a release from a teaching obligation. Course release times can vary from one course release a year to half of each semester's contract hours assigned to administrative work. Faculty members who receive course releases have reported higher levels of perceived support from administrators and supervisors (Marek, 2009). Another popular support structure is a coaching staff. Coaching staff may include assistant directors, coaches, and graduate student assistants. A coaching staff can be formal (assigned by the department head) or informal (volunteer coaching). Staff size can be based on budget, the presence of a graduate program, and team size. It is possible that these opportunities would be perceived as examples of support, especially from supervisors, administrators, and co-workers.

H$_2$: Forensic educators who receive course releases will report higher levels of perceived support than forensic educators who do not receive course releases.
H$_3$: Educators with larger coaching staffs will report higher levels of perceived support than coaches with small coaching staffs.

Cobb (1976) noted that "as life progresses, support is derived increasingly from other members of the family, then from peers at work and in the community" (pp. 301-302). As interaction networks grow, social support networks need to grow, as well. Social support for forensics coaches extends beyond just their biological family to their team and peers and colleagues who coach other teams. This is not to say that family support as a form of social support is not important. Dush and Amato (2005) found that subjective self-reports of well-being increased with increased levels of commitment to pair bonding. Those who were just causally dating scored lower than those who were in steady dating relationships. Steady daters scored lower than those who were co-habituating and all groups scored lower on self-reported well-being than married couples. However, a counter to family support is children or people cohabitating with a partner. Individuals with children and those living unmarried with a significant other tend to report more home and workplace stress as well as have more difficulties dealing with that stress (Ray & Miller, 1994). Regardless, it stands to reason that individuals in relationships have an outlet to disclose concerns, vent about job stress, and seek reassurance for their work.

H_4: Forensic educators in relationships will report higher levels of perceived support than educators not in relationships.

Communication Competence

An important element for communicating about support needs and deficits is communication competence. Communication competence is a person's ability to effectively and appropriately choose among several options for how to behave and communicate in a social context (Duran & Kelly, 1988; McCroskey, 1982; Weimann, 1977). Competent interactions are judged based on how the effective and appropriate communication helps to achieve the relational purposes and goals of the interaction (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983). A competent communicator is able to master "an underlying set of appropriateness rules for how to interact" (Johnson, 1979, p. 15). Genuine competence entails not only meeting one's objectives in the short-term but building long-term relationships as well, and is contextually based; people are more competent in some settings than others (Duran & Kelly, 1994; Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982). Communicative competence includes cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains (McCroskey, 1982; Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982), including interaction management, affiliation, behavioral flexibility, social relaxation, and empathy (Weimann, 1977). Dimensions include understanding the communication process, interpersonal sensitivity, communication skills, and ethical responsibility (Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982). A communicatively competent individual will be able to assess a situation (including cultural and organizational components), understand the variety of options available for how to behave, determine the appropriate way to behave, and act accordingly.

Communication competence is a multidimensional concept, with adaptability as the cornerstone of the concept (Duran, 1992; Duran & Kelly, 1988). The ability to assess and adapt communication styles has been positively related to interaction involvement, specifically in relation to responsiveness, perceptiveness, and attentiveness (Cegala, 1981). Communicatively competent individuals can understand what others are saying (both on a surface level and deeper meaning level) and respond in such ways which

confirm and support their conversational partner (Duran & Kelly, 1988). A number of factors influence a person's ability to develop communication competence, but social confirmation, social composure, and social experience have a major impact on competence development (Duran, 1992; Duran & Kelly, 1994). In other words, the more varied communication encounters a person has, the more opportunities there are to find ways to acknowledge others' goals and maintain composure in the face of an undesired response. Additionally, communication competence is related to socio-emotional skills, such as building rapport, fostering relationships, listening, showing empathy, being flexible, and being culturally sensitive (Yungbluth, 2009).

Situating forensic educators in the forensic organization and the university adds several more dimensions to communication competence. In an organizational setting, communicatively competent employers often demonstrate competence through five communicative events: initiating interactions, self-disclosure, emotional support, conflict management, and negative responses to others and self (Reinking & Bell, 1991). The setting, context, and interactants of an organization must also be taken into account (Johnson, 1979). For forensic educators, this includes the variety of communication interactions they experience (forensic and non-forensic interactions in and outside the classroom), the context of their interactions (which include forensic work and non-forensic work related conversations), and the people with which they interact (forensic and non-forensic interactants). Organizational success has been directly related to communication competence, including organizational achievement and promotability (Reinking & Bell, 1991; Shockley-Zalabak, Staley, & Morley, 1988).

Communication scholars connecting communication competence, stress, burnout, and social support have focused most of their efforts on caring health professions (Kreps, 1988; Weathers, Querty, & Kreps, 2010; Wright et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2013). Communication competence is situated at the center of successful relational communication between caregivers and patients, with increased communication competence leading to "therapeutic communication, social support, satisfaction, information exchange, and cooperation" (Kreps, 1988, p. 354). Kreps (1988) posited that communication competence influenced social support (the better you are at communicating, the better you will be at successfully seeking out social support) and both of these helped to decrease stress and burnout. This thesis has been supported by researchers connecting communication competence and health outcomes, with caregivers reporting that being able to talk successfully about their stresses helped to decrease their concerns and ultimately their burnout (Weathers et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2013). Additionally, individuals who report higher levels of communication competence also reported higher levels of perceived social support (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Query & Kreps, 1996; Wright et al., 2010) and these all contributed to decreased stress and burnout (Wright et al., 2010).

Although previous research has focused on more traditional careers in the caring profession (Wright et al., 2010), lay caregivers of Alzheimer's patients (Query & Kreps, 1996), and students with depression (Wright et al., 2013) as we have previously argued, forensic educators are in a caring profession, where they teach, coach, and mentor undergraduate and graduate students. Therefore, it is possible that communication competence and social support could be related to stress and burnout in the forensic educator community.

RQ: Is there a significant relationship between forensic coaches' perceived support and their reported communication competence, job stress, and job burnout?

METHODS

Participants

A total of 111 collegiate forensic directors and coaches participated in this study. After receiving university IRB approval, participants were contacted via e-mail and through forensics and communication list-servs. Coaches interested in participating were directed to a Qualtrics link to the survey. Among the coaches who participated, 65 were male and 46 were female. Ages ranged from 20 to 64 years, with a majority of participants' ages between 25 and 34 ($n = 39$, 35.1%) and 35 to 44 ($n = 40$, 36%). Participants were predominantly Caucasian ($n = 105$, 94.6%), with one person identifying as Hispanic (1.0%) and five participants identifying as African American (4.5%). A majority of participants had earned a Master's degree ($n = 64$, 57.6%) or doctoral degree ($n = 40$, 36.0%); five participants (4.5%) had completed a Bachelor's degree and two participants had completed a professional degree (JD, MD). Most participants were married with children ($n = 49$, 44.1%), married without children ($n = 26$, 23.4%), or single, never married ($n = 22$, 19.8%). Nine participants were living with a partner, four were divorced, and one participant was widowed.

A majority of the participants were instructors ($n = 52$, 46.8%), 17 were tenure-track assistant professors (15.3%), 15 were associate professors (13.5%), 12 were full professors (10.8%), six were adjunct instructors (5.4%) , and eight were graduate students (7.2%); one participant chose not to answer. Participants taught a wide number of classes, with most coaches teaching three to four classes a semester ($n = 50$, 45.0%) or one to two classes a semester ($n = 47$, 42.3%); 12 coaches are teaching five or more classes a semester and two coaches do not teach classes at all (10.8%). Seventy-five coaches received one or more course releases to coach (67.5%); thirty-six participants said they did not receive a course release (32.4%). Along with teaching and coaching, a minority of coaches are also mentoring forensics graduate assistants ($n = 37$, 33.3%) and/or non-forensics graduate students ($n = 20$, 18.0%). Of the 63 participants who responded to the question about type of school at which they taught, 45 taught at a public university or college (71.4%) and 18 taught at a private college or university (28.6%). Forty-eight participants did not indicate at what type of school they taught.

Participants had been coaching for a number of years, with most coaching between four and six years ($n = 24$, 21.6%), seven and nine years ($n = 22$, 19.8%), and 10 and 15 years ($n = 22$, 19.8%); a large number of participants had also been coaching for between 16 and 20 years ($n = 11$, 9.9%), and more than 20 years ($n = 21$, 18.9%). Along with teaching and service, the participants were also offering multiple coaching hours a week; 54 coaches were offering 11 or more coaching hours a week (48.6%), followed by three to four hours a week ($n = 15$, 13.5%), seven to eight hours a week ($n = 15$, 13.5%), five to six hours a week ($n = 11$, 9.9%), and nine to ten hours a week ($n = 10$, 9.0%). Five coaches only offered one to two hours of coaching week (4.5%) and one coach offered less than one hour a week (1.0%). A small portion of coaches were at the beginning of their careers, either in their first year of coaching ($n = 6$, 5.4%) or coaching between one

and three years (*n* = 5, 4.5%). Many coaches had help coaching; 42 participants have one to two additional coaches on their team (37.8%), 25 coaches have three or four additional coaches (22.5%), and 22 coaches have five or more coaches (19.8%). Twenty-two coaches were the only coaches for their teams (19.8%).

Instrumentation

Communication Competence Scale. The Communication Competence Scale (Wiemann, 1977) was used to measure participants' ability to choose appropriate communication behaviors in order to meet goals and maintain face with others. This 36-item scale uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Individuals can score from 36 to 180; individuals scoring between 109 and 180 are considered to have high communication competence. Sample statements included "I am easy to talk to", "I let others know I understand them", and "I am flexible". Five items were reverse-coded before summation of the final score. Reliability was .88 (*M* = 138.77, *SD* = 12.74).

Social Support and Stress Measure. In order to measure the different types of familial and work support coaches may receive, Ray and Miller's (1994) adapted Social Support and Stress measure was used. This 26-item scale uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is comprised of five subscales, measuring home/work stress, supervisor support, co-worker support, administrative support, and family support. Statements included "My job often interferes with my family life" and "My supervisor respects me". The subscales are reported separately. Cronbach's alpha was high for each subscale: home/work stress (α = .88, *M* = 2.22, *SD* = 0.86), supervisor support (α = .92, *M* = 3.66, *SD* = 1.01), co-worker support (α = .93, *M* = 3.48, *SD* = 0.98), administrative support (α = .91, *M* = 2.88, *SD* = 0.96), and family support (α = .88, *M* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.77).

Global Measure of Perceived Stress. To measure forensics coaches' perceived stress, the Global Measure of Perceived Stress was used (Cohen, Karmack, & Mermelstein, 1983). The Global Measure is comprised of 14 items and uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from never to very often. Questions ask participants to reflect on daily stressful events. Participants were asked questions such as "In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?" and "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?" Seven items were reverse coded before summation. Reliability was .85 (*M* = 2.84, *SD* =0.51).

Maslach Burnout Inventory. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) was used to measure forensics coaches' perceived job burnout. The Burnout Inventory is a 22-item scale with three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement). The measure uses a 7-point scale ranging from never experienced to every day and includes statements such as "I feel like I'm at the end of my rope", "I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally", and "In my work, I deal with emotional problems very quickly". Eight items were reverse coded before summation. The three subscales are reported separately. Reliability for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement were .92 (*M* = 3.69, *SD* = 1.29), .79 (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = 1.08), and .83 (*M* = 2.39, *SD* = 0.84), respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Independent sample *t*-tests were performed to determine differences between participants' sex and perceived support (H$_1$) and differences between whether participants received a course release and perceived support (H$_2$). One-way analysis of variance tests (ANOVA) were conducted to identify differences between size of coaching staff and perceived support (H$_3$). Independent sample *t*-tests were performed to determine differences between relationship status and perceived support (H$_4$). Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to determine relationships between pairwise combinations of support, communication competence, job stress, and job burnout (RQ). Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for sex, course releases, relationship status, and coaching staff and perceived support. Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations for perceived support, communication competence, job stress, and job burnout.

RESULTS

Hypotheses 1 posited there would a difference between participant sex and perceived levels of support. Independent samples *t*-tests revealed that female coaches reported significantly less support from their supervisors than male coaches ($t(111)=$ 2.16; p<.01), significantly less support from their coworkers than male coaches ($t(111)=$ 2.84; p<.01), and significantly less support from their families than male coaches ($t(111)=$ .582; p<.001). There were no other significant differences between the groups in terms of perceived support from administration.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that significant differences in perceived support would exist between educators who received a course release for forensics and educators who did not receive a course release. Independent samples *t*-tests also revealed only one significant difference of perceived levels of support for coaches who receive a course release. An independent t-test found that coaches who did not receive a course release reported significantly more support from their families than coaches who did receive a course release ($t(111)=$ -.988; p<.05). There were no other significant differences between the groups in terms of perceived support from supervisors, coworkers, and administration.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that coaching size would influence perceived support. A one-way ANOVA was also run to determine if coaching staff size influenced how participants reported perceived support. The one-way ANOVA revealed that coworker support differed significantly based on the coaching staff size $F(3, 105) = 3.095, p < .05$. The Bonferroni post hoc test also revealed that coaches working on teams with 5 or more coaches on staff reported significantly higher levels of support from their coworkers than other coaches. No other significant differences existed.

Hypothesis 4 stated that educators in relationships would report higher levels of perceived support than single or divorced educators. Independent samples *t*-tests determined that coaches in relationships reported receiving higher levels of support from their families than educators not in relationships, ($t(111)=$ 3.10; p<.01). Mean differences suggests that coaches who are married without children receive higher levels of support from their families than other coaches. No other significant differences were discovered.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Support Responses Related to Sex, Course Releases,
Relationship Status, Coaching Staff

	N	Supervisor M	SD	Coworker M	SD	Administrative M	SD	Family M	SD
Male coaches	65	3.83	.92	3.69	.84	2.98	1.01	4.37	.58
Female coaches	46	3.41	1.11	3.16	1.09	2.73	.88	4.28	.98
Received course release	75	3.67	1.10	3.47	1.04	2.83	.99	4.28	.85
No course release	36	3.63	.84	3.46	.86	2.96	.91	4.44	.57
Single, never married	22	3.42	.91	3.30	1.03	2.44	1.04	3.83	.93
Married without children	26	3.61	1.03	3.51	.76	2.97	.91	4.56	.57
Married with children	49	3.76	1.10	3.51	.76	2.99	.93	4.47	.64
Divorced	4	4.04	.95	3.37	1.25	2.83	.95	4.06	1.39
Widowed	1	3.33	--	3.83	--	3.16	--	4.75	--
Living with partner	9	3.65	1.02	3.87	.67	3.02	1.07	4.22	.76
Only coach	22	3.82	.98	3.28	.91	2.76	.81	4.19	.86
1-2 coaches	42	3.59	.92	3.25	1.03	2.78	.99	4.39	.83
3-4 coaches	25	3.53	1.23	3.56	1.02	2.86	.97	4.29	.73
5 or more coaches	22	3.75	1.02	3.97	.73	3.19	1.03	4.41	.60

Data were analyzed to determine the relationship between perceived levels of support, communication competence, job stress, and job burnout (RQ). The research question asked if there were any significant relationships between these variables. As indicated by Table 2, significant positive correlations were observed between administrative support and communication competence (r[109] = .204, $p < .05$) and family support and communication competence (r[109] = .199, $p < .05$). No other significant positive relationships existed. Participants who reported high levels of communication competence also report receiving more support for coaching from their college/university administration and from their families.

Several significant negative relationships were observed (see Table 2) between job stress and supervisor support ($r[104] = -.326$, $p < .01$), job stress and coworker support ($r[104] = -.224$, $p < .05$), job stress and family support ($r[104] = -.226$, $p < .05$), emotional exhaustion and supervisor support ($r[104] = -.277$, $p < .01$), emotional exhaustion and coworker support ($r[104] = -.273$, $p < .01$), and personal achievement and coworker support ($r[100] = -.200$, $p < .05$). No other significant negative relationships existed. Participants who reported high levels of job stress reported receiving less support from their supervisors, coworkers, and families. Additionally, coaches who reported being emotionally exhausted by their jobs reported receiving less support from supervisors and coworkers. Finally, coaches who feel a lack of personal achievement feel they receive less support from coworkers.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Coefficients for Stress, Burnout, and Job Satisfaction

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Stress ($N = 111$)	2.84	.51	---	-.24*	.62**	.38**	.41**	-.33**	-.22*	-.11	-.23*
2. Communication Competence ($N = 111$)	138.77	12.74		---	-.20*	-.28**	-.36**	.19	.10	.20*	.20*
3. Burnout-Emotional Exhaustion ($N = 111$)	3.69	1.29			---	.47**	.28**	-.28**	-.27**	-.10	-.12
4. Burnout-Depersonalization ($N = 111$)	2.36	1.08				---	.35**	-.14	-.12	-.04	-.06
5. Burnout-Personal Accomplishment ($N = 111$)	2.39	.84					---	-.12	-.20*	-.16	-.11
6. Supervisor Support ($N = 111$)	3.66	1.01						---	.400**	.43**	.15
7. Coworker Support ($N = 111$)	3.48	.98							---	.28**	.11
8. Administrative Support ($N = 111$)	2.88	.96								---	.17
9. Family Support ($N = 111$)	4.34	.77									---

* Correlation significant at .05 level (2-tailed)
** Correlation significant at .01 and .001 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

Stress and burnout are considered "occupational hazards" of the education profession (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982), and forensic educators have an additional layer of stress as the result of coaching and mentoring a forensics team. The purpose of this study was to examine the social support, communication competence, job stress, and job burnout in forensic coaches. The results indicated that those who scored higher in communication competence had reported receiving more support from administration and family. Educators who reported higher levels of communication competence could have better relationships with administrators and with their family members because they are able to successfully communicate their needs and frustrations. For example, if workplace stress is the result of not having an appropriate budget, communicatively competent forensic educator would be able to adapt their communication message to different administrators to successfully argue for a budget increase. Conversely, forensic educators with lower reported levels of communication competence might have difficulties discussing the stressors of their work with their family. These two groups are especially important for forensic educators; administrators might control budgets and coaching spaces while families might be the ones educators turn to vent about work.

Perhaps the most surprising finding was that female forensic educators report receiving less perceived support from the families. There are a number of reasons this may be the case, all related to the general premise that the family is "women's work" and women are expected to fulfill the responsibilities of the family. Female educators may be experiencing the result of the second shift (Hochschild, 2003). The second shift suggests that women work two "jobs"—one in the traditional workforce and the other at home. This results in the work-family conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999), where women struggle to balance work and family. It is possible that female educators do not have time to seek out support from their families because they are too busy supplying support to their families. Work-family spillover, the push of family or work into the other category may also be a concern (Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon, & Kiger, 2007). Female workers report long hours as a major factor which causes work to spill over into family expectations (Maume & Houston, 2001). Forensics is a profession associated with long hours and time away from family; evening team meetings and coaching and tournament travel mean that coaches put in more than 40 hours a week away from families. Coaches (male and female) are away from their families, but with the added expectations of family for female coaches, they might not be able to receive the family support they need.

Interestingly, communication competence did not appear to have any significant connection to support from supervisors and co-workers. Although there is no previous communication research examining communication competence and support from specific work groups, organizational members often report turning to co-workers and supervisors because they are the ones with whom members come into the most contact (Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2000; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002) and these two support groups can help reduce stress and burnout (Babin & Boles, 1996; Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987). There are several possible explanations for why forensic educators' level of communication competence did not have a significant impact on perceived support from supervisors and

co-workers. In this study, supervisor was operationalized as someone who has immediate and direct involvement in the evaluation of the forensic educator (a department head or chair). Although being able to competently adapt messages about stress and burnout is important for communicating with supervisors, coaches may not speak to supervisors about this because it could lead to negative evaluations. Previous research supports this concern, with supervisors identifying stress and burnout identified as reasons for terminations (Goodman & Boss, 1999). Another explanation could be who forensic educators consider co-workers and their interactions with those co-workers. Forensic educators might have multiple co-workers, including departmental colleagues, other coaches, and even graduate assistants. Depending on how often forensic educators interact with co-workers and in what settings, coaches might not seek support from these groups. If they are not seeking support, there would be less of a reason for a coach to communicatively competent about support.

The results of this study highlight the importance of communication competence in piecing together the puzzle of forensic educator well-being. Being unable to communicate about job stressors is directly connected to burnout (Wright et al., 2010, 2013) and coaches who report being emotionally exhausted report higher levels of intent to leave forensics (Carmack & Holm 2013). Results also showed significant negative relationships between job stress and support from family, co-workers, and supervisors and between emotional exhaustion and supervisor and coworker support. In short, forensic coaches who experience higher levels of job stress and emotional exhaustion are the coaches who perceive they are not receiving needed support from their family, coworkers, and supervisors. Absent from these findings is administration. This is a surprising omission. Administration often turns to successful coaches and teams to "sell" the university, using the successes of the team to bolster the academic image of the university. Administrators might provide forensic educators with the needed funding needed to travel to larger tournaments and recruit competitive students. This could increase stress for forensic educators, but it is possible it does not create enough to outweigh the support.

Finally, the research yielded results showing that coaches who were part of programs with five or more coaches reported significantly higher levels of coworker support than those with four or less (or no additional) coaches. To successfully coach and manage a team, coaching staffs need to be cohesive units. Increased coworker support, in the form of other coaches, could be because of a sense of shared values and commitment and seeing team accomplishments as a communal effort. Feelings of coworker support may be the result of those shared perceptions and activities. It could also be that a larger coaching staff has more influence and recognition in a department, which could lead to more supportive communication from coworkers outside of forensics being passed along to the coaches because there are simply more connections in the department and more coaches to receive the comments.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations with the current study. First, the data collected were all self-report data and as such subject to the lens of human bias. But given that the data being collected related to perceptions of support, self-report techniques were most appropriate. Second, the sample size (111 participants) is relatively small. This limitation

is tempered, however, by the fact that the entire population size of active collegiate forensic coaches is estimated to be 200-250. Finally, when asking about coworker support, we did not clarify who counted as a coworker. It is possible that some participants answered the questions with other coaches in mind, while others may have been thinking about non-forensics faculty members.

As an exploratory study, there are a variety of future projects from this line of research. Future research could examine the role of social support messages from team members to coaching staff. Given that the members of a team would not necessarily fall under any of the groups identified in this research project, students on the team comprise a significant amount of coaches' interpersonal relationships. This piece is the relationship puzzle is important for understanding coaches' support matrix. Additionally, this study focuses primarily on organizational factors that influence support, with interpersonal factors as a secondary emphasis. Future research could separate the two areas, examining interpersonal and familial stress and burnout as a result of coaching and stress. This study only reports perceived support from coaches' perspective. In order to understand the complexity of support, future research needs to explore how families, administrators, coworkers, and supervisors perceive the support they provide forensic educators. More research is also needed examining the potentially gendered nature of forensic education. If male and female coaches experience different stressors and receive different support, scholars need to identify these differences in order to identify ways to help all educators. Finally, it would be valuable to explore the impact of social support matching, where the types of support received match the needs of the individual to alleviate the stressor (Cutrona, 1990); For example, if a forensic educator reports experiencing a certain type of stressor, how does the educator seek out and receive a matching type of support? This study did not differentiate the types of stressors experienced by forensic educators; however, this would be an important next step in order to begin to identify specific support tactics.

These results support what many of forensic educators have suspected and reaffirm the importance of supervisors, family, and colleagues providing positive support for the work coaches do in the classroom, during coaching, and at tournaments. Burnout could be mitigated or even circumvented with supportive communication from family, coworkers, and supervisors, but it is important for educators to be communicatively competent in how they seek out support. Given the years of training and education that are required to be an effective coach, as well as the prestige a successful team brings to a department and university, it is organizationally wise to keep forensic educators from burning out. Recognition and respect cost nothing to give and do so much for the coach, the forensics team, the department, the university, and the forensic community at large.

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