

Female Athletic Trainers Working with Male Division I Teams: Exploring their Experiences and
Interactions

by

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Despite representing half of all certified athletic trainers in the United States, females tend to not staff male teams at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level. To date, there has not been much research on female athletic trainers (ATs), especially in positions such as head athletic trainer of a Division I school or at the professional level. Rather, the few studies that have been conducted have focused on the work-life conflict female ATs face and its relationship to higher attrition rates from the profession. The current study extended the examination of female ATs by exploring the experiences of female athletic trainers who currently staff or have previously staffed (within the past 5 years) male Division I teams through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. Findings suggest that gender stereotypes and sex roles, various levels and types of support, and mentors/role models influenced participant experiences. These findings suggest possible causes of higher attrition rates for women than men in the athletic training field besides work-family conflict and suggest a new avenue of research to be explored further.

Female Athletic Trainers Working with Male Division I Teams: Exploring their Experiences and
Interactions

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	5
Gender & Sex Roles.....	5
Hegemonic Masculinity.....	7
Institutionalization.....	10
The Glass Ceiling.....	12
Hegemonic Masculinity, Gender, and Athletic Training.....	13
Work-Life Balance.....	14
The Current Study.....	15
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	16
Theory.....	16
Critical Theory.....	16
Phenomenology.....	16
Hegemonic Masculinity.....	16
Current Study.....	17
Participants.....	17
Procedures.....	18
Analysis.....	18
Transcription.....	19
Coding.....	19
Credibility & Transferability.....	20

Peer Review/Peer Debriefing.....	20
Negative Case Analysis.....	20
Memoing.....	21
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSION.....	22
Gender Stereotypes & Sex Roles.....	22
Support.....	26
Spousal Support.....	27
Administrative Support.....	27
Personal Support.....	28
Burnout.....	29
Mentors/Role Models.....	30
Professionalism.....	31
Negative Case.....	33
Limitations & Implications.....	33
Conclusion.....	34
REFERENCES.....	36
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....	44
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS.....	46
APPENDIX C: STUDY QUESTIONS.....	47
APPENDIX D: RESULTS OUTLINE.....	49

Chapter I: Introduction

Gender bias is defined as “behavior that shows favoritism toward one gender over another...most often, the act of favoring men and/or boys over women and/or girls” (Rothchild, 2007). This is an issue which most workplace settings must be prepared to confront. There are laws in place to protect individuals from race, religion, and sex discrimination which can prevent both men and women from obtaining particular jobs and to make sure those individuals are treated fairly in the workplace (“About the EEOC”, para 1). Many gender discrimination laws were created to protect and safeguard women in their career positions, as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC) “very first decision held that a policy terminating female flight attendants once they were married was sex discrimination” (Yang, 2015, para 2). In fact, the EEOC’s chair in 2015 indicated that testimony was given at a meeting indicating that one in four women encounter harassment in the workplace (Yang, 2015, para 10). Gender bias traditionally favors men but there are some instances where gender bias may be in favor of women, such as in the field of nursing. However, most professions are predominantly male-driven fields where it is more likely to occur. The business of sport, as a male-driven field, is an area that has significant potential to be affected by gender discrimination and gender bias in all levels of administration from athletic trainers to coaches to athletic directors (Mazerolle 2012; Duehr, 2006; Whisenant, 2002). For example, Rhode and Walker (2008) determined that the number of men’s intercollegiate teams with a female head coach was fewer than 2% and 17.7% of all intercollegiate teams have a female head coach.

Athletic training is an area of athletics that can sometimes be overlooked, as many people in the general population intertwine personal training and athletic training. The National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) defines athletic training dimensions as “prevention, emergency

care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention, and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions” (NATA, 2014). Athletic trainers who attend an undergraduate program complete a four-year accredited bachelor’s degree program including a strenuous curriculum, practicum exercises, and supervised clinical experiences completed at various professional workplace settings. There are also entry-level master’s degree programs where a similar curriculum is completed in two years. In addition, individuals must pass a national board certification exam and, in most cases, apply for licensure in the state in which one works. Athletic training, like many others, is a profession requiring significant time and dedication to working with athletes as well as continuing education seminars and classes. Certified athletic trainers work in a variety of professional settings such as secondary schools, colleges, universities, physical therapy clinics, and as outreach personnel for hospitals.

There has not been much research on female athletic trainers (ATs), especially in positions such as head athletic trainer of a Division I school or at the professional level. Most research has focused on the work-life conflict women face and the lack of retention of female athletic trainers due to this issue (e.g. Mazerolle, 2013; Eason et. al. 2014). Athletic training is becoming much more diverse in both gender and race but this diversity is not reflected in positions working with high profile sports which are often viewed as the face of the profession. This becomes more apparent at higher level positions such as head athletic trainer (Mazerolle, 2012; Ohkubo, 2008; Gorant, 2012). Of course, every woman in the coaching world does not necessarily want to be a head coach, but it is interesting to look at the makeup of head coaching positions as most people tend to reference head coaches only. This idea is mirrored in athletic training as many women do not hold head athletic training positions and many do not wish to do so but from those outside the profession, that is who is recognized first. This points to the idea

that some women, who wished to be head athletic trainers and now do so, have broken through the invisible glass ceiling and there is now a question brought to the table of how they did it. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2016) reported that the percentage of women holding the head AT position at the Division I level was 19% for the 2015-2016 year. This is a significant difference from the 49% of assistant AT positions held by women the same year. To put this into context, in the most recent data from March 2016 the NATA reported that 55.1% of its members were women (NATA, 2016). No woman was head athletic trainer for an NFL team (Lipchick and Robinson, 2015, pp. 14). These numbers point toward distinct differences in the representation of women in particular athletic training positions. In addition to gender bias, possible explanations include hesitancy to pursue head AT positions, perceived work-family challenges, and organizational barriers (Mazerolle, Burton, & Cutrufo, 2015).

It is documented that women face difficulty when trying to work with male sports. Some male coaches as well as some male ATs believe that a large part of caring for male athletes is making sure they are comfortable in the locker room and a female AT would upset that comfortability (Duehr, 2006). This may be tied to the belief that women, who in the past were viewed as softer and more nurturing, were regarded as not fitting into the demanding dynamic that male sport requires (Duehr, 2006). Previous research supports this belief that male athletes are more comfortable with male athletic trainers, especially for sex-specific injuries (O'Connor, et. al, 2010).

Although all athletic trainers complete vigorous introductory and continuing education, men seem to staff the positions with high profile collegiate and professional sports disproportionately. This study aims to investigate whether gender bias exists in the athletic training profession through the perceptions and experiences of female athletic trainers (ATs).

Their stories may give us a deeper look into how female ATs navigate the profession and illuminate another possible explanation of the large attrition rates of women in the field.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In order to understand the experience of women in athletic training, one must first understand sport as a culture. Connell (2005) describes sport as a display of masculinity in two ways: characterizing masculinity through physicality and through its institutional organization that emphasizes competition between men and the disregard of women. Although both of these are valid and strong points, this paper will focus on the organizational structure of sport as that is where the field of athletic training fits. Sport divides men and women based on brawn while also enhancing the opportunities of boys and men to learn “masculine” qualities while limiting the opportunities of girls and women to do the same (Kidd, 2013). By creating a space that is mostly male and strengthening athletes’ character and their bonds with male coaches and male staff, this inhibits men from creating those same strong bonds with women in the future (Kidd, 2013). A large part of sport is the allied health care field of athletic training as ATs help to keep athletes healthy and playing the sport they love. Looking from the top down in the field of athletic training specifically, the NATA currently has a Board of Directors that is 36% female and has only had three female presidents in its entire forty-seven year existence (NATA website). This further perpetuates the idea that sport is a masculine domain that women are still trying to break into. As this is a tricky area to understand, it is helpful to go back to the basics of gender and gender dynamics.

Gender & Sex Roles

Scott (1986), states that the term “gender” was conceived in the early 1900s by American feminists aiming to portray an accurate female history and understand what it means to be a woman in the present. Gender affects sex roles imposed on society by cultural symbols, concepts of what normality constitutes, as well as subjective identity (Scott, 1986). This new social

category facilitates a way of looking at social relationships through meanings placed on cultural symbols. Gender is a classification that seems to have a fixed meaning but at the end of the day has no one perfect definition. This also appears in gender identification which is an unstable construct that varies due to the fact that masculinity and femininity are not standard measures as well (Scott, 1986). With this in mind, it is easy to see why the meaning attached to the word “gender” can and has changed over time. This has occurred due to political disturbances, demographic catastrophes, changes in employment patterns, and the development of new cultural symbols (Scott, 1986).

One area in which researchers have sought a better understanding of gender is the workplace. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission deemed sexual harassment a form of sex discrimination and violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (“Guidance: Sexual Harassment Discrimination”, para 1). The EEOC is now “responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information” although all those included today were not covered previously (EEOC website, para. 1).

Murrell et al (1995) noted a possible connection between experiences of discrimination and future encounters with sexual harassment. This study delved into the negative experiences of women in business and professional organizations through survey information retrieved in 1984 and 1991 as well as the impact those experiences had on their career. The findings of this study pointed to one experience of discrimination leading to more experiences of discrimination and discovered a possible connection between discrimination and later acts of sexual harassment. This shows that more longitudinal studies need to be performed in order to see what impact

discrimination truly has on women in the workplace. A beneficial action that could assist women who have been through sexual harassment or discrimination would be to provide social support (Murrell 1995).

The term “sex roles” was first denoted by Talcott Parsons (1942) and describes the differences between males and females of all ages based on both home life (nurture) and sexual interest and attraction (nature). Not only are sex roles related to age but they are also intertwined with kinship structure, formal education, occupation, and community participation (Parsons, 1942). Sex roles in this society indicate that girls and women are meant to be “docile” and “good” where boys and men are “defiant” and “disciplined” (Parsons, 1942). These norms are either “learnt, acquired, or internalized” (Carrigan et. al, 1985). Athletics, especially the level of achievement and competition achieved through sport participation, is seen as a predominantly male activity (Parsons, 1942). Because sex roles denote women as being nurturing and passive, athletics would be contrasting with their sex. Previous studies have shown that this can lead to higher levels of stress and internal psychological battles (Datta & Bhardwaj, 2015). These fundamental gender definitions and issues are all tied to hegemonic masculinity which addresses the concept of power. Those who are in the majority do not have to combat the same issues that those in the minority face as they are generally the group with the power.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell (2005) describes hegemonic masculinity as the “gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women”. Individuals who benefit from hegemonic masculinity may not actively involve themselves in practices that marginalize women or may not even be viewed as powerful people. Corporate

masculinity is most important to maintain hegemonic masculinity and is difficult to disrupt (Connell, 2005). This can be seen in the government, military, and various institutions. It is difficult for women to try to combat hegemonic masculinity as this construct is always changing as the “currently accepted” strategy changes over time.

One foundational aspect of hegemonic masculinity is that women exist purely as potential sexual objects while men are not and, therefore, must be responsible for the sexual validation of men (Carrigan et. al, 1985). This limits women to one purpose, as sexual objects, while men are active in multiple areas of life and defines women as inferior to men. The existence of hegemonic masculinity adds to the numerous obstacles women must face as they participate in “non-traditional” spaces, such as the workplace and athletics (Carrigan et. al, 1985). Over time, this definition shifted as Connell (2005) described hegemonic masculinity as a set of procedures that are carried out in order to maintain men’s dominance over women. These procedures are only carried out by a portion of men but is still considered normative as it required the power positioning of other men to be successful. Hegemonic masculinity is also tied to situational circumstances, therefore, its components can change over time (Connell, 2005). This concept can be used in many areas of life including education, criminology, media representations, and general gender politics (Connell, 2005).

Exploring hegemonic masculinity within the organizational structures of athletic administrations at the collegiate level was the next step. Walker, et. al (2011) aimed to determine if hiring bias existed against qualified and overqualified female applicants for a men’s basketball coaching position based on stereotypes, traditionalist gender-role attitudes (men are providers and women are caretakers), and gender-role congruity theory (traditionalist gender-role beliefs influence leadership-role attitudes). The study found that the participants perceived qualified and

overqualified female applicants as having low job-fit and were recommended for hire significantly less often than male qualified applicants. However, female participants rated the overqualified female applicants higher than the male participants in all categories (Walker, et. al, 2011). The results of the study showed that many participants uphold traditionalist gender-role beliefs which led them to consider women to lack in qualifications and believe athletes would not show them respect (Walker, et. al, 2011).

One suggested reason many individuals believe that women cannot coach men's sports, such as college basketball, is that women lack playing experience as men play more "athletically" than women do. Although, one could argue that this is true, this same point does not seem to hinder any less athletic men from high level coaching positions (Walker & Bopp, 2011). A phenomenological study examining the experiences of women coaches of men's basketball done by Walker and Bopp (2011) illustrated that women coaching men felt respected but also felt their ability to the organization was still not accepted and had to work harder to prove they deserved to have their position. An interesting piece that influenced hiring women coaches is the "good old boys club" versus the "good old girls club" scenario examined in the 1990's by Lovett and Lowry (1994). The authors examined the leadership make-up of high schools in Texas and determined that when a woman held a leadership position and had influence on the hiring process there was an increased chance of more women coaches to be hired there, especially if women became the dominant gender employed (Lovett & Lowry, 1994). However, this notion of the "good old girls club" is significantly less effective than the "good old boys club" backed by masculine hegemony.

Many of these same issues faced by women in coaching are also experienced by women ATs. The negative outcomes of a "good old boys" approach is usually seen as homologous

reproduction, or the hiring of individuals who resemble those currently in power. In sport, heterosexual white males are those in power and therefore men tend to be active in the various areas of sport and make it hard for women to do the same (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016). In fact, a previous qualitative study showed that “men perceive the role (head AT) to be a man’s job and attempt to continue to hire a male over a female” (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016). This difference in hiring practice based on sex roles and gender stereotypes can be explained by institutionalization, which is a process that varies by organization and includes informal norms, selective hiring, and administrative customs (Selznick, 1996).

Institutionalization

Traditionally speaking, more boys and men participated in sport than girls and women but this has shifted in the past few decades (Chalabaev, et. al, 2013). In addition, gender stereotypes categorize sports where activities with characteristics such as physical contact or aggressiveness are deemed masculine (i.e. boxing) and activities with characteristics such as grace or expressiveness are deemed feminine (i.e. dancing) (Chalabaev, et. al, 2013). Young boys often begin participating in organized sport at an early age, such as Little League for example. In this organized sport, often the competitive structure is the focus instead of play or enjoyment (Connell, 2005). Fostering competitiveness is believed to aid in defining the masculinity of those involved, even if it isn’t their reason for participation. This is then translated into other aspects of life including the organizational structure of corporations and institutions. This organizational aspect was combatted with the passing of Title IX which is a law requiring institutions that receive federal funding from the Education Department to incorporate all individuals in various areas of the organization including recruitment, admissions, counseling, athletics, discipline, and employment (“Title IX and Sex Discrimination”, 2015).

Title IX is designed to protect individuals from sex-based discrimination in education programs or activities at institutions that receive federal funding (“Title IX and Sex Discrimination”, 2015). This law has pushed for equal opportunities for men and women at all colleges and universities. The main focus of this law is not athletics, but this department has seen significant change since its implementation. Unfortunately, not all schools adhere to the policies that Title IX put into place. As previously mentioned, Title IX has a much larger scope than athletics but it has provided many opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports from which they were previously excluded (“Title IX and Sex Discrimination”, 2015). This is partly because gender inequality is perceived as an “institutionalized practice”, or just the way things are done (Cunningham, 2008). These beliefs become so normal to society that they are taken as truths and how things must be done. Institutionalized practices are formed based on history, traditions, and habits of those involved (Cunningham, 2008). Institutionalization was originally defined by Broom and Selznick (1955) as “the emergence of orderly, stable, socially integrating patterns out of unstable, loosely organized, or narrowly technical activities” (p.238). This is related to gender inequality as this is an informal norm that is still displayed as women are underrepresented and marginalized in collegiate athletics by way of decreased opportunities and resources.

Institutionalization is also referred to as external hegemony, which illustrates men’s dominance over women while internal hegemony focuses on the social dominance of one group of men over all other men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of hegemony focuses on success and the possession of power that leads to the creation and destruction of social groups in order to obtain and maintain that success and possession of power (Donaldson, 1993). This must be maintained through influence from the media and punishing those who choose not to

conform to the “normal” defined by those in power. Donaldson (1993) further explains that the foundation of hegemonic masculinity is that men compete with each other to receive sexual validation from women who exist primarily to do this for them. Society is so engrained in this “normal” set by those in power, typically upper class white men, that those who are oppressed by this system, women for instance, go along with it because it is familiar. Although not all men practice hegemony, most benefit from its general use in society (Donaldson, 1993).

Hegemony is fed by negative gender stereotypes and inequalities that have become normalized in society. Cunningham (2008) illustrated a three-point plan to combat institutionalization including political pressures, functional pressures, and social pressures. Political pressures are those dealing with power such as team names like “Lady Bears”. Functional resources are those involving performance, fans, marketing, and promotion. Social pressures include the diversity makeup, changes in the makeup, and changes to the social norms of the workforce. Without diversity, there tend to be individuals who are outsiders from the majority norms and may face obstacles that the majority does not. Being outsiders comes with some added hindrances that those in the majority do not confront, including the “glass ceiling”. Lips (2005) defines the glass ceiling as “a barrier that keeps people from rising past a certain point” that is “transparent and therefore virtually invisible until the person crashes into it” (pp. 495). This is an obstacle that women in many male-dominated fields confront and some break through.

The Glass Ceiling

As women tend to be the minority in various workplace situations, their limited power produces a glass ceiling that keeps them from forming the strong bonds and networking that can propel men in the same field. This effect is experienced by women who strive for leadership

positions usually inhabited by men. There has even been some suggestion of a second glass ceiling (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). The second glass ceiling affects women who make it to one of the coveted leadership positions only to experience bias based solely on status. This manifests in lower salary increases as well as bonuses and other fringe benefits. A glass ceiling in this situation reflects a more significant inequality that warrants policy intervention (Cotter, et. al, 2001). More specifically in the workplace, it is an invisible barrier that limits minorities and women from reaching high positions in organizations irrespective of their qualifications (Cotter, et. al, 2001). There are differences between gender inequality and the presence of a glass ceiling. A glass ceiling is present if there is a significantly higher difference in the gender makeup at higher levels of the organization, however, if the same level of disparity is found at all levels within the organization, it is merely gender inequality (Cotter, et. al, 2001). There seems to be a parallel between the coaching and athletic training worlds so we will first explore the relationship between gender and coaching.

Hegemonic Masculinity, Gender, and Athletic Training

There is a profound lack of literature examining hegemonic masculinity and athletic training. In fact, most of the literature encompassing gender and athletic training focuses on work-life balance and the influence of family dynamics on attrition. There are also a few theses and dissertations discussing player perceptions of female athletic trainers or the experiences of female athletic trainers. The present literature will be discussed here as there has been evidence of a relationship between difficulty balancing work and family and women leaving the field.

Walk (1994) conducted a study that examined the experiences of female student athletic trainers and graduate assistant athletic trainers. Although his study can't be generalized to the female athletic training population as a whole due to the use of a small sample from a single

university, there were significant conclusions drawn. Results demonstrated that the female athletic training students were placed into more feminine roles that did not showcase their expertise or competence as much as their male counterparts. Some participants were even barred from watching their male teams practice by the head coaches and had to remain in the athletic training room. One reason for this was that plays mentioned included terms relating to female anatomy. Since the student athletic trainers were considered as women first and were viewed in a sexual manner, it was unacceptable for them to be involved (Walk, 1994).

Work-Life Balance

A significant phenomenon in the field of athletic training is work-family conflict, which describes the tension that occurs when time spent on professional tasks limits available time for family-related duties (Mazerolle et. al, 2008). In essence, an individual's job requires so much that it keeps them from spending time with their families. To examine this further, Mazerolle et. al (2015) conducted a study of Division I head ATs via open-ended questions in a web-based survey examining work-life balance. Themes discovered through data collection were: being or having a positive role model, urging staff to take time away from the athletic training room, cohesion in the workplace, and support from the institution's athletic administration (Mazerolle et. al, 2015).

Not only is work-life balance an important issue for employed professionals like ATs, it has also been shown to influence retention rates as it increases job satisfaction (Mazerolle et. al, 2015). In 2010, Goodman et. al conducted a study to help identify elements that influence whether or not women remain in the field of athletic training. It was determined that the following four factors helped to keep women in the field: increased autonomy, increased social support, enjoyment of the job, and kinship responsibility (Goodman, et. al, 2010). With such a

demanding job, it is difficult to prioritize personal or family life but that will be what keeps women in the profession longer. Giving women the necessary tools and assistance will allow them to be more comfortable and have increased job satisfaction.

The Current Study

Using this knowledge currently found in literature, this study will focus on nearly uncharted territory—women in athletic training. Previous studies have thoroughly examined attrition and work-life balance but the age-old issue of gender has yet to be addressed. Gender bias in favor of men has already been shown in the coaching realm, even more so since the passing of Title IX (Cunningham, 2008). For those breaking through the barriers limiting women in sport, they sometimes feel as though they are forced into traditional sex roles that hinder their optimal work performance (Walk, 1994). Interviewing women ATs will aide in the exploration of the experiences of women in the field of athletic training and identify any possible gender bias that may exist.

Chapter III: Methodology

Theory

Critical Theory

Critical social theory focuses on the way power and justice interact with cultural aspects of society including the economy, race, class, gender, education, and religion (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 90). Shelby (2003) indicates that ideologies such as critical theory influence social relations, including hegemonic power, in a way that supports the interests of the dominant group. This keeps the power in the hands of the dominant group and can have negative effects on those in the minority groups.

Phenomenology

This study will use a phenomenological approach to examine gender bias in athletic training. Phenomenology was first described by Husserl (1908-1914) but its implications and applicability to psychology and research were not illuminated until decades later. V. J. McGill (1947) described phenomenology as an area of science stemming from philosophy focusing on discovering what is “unconsciously assumed” in procedures of life to explain aspects that are overlooked due to being “seemingly obvious”. This means that phenomenological research is descriptive in nature and aims to observe the human experience as it is lived without any biased beliefs (Omery, 1983). A big concept within phenomenological research is to explore an area of human experience with all of the subjectivity of the individual going through it first-hand allowing the researcher to fully view the phenomena from the eyes of the individual being studied instead of their own (Omery, 1983).

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity has yet to be examined significantly in the field of athletic training. However, this concept centers on the idea that the dominant group put procedures in place to maintain their power (Connell, 2005). In addition, corporate masculinity is another factor that athletic trainers have to deal with that is difficult to disrupt (Connell, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity is relevant in this study as it deals with both gender and power, which may be at play in such a male-driven field as athletics, especially athletic training.

Current Study

The current study examined the experiences of women in athletic training who work with male sports at the NCAA Division I level. Most of the previous literature concentrating on women in athletic training is centered on work-family balance, or the lack thereof. This study is important as it explores nearly uncharted territory of the female experience in such a male-driven athletic field. This study investigates intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level of the NCAA, specifically women in athletic training. This area was of interest as the author is a female athletic trainer looking for more insight into her career field. The focus is on male sports at this level as these sports tend to be representative of elite sport to the general population.

Participants

Nine female athletic trainers from 8 universities across the country participated in this study with an estimated mean age of 39.8 years. Inclusion criteria included: at least 3 years of certification and at least one full season working with a male sport at the Division I level. Seven of the participants currently worked with a football team, one with a men's lacrosse team, and one with a baseball team. Two participants were also head athletic trainers. All of the participants had experience in multiple athletic training settings due to their undergraduate program requirements but many spent most, if not all, of their career at the Division I level. The

four eldest participants were married and had children (44.4%). Participants have spent 16.4 years on average as a practicing certified athletic trainer (min = 4 years, max = 39 years).

Procedures

Participants were contacted via email addresses obtained from exploring Division I athletic training websites and some snowball sampling. Approximately 70 Division I institutions were looked up to find participants. Twenty-two of those institutions had women staffing athletic training positions with 35 women being contacted in total. Follow-up emails were sent to those who did not respond initially. No potential participants declined to partake but just did not respond to emails. The initial email contained a consent letter detailing how the interview will be conducted. Their response of interest in the participation was taken as consent and was double checked verbally at the beginning of each interview.

The women participated in a semi-structured phone interview consisting of approximately 17 open-ended questions. These questions were reviewed by athletic training professionals before their use to ensure they were not leading and would obtain beneficial information. This number fluctuated based on how the participants answered questions as sometimes multiple questions were answered at once. The questions were developed based on the experience, values, and behaviors of female ATs (including the author) and feedback from female ATs working at the Division I level. The interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience, were conducted over the phone, and lasted approximately 35 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded on the author's computer to make sure each participant's responses were accurately recorded.

Analysis

Transcription

Schwandt (2001) indicates that triangulation is a beneficial tool that uses multiple viewpoints to assess the “integrity of the inferences one draws” (p.257). The three viewpoints to be used in this study are as follows: the experiences of the author, a third-party who transcribed the interviews, and peer reviews of the transcriptions. The recording files were sent to a company which specializes in transcribing audio files, Rev.com, and transcribed verbatim by multiple persons. The transcripts were sent back via email for analysis by the author. Three major themes emerged across all participants: gender stereotypes and sex roles, support, and mentors/role models. These themes were all examined through the theoretical lens of hegemonic masculinity which indicates that the corporate structure of Division I intercollegiate athletics programs maintains the marginalization of women through keeping the power with their male counterparts (Connell, 2005). The participants ranged in age, marital status, and geographical location.

Coding

Schwandt (2001) defines coding as a “procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks it down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments” (p.26). This process was conducted using the transcripts based on what present information connected to hegemonic masculinity and critical theory. The interview transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to familiarize the author with the data. Then ‘open coding’, or “coding anything that might be relevant from as many different perspectives as possible”, was conducted on data segments deemed important (Gale, et. al, 2013, p.4). Flow charts (included in Appendix C) were created from the themes that developed across the entire sample to group codes together into categories. Then the data segments were compared and contrasted based on their context within the

transcript based on the categories developed by the author. In addition, meaningful quotes were noted to be discussed with relevant coding categories.

Credibility & Transferability

A key component of qualitative research is proving the validity, or trustworthiness, of the results. When establishing credibility, it is crucial to determine how well the created categories connect the data and how accurately they compare and contrast data segments (Elo, et. al, 2014). This is displayed in the figures included in Appendix C. Transferability relates to the ability to generalize the results to other populations (Elo, et. al, 2014). Due to the specific inclusion criteria for the participants of this study, these results are not very generalizable to any population outside of female athletic trainers working with male teams at the NCAA Division I level. In addition, the following tools were used in the current study.

Peer Review/Peer Debriefing

In order to limit any assumptions or biases from the author, peer debriefing was performed. Yilmaz (2013) defines peer debriefing as “involving another researcher in reviewing the study report to see if it fits or resonates with the experience of both the participants and the audience rather than the researcher” (p.321). All transcripts and codes were read and discussed with a member of academic staff to receive her comments and perceptions of the data.

Negative Case Analysis

Bitsch (2005) describes a negative case as one that conflicts with what the researcher is anticipating. Based on the research question of this study, this negative case sought to identify women in athletic training at the NCAA Division I level who are staffed on male teams who

have not experienced any gender bias in their career. This will be discussed further in the results and discussion section of this paper.

Memoing

Throughout the analysis, the researcher jotted down notes in portions of the transcripts. This act of memoing allows the researcher to engage more with the data and the meanings discovered within (Birks, et. al, 2008)). This is beneficial as memos can help manage assumptions and subjective perspectives as well as help the researcher to retain ideas and extract meaning from the data throughout the coding process (Birks, et. al, 2008). The memos written by the researcher throughout analysis were used to develop the overall themes and to interpret the data with respect to hegemonic masculinity with a phenomenological approach.

Chapter IV: Results & Discussion

This study focuses on examining the experience of women in the field of athletic training who seem to defy gender roles and gender stereotypes by working with male teams at the NCAA Division I level. The information gained was examined through the lens of hegemonic masculinity by focusing on if and how gender and power influenced the responses given. This impacts how the following results are presented and through the lens of another theory, other themes may have developed. There were three components that emerged from data analysis: gender stereotypes and sex roles, support, and mentors or role models. These were examined in depth to determine their influence on female AT's perceptions of the field and the effect on their career paths. In addition, some insight was given towards what happened when the participants had negative experiences in these areas and how they have overcome those difficulties previously.

Gender Stereotypes & Sex Roles

One of the most common topics mentioned by the women was the expectation, consideration, or plan to leave the Division I setting for either a physical therapy clinic or secondary school when they start a family. Multiple women described an expectation that at some point they would have to change the setting they work in because they would not receive the administrative support in order to be in their child's life without losing their job. Three women indicated they were either considering leaving the Division I setting when they decide to have a family or did seriously consider it when they began their families. In fact, one woman has already decided to take at least five years off from the profession when she has children in order to be able to spend time with them. Two of the three women identified that their decision was based on the environment of the profession not being favorable to family life, however it was

mentioned that it was especially tough for women in the profession. These women also alluded to leaving the Division I setting being a step down and not having a clear idea of what they would like to do, or for how long.

This is an example of how traditional sex roles are associated with multiple facets of life, including one's occupation (Parsons, 1942). Traditional sex roles indicate that women should be homemakers who are responsible for most of the caregiving activities with the children while men are supposed to put work first and be the breadwinners of the household (Berdahl, 2013). Stereotypes such as "mommy brain" say that women lack concentration, especially towards their work, after having children (Berdahl, 2013). In fact, a previous study, Cuddy, et. al (2007), showed a significant association between gender and perceived competence based on a questionnaire assessing descriptions of consultants completed by undergraduates. This study noted that participants rated childless men and men with children as equally competent but childless women significantly more competent than women with children (Cuddy, et. al, 2007). Karen mirrored this belief in her interview while discussing what setting and team she was job hunting for after becoming certified by saying

"...most of my clinical experience had been in football up to that point ...but I knew it was pretty unlikely for a woman to get a position right out of graduate school".

Expectations of traditional sex roles seem to also be present in the relationship between coaches and female athletic trainers assigned to their teams. The lens of hegemonic masculinity tells us that women are potential sexual objects for the sexual validation of men, nothing more (Carrigan et. al, 1985). This would further explain why it is so hard for some to understand and accept women in such a masculine space. This is reflected in the interviews as three women reported receiving sexual harassment from a coach and one woman had not but said

“...if I didn’t acknowledge that [this underlying current of either sexual harassment or exploitation] existed then I would be walking through this with my eyes closed” (Sandra).

For one-third of the women who were interviewed to indicate some form of sexual harassment, the complete lack of literature on the subject is alarming. There are multiple articles examining female student-athletes’ experiences with sexual harassment but no such look into athletic training. Lindsay described a negative experience this way:

“I’ve definitely worked with coaches who have tried to cross that line of professionalism and thought that it was appropriate to speak to me in a way to suggest that I was there to be looked at or to be an object of their affection, essentially.”

Kristin illustrated an incident as a student athletic trainer:

“...there was a time as a student where I was definitely sexually harassed by a coach and that went on way longer than it should have before I finally spoke up to our head athletic trainer and called attention to the situation, that it was inappropriate. Then it came to light that he was harassing multiple other female student athletes.”

Tracy indicated that while a coach she had previously worked with were positively communicating with her, she later discovered

“...he had made some off color remarks about why he thought the coach let me run the strength and conditioning program that spring, like sexual offhand remarks.”

Institutionalization of this structure influences informal norms, selective hiring, and administrative customs and can hinder women from reaching positions they may want to inhabit (Selznick, 1996). Moreover, a study conducted by Mazerolle and Eason (2016) showed that the

head AT position is a position with homologous reproduction, or continual hiring of men over women. These issues were reflected in the stories of the participants in this study. Cathy reflected on the beginning of her head AT career in this way:

“I applied for the job and I was lucky that the Dean of Students who was also the athletic director at the time, was just very open minded and willing to take a risk. Because those days (1978), there were not females that were heads, let alone females in the profession at all.”

Although this anecdote is not recent, these practices are still reflected in the organizational structure today. For example, Meredith recalled an incident where an athlete was injured during a game and she felt that she needed to immediately call her supervisor for backup on her decision to withhold him from the rest of the game.

“I called our head team physician, and I said to him, I'm going to need you to back me up, because I knew it was going to be an issue. And I told him everything that had happened and everything that was going on, he has a concussion, he's done. And said okay, and I said, 'I just want you know they're going to fight me.' Like I knew the coaches were going to fight me, and [the team physician] backed me up...He said, 'Call me if you need me.' ... [The coach] said to me, 'Who makes the call if he plays? You?'... 'You or your boss?' And I was like, 'I do.'”

A large part of institutionalization is that these beliefs are then internalized and treated as “normal” by all involved even though those in power are the ones who defined it (Donaldson, 1993).

One way that women fight against these obstacles is through taking the time and effort to earn the respect of the male athletes and coaches they work with. This issue falls in line with men not accepting women in such a non-traditional setting. When asked about coach conflict, Cathy noted that a previous football coach did not “learn my name until like three years in. He would just see me and go ‘Hey trainer.’”. According to the women in this study, this can be minimized by being more “assertive”. This was explained as “standing up for themselves” or “establishing an authority figure” when it came to their decisions about treatment and return-to-play guidelines. This strong action can lay a foundation for trust to be built between all involved. Assertiveness was mentioned by multiple participants as a way to contest the social norms that were expected from them and made it easier for male coaches to respect their decisions. On this topic, Lindsay mentioned:

“...this culture in our...world, for lack of a better term, whether it is just athletic training or just sports, or if it’s outside of that, we are perceived as weak and can’t handle things. Because it’s a man’s sports. And that’s tough for me, because I like to assert myself as who I am and what I can do, anything that a male can, if not better. And I think I’m just as qualified.”

Support

Participants mentioned the three following main types of support that help them manage their work and family obligations: spousal support, administrative support, and personal support. Each type of support was critical as it balanced responsibilities paired with some type of stress release. When the three work together, the work-family conflict is significantly easier to manage. Previous studies have shown that specifically, “a supervisor (head AT) who promoted and lived

a balanced lifestyle; a head AT who also supported autonomy within his sports medicine staff; and a supportive, collective group of ATs who believed in teamwork and job sharing” aide athletic trainers with managing family dynamics with work requirements (Mazerolle & Goodman, 013, p. 671). Support is important for all athletic trainers as work-life conflict may arise regardless of sex, marital status, or family status (Mazerolle et. al, 2008).

Spousal support

When participants were asked about how they manage work-family conflict, all of the married participants (44.4%) indicated that a supportive spouse is key. The phrase “tag-team parenting” was used to describe the household style where both parents worked full-time (Cathy). This support from their spouse can come in the form of respecting their job and work ethic, having an occupation with stable 8-5 hours, or a profession with very flexible hours allowing for a balance of childcare responsibilities. Without this support, it is difficult for a female AT to balance her family duties, especially as caregiver, with the time demand of being a Division I AT. This is stressful because traditional sex role theory indicates that women are supposed to take care of the children which many women have internalized over time and feel it is an obligation (Berdahl, 2013). Having their spouse value and respect their profession is key. In addition, the large time commitment required from the athletic training profession, with treatment hours, practices, and travel for competitions, makes it difficult to balance work life with familial obligations. Marital status has an effect on what type of work-family conflict may ensue but not whether or not a conflict will arise (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008). With most of the literature examining women in athletic training focusing on high attrition rates, spousal support is very important as it can increase retention (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008).

Administrative support

A study conducted by Mazerolle and Goodman (2013) pointed towards the importance of a supervisor or head AT who valued time outside of athletic training. One participant of that study indicated that this support aids the athletic trainer in balancing their responsibilities by helping them to not feel like it is an “all or nothing” arrangement (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013). Supervisor support is significant as supervisors have direct influence on the level of autonomy that athletic trainers have at their place of work (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008). Increased autonomy leads to increased job satisfaction and reduced attrition rates. Participants in the current study noted significant support coming from direct superiors during conflict with coaches about treatment plans. This can be very helpful as many women indicated it took much longer to gain the respect of certain coaches, especially football coaches. Another area participants noted a significant amount of support was from coworkers when needing to find coverage due to family issues such as a sick child. With coworker support, the load of the job can be more widely dispersed allowing for a more reasonable work schedule (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013). Coworker support can also ease the stress when familial challenges arise, such as a sick child at home (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008).

Personal support

The third area of support mentioned by participants in this study is the idea of having time away from the job. This acted as a release and allowed them to have some level of separation between work and home. This concept is important because this helps to maintain balance and stimulates renewal after working long hours (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013). Some examples provided included dog ownership, exercise, and a friends circle away from sport. When discussing personal time, Simone mentioned

“I’ve always had friends outside of here and I think that helps, too, to keep you grounded.”

Personal time away from work is especially important for single ATs as there may not be that familial support in the area whereas married ATs have the opportunity to receive additional support from their spouses (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008). A key aspect of this outside interaction is that it should be encouraged and accepted by the head AT (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013). If it is accepted at the top, its importance will usually be appreciated at all levels (assistant AT, associate AT, graduate assistant, undergraduate student) (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013).

Burnout

Work-family conflict is positively correlated with burnout and attrition (Mazerolle, et. al, 2008). If the athletic trainer is not receiving enough support from these areas, it becomes harder to maintain balance and they could end up burnt out. Lindsay identified her stress levels in this way

“...I easily can ruin relationships by bringing a lot of [stress] home with me and worrying and constantly making work my life”.

At its conception, the term “burnout” was used to describe individuals in people-oriented professions who display the following three components: emotional and/or physical exhaustion, reduced job productivity, and increased depersonalization (Perlman & Hartman, 1982). Although previous studies have shown that ATs present a lower level of burnout than other health care professionals (Capel, 1986 & Kania, et. al, 2009), one limitation of all of these studies is that ATs who are burned out are much less likely to participate as they are already spread thin (Kania, et. al, 2009). Although burnout has been documented as very low, stress levels indicated

otherwise. Hendrix, et. al (2000) conducted a study examining burnout in NCAA Division I athletic trainers and found that those with less social support and more athletic training issues reported higher levels of stress. The athletic training issues discussed were examined using the Athletic Training Issues Survey (ATIS) and included topics such as not having enough personal time, budget limitations, and personality conflicts (Hendrix, et. al, 2000). This is meaningful because Gibson, et. al (2016) found that stress is the most consistent factor associated with burnout in ATs through an examination of three studies examined in a Critically Appraised Topic (CAT).

Mentors/Role Models

A strong indicator of how the participants seemed to view the field of athletic training and their place in it appeared to come from their first introduction to the field. Eason, et. al (2014) found that mentors or role models can have an influence on a female AT's view of job commitment. In addition, role models who maintain good work-life balance can have a significant positive or negative effect on how female ATs view work-life balance. Essentially, mentors and/role models have the tools to inspire or discourage how female ATs pursue their careers and how they perceive work-family conflict (Eason, et. al, 2014). In fact, Karen stated that

“Job placement in any setting is about networking, and so having someone to make those introductions for you and kind of coach you through that process in all stages of your career, is valuable.”

When asked if there was any significant mentor along the course of their career who they felt helped them along the way, multiple women mentioned their very first supervisor in a high

school or undergraduate setting. In fact, two women from the same area, Cathy and Simone, mentioned the exact same man who seemed to lack that institutionalized bias seen across athletics and viewed the athletic training room as a place to learn and grow, regardless of gender. In addition, participants indicated that they had at least one strong female role model along the way. Lindsay indicated there were two significant female mentors she remembers from her collegiate experience. She stated that a supervisor from her undergraduate college was a “single mom of two who worked her butt off and supported both kids and didn’t take no for an answer and kept working” while one from her graduate college had a “family of five and worked with the D1 level for twenty some years”. These women showed her that it was possible to have a family and career.

This mentorship had significant positive effects on the career paths of these women and seven of the nine interviewed believed that a mentoring program of some kind would be beneficial to female student ATs and all student ATs. One aspect of the program, presented by Tracy, is that the mentee should know or respect their mentor instead of just pairing women together. Instead, Tracy suggested “offering a class along the lines of you know, how to be a mentor, how to be a leader...then maybe encouraging women to take it more”. This type of class would allow both male and female student ATs to have access to this information, helping all, but making sure women take advantage of this opportunity and could give women information they do not normally get without creating a divide between male and female students. However, there are issues that female student ATs face that male ATs most likely will not that should be addressed such as the idea that women “have to be better than the guys to prove you’re as good as the guys” (Karen). In fact, by four out of nine of the women specified professionalism as a crucial element of being a women in such a male-dominated field.

Professionalism

The participants viewed professionalism as a way to combat any negative experiences, especially as a preventative measure. Being exceedingly professional in how an individual dresses and approaches clients can hinder others from questioning your competence or decisions. In addition, being professional reduces the assumption that heterosexual women cannot be in such a male dominated space without introducing some sexual aspect to the area. This assumption is believed due to traditional sex roles and even internalized by some women in the field who take derogatory comments as indications that some people “think it is kind of the boys network and they’re just being funny by saying that” (Renee). Being professional to a fault will limit negative ideas from entering and influencing interactions between coworkers, supervisors and employees, and ATs and clients/patients. Karen gave her input on this topic by saying,

“You’ve got to be professional beyond reproach, because there is still a problem of being concerned about unprofessional relationships between female ATs and male athletes.”

Often, an AT’s perspective of professionalism, and its relationship to work-life balance comes from a supervisor or mentor early on in their career (Eason, et. al, 2014). This has a substantial influence on how ATs, especially female ATs, progress through their careers as well as their career goals. Professionalism is especially important at the collegiate setting where many athletes are adults and sexual harassment from athletes to AT or vice versa is a more likely issue. Multiple participants indicated that “setting your boundaries” is important and should be done early on to limit problems from athletes, coaches, coworkers, and supervisors.

The participants in this study indicated that the components that influenced their career path and retention/attrition in the field of athletic training are gender stereotypes and sex roles, a

support system, and some form of mentorship. All of these concepts can have either a positive or negative effect on a female AT's perceptions of the field of athletic training and their place in it. This is important information as this is a previously overlooked area of study and can be very beneficial in the retention of female ATs, which is a large problem in the profession. This is the first step in the direction of uncharted territory that could significantly increase the retention of female ATs and their positive experiences.

Negative Case

One participant, Julie, indicated that she had not faced any previous discrimination by saying,

“I don't think I've ever really been truly discriminated against because of being a female”.

This is a key data segment as this indicates that this sample is not biased to only include participants who have experienced gender bias or discrimination during their careers. Previous research has indicated that discovering and reporting negative cases increases the credibility of the study as this provides a possible other explanation for the phenomenon (Anney, 2014). A larger sample size may encounter a higher number of negative cases.

Limitations & Implications

A limitation of this study is the small sample size and the homologous nature of the participants but it provides possible perspectives of women in athletic training, their ambitions and hindrances. This may be due to the smaller size of the population as well as the significant

scheduling difficulties that exist due to the high travel demand within the athletic training profession. Another limitation of this study is the seasonal timing in which the interviews were conducted. Participants were initially contacted during the late summer/early fall. Due to their busy schedules, interviews were unable to be conducted until winter/early spring. This also could be a potential reason that response rate was so low (25.7%).

The common themes and ideas from the participants provide a foundation for forthcoming exploration in a new direction. There are multiple avenues that could be explored in future research. First, increasing the number of participants could show whether the results described in this study truly express the experiences of women in athletic training or if this is an abnormal sample. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine the intersectionality of race and gender within the profession, especially the experiences of African-American women in comparison with these results. Lastly, widening the lens to include NCAA Division II and/or Division III athletic training staff may provide different results as those organizational structures tend to be somewhat different as there are usually fewer athletic trainers on staff with more sport responsibilities. In addition, the results of this study can be very beneficial in athletic training education programs as well as for coaches and athletic administrations to possibly increase sensitivity and understanding within institutions. These results could lead to the development of mentoring programs within athletic training education programs as well as sexual harassment training for athletic trainers and coaches to work towards decreasing the occurrence of negative experiences of women in athletics.

Conclusion

This study gave women in athletic training, especially those in the higher profile collegiate setting, an opportunity to tell their experiences in the profession and how those

experiences shaped their perceptions of various aspects of the field. Much of the previous literature focused on work-life balance which has been shown to have a meaningful relationship with the high attrition rates of women in the athletic training profession. This research has shown one of the reasons that women are leaving the field but that does not mean it is the only reason. The data was examined through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, i.e. focusing on power and how those who have said power use it to influence the organization and people around them. This lens affected how the data was analyzed and the results that stemmed from it. This means that these results are only one possible piece of the puzzle. If another researcher examined the same data through a different theoretical lens, they may uncover slightly different results.

Through this specific theoretical lens, the current study explored another possible reason for lack of retention of women in athletic training besides work-life balance, focusing at the collegiate level. Although gender discrimination is not seen in salary pay as athletic training job postings usually do not include the sport with which the individual will be working. This maintains salary equality within the profession. However, the results indicate that possible gender bias and gender discrimination in the field exists and has some influence on hiring practices as well as women's career goals and views of particular aspects of the profession. This is an area of research that should be explored further through the use of other qualitative and/or quantitative studies to determine its true scope.

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Appendix A



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
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Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Continuing Review Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Michele Hudgins](#)
CC: [Melanie Sartore](#)
Date: 3/7/2017
Re: [CR00005607](#)
[UMCIRB 16-000194](#)
Female Athletic Trainers and Male Sports Teams

The continuing review of your expedited study was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 3/7/2017 to 3/6/2018. This research study is eligible for review under expedited category #7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Consent Letter.docx(0.02)	Consent Forms
Email Script.docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Study questions.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Thesis Proposal.docx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Appendix B

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age*	Marital Status	Children (yes/no)
Cathy	63	Married	Yes
Julie	25	Single	No
Karen	39	Married	Yes
Meredith	27	Single	No
Lindsay	26	Single	No
Renee	36	Single	No
Simone	59	Married	Yes
Sandra	47	Married	Yes
Tracy	36	Single	No

Table 1. Table including participant demographic information. *Estimated age based on educational information.

Appendix C

Study Questions

1. Background info

- a. Tell me about yourself. What drew you to athletic training? How did you get into athletic training?
- b. What have you done in the past? Schooling history?
- c. Athletic training history? What teams have you worked with and at what school?
- d. Have you always wanted to be an athletic trainer at this level (Division I)?
 - i. If not, why?
 - ii. What are your career goals?
 1. Have they changed over time?
 2. If so, why?
- e. Can you describe your experiences with women's team? Men's teams?
- f. Can you describe your experiences working with the coaches of the men's teams?
- g. What have you learned working with the _____ team versus the _____ team?
 - i. For example: "What have you learned working with the softball team compared to the baseball team?"
- h. Do you plan to stay in the profession?
- i. What made you stay in the profession so long?

2. Being a Woman in Athletic Training

- a. Have you ever felt uncomfortable working with a team?
 - i. If so, what was an experience?
- b. Do you feel like you have ever been treated differently working with a team?

- c. What have been your experiences traveling with women's teams? Men's teams?
- d. How do you deal with the demand of the job?
 - i. How have you managed your family dynamics and/or partner?
- e. Was there any significant professor or supervisor or mentor who helped you reach this position?
- f. Who do you seek athletic training advice from when confronted with a challenge?
 - i. What about with negative experiences?
- g. If you could give any advice to a student female athletic trainer, what would it be?
- h. Do you think a mentoring program for female athletic trainers would be beneficial?
- i. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Results Outline





