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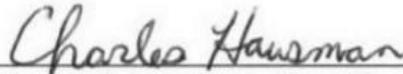
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PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS WORKING IN MALE  
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

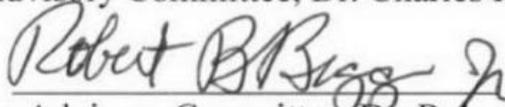
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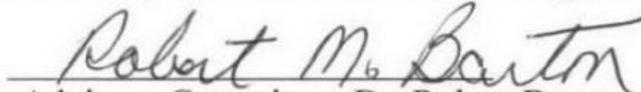
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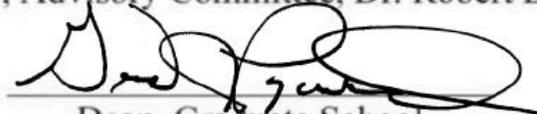
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PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS WORKING IN MALE  
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

By

TAYLOR MAE TEMNICK

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE

2018

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## DEDICATION

To my dearest mother: I think we both can agree that when you gifted me with Dr. Seuss's *Oh, The Places You'll Go* for my high school graduation, a doctoral defense was not something either of us saw for the future. Although this was not your favorite idea of mine, if it were not for your foundation, guidance, and support, I would not get to wear a raspberry beret. No daughter will ever be as lucky as I have been to have you as a mother. I hope I've made you proud. I love you more Oz.

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To my final committee member—my beloved friend and mischievous mentor, Dr. Robert Barton, you possess an alacrity and vanguard that is unmatched. Your influence, contributions, and career have significantly shaped the profession and so many individuals in and out of the field of athletic training. I'm so honored to have had the opportunity to meet you six years ago and develop the friendship we have today. I would not be where I am today without you. Thank you for your tutelage, your support, your time, your investment in this dissertation, and the joyous memories we've shared. You have always taken me under your wing, thrown me to the sharks, pushed me beyond my limits, and caught me when I've fallen. You are so very dear to my heart and I hope I've made you proud.

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To the 2011-2013 University of the Cumberland’s Athletic Training Staff, special thanks to JJ Blackburn, Chelsea Robl, Brina Strebeck, and especially Peggy Blackmore-Haus. Thank you all for recruiting me for graduate school and having a role in developing the athletic trainer I have become. I can’t express how much gratitude I have for all of you and how fondly I recall our memories. Mrs. Blackmore-Haus, thank you for always being available to guide me and help me, especially through my dissertation process.

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Without all of you, this endeavor would not have been pursued. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

## ABSTRACT

“In athletic training, males have dominated the profession for the initial 30 years of its existence, opening the doors for women only as recently as the 1970s” (Dieringer, 2007, p. 106). There has been a limited amount of research and data regarding female athletic trainers working with and at the level of professional sports, particularly with male teams. Within the last decade there has been an increase in interest of female athletic trainers and their professional pursuits; especially since 2007, there have been more females in the field of athletic training than males. The following literature and results provide various pieces of information which describe the current state of female athletic trainers in male professional sports.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Problem

According to the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), an athletic trainer is a "highly qualified, multi-skilled health care professional who collaborates with physicians and other health care providers to deliver preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic interventions, and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions" (NATA, 2015). Athletic trainers are certified and licensed health care professionals who are expected to be competent and show mastery in domains such as 1) injury/illness prevention and wellness protection, 2) clinical evaluation and diagnosis, 3) immediate and emergency care, 4) treatment and rehabilitation, and 5) organizational and professional health and well-being. Athletic trainers are a diverse group of educated, hard-working, individuals with careers in a myriad of fields; from tactical or military fields, traditional health care settings, performing arts, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, professional or Olympic level athletics, high school, recreational, and collegiate athletics.

Athletic training is a professional field made up of board certified (and by most states, licensed) athletic trainers who are represented by a professional organization known as the NATA. This organization does not require all athletic trainers to be members. The purpose of this organization is to govern (via professional standards), advocate, promote, engage, and advance the field of athletic training to other allied health professionals and the public. The NATA was founded in 1950. The Board of Certification, Inc. was established in 1986 and is the credentialing body of athletic

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training. It accredits collegiate athletic training programs, in addition to establishing the standards of practice and continuing education requirements.

Similar to other professions, specifically professional and collegiate athletics, athletic training has faced various issues in its lifespan, including discrimination, specifically gender discrimination. Martin (2013) identified in her review of the literature, that it was 16 years after the foundation of the NATA, when the first female, Dorothy “Dot” Cohen (of Indiana University), joined the NATA. Martin also identifies in the review of the literature that it was not until 1972, two decades after the NATA was founded, that a woman, Sherry Bagagian, sat for the Board of Certification, Inc. exam (Martin, 2013, pp. 3-4). Only 1% of the athletic training membership of the NATA was female in 1974 (Martin, 2013, p. 4). In 1976, trail blazer Gail Weldon became the first board certified female athletic trainer to be hired by the U.S. Olympic Committee and worked the 1979 Pan American games (Martin, 2013, p. 4). Within roughly her first decade as an associate of the U.S. Olympics, she was the director for the athletic training and physical therapy services (1984) and the Medical Director (1991) for the games. Weldon was the first female athletic trainer to be inducted into the NATA Hall of Fame in 1995; 45 years after the NATA was founded. Fifty years after the foundation of the NATA, Julie Max became the first female President of the organization.

Martin utilizes data taken from the NATA’s website, pertaining to the percentage of members based on gender, and identifies that only as recently as 2006 are there more women in the membership than men. The Figure 1.1 (Martin, 2013, p. 7) shows a growing trend over an 11-year period of females within the organization increasing,

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allowing the reader to assume the majority of these members are athletic trainers; although the membership is made up of non-certified athletic trainers and professionals

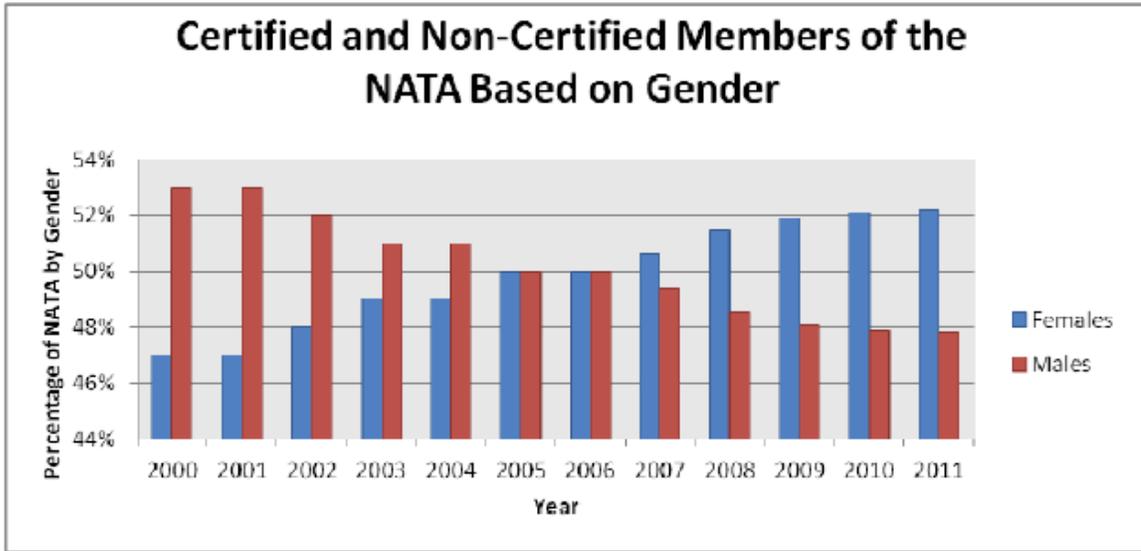


Figure 1.1. NATA member demographic of gender based on NATA Ethnicity-  
Demographics

One could infer from the graph and historical context that it took 55 years, from the NATA's inception in 1950 to 2005, for the membership to be 50% female. Although it is clear to see the increase in female athletic trainers and/or members of the NATA over time, this increase is not seen in the "traditional" settings of athletic training, especially within the professional level of sports. Martin (2013) highlights that the first female to break into male professional sports as an athletic trainer, was Michelle Leget in 1997 into the NBA. She was followed by Janet Panek, also hired in the NBA. Ariko Iso was the first female athletic trainer to work in the NFL in 2002 and Sue-Falsone became the first female head athletic trainer of professional sports, specifically in Major League Baseball, in 2011.

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It has been documented on multiple accounts and publications that the profession of athletic training, especially in traditional athletic settings, is a demanding profession. When taking into consideration just how busy the athletic trainers are, especially those who work with professional sports, Graf (2014) brings to light just how extensive the time constraints are. In the following table, Table 1.1, Graf (2014, p. 30) shows just how arduous each season is.

Table 1.1

Game/Time Commitment Chart

League	# of Games	Regular Season Time Frame
Major League Baseball (MLB)	162	April-October
National Basketball Association (NBA)	82	October-April
National Hockey League (NHL)	82	October-April
Major League Soccer (MLS)	34	February-November
National Football League (NFL)	16	September-December
College Football (Division 1)	14	August-December

*Source:* Graf, C. (2014). *Female athletic trainers in male professional sports.*

(Undergraduate paper, St. John Fisher College). Retrieved from

[https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=sport\\_undergrad](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=sport_undergrad)

Seasons may be as little as three months while others may be as long as nine months; what Table 1.1 does not portray is the number of hours in a day dedicated to the care of each athletic team, nor the hours of a work week. It also does not express the frequency of work; there may be one day off a week or three days off an entire month.

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These hours can be very strenuous, not only for the family or loved ones, but for the working individual themselves, regardless of their gender.

“While our educational programs are teaching athletic training skills, they should also be teaching their students such socialization skills as how to balance their professional and personal lives to ensure that all of these students know what the expectations of the profession are and can deal with them” (Dieringer, 2007, p. 112). In her dissertation, Dieringer (2007) not only highlights the patriarchal biased perception of females working within the field of athletic training, particularly [male] professional sports, she emphasizes that we have not adapted our educational curriculums for our future athletic trainers.

In addition to the skewed implementation of social and business aspects of education for athletic training students and teaching them awareness of discrimination and equality of athletic trainers, Momsen (2014) suggests that we should focus on the female athletic trainer’s leadership aspirations. “The findings of this study (Momsen, 2014) present conflicting data to Gorant’s (2012) findings of low leadership aspirations in women. Further investigation of both women who become leaders and those who do not become leaders will give a clearer picture of the phenomenon” (Momsen, 2014, p. 78). Although Gorant focused her work on female athletic trainers in the National Collegiate Athletics Association Division I football setting and Momsen (2014) focused his study on female athletic trainer’s in leadership positions within the NATA, Momsen’s point is one that this researcher believes to be transcendent to females working as athletic trainers in male professional sports. Do the women who are hired in this arena possess specific

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personality, character, or leadership skills that have enhanced their ability to integrate into the male dominated profession?

### **Problem Statement**

When someone is asked about professional sports, women are unlikely to be the first thought that comes to mind. If women do come to mind, it is more than likely an athlete or team, rather than a CEO, general manager, coach, official, or health care provider. Unfortunately, women in male-dominated fields, such as professional sports, have been under-represented, under paid, or often just looked over. “As a profession that has historically been dominated by males, women have struggled to earn equal salaries, award recognition, and leadership positions in the NATA” (McConeghy, 1996; Dieringer, 2007, p. 136). However, there has been an inaudible and discreet interest in women working and expanding in the field of athletic training. Marcia Anderson initiated this conversation on women working in athletic training with her 1975 study, *Pioneer Women Athletic Trainers: Their Side of the Story* (Ebel, 1999).

“Patriarchy is well reflected in men’s professional sports, where such behaviors as sexism, sexual harassment, violence against women, and homophobia are tolerated. As an example of this, female athletic trainers have not been permitted to successfully break into jobs in men’s professional sports, even though males often work with female professional athletes” (Dieringer, 2007, p. 119). Women in the professional sports arena have been a topic of discussion in social media and across our vehicles of communication within the past two decades. The National Football League, in 2002, created the Rooney Rule which requires each franchise within the league to interview minority candidates in order to promote diversity (Smith, 2008). Although this rule is 15 years old, there is an

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acute awareness of the lack of diversity today. Acceptance has grown yet female athletic trainers are still under-represented in this profession.

As of 2015, women made up 54% of the gender demographic of athletic trainers per the NATA's Ethnicity-Demographics. Martin (2013) noted that in 2012, women made up 52% of the national athletic training membership. Literature in athletic training has observed female athletic trainers working in NCAA Division I positions, however little research has investigated these women working in the male professional sports arena. "There is still information that needs to be answered to fully understand why there is a lack of female athletic trainers in male professional sports" (Graf, 2014, p. 23).

Various studies within the last 15 years have begun actively seeking out the reasons why female athletic trainers are not employed in male professional sports, especially when they make up over half of the NATA, and have so since 2006 (Momsen, 2014). "Persisting questions remain: Why are women having difficulty ascending to leadership positions, receiving awards, remaining in the profession, and competing for positions with their male counterparts for equal compensation?" (Dieringer, 2007, p. 4). The problem is, why are female athletic trainers under-represented at the male professional sport level?

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research is to explore the personal, leadership, professional, and educational experiences and perspectives of women athletic trainers who are working in male professional sports. By investigating these perspectives, the researcher hopes to unveil reasons as to why so few female athletic trainers work in male professional sports. Because previous research and information is sparse for this criterion, this study will be

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examining and collecting data from women working in five American male professional sports: 1) National Football League (NFL); 2) Major League Baseball (MLB); 3) National Hockey League (NHL); 4) National Basketball Association (NBA); and 5) Major League Soccer (MLS).

“Even though women today have had a great impact in the field of athletic training, there are still some sports that are male-dominated regardless of Title IX. Some of these sports include football, ice hockey, and rodeo” (Martin, 2013, p. 9). From the literature gathered, the translational questions have been to understand why female athletic trainers are still under-represented at the professional sport level, as well as, in the roles of higher administration and/or as head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I or in leadership positions within the NATA.

A goal of this study is to aid athletic training educators in their curriculum development of knowledge and skills to help prepare athletic training students for successful integration into professional sports, should that be an avenue of professional interest. If we can identify and create a curriculum of professional and leadership skills into future generations of athletic trainers, we may see more gender-neutral leadership and professional roles in male dominated areas of athletic training. “Athletic Training students and novices learn and acquire practical skills and knowledge from interacting with mentors and role models” (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016, p. 554). The knowledge and skills the researcher is hopeful to identify will be beneficial for athletic training educators, clinicians, and students as well. The aspiration of this researcher based on the results of these findings is to “open up the opportunity for potential female athletic trainers to pursue that level [male professional sports] of sport and not be judged because

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of their gender” (Graf, 2014, p. 23). If we can identify and create quality athletic trainers possessing care, commitment, communication, integrity, and knowledge, particularly women, as defined in Raab, Wolfe, Gould, and Piland’s 2011 study, our society may be able to see even more gender equality and transparency in the domain of athletic training.

### **Forming Research Questions**

This research will explore the domain of female athletic trainers working with male professional sports. A great deal of research has occurred in the NCAA, particularly in the Division I, II, and III settings. Female athletic trainers have been the focus of several studies which have researched their employment position (head, associate, or assistant), their years of experience, the experience they received prior to entering the field, and the reasons they leave the profession and the collegiate athletic training setting. The present study will hopefully identify similar findings. As Graf (2014) said, “To fully understand the reason why there is a lack of female athletic trainers in male professional sports is difficult to measure due to the lack of current female athletic trainers at the professional level” (p. 3).

The researcher found it intriguing that there are so few women athletic trainers working with male professional sports. This researcher has identified that there are currently less than 45 potential participants which fit the criterion of being a certified female athletic trainer working with the NFL, NHL, MLS, MLB, or NBA. To date, the numbers of women working in male professional sports are sparse and difficult to identify. More female athletic trainers today are presently working in the NFL than in the MLB, NBA, MLS, or NHL. Why are there so many women within the field of athletic training, but they are only working within the clinic, high school, or lower collegiate

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levels of the junior colleges, NCAA, or NAIA? What are the factors, experiences, or perspectives that women are considering when selecting their career advancement or placement?

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Thematic Sections**

This researcher has identified various social theories as the ideal lens to view and develop the present study. The findings from this study will be more specific and directional by utilizing one of the social theories to develop, execute, and interpret this study. These social theories and perspectives are further discussed in the theories section of this paper. The theories, particularly Preference Theory, developed by Hakim (2000), was utilized by Gorant in her 2012 study as the lens in which she investigated female athletic trainers working as head athletic trainers.

Leadership qualities and traits have been identified in the research which the researcher believes to be a vital component of analysis. Momsen notes in his 2014 study that leadership is often discussed, especially in dissertation form or in books of theory, however it is not documented in peer reviewed journals. Leadership has a myriad of definitions and interpretations, but the overall premise the researcher identified was that leadership consists of a change agent relationship with motivations of growth and development. Kutz and Scialli (2008) investigated baccalaureate and graduate (master's and doctoral) programs and identified leadership content areas which were rated by "experts", consisting of faculty, preceptors and/or clinicians. Understanding issues and trends in professional development, awareness and practice of behavioral ethics, understanding and practicing industry-specific regulatory policies (i.e., Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), understanding and implementation of risk management of legal issues, and understanding and practicing time management and

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evidence-based medicine concepts were identified as the top-rated content (Kutz & Scialli, 2008, p. 208).

Kutz (2010) asked a small sample of athletic trainers (reported to have leadership experience) to identify top leadership characteristics; they included excellent verbal communication skills, ethical, responsible for actions, crisis management, nurturing professional relationships, emotionally stable, effective delegation, innovative leadership, credible, and critical thinking. By incorporating some of the leadership content identified in Kutz and Scialli's 2008 study and Kutz's 2010 study, practicing female athletic trainer's working with this study's selected male professional sports may be better adept to select and identify leadership qualities of their success.

Throughout the literature research, aspects of leadership have been a reoccurring theme as it pertains to the success of female athletic trainers. Momsen's 2014 dissertation identifies various leadership perspectives and behaviors of these women working within the NATA, one of the 12 districts under the NATA, or a state organization (as an extracurricular to their full-time jobs). Momsen notes that the participants in his study learned and developed their leadership abilities from informal training, especially from mentors and preceptors or educators. In Raab, et al.'s 2011 study, they sought to identify characteristics, behaviors, and abilities that characterized an athletic trainer as a quality healthcare provider. These constructs included care, communication, commitment, integrity, and knowledge. The findings from all of these studies share overlapping and translational conclusions.

It is imperative that athletic training educators teach and implement actions, strategies, and knowledge of leadership, social skills, and clinical skills that will prepare

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future athletic training students as they transition into the professional realm of athletic training. “Because leadership is expected of athletic trainers and other allied health care professionals, determining specific leadership content is important. Leadership content provides the foundation necessary to develop objectives, learning activities, and competencies surrounding the practice of leadership” (Kutz & Scialli, 2008, p. 203).

### *Barriers in Literature*

Previous research has associated the lack of female athletic trainers in male professional sports due to barriers, such as work-life versus personal-life, gender, “old boys’ club,” and personality theories. Parenthood, kinship responsibilities, work-family conflict, and incongruent role perceptions were high-lighted as barriers for Mazerolle, Borland, and Burton’s 2012 study. Momsen’s 2014 study provides a rich background of barriers for female athletic trainers, including initial refusal to include women in the profession, limited opportunity for advancement or financial compensation, discrimination, socialization, and patriarchy. “The most surprising, and positive, finding of this study was that nine of the women stated that they did not believe they faced any barriers or challenges to their career or leadership positions because of their gender” (Momsen, 2014, p. 50). Momsen’s (2014) study identified that barriers may not be as predominant now as they initially were within the early days of the profession.

As previously mentioned in this text and by Graf (2014), the field of athletic training does not fall under the typical eight-hour work day. These demands may be even more exacerbated at the professional sport level; an athletic trainer working with professional football can anticipate a minimum of a 16-week season (see Table 1.1). In

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order for the readers to fully fathom the work schedule of a NFL athletic trainer, a comprehensive schedule must be portrayed.

### *Time Demands in Literature*

Before the four-month competition season ranging from September until December or January, January starts a very arduous off-season schedule. Athletic trainers in the NFL begin performing end of season physicals with their athletes. In addition to continuing therapeutic treatments and rehabilitation programs for athletes with manageable injuries, the athletic training staff makes physician referrals for athletes who have chronic or impairing injuries or require surgical referrals and additional diagnostic treatments and/or evaluations. In the month of January, one can assume that an average work week is five days, consisting of 40-50 hours.

In February, athletic training staffs are preparing for the NFL combine, which is a seven-day event requiring travel to Indiana. For athletic trainers and sports medicine personnel of every NFL franchise, the week begins with two days of 10-hour meetings, followed by evaluating and collecting information on NFL combine participants. This consists of performing pre-participation screens with over 300 NFL prospects. Meanwhile, athletic training staffs continue during the month of February, both in Indiana and at their primary facilities, to address insurance or worker's compensation issues, perform injury evaluations, rehabilitations, treatments, or making further referrals.

As March and April arrive, the work week becomes cumbersome as the athletic training staffs begin sifting through the pre-participation screens of their current and potential players and prospects, evaluating financial risks of players as they pertain to health. The work week for some of the athletic trainers is spent in meetings with upper

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management discussing athlete risks; this takes up about 20 hours per week, in addition to the daily responsibilities of the 30- to 40-hour work week. At the close of April, athletic training staffs are preparing for the NFL draft, and continuing to perform daily or weekly responsibilities. Athletic trainers are treating or working with athletes required to come in for therapy and off-season training for the majority of the work week, Monday through Thursday.

In May, a rookie mini camp takes place, possibly during the Mothers' Day holiday weekend. Towards the end of May, five weeks of organized team activities of off-season practices (on-field practices in helmets only) last into June. A down period exists of two to three weeks; but this down period is for the athletes. Athletic training staffs begin preparing for pre-season the second week of July. As July nears its end, pre-season officially begins, consisting of five to six weeks of practices, scrimmages, and team functions. Pre-season is typically known for its multiple training sessions, which may escort a surplus of injuries which need to be tended to.

One should assume that there are 52 weeks in a calendar year. For the athletic training staff working in the NFL, roughly 23 to 24 weeks (five days in a work week) consist of the off-season responsibilities. If one combines pre-season training and in-season practices and competitions, the athletic training staff works five to seven work days per week for roughly 23 to 24 weeks. Work weeks in the off-season consist of roughly 40 to 50 hours, while in-season work weeks may be 50 to 70 hours per week, not including travel (personal communication, March 15, 2017). Although Graf (2014) demonstrates a regular season, her chart does not portray what the schedule is outside of a 16-week season.

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The researcher illustrates the year schedule for those working in the NFL to share that there may be a possible 46 to 48 weeks that athletic trainers are working more than 50 hours per week and that the athletic trainer does not get to spend with their family. A game day could possibly start at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning for pre-game treatments, staff meetings, and coach's reports, and possibly end between 6:00 pm and 1:00 am, pending the start of the game.

This schedule is may not be conducive for individuals, regardless of gender, to develop and nurture relationships, begin or maintain family life, or engage often in personal endeavors or hobbies. One can see why work-life balance or time demands have been a barrier identified in the literature. These long hours and extensive schedules can lead to burn-out and family stress. In addition to the hour requirement, the reader can safely assume that the majority of athletic trainers are salaried employees. Continuing this assumption, one can assume the pay may not match the hours or effort of labor for athletic trainers; During the literature review process, the 2016 Fair Labor Standards Act was introduced, and numerous employers were forced to identify and compensate salaried employees whose pay was less than \$40,000. Although this was delayed and eventually not passed, this dynamic would have significantly impacted the outcomes of salaries, particularly for athletic trainers.

Working within the NFL is not the only profession that battles this type of work schedule, but it is understandable to assume that schedules may seem undesirable to men or women working as athletic trainers who may have other aspirations besides work. In Mazerolle, Dawson, & Lazar's 2012 study on career intentions of athletic training students, they pin-pointed that female athletic trainers typically leave the traditional

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setting or profession at the age of 28. They also found that female athletic training students spend more time evaluating this career as they consider their future lives and families.

### *Work-life Balance in Literature*

Family life was another theme that arose from the literature research. Throughout the literature, traveling was a key factor in whether a female athletic trainer, who was family oriented, had to take into consideration. Several participants, especially seen in Momsen's 2014 study, personally narrated the importance of having a supportive partner who took on a more significant family or home life role. In Goodman, Mazerolle, and Pitney's (2015) work-life balance research, spending time with family was found to be a stress-relieving agent for athletic trainers; in a profession which has strenuous hours, spending time with family, enough to relieve stress, may not be feasible. This may in fact cause more stress for the athletic trainer and be a deterrent or barrier perceived that prevents women from working in this profession.

### *Relationships and Mentors*

Outside of the family, relationships were another reoccurring theme from the literature collected. Specific mentions of mentorship were examined in several studies. In Mazerolle, Borland, & Burton's 2012 study, they defined mentorship as a vehicle to combat gender discrimination. "The sex of the mentor was not a strong influence for the participants. Rather, their mentors demonstrating professional behaviors and supporting the professional development of the student were important factors" (Mazerolle, Borland, & Burton, 2012, p. 698).

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Sheryl Sandberg discusses in her book, *Lean In*, (2013) that when women seek out (or understand that their success would benefit from obtaining) a mentor, they need to find someone who will advise them and advocate for them (p. 65). “Studies show that mentors select protégés based on performance and potential. Intuitively, people invest in those who stand out for their talent or who can really benefit from help. Mentors continue to invest when mentees use their time well and are truly open to feedback.” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 68).

Along with mentorship, having a support network of loved ones and work support (especially from staff and supervisors) was another theme. Females, in the previously mentioned study, were more successful when they had the support and confidence in their staff and supervisors. They were also beneficial, as seen in Graf’s 2014 literature review, for female athletic trainers who had their own families. Having an understanding staff and supervisor created an environment in which the woman athletic trainer did not feel guilty when they needed to meet the needs of their family.

### **Seminal Works**

Initially in the literature research, Mazerolle and her work surfaced multiple times through keyword searches and also as work cited by other authors. Mazerolle emphasizes themes such as gender discrimination in athletic training, work-life balance (especially for women), and women working at the collegiate and high school level. Mazerolle’s broad research interests have benefited the researcher in the review of the literature.

Mazerolle’s breadth of research allowed the researcher to explore possible avenues of causation for the number of women working in the professional sports arena. Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo (2015) identified that since the passing of Title IX, an

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increase of women has been seen in the field of athletic training, especially for women holding the position of graduate assistant athletic trainer or assistant/associate athletic trainer, as well as head athletic trainer. There has not been a significant increase in women holding the position of head athletic trainer, especially in the NCAA Division I setting. The 2015 qualitative study conducted by Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo affixed and supplemented the work of Gorant (2012). Their findings identified that women do not seek out leadership positions; they still believe that a male support system (or lack thereof) create or hinder opportunities, and women head athletic trainers self-identify as adaptive.

Mazerolle's other works, particularly her most recent publication in 2016 with Eason, identified that mentoring, role models, leadership skills, and communication skills were all successful factors to promote women in head athletic training positions. This study's results were particularly interesting to the researcher, especially because the participants in the study identified less competitive (i.e. win at all costs) work environments to be one of the primary sources of their success and duration in the role of head athletic trainer. Family-friendly environments also played a role in why more of these head athletic trainers were at the Division II and III levels. This study identified mentors and role models, being a leader not a follower, persistence and dedication, being a hard worker, having creativity and seeking out solutions to problems mirrored other literature about leadership success in athletic training.

A primary source whose study had a significant impact on this researcher was Gorant (2012). Gorant's intent pursuit on illuminating the female athletic trainer at the collegiate level was an influential source for the researcher.

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The rationale for this study was to enter the minds of the women who have successfully ascended to high rank in the field of athletic training and draw upon their common experiences to develop a better understanding of what it takes to achieve their goal. The study was able to identify commonalities in career path, and successful strategies or personal characteristics that enabled these women to persevere in the field of athletic training. Through the experiences of others, young women in the profession can then learn and grow. (pp. 8-9)

Gorant's journey identified leadership skills through experiences of female athletic trainers and translate this information to current and prospective students.

Gorant's work utilizes a similar demographic of participants that the researcher investigated for the current study. Gorant's work provided the researcher with a vast amount of information and perspective on the research design.

Another work that was beneficial to the researcher was Momsen's 2014 study on female athletic trainers and leadership qualities. Momsen (2014) examines the perspectives of a small sample of female athletic trainers, all with different careers, but all in leadership positions within their state, district, or in the NATA. Momsen (2014) uses a qualitative, open-ended interview format which he conducts over the phone and digitally with the participants. The perspectives provided from the research were very rich and provided the researcher with a great deal of perspective.

### **Theories**

There have been a variety of themes and theories that have surfaced from the dissertations, publications, and studies collected for the literature review. A theme that has captivated this researcher's attention has been the psycho-social theories, especially highlighted by Graf (2014). Theories and themes such as Social Role Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Preference Role Theory have been repeatedly seen in the

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dissertations and articles that the researcher has reviewed. In Dieringer's 2007 study, she highlights several other theories of interest:

Functionalist theory and conflict theory both offer ideas regarding how social life is controlled by economic powers and maintaining the status quo (Coakley, 2006; Costa & Guthrie, 1994). Critical theory, by contrast, is based on the assumption that sports and social norms are related, but both change as power in society changes. (p. 14)

She also taps into the feminist theory, which may fall under postmodern, liberal, radical, or other theories. This feminist theory assumes that women are held back and secluded based on patriarchal themes.

In Gorant's 2012 study, she expands further on Dieringer's 2007 dissertation by presenting the homologous reproduction theories; these assume that any group that is in a position of authority will continue to maintain this authority through successors of similar qualities. Gorant (2012) quotes Acosta and Carpenter's 2008 study stating, they "have supported this theory by demonstrating that male Athletic Directors are more likely to hire male coaches to coach female sports, and, of course, very few have made the leap to hire a woman to coach male sports" (p. 32).

Graf, in her 2014 study, points out the Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory. The Social Role theory states that gender behavior and personalities are unique to males and females and that these are illuminated through various jobs or positions. More or less, this is the stereotyping of males and females as to what careers would be better suited for them (i.e., females are nurses or teachers while males are firefighters, doctors, or lawyers.) Gorant (2012) points out in her study that one means of discrimination which falls under Social Role Theory is that job descriptions may be written in ways which eliminate female applicants (p. 40). Role Congruity theory states

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that males and females are evaluated or judged based on their agentic (male) or communal (female) characteristics, which identify the roles in which each gender should fill; leaders are typically more agentic, so when a female is in the role of a leader, there are often double standards placed on her. Gorant (2012) and Graf (2014) both present the Preference Role Theory, introduced by Hakim (2000, 2004), which states that women have a choice in the type of life-style preference they want to have. They may be work-centered, home (family) centered, or adaptive; each role determines success in the area (professional or home) the woman wants to excel in. Gorant (2012) and Mazerolle, Burton, and Cotrufo (2015) both identified in their qualitative studies that working women, in the field of athletic training, ideally sought out or identified as having an adaptive preference.

Home centered or family centered preferences place the priorities of the woman on developing and nurturing family or personal experiences over work or a profession. Women who may fall into this group would identify that they would leave the work place or seek out employment that would be more conducive to marriage, children, or family life. Work centered preferences mimic that of the home centered, however the professional advancement or career goals are the priority. Gorant (2012) notes that this group resembles the male model (p. 5). The male model may be understood as the social attitudes and behaviors, (i.e. self-assertive, dominate, aggressive, and competitive,) which allow men as a group to pursue and obtain the highest positions in any hierarchy over women as a group (Goldberg, 1993; Hakim, 2000, p. 282). Family life, marriage, and children are put on the back burner as time and efforts are placed on professional, academic, or work related tasks or feats. The last group known as “adaptives,” most

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identified with throughout the research, are the women who try to balance both family/home life and a career or professional goals. The important finding, especially noted by Gorant (2012) is that these women tend to seek out balance and reject the possibilities of promotions due to the possibility that an increase in responsibilities may decrease time and efforts spent with the family (p. 6).

Prior to the researcher finding the various theories that pertain to female athletic trainers, the researcher focused the literature review on various characteristics or traits that would permit (female) athletic trainers to be successful in leadership, managerial, or in this case, professional sports settings. Traits such as hard-work, commitment, determination, dedication, communication, honesty, and loyalty have been addressed repetitively. Additionally, qualities or skills obtained by successful athletic trainers were the use of role models, mentoring and networking, and having support groups (or administrators'/work peers). Prioritizing or focusing on work, having a desire to be at work, and having a strong work ethic were also mentioned. Self-confidence, willingness or tendency to lead or work, having an education and being knowledgeable and current in the field of sports medicine, and possessing management and/or leadership skills were mentioned as well.

From Momsen's 2014 interview with women athletic trainers in leadership positions, the participant "Candace" stated, "You know, I can tell you as many non-success stories in my leadership as success stories" (p. 64). An important finding from Momsen's (2014) results was that possessing some humor or the ability to bounce back from adversity is an element of success. Another component for success that Momsen (2014) presents is the education and awareness invested into society to recognize gender

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discrimination and promotion of women in leadership positions. The review of the literature has provided a breadth of perspectives and theories as to why women, particularly female athletic trainers, have not seen successful integration into male professional sports.

### **Analyses of Research**

The area of emphasis for the literature review search has been focused on female athletic trainers and leadership qualities. There has been a great deal of study on female collegiate athletic trainers, especially in the NCAA Division I. The information collected from these sources has identified various factors affecting or contributing to the current role of women in this setting. One study the researcher found sought to identify female athletic trainers working in male professional sports, but this study did not utilize the women in this criterion. The researcher specifically tried to seek out experiences and characteristics that would identify women who have successfully integrated into the field of athletic training for professional sports. Gorant (2012) identified in her literature review, “When working in positions where the leadership model was more masculine, women’s leadership abilities were significantly less valued than those of their male counterparts” (p. 34). The significance of this quote is the presumption that women have previously been discredited as leaders due to their communal nature, had to work at a higher rate (i.e., take on more tasks or work longer hours) and work harder than their male counterparts in order to receive recognition, promotion, or merit (Dieringer, 2007).

Additionally, the researcher sought out to identify factors which would deter females from wanting to work in male professional sports or within the traditional athletic settings of athletic training. These factors ranged from work-life balance,

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communication skills, mentorship, professional and home support, position responsibilities, and discrimination or harassment. The household roles also played a factor in career and position selection if a woman had a family or wanted a family. Although numerous studies have looked at women athletic trainers, some working with male patient populations (i.e. high school or collegiate athletes,) and information is readily accessible in this domain, the researcher sought to explore the domain of male professional sports to increase the literature in this area. Another perspective the researcher took was searching for articles which identified leadership skills and characteristics of successful and/or quality athletic trainers.

### **Conclusions of Literature Review**

“The most important area may be further research on the barriers women may or may not face during their professional career or leadership endeavors” (Momsen, 2014, p. 77). Of the many themes and content areas that have been presented in the literature, identification of barriers may be an area of value. Since the researcher found it noteworthy that Momsen’s (2014) participants did not identify or claim many barriers in their leadership journey, contradicting the assumptions of several dissertations and studies, the researcher was curious to know if women athletic trainers working with male professional sports share the same perspective. By recognizing barriers which may be common to the researcher’s specific population, future research could then identify how to surpass said barriers. “It would also be appropriate to investigate whether or not the women who rise to leadership positions are more adept at circumventing barriers. ‘One possibility suggested by a participant’s response in this study, suggests that perhaps the

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women in this study are not aware of the barriers faced by other women because they are able to make such barriers non-existent” (Momsen, 2014, p. 78).

Social theories have been a very predominant concept for previous research on female athletic trainers. The researcher believes the importance of the social theories that have been utilized or presented in the literature stem from the agentic or male dominated realm which is athletics. Additionally, the research has emphasized the theme of work-life balance and support systems; because of the rigorous demands and standards the athletic trainer is held to, regardless of gender, these themes play a vital part to the physical and mental happiness of the individuals working in this field. Having a support network at home, with family and friends, and having that similar network in one's career, impact the outlook and overall happiness of a person. In addition to the support, mentorship has been a significant factor in the research.

Other major components of the literature revolved around mentoring relationships, leadership skills, traits, or characteristics, and work-life balance. The literature also distinguished patriarchy as a factor to deter women athletic trainers from this setting.

Female athletic trainers still have not successfully broken into the professional setting, as the men's professional organizations (NFL, NBA, etc.) continue to be hesitant to hire women. In this setting, patriarchy continues to ensure that women are not welcomed or permitted to enter (Coakley, 2006; Costa & Guthrie, 1994) ... the consensus is that women do not belong in the male locker room. People just don't get it, we have professional bedside manner no matter what the setting, but are not given the opportunities to prove it. (Gorant, 2012, p. 107)

The literature gathered and synthesized has been thought provoking and inspiring to the researcher. As the recent interest and investigations have begun to explore and evaluate these situations, beliefs, and contexts, the researcher has already identified a

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shift in the results of the literature. “Future research can build more on the topic of female athletic trainers in male professional sports and open up the opportunity for potential female athletic trainers to pursue that level of sport and not be judged because of their gender” (Graf, 2014, p. 23). As studies progress with time, research will continue to advance, especially for women athletic trainers in this setting and others. Although there were countless explanations and factors identified through the psycho-social theories, previous studies and literature, the researcher was able to ascertain critical factors that would contribute to the design of this study.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

#### **Qualitative Study**

Based on this researcher's exploration of current trends and previous literature, the researcher felt that an exploratory, qualitative investigation was most appropriate to answer and identify the research questions. After reviewing Litchman (2013), the researcher determined that the phenomenological qualitative approach was best to seek out the insights of women who have worked or are working as athletic trainers within male professional sports. Phenomenology allows the researcher to explore and understand all aspects of a phenomenon. Since the desired population of this specific group of individuals accounts for less than 40 persons, the researcher felt the phenomenology was the best investigative vehicle. The researcher sought to understand and portray to athletic training students, clinicians, and educators within the field of athletic training, and readers outside of this field, the lived experiences of women working in the aforementioned setting.

#### **Research Design**

In order not to pollute the researcher's small sample size, a pilot study was conducted in order to examine if the desired research, methodology, and interview questions would produce a well-rounded perspective which would explain a female athletic trainer's perspective in regard to the research question(s). In the fall of 2016, the researcher investigated women working within the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics' Mid-South Conference, which is primarily located in the Kentucky and Appalachian areas. The women were contacted via phone, informed of the intent of the investigation, and all participation was voluntary. The researcher sought out

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to explore the perspectives of women who have or are currently serving as Head Athletic Trainer in the MSC. The research design for the current study was slightly revised following the results of the pilot study.

Originally, the researcher contacted associates of the NATA in the fall of 2015 and spring of 2017 in hopes to obtain contact information for women working as athletic trainers in male professional sports. Due to the voluntary admission of NATA members for their demographic information, the researcher was not able to utilize the NATA's member database in order to obtain participant contacts. Following the contact in the spring of 2017, the researcher began reviewing participants via professional team website directories (PBATS, PHATS, PFATS, NBATA, and PSATS, contact with professional associates, and contact with athletic trainers listed as President or Secretary for professional athletic training societies. After the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, the researcher began contacting the participants via phone, social media, email, and also attended the 2017 NATA convention in Houston, Texas in hopes to obtain in-person interviews.

### **Research Questions**

The original premise of this study originated from the curiosity of the researcher as to why so few women served as an athletic trainer within five (popular) male professional sports, when more than half of the individuals working within the field of athletic training are female. The researcher has four primary research questions that pertain to the women working as athletic trainers within the five specified male professional sports. The questions are:

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1. Why did the females in this criterion pursue and obtain positions as athletic trainers within the professional sports?
2. What leadership or professional skills were taught or learned by the female, which assist(s) her now in her current/former position?
3. How do women working as athletic trainers describe/acknowledge the changes in professional opportunities in this field?
4. What barriers have women working as head athletic trainers and how were those barriers overcome?

The final component of the study was the incorporation of the Preference Theory to comprehend and interpret the results gathered from the study. The women were provided an introduction of the theory and given a description of the three preference styles. They were asked to identify and explain the preference they associated with most.

The researcher was motivated to select these questions because of the varying perspectives they may provide for women serving in the criterion identified. The 10 sub topics identified in Table 3.1, help to elaborate and clarify the selected participants' perspectives as they relate to their experience as an athletic trainer at this level.

Table 3.1

### Interview Topics

Intentional leadership positions/motivations	Career path/resume
Developed leadership skills	Mentors, support systems
Educational influence; rotations, courses	Changes in leadership/jobs available for women
Barriers experienced in position/career	Work/lifestyle preferences
Perspective on women in AT now	Perspective working male sports

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These sub topic questions were developed in order to explore further aspects of the research questions. The semi-structured interview format (see Table 3.1) includes the research questions, sub-topics, and demographic questions, which relate to the participant's education, perspective, and experience to help the researcher understand the current state of the selected participants. Other sub topic questions included mentors, relationships, characteristics and/or traits, skills and/or philosophies, personal, work, or educational experiences, and barriers.

### **Participants**

The researcher was able to work with five participants for the study. The participants ranged from 25-45 years of age and were licensed and certified athletic trainers. All participants attended a Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) accredited bachelors program and all held an advanced degree beyond the athletic training bachelors. Each participant had less than 10 years of experience working within male professional sports. The participants in this study are disguised with pseudonyms by the researcher to conceal their identity and protect their information, which they were informed of in the consent letter and at the beginning of each interview. These names have no meaning: Andrea, Beth, Catelyn, Donna, and Evelyn.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher initially introduced each participant with a description of the study and intent of the investigation. Upon the participant's interest and consent, the researcher read (see Appendix E) and/or sent an email of the participant consent and information letter (see Appendix A) and informed consent (see Appendix D) prior to scheduling the

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interviews. Using the phenomenological philosophy and method of exploring the lived experiences of those affiliated with a particular phenomenon, the researcher used a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix B). The participants also received a copy of the semi-structured interview as a part of the initial documentation sent out. These documents were re-introduced prior to the start of each interview and the participant was granted the opportunity to clarify any questions they may have had about the study.

Each interview was recorded on the researcher's personal laptop, and after the recording was obtained, the researcher transcribed the conversations. Although the interview utilized the semi-structured format, it was open-ended and allowed for the participants to discuss as much or as little as they wanted. Interviews lasted 50-145 minutes. Each interview started with a brief demographic questionnaire and career path explanation. The researcher took notes during the interview process and during the initial and follow-up review of the transcriptions. Once transcribed, the researcher utilized the coding sheet created (see Appendix C) and to identify recurring themes in addition to highlighting themes within the texts. The guided interview format also assisted the researcher in the coding process. Once the transcriptions and coding were completed, the researcher sent the coding sheet or transcription (depending on document length) back to each participant to review. These coding sheets were also sent to the committee for review.

### **Trustworthiness**

Litchman (2013) identifies that trustworthiness includes “transparency of the process, data gathered for a purpose, search for multiple perspectives, change in the researcher and in the practice, and results that matter” (p. 292). The researcher reviewed

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Creswell (2009) and Litchman (2013) as the primary recommendations to ensure for trustworthiness. As shown in the Table 3.2, the researcher utilized Litchman's question strategy (2013, p. 200) in the creation and design of the semi-structured interview format for both the pilot study and current study.

Table 3.2

### Litchman's Question Strategy

Elaboration	Probing	Neutral	Single Question	Wait Time	Special Areas
Expand ideas	Elicit more info	Maintain non-direction; no nonverbal cues; don't add yourself	Ask only one	Allow silences and pauses	Listen, don't assume; probe to verify; don't cut off

*Source: Litchman, M. (2013) Qualitative research in education: A user's guide (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.).*

Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Then, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and identified/corrected any errors in the documentation (grammatical and spelling). A coding style was created in order for the researcher to not shift the coding process or analyze haphazardly. The findings of the researcher were shared with the participants and committee members, known as member checking, in order to ensure that the perspectives and information the participant provided were interpreted correctly and that all information was permitted for use.

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Triangulation, the use of multiple strategies to collect data, was another form of trustworthiness Lichtman (2013) discussed. This was accomplished by utilizing different participants working within the five various male organizations at the professional level. The role of the researcher and personal bias was combated via peer review and debriefing with committee members and participants. The final means of accounting for trustworthiness utilized the researcher's committee review and feedback for the researcher to revise and articulate the data.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used the transcribed interviews and identified themes within the text. The researcher categorized the themes into codes and continued this process until the codes and/or themes were condensed. The researcher identified the themes via key words searches, utilizing the search function within the document, which is provided by the Microsoft Word document. The researcher utilized text color and highlighting functions, also within Microsoft Word, to identify themes and codes. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read through the interviews prior to coding. Notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews and during the first review of the transcript, which the researcher utilized in identifying codes and themes. A discussion and disclosure of anticipated results and expressed findings were disclosed to the participants for their approval or rejection. This was done in order to ensure the protection of the identity of the participants and their employment, resources, and livelihood.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Interpretation

The qualitative method of this research proved to be the best means of identifying and addressing this study. All of the women who participated in the study remarked that they not only appreciated the topic of the investigation, but they appreciated the convenience of the interview. Some participants had mentioned that similar topics had been brought to them, however it was through quantitative or mixed methods such as surveys and questionnaires. These are very time consuming for any athletic trainer, regardless of employment setting, due to the nature of the job.

The present study sought to address the perspectives of women athletic trainers working with male professional sports. Identifying domains such as the motivations to pursue their career and the paths they took to get to where they are, their role models, mentors, support systems, and sharing personal experiences throughout their career allowing the researcher and readers to understand and compare their experiences to the participants. Allowing the participants to share their personal barriers (or lack thereof), advice and recommendations for other athletic trainers, and their personal experiences with other women working in male professional sports enables the participants and readers to understand the perspective of this particular role.

As Gorant (2012) sought to do, this study hopes to identify the pathway, influences, and advice in order to promote women in the profession of athletic training, particularly in the field of male professional sports. The researcher also thought it was important, as in Gorant's (2012) study, to investigate how the participants identified with

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Hakim's (2000) Preference Theory and if this theory may be something worth utilizing when designing curriculums or assignments in courses.

The results of the interviews are organized based on the four primary research questions and the subtopics which related to the themes. Five women agreed to participate in this study and their stories had differences and overlapping similarities. They expressed their incentives to obtain the positions, the role of networking and their mentors, their leadership and professional skills and weaknesses, identified and commented on the barriers, changes, and improvements of the professional sports world, as well as provided advice for future athletic trainers while sharing their own experiences from which the readers and researcher to learn. In Table 4.1, below, is an overview of participant demographic information.

Table 4.1

### Participant Demographics

Variable	Ranges/Values
Age	25-50
Years in Male Professional Sports	2-8
Years as Athletic Trainer	3-15
Educational Degree(s)	DPT (2); Masters (3); Bachelors (5)
Married	2
Children	14
Preference Theory: Self-identified	Adaptive (1); Work-Center (3); Work to Family-Center (1)

### **Interpreting the Research Questions**

As the researcher identified in the previous chapters, little research has been done on women athletic trainers working in male professional sports. The researcher felt that it was important to explore this particular setting in the profession of athletic training due to the amount of certified and licensed women working within the field, as well as the amount of female athletic training students in accredited athletic training educational programs. In addition to the gender numerical factor, professional opportunities and careers within the field of athletic training are being promoted and explored across the nation. The study's research questions and interview questions were selected in hopes of identifying why so few women are in the field of male professional sports and a means as to how to increase the opportunities and interest in pursuing employment in this arena.

### *Preference Theory and Female Athletic Trainers*

Preference Theory was utilized by the researcher as a lens for interpreting qualities and characteristics for the women participating in this study. Preference Theory, as previously defined in the literature review, is the lifestyle choice selected by a woman that aligns with her preferences: 1) family or home life, 2) work-centered or professional advancement, or 3) adaptive, or women who try to balance or place both aforementioned preferences at their forefront.

Work centered women commonly are identified as competitive, goal-oriented, and atypical. Gorant (2012) notes that the women typically pursue additional qualifications (certifications, degrees, or skills/experiences that will set them apart) as well as higher ranked positions (full professor, dean, CEO, COO, head athletic trainer, etc.) Women who were more family or home centered felt that their satisfaction, and the

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role they enjoyed and were best utilized in, was as the head of the household. Adaptive women were categorized as those women who tried to succeed at both home and work, those who were at odds with or who were thrown into the dual roles. Hakim (2000) identified the majority of women in the workforce in this group.

All but one of the participants in this study identified as work-centered women while working as an athletic trainer in male professional sports. Because of the majority of participants identifying as work-centered, the researcher found it interesting when Catelyn shared that someone who has a family may struggle with this particular role.

It's not a very stable job. It you're a work [centered] person like me, but if you're a half and half [adaptive] or a family [centered individual], I just don't think these jobs are for you. That's some it. Some of it is just, I don't know if it's a solo thing or this is the female role, this is the male role, and this is what we do.

Catelyn also pointed out that her career path and life choices played a role in her being more work-centered, rather than adaptive or family-centered. Catelyn was not the traditional student. "So, for me, I didn't have time to waste or whatever, so I've been really focused on my career. I don't think I would be where I am if I wasn't focused on work, truthfully."

All the participants stated that they were very goal and task oriented, each stating various versions of their pursuit and additional efforts taken to work in professional sports. Each did various internships with various professional organizations or sought out experiences with sports that they are currently working with during their accredited, undergraduate clinical experiences and after they had graduated from the bachelors and been certified by the Board of Certification (BOC).

Andrea felt that she was originally more adaptive during her undergraduate athletic training experience, but as her position has required her to move further from

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friends and family, she has become more work-centered. Beth felt that she has always been more work-centered; especially with her undergraduate, graduate, and athletic training endeavors. She went away for her college experience and as her career has continued, she has progressively moved closer to home. "I'm consciously trying to be a little bit more adaptive. But I still find myself work-centered. But, at least I'm aware of these other things, aware of my shortcomings, and that sort of thing."

Donna also stated that she was very work-centered, prior to the birth of her child. She had no intention of starting a family, as her husband also works with professional sports, but she noticed a drastic shift as her family grew.

I was work [centered] 1,000%, all the time, up until the day my child was born, and then I struggled through my last season. I felt like I was not failing at both of my jobs, but I was just so used to giving 1,000% [to the athletes] that I felt like I was not doing a good job at either place, and it just made me so miserable. I felt like I wasn't doing justice to my child, [like I wasn't] able to be fully there for [my child] and then like I was letting players down.

For Donna, the goal-oriented demeanor that drove her through her educational and professional career, also drove her in fulfilling the role of motherhood to the best of her abilities. Donna related more with family centered at the time of our interview than she did during her position as assistant athletic trainer.

Evelyn was the only participant who believed she was adaptive. Evelyn, like Donna, experienced the artful balance of motherhood and working in male professional sports. Evelyn's optimism of the balance between fulfilling her duties as an athletic trainer and mother, although a learning process, radiated through her perspective.

I would say that while I probably put work before family in general, I always thought it was very important to have a balance, a work-life [balance, that] balance between work and when you're not at work. Certain times in the year are more demanding than other times, but I always thought it was important to take the time for myself. I definitely wouldn't say that I'm just all about work, all the

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time. Balance has always been important to me, so even then I would want to say I was more adaptive, but definitely now I would put myself in the adaptive category.

To represent the self-selected lifestyle preference, Figure 4.1 shows the preferences of each participant.

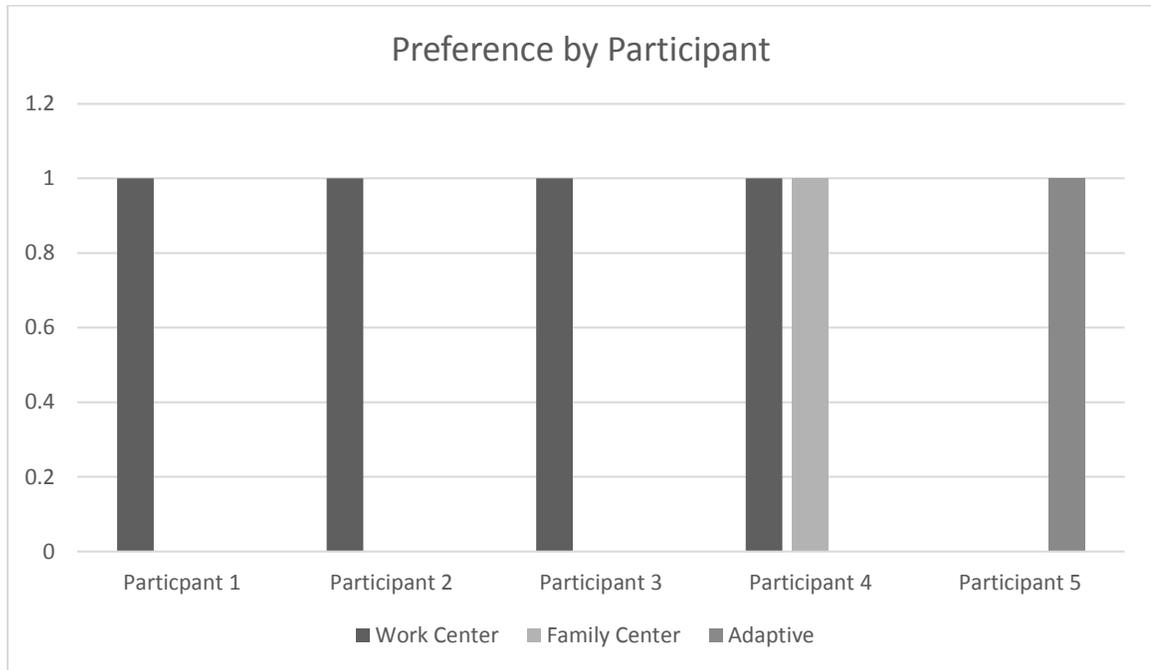


Figure 4.1. Preference by Participant

### *Work/Lifestyle Preferences*

Athletic training students and professionals can easily recount all the times work-life balance has been preached, debated, thought of, or longed for. Symposiums and conferences alike have workshops, presentations, or studies conducted on how everyone has attained or ignored work-life balance. Regardless of the professional or educational level, it still presents as a topic of significance, especially in various fields of athletic training.

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Andrea was quick to identify that she is aware her work-life balance could use some adjustment. “I think people say, ‘Oh, you need to have better work-life balance.’ Well, how do you do that? I still don’t know. I hope people don’t ask me that, because I don’t know. I think there could be better ways to help athletic trainers with that.” Although experience teaches most of us how to find balance, younger professionals do not necessarily get or are aware of the support and practical advice for them to implement it into their daily lives.

Andrea was asked about work-life balance after a presentation she gave at a conference. “I had one person ask me after the talk about life balance and how do you even do that. And I said, ‘I don’t know.’” Andrea frequently wonders how the other women working in male professional sports have developed their work-life balance. She does know that when she is ready, she will know and find it. When discussing career paths and how long her male counterparts have been working in the profession, she responded,

You just never know, time starts to fly. I don’t want this job to get in the way of the rest of my life. So, I wouldn’t be upset, I think, if I had to leave to have better work-life balance. But this is the only job I’ve ever done, so who’s to say that there’s an easier job?

When prompted with the topic, Beth stated that she creates her own work-life balance, but she also credits her city, which permits and makes her hobbies accessible.

I don’t feel like I have to go out of my way to integrate those [hobbies]. Things like working out, going for a run or a bike ride, living in this area with a million miles of paved green way has been great. And then just making it part of your schedule has been really important to me. I see a lot of burnout with athletic trainers and with athletes. So, knowing that I’m younger in my career, I want to make sure I schedule things in and I am purposeful right now about it, so I can hopefully prolong my career.

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### *Work-Life Balance and Time Management*

Beth also credits the particular sport she works. She notes a difference in the professional level and collegiate level seasons, acknowledging that she worked more hours at the collegiate level for the same sport she now works at the professional level. The difference of the professional schedule and collegiate schedule also plays a role; the collegiate season typically only last four to six months, whereas with the professional schedule, the season lasts throughout the year which allows for more planning with travel, practice, and events. She believes this allows for more balanced hours during the week. Beth shared her insights on work-life balance.

It's definitely quality over quantity. If you come in, get your work done, and you go, you don't need to hang around. You don't need to be here just to be here. If you're done with your work, go enjoy your life, do what you want to do, then come back ready to work the next day.

Catelyn also feels that there is a difference between collegiate and professional athletic training. After working in both, she appreciates that she has more balance in the professional sport than she did in the collegiate sport, particularly responsibilities of the collegiate athletic trainer, noting that "there was just more to deal with." Her organization is structured similar to Beth's; the group comes in, gets their work done, and when the work is over, they leave. Catelyn acknowledges that work-life balance comes naturally, which she believes is also because she started in the profession as a non-traditional student.

Donna was quick to identify that professional sports are not as glamorous as they appear, such as the work hours and road trips. "If you don't enjoy the lifestyles of eating out all the time, whether that [means] grabbing a quick McDonald's before you go into

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work or a quick bite to eat at the bar, or room service; there's a lot of unpacking and repacking every few days.”

### *Work-Life Balance and Support Systems*

Donna also credited her organization, particularly, for their assistance and efforts to accommodate her work life balance. The organization(s) she worked for not only made efforts for her, but for her coaching staffs, athletes and their families, members of her sports medicine staff, and more. Her gratefulness to her professional organization for their management efforts towards work-life balance shined through every response.

Evelyn too cited her organization as being proponents of work-life balance, especially her head athletic trainer. Her sports medicine staff is supportive and reliable, each understanding that themselves and their co-workers need balance.

Being with the [organization] is great because I know it's not always the same everywhere. Yes, we work long hours during the season, but in the off-season, the head athletic trainer is really good about making sure we get to take the time off that we need. And we rotate Monday through Friday off early in the off-season when there's not much going on at all.

Evelyn's nature has always been more balanced. Even with her division one experience prior to working in male professional sports, she was accustomed to investing time into herself and her loved ones.

Catelyn credited her mentors for learning to incorporate work-life balance. She learned in her first job to make time for yourself and to help others make time for themselves. She recalled an athletic event she was participating in, which was out of state, and her former boss and mentor allowed her to miss a game to participate. His efforts and emphasis on the importance of work-life balance shaped how Catelyn incorporates it into her life today.

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Catelyn's professional organization is also located in near her home, so she has retained her routine and relationships with family and friends. She does note that personal relationships have been challenging to maintain due to the work hours and other requirements. In addition to her family and friends to help structure her work-life balance, Catelyn also credits her religion and spirituality.

I think marriage is a great thing and if I can do that someday, I would be totally into it, but it's not like my living dream and goal to be married or anything like that. I think for [my career and personal situation], it works. I have really great friends and family. I would say those people support me quite a bit.

For all the participants, the drive to be successful, as they measured success, has allowed them to be role models and significant figures in male professional sports. Andrea befriended other women in her professional organization which helped her in her transition. "Living with the other three girls; we all have said we would not have survived if we didn't live together. We're in different enough jobs; we don't see each other all the time, but we're all kind of in the same boat."

### **Pursuit of Professional Sports**

The first research question presented in this study was to identify why participants in this study sought to obtain a position within male professional sports. Overall, the participants in this study had their intentions set on working in male professional sports. Each coming from a different background, (educationally, geographically, athletically), they were mostly united in this pursuit. Catelyn, Donna, and Beth all echoed the same thought. They always wanted to work in the professional sport they pursued and adored.

Although Donna tried working other sports, the desire for her path only grew for her beloved professional sport.

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In grad school I tried working with [another sport] because I knew it would be easier to get into. I was really hoping I would love that as much as [my professional sport]. I just didn't. I loved the athletes and the coach, but I knew long term that was not going to work for me.

Donna, once she began to pursue athletic training during her undergraduate and graduate degrees, sought out internships, conferences, and interactions with athletic trainers in her professional sport on her own. She had little assistance in these endeavors, although her family and educational program supported her. Donna also noted, that once she had connections within her professional sport, she was able to utilize her connections to gain experience and advance her career. "I always wanted to work in professional [sports]. I mean, specifically, I always wanted to work with the [professional organization]. I specifically really wanted to work for that team and it was my hometown team."

Catelyn had her eyes set on a particular team and sport early on and even when she was disheveled with uncertainty that a position would open up or the opportunity would arise, she never let the desire and dream go. "I kind of put it in the back of my head more because I thought "it's just not going to happen kind of thing." Because, it didn't seem like it any time soon, anyway." Catelyn found later that she had somewhat of an advantage. Once she concluded her education and certifications, she went to work for her alma mater. As time passed, and she worked with her preferred sport, professional connections cultivated the opportunity for her, along with her colleague recommendations and skill set. Once in touch with the head athletic trainer [of desired professional sport] and after her interview, she was identified as the best candidate and found her calling in her dream job. Catelyn jokingly said, "When opportunity meets preparation, you get lucky."

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Beth had exposure to her desired sport from a young age. As she advanced in school, she always had a desire to pursue a career in the professional sport. Beth's passion for the sport grew from the love of the game to the attraction of aspects incorporated in athletic training. "I love the sport and I love the movement of it. I understand the science well. I've always been interested in the sport. So, when I decided what my career path would be, I had a goal to shoot towards." Beth utilized her clinical rotations during her education within the athletic training program and in her career to enhance her skill set within that sport.

As I started gaining experience as a professional, I realized that it was well within the realm of possibility that this could be something that I could do. So, I started making that known to the people I was around and getting more experience [with my sport]. Then, through one of my professional connections, was able to interview for the position I have now.

Andrea was introduced into her professional sport by chance. She had been pursuing a summer internship/clinical rotation with another professional sport which fell through. The professional organization she obtained clinical hours under had been pursuing connections with the athletic training program in which Andrea participated. Her performance with her summer clinical rotation impressed the professional team's athletic training staff and they invited her to join them for the remainder of the year as a clinical rotation.

Evelyn too shared a similar experience as Andrea. Evelyn had no intention of working in professional sports until her head athletic trainer and assistant athletic trainer overseeing her in graduate school presented the idea of internships to her. These mentors and preceptors both had experience in the male professional sport and recommended that she pursue the endeavor one summer. Evelyn responded, "Well, if you think I can do it,

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I'll definitely apply.” With their encouragement, Evelyn applied to and was accepted for a summer internship, which ultimately lead to her position with that same team in the seasons to follow her experience. Table 4.2 portrays the four main components participants used in decision making to pursue work as athletic trainers in male professional sports.

Table 4.2

### Pursuit of Professional Sports

	Desire to Work in Pro Sports	Desire for Specific Pro Sport	Motivated by Mentor	Aligned Career Path
Participant 1	X			X
Participant 2	X	X	X	X
Participant 3	X	X	X	X
Participant 4	X	X		X
Participant 5			X	X

### Leadership and Professional Skills

The second research question of this study sought to identify the leadership and/or professional skills the participants possess which aid them in their current position in male professional sports. All five participants identified various skills, mindsets, advice, and lessons they learned from their own experiences or the experiences of others. When it came to skill sets, personal and professional skills arose. In regard to the individual as a person, quality athletic trainer, and as a leader, the ability to develop rapport with others and working well with others were echoed by each woman. Being a good listener, treating others with respect, being able to delegate work, inspire others, and working hard

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were expressed. Working hard included work-ethic and drive, pursuing knowledge and education, being prompt and timely, having initiative, and being flexible and adaptive to situations.

Andrea noted the importance of learning and incorporating leadership into working with others. “The soft skills, not the athletic training stuff—it’s about critical thinking. Be a problem solver, not a problem creator.” Andrea stated that her willingness to be thrown into situations or skills and knowing there was value in the lesson, in addition to her work-ethic, enabled her to be a successful and contributing member to her staff. Andrea highlighted the importance of being able to delegate work and knowing when the strengths of others allowed them to perform a task better for the sports medicine staff and the patient. It is important to note that these are interpersonal skills rather than technical training skills.

Beth noted accepting weaknesses, acknowledging and working towards those weaknesses, while appreciating your own strengths was a professional and personal skill.

I am not great at the aesthetics of ankle taping. I can tape a very functional ankle, but I’ll tell you, somebody who went through an internship or rotation that practiced and perfected taping, [they are] a heck of a lot better at taping an ankle very quickly [than I am].

Beth also acknowledged her love to read and be challenged academically, for her own knowledge and for questions or treatment interests of her athletes. Her love of learning and stimulating herself through education and certifications enhances her practice and promotes rapport with her athletes and coaches. “I’ve always been pretty goal-oriented, from an educational standpoint, and that just transitioned into my work life.” Beth points out cognitive skills here, rather than interpersonal skills. Beth, like

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Catelyn, set goals and high standards for themselves. Catelyn sought to be a head athletic trainer. She pursued continued education and an additional certification.

And I thought, well, the head athletic trainer is a physical therapist, and that's what I want to be some day, a head athletic trainer, so maybe that's how I'm going to get there. I'm going to be a PT and ATC and that might fast track me to become a head athletic trainer. That was my thought process.

By setting her goals high, Catelyn knew what she wanted and planned a course of action to achieve it. In addition to setting goals, Catelyn acknowledged another skill.

My strength is definitely my professional, my skill. I think I'm very good at what I do, and I strive to be better. Every day really, I try. I want to be excellent every single day. I would rather suck than be mediocre, so that's my goal every day. If I suck, then that leaves room for improvement. I try to be excellent; just to be the best I can be every single day. We all fall short, but I never try to just status quo it.

Evelyn believed her personality enabled her success as an athletic trainer, especially within professional sports.

I would say I'm generally laid back, very easy going. I'm able to be flexible and adapt to situations, like if things are unplanned, or something comes up, I just immediately start thinking, "Okay, that wasn't what was supposed to happen, but now what are we going to do?" Just kind of logically, rationally, kind of working through problem solving, you know? What needs to be done next.

Donna believed that it was important to not expect others to change for her as she entered the environment of male professional sports. She specifically did not want to be treated differently because of her gender, particularly in the way the athletes interacted with each other in front of her or towards her due to injuries. Donna also reiterated the sentiments of Beth.

I know players really appreciated that I was [willing to investigate or obtain education/certifications for treatments] even though I don't really believe in [treatments or techniques providers from home performed on athletes]. I was at least willing to do the basic courses to help them feel more comfortable.

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Catelyn had several different recommendations for being successful in leadership, professional skills, and personal skills. Networking and nourishing relationships with mentors was one of the most notable concepts she expressed. She also emphasized the self-drive to be better; a willingness to learn new concepts or skills and a willingness to work on weaknesses.

I think I have good people skills. I think I can make someone feel at ease and trust me. I'm trustworthy. As for weaknesses, well, technical things are definitely weaknesses I would like to get better at. Another weakness is I'm too nice. As I get older, I am not as tough on players. It depends on my mood. There's just so much testosterone and male "rah-rah," screaming and yelling all the time; I'm just not a screamer.

Catelyn also credited her leadership and work ethic to being the oldest of eight siblings and her innate understanding and observation of others and how to work with them. Catelyn reiterated how she believed her non-traditional status enhanced her abilities as an athletic trainer in addition to the professional experience she gained prior to joining the professional sport benefited her. Evelyn too identified her work-ethic as a leadership and professional skill which has enabled her success. She believed her work ethic assisted the organization in deciding to reach out to her for a full-time position. Evelyn, too, emphasized being a hard worker and having a strong work ethic. These qualities were significant factors in her observation of interns and other athletic trainers.

Hard work is definitely a combination of things. With regard to time, you should definitely be like 15 to 30 minutes early So just being there early and getting stuff done ahead of time. Then, kind of anticipating what needs to be done. So, looking ahead to the next thing that we should be doing, so just finding something that needs to be done, whether it's helping an athlete, or knowing that we're low on gauze pads, or setting up for practice. That's one thing that I always look at now, overseeing some of the interns—which students never go set up for the practice field. Yeah, it's not glorious work or anything. You're not working and treating the athletes, but it needs to get done. I mean, I remember as an intern I never minded the setup, and I made sure that I did it just as I didn't try to miss it or anything like that. And I can definitely tell [you] there are certain students that

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never set up. Everyone kind of has to pull their weight and do the dirty work. The best time that the athletes have an opportunity to drink is in between drills. So, if you're not at the spot where they're going to be next, they're not getting their drinks. So, it's like you're lagging behind. That's not really helpful. So just showing them that you understand that you're showing the athletes that you're working hard too because you understand what they're going through. I think pays off and makes a difference.

Listed in the Table 4.3, are the leadership characteristics identified from a small sample of athletic trainers with leadership experience.

Table 4.3

### Leadership and Professional Skills (Kutz, 2010)

Excellent verbal communication	Responsible for actions	Ethics	Crisis management
Credible	Critical thinking	Innovative leadership	Nurturing professional relationships
Emotionally stable	Effective delegation		

*Source:* Kutz, M. R. (2010). Leadership in athletic training: Implications for practice and education in allied health care. *Journal of Allied Health*, 39(4), 265-279.

In the next table, Table 4.4, desired characteristics and traits of successful athletic trainers in male professional sports, as identified by the participants in this study.

Table 4.4

### Leadership and Professional Skills (Results)

Trustworthy	High standards	Inspire others	Network; Nourish professional relationships
Team player/work well with others	Delegate work	Use others' strengths	Humble; Improve weaknesses

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Table 4.4 (continued)

Goal setting	Critical thinking; Problem solver	Good listener	Treat others with respect
Ability to develop rapport			

### *Role of Mentors*

The value of a mentor was different for each participant. However, similar to what was seen in Mazerolle, Borland, & Burton (2012), the gender of the mentor was not relevant to the participants. The professionalism and support were notably seen as aligning factors in their development and relationships. Contrary to Gorant's 2012 study, each participant working in male professional sports noted some involvement of a mentor, whether that be an athletic training educator, a preceptor, or a supervisor during their careers.

Donna credited a significant amount of her early success in her professional sport to the mentors and individuals she interacted with early in her career. Throughout the interview, she could recall situations or lessons mentors provided her as it related to athletic training, professional and personal relationships, potential situations, and work-life balance. Donna reflected on various pieces of advice the coaches and athletic trainers in her various organizations within the professional sport aided her.

[The coaching staff] made it very easy to navigate, whereas I think a lot of times people aren't. Again, because people don't really talk about a lot of the professionalism and stuff as much in depth as people should, because there are so many gray areas. Especially when you're traveling with the team and there's only one restaurant in that little town of wherever to get food. As I got older and got into [various levels of the organization], it was not so easy. Luckily, I had had all these good experiences and good people, that I kind of realized where boundaries

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were. You've got to eat; you've got to. So, you [go to the restaurant where the athletes are]; you give a wave from across the room, but you don't go over and socialize. There are just ways to handle things. Anyways, I think that I was just very lucky that [the organization I was affiliated with] was so up front and coaches were so willing to—not just the coaches, the [athletic] training staff, everyone—were just so willing to look out for us. I think they knew how much we enjoyed the job part. That's the thing, [they wanted to] make sure we didn't do anything stupid, but [also] make sure what we were doing wasn't perceived [in a negative] way.

Donna valued and appreciated the lessons, patience, and protection she received from members of the organization. She, like many of the other women, utilized the lessons that were taught to her to teach to other men and women she mentored herself. Having individuals who were upfront on expectations and potential situations, who took the time to explain or guide professional, ethical, and personal ventures, and guided her on social interactions enhanced her professional and personal character. Outside of her professional experience, Donna recalled her professors at her undergraduate on their teachings of work-life balance and professionalism. She acknowledged the lessons she learned from her parents and childhood as well.

Andrea credited her boss within her professional organization. Andrea credits his leadership and mentorship with her initial success.

It's funny, I think in the beginning, when he went through his athletic training career, his career is very similar to mine. He was really young when he got hired. And so, being so young the first year, we had two interns that were older than me, and almost had more experience than me. And like I said earlier, I didn't know how to be a leader and I do all that kind of stuff [like supervise interns] and so, I think I was most disappointed in not being able to inspire them to do the job I wanted them to do, at their best. Because, I didn't realize until a year later, and [my boss] was like, "Well do you realize that when you were an intern and I gave you these projects, I presented it like, 'You figure out a way to do this.'" And I realized that is an important lesson in leadership. How to sort of trick people into doing the best job.

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Beth shares similar adoration for her mentors, who are males. One mentor in her undergraduate rotations enabled a path for her to start her career.

I think I got really lucky to have our paths cross and have him believe in me and introduce me to people in the [sport] world. Because, I actually took his position at the [university] when I started there. He was previously with [his chosen sport] for seven years. So, I think for him it was a big deal to make sure that he was comfortable with the person who was coming into the role that was previously his. And so, we've remained very close, even though we've both kind of gone away from the [university].

Beth's relationship with this mentor enhanced her goals, learning, and passions within the realm of athletic training, but also served as a motivator and challenger for her. His mentorship for her stimulated her professional and personal growth and has remained a constant source of guidance and friendship. Beth also recalled her program director of her accredited athletic training program as a mentor. Beth stated he was supportive, considerate, a great teacher, and a great ambassador for the profession of athletic training; all common traits seen in leadership and mentorship.

For me personally, from a clinical skills standpoint, he's been phenomenal. And just more of a great person, good sounding board, someone who will be honest with you, and who believes in you. And he's the person, right when I got offered this job, he was the first phone call. And he said, "Beth, that's great. I know you have always wanted to do it. Go out there and kick their butts."

Catelyn credits her leadership and professional skills to her mentors and also acknowledges their roles in her endeavor to obtain her dream job. Her mentor, who is the athletic director at her alma mater and former head athletic trainer there, not only was very supportive to Catelyn, nurturing her professional and academic goals, but she served as a role model and friend.

She's very involved in NATA and all of that. She really taught me my foundation. She was hard on us students. She was very, very hard and didn't let us get away with a lot. Some people would say that she was mean, I mean, I got to know her, and she's not mean at all. She's just very passionate about athletic training and

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she wants, not only women but men too, everyone to be professional. I think the professionalism part she really drove into me and her other students. She didn't say one thing and do another, she really practiced what she preached. She had fun too, don't get me wrong, she had a good time and was a fun person. She is a fun person to be around, but she knows that line. She knows when to separate her professional life and personal life and things like that. That was a big one she taught me and why I think she's a mentor to me. She's just always supported me through the years and hard times.

The two other mentors, who were male, Catelyn acknowledges taught her to "not sweat the small stuff" and encouraged work-life balance. They also taught her that old techniques still work and they all gave her tips, tricks, and techniques of athletic training skills that she has utilized throughout her career.

Evelyn shared several athletic trainers who influenced her career and were mentors to her, particularly in her undergraduate and graduate experiences. These mentors were all male. In her graduate assistantship, she credited her head athletic trainer and assistant athletic trainer for shaping her professionalism, skills, and readiness.

I always like to mention [the assistant athletic trainer] and how he shaped me for my experiences in [our professional organization], you know, for the internship and full-time experience, just because he had done [organizational] internships before, and he had the best work ethic out of anyone I've ever seen. Like, always hustling around during practice, sweating more than the players; just above and beyond he would do things. So, I always looked up to him and wanted to work as hard as him.

In addition to observing her mentors, Evelyn was grateful for the time her head athletic trainer invested in her and her fellow graduate assistants. Especially the time he took to be transparent with them and prepare them for various situations.

[He] was one that really, because of his [professional organization] background, I think he had a lot of influence on making sure that [I was prepared for the internship and professional sport experience]. Always walking around with a purpose. He was also really good in mentoring us as [graduate assistants]. He'd have meetings with us once a week, just kind of talking about issues that maybe came across his plate that he had to deal with, and how it may affect us. But also, just to get us thinking, like you know, "Try to think like a head athletic trainer.

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What would you do in this situation?” So, he’d always give us different scenarios to think about.

She also credited her clinical preceptor in undergrad and her clinical experience there in her preparation for working in male professional sports.

He was in charge of students and he really helped us understand the importance of attention to detail, making sure you had a sense of urgency about everything. Making sure we took everything very seriously and worked very hard, but we had a good time doing it too. I would say that definitely set the foundation for feeling comfortable in [that] environment.

Below, in Table 4.5, are the individuals identified as a mentor for each participant.

Table 4.5

### Mentoring

	AT Educator	AT Preceptor	HAT/Boss	Family	Coworkers
Participant 1			X		X
Participant 2	X	X		X	
Participant 3	X	X	X	X	
Participant 4	X	X	X		X
Participant 5		X	X		

### Changes in Professional Opportunities

The third research question within this study was to identify and describe the changes in professional opportunities within male professional sports, particularly for women. With all of the participants beginning their careers in male professional sports within the last 10 years, optimism was reverberated in conversations. Changes ranged from staff, facilities, upper management, travel and lodging accommodations, to athlete demeanors. One key factor has been the shift in the environment. Evelyn shared,

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Well, I think it helps, for [our staff], because [the head athletic trainer] has been here for 27 years, and so has our owner. He is very trusted and respected that way, and that, I would say is similar for some of the other teams that hired females. They had a good relationship with the head athletic trainer, and either the owner, or whoever higher up was going to ultimately give the okay for hiring a full-time female.

### *More Women*

The participants humbly noted the growing amount of inclusion and support for women in male professional sports. Each participant was able to identify a female athletic trainer who had worked in their sport prior to their arrival that had some type of influence on them. Each woman also identified that some professional organizations have taken the approach of hiring the person who is most qualified and who would do the job well, gender and gender issues irrelevant. Donna stated,

I think eventually it's going to turn. There are more female athletic trainers now than male. The players have so much say, if they have really great [athletic] trainers and people that they want to work with. I think it's going to change soon that more women will get in.

When asked about the changes she has seen in the profession, one participant responded,

From one to five [female athletic trainers] in a couple of years is pretty good, and there are definitely more season-long interns that are female, which is another positive thing because it's a feeder system. Many of the gentlemen and ladies now that are staff members or even head athletic trainers were once interns, so it's definitely a positive thing that there are female season-long interns.

Several participants credited Samantha Rapoport, who is the NFL Director of Football Development in the Football Operations Department. Rapoport's main role is to find, promote, and develop female candidates into roles within football operations.

One of the participants stated,

So [Samantha] works in the league office and she was recently hired. She was hired to do this, get women into the NFL. But we know of her actually because

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she wanted to know from the trenches, like what are things you know, that we would like. What we would like to get done. [Because of the women's summit,] I was able to meet all of [the female athletic trainers] at the combine.

Another echoed similar praise,

Samantha Rapoport is a woman who works for the NFL and she's in charge of football operations. Her whole thing is basically to promote and get women into the NFL. She's a spectacular human-being. She's not an athletic trainer, but she is just a wonderful human being and very passionate about what she's doing. She played women's football and stuff. Actually, another athletic trainer and I went to a women's symposium in March that the NFL did. We got to go to it and it was really cool. It was a bunch of women in a room that all work for the NFL in various departments. It was really a neat thing to be a part of. I know they're planning on trying to continue those types of things. I think the NFL is serious about [getting women more involved] and I don't think this is a flash in the pan. I think this is an initiative that isn't going away. The Rooney Rule was really more for diversity in general, but I don't think it was for women. I think the future is bright. I don't think it's a shoe-in or a given. I think you have to be good.

Another participant shared her excitement about the advancement of women in the sport. When prompted with a question about whether she feels that women are being deterred from getting into the pros, she replied:

No, not at all. So, [the NFL] started a scholarship a couple of years ago, and [2017] is the first year that all 32 [scholarships] have been given out to women. And I get all the applications for the summer training camps, and I would say that over 60% that are applying are female. So, it's actually the opposite. And it actually stems from Roger Goodell, he's the commissioner. He's the one that has been pushing the female refs and female coaches, and he's the one that agreed to sponsor the scholarship. When it comes from the top down- not every team is like that. Like I don't know which teams are or aren't, but I know for us, from the top down. None of them see gender as an issue.

One participant played a key role in assisting her organization with the promotion of women working in her male professional sport. She, other athletic trainers, and the commissioner had a meeting to identify why more women were not in the profession. She shared her perspective of the meeting and the dialogue between those involved.

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So, [the commissioner] asked me, “Why aren’t there more [female athletic trainers]? Like, what were my thoughts on it. And I said, “Well, a lot of it is just the old-school mentality. Ownership, mostly ownership, and the higher up people just didn’t think there was a place for women in [this sport]. But obviously, things are changing and evolving, and there’s tons of females in the collegiate level of this sport.” So, I was explaining that, and it’s really just a matter of comfort, people seeing that it is possible that it can work. Maybe not every female student is for the environment, but there are many that are. So just giving them those opportunities. And I was also explaining that the way most male athletic trainers in the sport got there were by route of internship. They did internships, proved themselves, and that’s kind of how they got their foot in the door, and that should be the same way that females are able to get in there. So, they were able to at least start there, hiring more female interns.

### *Role of Responsibility*

The participants in this study all held themselves to a higher standard because they felt that they were role models for the women who want to advance and be successful in this field. They all recognized that their actions, whether they liked it or not, determined how employers, upper management and administration would view women serving as athletic trainers based on their performance.

I think anyone who is maybe in a minority, I don’t know. I probably work extra hard. I mean, because I feel pressure. I put a lot of pressure on myself more, I think, than anybody. But, I feel pressure to not mess it up for any of the other ladies who want to do this. I don’t want to make any mistakes to hurt the future women who want to do what I’m doing, so I put a lot of pressure on myself to not screw up.

Another participant concurred feeling a responsibility for her role. In her response, she realizes that her performance, actions, and the way she presents herself will have an impact on how others, in and outside of athletic training, view women in this role. She also noted that more opportunities are on the rise, especially for those who are dual credentialed. She believes that the team approach to hiring provides multiple roles for individuals in the sports medicine team.

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I do [feel a responsibility for women in athletic training], and I think that's because, if you're outside of the small medical community, so say you're an upper admin or in management, you don't have the same experience with the medical stand point. So, you're looking in, kind of from the outside, even though you're making those big hiring decisions a lot of the time. And if you look in from the outside, it's very easy to look in and say, "Okay, there's a female." I may have a much better resume or background skill set, it doesn't matter, the first thing they are going to say is, "She's a female." So, I think there will always be somebody who makes a comment about it, somebody that points it out. Because it's easy to do. But I think the question becomes how you are treated after that... I think you're going to start to see more opportunities in the league, and just from the medical standpoint, the staffs will be expanding in the next couple of years.

### **Barriers**

Barriers were identified by all participants, but not all barriers were such a burden that the participants would consider leaving their positions. Barriers ranged from work-life balance, to facilities, or to self-fulfilling prophecies. Several participants were unable to specifically identify obstacles limiting their professional aspirations, which echoed responses from Momsen's 2014 study; they were able to identify what could be barriers for others debating if this is the right career path for them.

### *"No Barriers"*

Beth noted that her gender has not been a hindrance, as it relates to barriers; she has seen it as a conversation starter. Other coaches, athletes, medical staffs are able to recognize her, due to being a female in the male professional sport, and they have been receptive and intrigued by her integration. Andrea and Evelyn noted that they have not felt any barriers as they relate to gender in regard to their positions or in their organizations. Donna stated, "I really think the only barriers are what people make of them... I don't know, but to me, there's no true barrier as long as you're willing to be

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professional and figure it out.” Beth shared this response in regard to experiencing any barriers,

My entire career has been with male sports. And I’ve always had phenomenal male and female role models who never made gender an issue. And I really had not had issues from the patient stand point. So, I’ve been very, very lucky, I know that. Because I know a number of my colleagues who have been in different roles, who are females working with males, and they haven’t had the same experience.

### *Personal and Professional Barriers*

**Changing Clothes.** All participants noted minimal obstacles to their daily routine, such as changing clothes or changing in facilities. All women were able to identify that when they would travel with their teams, finding spaces to change or shower before and after the games were inconvenient. Some women would be told to change with the cheerleaders, some were told offices or maintenance closets, the locker rooms when the team had already departed, and some changed back at their hotels. Evelyn shared, “I would say in the last year there has been some positive changes; just access to more female lockers rooms, because I was, you know, sometimes I would just be changing in a unisex bathroom in the tunnel of stadiums.” Although the convenience of changing, or even wearing athletic training clothing that were for men, most organizations were improving the day to day responsibilities and tasks for gender accessibility. One participant jokingly noted that there was a shared document identifying which team facilities were female favorable.

**Instability of Job.** Catelyn noted that professional sports is a business at the end of the day. A barrier, as seen in some fields, is that the jobs in professional sports are not guaranteed. Performance does not necessarily play a role in retention at this level. Upper

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management may feel there needs to be a change in personnel in any department and can easily fire and hire at will.

**Attitudes.** One participant noted that there was a growing shift in mindset, particularly in regard to hiring female athletic trainers in male professional sports. In over a decade, upper administrations have become more inclined to the idea of hiring women in various departments of male professional sports.

One thing I should bring up that shocked me was, when I was [initially interviewing], and to me this is part of the problem, there were a few teams that I went really far in the interview process, that I felt like were just curious about what it would be like to have a female. I think this is part of the problem: a lot of teams haven't had females in their organizations, so this is the whole reason I took the [organization that I did]. They were the only team that gave me a real interview, as far as asking me medical questions, medical scenarios. Other teams, the whole interviews were, "So how does that work, like when you need to go tell a player something in the locker room?" They just were so curious about how it worked in my internships. That was the whole interview, and no medical questions were asked. I think that's part of the problem. If [the upper administration, front office, etc.] haven't experienced [having a female on staff], they don't see how well it can work.

Although Beth did not have any specific barriers that she encountered, she was optimistic for a genderless era.

I think [the athletes, coaches, front office, etc.] realize that you're a medical professional and it doesn't matter what your gender is. And if you treat your job like you're a medical professional, and you treat them like they're patients, and you don't make a big deal about it, then it's not an issue. But I've seen scenarios where it's been very awkward, because there's either been a male with all females or vice versa, but they make it an issue. And so if you just kind of go about your normal day, then they're like, "Oh, it's normal."

### *Lifestyle Barriers*

**Families.** The greatest encumbrance the participants voiced, came down to personal lifestyle. In relation to the Preference Theory lens, each participant articulated that, for themselves and others, each woman needs to determine what she wants for her

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life's endeavors as it pertains to 1) having a family or not, and 2) how involved in her family she wants to be. Andrea shared that work-life balance was the most challenging: "It's one of those things where you have to learn how to have work-life balance. How to be an adapter. And knowing that is hard. Knowing that I'm more work-centered, just knowing that means I've got to put more effort into the other half."

Evelyn shared that the stress exists for all athletic trainers especially with the addition of a newborn. From her experience, she utilized conversations and advice from other female athletic trainers, within and outside of her setting, to get a comprehensive idea of how she will balance motherhood and work.

I know that I do feel comfortable in the setting that I am in, because my boss is very understanding, and has three kids of his own, and understands the importance of the family, you know, making sure you have time for a family. So, he's been very accommodating already. I will mostly like use my maternity leave; I mean if I want it, I can take it, it is just more me probably going to be conflicted about. So that's definitely an internal debate that I'll have.

Donna emphasized, from her personal experience, that professional and personal aspirations of life will happen and sometimes they cannot co-exist. From her perspective, which was shared by the other participants, the juggling act of finding a life partner, determining the conjoined lifestyle goals of that relationship, and excelling in career aspirations, especially in this setting, may be burdensome. But she was hopeful that the balance of choosing family (and the role one would play) and a career would be much more manageable, as more women are working in front offices.

Fortunately, these identified barriers discussed by the participants' conflict with Gorant's 2012 findings that in male professional sports women are excluded by "the old boys club" (p. 40). Since her study four women have been hired as athletic trainers in the NFL, with at least the majority, if not all, of the 32 seasonal athletic training intern

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positions being filled by women since 2016. Although it is true that hiring staff members relies more on the referrals and recommendations of colleagues, it does not appear that limitations by the “old boys club” still exist, in any of the five male professional sports. In the spring of 2018 another female became the head athletic trainer for a MLB team and female athletic trainers were identified in the MLS, NBA, and NHL.

### **Additional Themes**

#### *Support Systems*

For all the women in the study, navigating and having support systems has been critical to their success. All of the women in the study identified co-workers, family and close friends as support systems, and even significant others.

**Support from Staff.** Support from staff and the organization was instrumental in the prosperity of their careers. Catelyn, having hometown and academic connections for her position, felt at home with her co-workers. As Graf (2014) pointed out, having the support of staff and supervisors benefited the female athletic trainer. “For me, I didn’t have a huge, difficult transition because I think I knew [the head athletic trainer and athletic training staff] pretty well, and I think they all wanted me to succeed. I had some good guys in my corner, type of thing.”

Andrea praised her organization, as did Donna and Evelyn, as to the support they received from all levels within their organizations. Donna was humbled by how members of her organization were always accommodating her, especially after her family dynamic changed. She elaborated on how athletes, coaches, front office staff, and the athletic training staff were always aiding her in various aspects of her day to day responsibilities

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in order for her to perform as an athletic trainer. Andrea noted that her organization has worked very hard to be a diverse, open, and supportive environment. Evelyn shared,

We now have four full-time people [on staff]. The head athletic trainer and then now there are two assistants. They're both males, and close to my age too, so we have a good time. It's nice to have people that kind of are more your peers, like, your same age. But, yeah, we get along well. Definitely our staff works great together as a team. Everyone's definitely understanding of the team aspect. We all pitch in to help each other. Like if somebody has to miss something for a family emergency, we all pick up and cover for each other; [there's] definitely a family atmosphere at work.

**Support from Family and Friends.** Family, personal relationships, and friends were a significant source of support for all of the women. Some of the women were able to live close enough to family and friends and maintain close contact, while others had either relocated farther away or were slowly trying to relocate closer to home. Evelyn shared,

I would say I have a good set of friends, and I love my family. We're not super close, they're farther away. But you know, they're there if I need to call and talk to them type of thing. But yeah, overall, I guess just having a good group friends that you can always talk to, and just yeah, making time for yourself to work out and do the things you like to do, in my case, travel.

Andrea has relocated farther from her family and friends, but credits their persistence in making contact with her is something she greatly appreciates. She also credits her roommates as support.

Living with three other girls, we have all said we would not have survived if we didn't live together. It's been nice, because even though we all work together and then we go home together, we're in different enough jobs [in the organization] where we don't see each other all the time, but we're kind of in the same boat.

Personal relationships have been an understandably arduous endeavor. As in the lifestyle theme, personal relationships have not been prioritized such as the career has. But, at this point in their lives, none of the participants were distressed about this. Donna

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was fortunate that her partner also is an athletic trainer in male professional sports. Their educational and professional background allowed them both to be supportive and understanding of one another, even as their places of employment were in separate states.

Not only did he get [the aspects of the job], he is the same way. He got the hours, he understood everything about my job, and he was kind of the same way. Always wanted to do the best he could at his job. Our lives and stuff are just so similar.

### *Perspective on Female Athletic Trainers in Field*

One question of this study was to identify the relationships between female athletic trainers working at the male professional sports level. Supportive relationships were noted, but relationships varied due to sport, schedules, and familiarity. Some of the participants noted interactions as friendly acquaintances. Some women were very close, and correspondence was frequent and open, while others were less frequent.

A participant discussed the women working in her sport at the start of her career who would reach out to her.

There were two women working with different teams who, when I was starting out, would reach out to me and I would reach out to them. I felt like we had a pretty good relationship. Especially once I first got in, they were always like, "Hey, if you ever want to talk about anything give us a call," and they were wonderful. I felt like there was a couple of years there that we kind of tried. There were only a few of us who tried this, kind of emailed back and forth and stayed in touch, but I think they both are out of the sport now.

One participant shared several instances where she has utilized the support of other female athletic trainers in the field, as well as her efforts for those women and others that are steadily becoming more involved.

Since having reached out to her, later in my career, it's just been amazingly helpful. I talked with her for like an hour as I was getting ready for my presentation, so she's been awesome. And you know, the more women that are in these positions that are available, the easier it will be. We have a training camp for our full-time interns now. And I haven't asked her, but I would just say, "Hey,

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this is what you wear. This is what you do.” And little things like, in my opinion, having your hair up for treatments. You know, it’s just a professionalism thing. And I doubt that I would ever had to tell her that, but you know, knowing that you have someone looking out for you, not doing things wrong, has been nice.

Another participant shared her experience of reaching out to other female athletic trainers.

Well, whenever I hear there’s another female hired, I definitely want to reach out to them. So, I’ve reached out to them when I hear they’re hired. It’s really just like, you know, “Welcome. If there’s anything I can help answer for you. I’m sure your staff can help you out, but if there’s anything you’d feel more comfortable asking me, or asking another female, I’m here if you need anything.”

This participant continued to express her relief in knowing that a transition of more women into the male professional sport would eventually occur.

But, it was just cool. Because for however many years, I was the only female working in [organization], walking into those seasonal meetings, and it’s all men. I remember the first time I was like, “Whoa, you definitely stand out.” But, after that first year I was used to it. I got to know a lot of the other athletic trainers, and for the most part they were all very friendly, and cordial, and all that stuff. But it was kind of nice just knowing that there would be other females in future years once they were hired. So, you know, it’s exciting just to not be the only girl. I don’t know, we’ve gotten together a couple of times at some of the meetings, just to kind of talk about stuff, and just general networking, just getting to know each other.

**Why Support May Be Low.** Some participants have not had the luxury of shared support and experiences due to the lack of women working in the field. Scheduling (season schedule, daily work schedule, vacation schedule, travel schedule, etc.) was seen in several of the interviews as a factor causing communication to be difficult. Location was another factor. Some participants may have been able to communicate, but distance made it harder, especially with day to day situations. Familiarity also played a role; one participant noted the uncertainty of how another woman would respond to her or the distant and uncomfortable interactions from women not being confident or too guarded to

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interact with another female athletic trainer. Other participants have not had the opportunity to create or share these bonds due to the lack of women working as athletic trainers in male professional sports. The women they have been able to connect to have been women working in other departments within the organization, who may not be able to fully share experiences from a day to day perspective.

### *Significant Experiences of Female Athletic Trainers*

**Interactions with Athletes.** Significant experiences were unique to all participants. Some identified work experiences, educational experiences, relationships with coaches, athletes, staff members, and more. All the participants shared experiences relating or pertaining to their relationship with their athletes. Andrea enthusiastically shared her appreciation of her athletes and their commitment to adhering to the sports medicine staff. “Once I started, I realized [working in male professional sports] was for me, because [athletes] were actually really smart when it comes to sports medicine, because that’s their life. Their life’s work is their bodies.”

Other significant experiences relating to athletes, pertained to the appreciation of the athletes not being concerned with gender. Donna shared one of her early memories in the athletic training room.

One of the biggest compliments I’ve ever received has been when athletes say they forgot that I was a female, they forgot that I was a woman. A new player would come in and a guy would be telling a story, and they would be like, “Dude, Donna’s right there.” And the player would say, “Oh, sorry. I totally forgot that you were a woman.” That player will never realize how much that comment meant to me.

The sentiment was echoed by several participants. The idea that athletes felt comfortable around the female athletic trainer, irrelevant of the context of conversations,

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but the premise that the female could work confidently because the athletes entrusted her as a medical professional and were comfortable with her presence was rewarding.

Another potential gender scenario arose for a participant twice in one season. When this participant was prompted with the type of interactions she had with players, particularly as it related to her gender, she shared two scenarios. The first scenario she shared was her first experience with an athlete being cautious because of an injury and her gender. The athlete had a groin strain and required an ice cup massage. After the instructions she provided to him, the athlete presented as anxious, and she responded that another athletic trainer could perform this treatment if he felt uncomfortable. The athlete shared, "I'm fine if you're fine," and the situation was never experienced again.

In another situation, the same participant had another athlete with a groin strain, requiring a hip spica. This athlete decided he wanted to perform warm-ups prior to the game without the wrap and realized that he needed the assistance of the wrap for the game. The athletic trainer prompted him toward the coolers, blocking the fans from view. The athlete persisted that the more public position they were in was perfectly fine for him, neglecting his own health privacy and the gender difference. After the game, she asked the athlete if he realized why she did not want to wrap his groin in such a public spot and the athlete responded that he had no awareness of the (potential) situation. As the participant jokingly reflected on the situation, she was appreciative that the fans, athletes, coaching and medical staffs were not fazed by the circumstance. Her awareness indicated that she is professionally aware of situations, but to her relief, it was not an issue.

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**Interactions with Coaches and Staffs.** Each participant shared an interaction they had with various members of the professional sport. One participant stated that her interactions with coaches, especially the males who were at least 20 years older than her, were polite, considerate, and chivalrous. These coaches held doors for her, asked to assist in carrying supplies, or watched their language in front of her. While the coaches she felt were closer to her age treated her as they did their peers; not performing any chivalrous activities or changing their behavior due to her gender.

All participants shared some experience pertaining to their laundry or changing clothes. Beth and Donna humorously shared stories of the personnel who performed laundry duties. Washing any feminine attire always ensued some anxiety, but each participant handled the anxiety and dilemmas with poise. Another participant shared this experience as working as the lone female athletic trainer,

We were going on the road and you know, my boss gathers all of us up and says, “Okay guys, when you’re on the bus you can wear this. When you get to the hotel, it’s khaki’s and a polo.” Then he looked at me and his actual words were, “Wear what girls wear.”

Although this was intended to be light-hearted in context, it does cause one to pay more attention, especially during such a tumultuous time in our society in regard to equal rights and gender empowerment. These scenarios portray that gender is still an area that has not been fully accepted in certain situations and awareness on how to deal with them is still lacking. Whilst many aspects of the diversity gap are still improving, it has not been forgotten.

Catelyn shared this in regard to how athletes and coaches interact with her:

I am one woman with [a lot of] men. Literally, I am one woman, so I’m different. Like I said, especially not anymore, they don’t treat me different. I mean, they treat me different in that I’m a woman, so they are politer to me. They don’t shake

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my hand. They'll give me a hug or a half hug, or maybe even a "dap" or something, which is nice... Even though I do try to blend in when I'm at work, my hair back is pulled back. I don't wear a lot of makeup. I'm very plain. Not that outside of work I'm glitzy and glamorous or anything like that. But I definitely wear my hair down, curl my hair, wear heels. But, obviously at work, I'm not wearing heels. I'm just aware. I just make myself really plain because I don't really need any more attention than I already have.

Evelyn shared that her initial experience and her career with her organization has always been an environment which allowed her and others to be at ease and comfortable.

So, I was ingrained to always have that sense of urgency and be helpful everywhere. And not to say that we didn't have that with the [organization], but it was just like, overall, a more laid-back atmosphere. And every team is different, but here, it was just like, everybody's friendly and easy going. So, once I had that experience [during my internship], that's the first time I was like, "Well, I could definitely see myself working [in male professional sports] if it's in an environment like [that organization]."

One participant recalled an encounter early on in her career which has stuck with her. While she was pursuing internships within the professional sport, she was at a conference and sought out a few of the athletic trainers affiliated with various teams offering internships. In conversations with these athletic trainers, she was asking a myriad of questions about techniques, job descriptions, and more, with the conversations not leading to potential interviews. However, in one of the conversations, a male athletic trainer who had experience in the one of the organizations told her that she was too attractive to work in that sport. He concluded with, "it just won't work." The participant said, "It took me totally off guard. I really, really did not know what to say. It's so funny because of course, years later, I'm interacting with him, like I'm sure he has no recollection of ever saying this to me."

Following this conversation, as she and another female went out to social gatherings following the conference, she recalled the two of them having various athletic

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trainers flirt with them. Both women felt they were not being taken seriously. Although the social scenario had its participants imbibed, this is not the first or last situation of its kind that women have found themselves in, especially in male dominated fields.

The participants shared similar stories of others' knowing who they were. When asked about her experience interacting with other teams or staffs, Catelyn replied that most of the other athletic trainers don't necessarily know her, but they do know there is a female on her staff.

When Beth was prompted about her perception of women working within her sport, she noted the difference between administrative positions to coaching or sports medicine roles. More women in her sport work in the front office or in other departments of the professional organization, not the athletic training or sports medicine departments. When prompted about her experiences with other teams or professionals in the organization, she explained that although her gender is not always the focus, it has been a conversation starter, for both staffs and athletes. "I've had a couple different players come up to me, and just say, 'Hey, I think it's really cool that there's a female.'"

**Experience Over Time with Teams.** Each participant was asked what the transition or their experience has been like while working as an assistant athletic trainer and/or as a dually credentialed role within their professional organization. Catelyn replied,

My first year was rough because it was just a new job, and it was the players, just like anywhere you go, they're going to take a while to warm up to you. I was the first female [in that role, in that organization], so that was kind of like, "Oh, okay." Just little things that took a while. But now, it's like I'm just one of them, really. They don't hold their tongue or anything in front of me, unfortunately.

Beth echoed similar sentiments with her transition.

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To be honest, the transition has been really easy. There are a lot of resources. I mean, at the collegiate level, the division one level, I was a part of a fabulous program where I had a ton of resources, but I know that's not always the case. But here we have the resources we need. The guys are very, very respectful and hard workers; the definition of professionals. I think a lot of people expected a lot more of a transition, but it's been very easy for me.

Beth shared that her experiences with the coaching staffs, athletes, and front office personnel has been effortless. When prompted on how the transition with her athletes has been, Beth responded,

As for the athletes, I think especially with a lot of the younger guys, they're growing up with female athletic trainers. So, whether it's a collegiate environment or in their high schools, they're used to it. They don't even skip a beat. Then, some of the older guys who are the vets, who have been around for a while, they think it's really cool. When you're the only female [there], they acknowledge you, but it's never brought up in a negative way. I've never been treated any differently. I mean, there's nothing that changes because of my gender.

For Andrea, her transition into her role has been focused on the non-athletic training related tasks. Her frustration came from the lack of correspondence between other department personnel and her specific role.

Working in logistics and dealing with all the other department leaders...A lot of times they'll communicate [with the head athletic trainer] and not include me on it, and I don't think we'll ever know; all they know is that I'm young, and I'm a woman, but also, I'm not the department leader. So, there's no way to tease out which it is. I'd like to think that's because of the department leader and not that it's anything else. But that's something I've had to learn how to communicate better with people who don't communicate well.

Although the experiences ranged for each participant, several of these themes reoccurred throughout their stories. It is critical that we examine the positive and negative experiences and how we can utilize these to better prepare our current and future athletic trainers.

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### *Advice for Female Athletic Trainers*

Each participant was prompted with the questions of “What advice would you share for overcoming barriers?” and “What advice would you share for other female athletic trainers wanting to pursue this domain?” Participants shared a variety of responses for each question.

Expanding skills and knowledge, obtaining internships, and getting diverse clinical and educational experiences were recommendations that were synonymous for all participants. Beth emphasized obtaining other certifications, such as Graston Technique, blood flow restriction training, etc. in addition to other professional or medical licenses and certifications. Catelyn shared,

I would say to do any internships that you can do. Anything free, work for free. You know what I mean? Don't worry about getting paid, that kind of stuff. Anything that can get your name or your face with a professional that's a head athletic trainer in the professional field; I think that will definitely help you, because having that, I think, on your resume, sets you apart.

Being willing to get experience, paid or unpaid, in the desired sport of your choice or not, was the difference in candidates wanting to work in the professional sports arena.

Andrea said,

Get experience. I don't know if every school does internships in the clinical rotations but get as diverse of an experience as you can. Don't just stick to one sport. I didn't really have any experience [with my sport] prior to starting with [my organization]. I think the diversity of the experiences I had, working with different types of athletes, different levels, different types of preceptors, and seeing their [athletic] training rooms, and seeing how their [athletic] training rooms work; seeing the good and bad in each of those to know how I can help make where ever I work the best.

Beth echoed the same sentiment and included the importance of getting experiences and networking.

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I think that some advice that I got early on was to just take advantage of any opportunity that you can. So, volunteer a ton, and it doesn't need to be specific to a certain sport you want to work in. It doesn't need to be specific to that because there's so much you can learn from all those other opportunities that you can also then apply them to whatever sport you're a part of. Just to get a lot of experience and meet a lot of people, because much like other professions, it really depends on who you know and exposing people to who you are and your philosophy and how you work with patients.

Donna and Evelyn shared that even at the professional level, athletic trainers still work and may perform tasks asked of younger professionals and students. Donna reiterated that only wanting to work when it was convenient or not wanting to work up the professional ladder were not only conversations the athletic trainers' paid attention to when interacting with potential candidates and interns, they were signals to discontinue communications and opportunities for those individuals.

Andrea shared this when prompted with what advice she would share with women wanting to get into professional sports.

It's going to be hard. Don't get discouraged. I had someone come up to me and say, "Oh I applied to all [the] teams and didn't hear anything back," and I'm like, "You have to realize how many people are applying." I mean, we get a ton of applications and I wish we could just identify their gender from it. It's funny, sometimes you don't know. So that's why we interview with everyone, that's important. But in athletic training it is about who you know. That doesn't mean you have to know someone to get into the [professional sport], but I don't trust exactly what a piece of paper is going to say. If you have an amazing resume but happen to be a horrible hire, or you could have a horrible resume and be a really good hire. So, just calling, speaking with the candidate, having someone call on your behalf, that's the way to do it. If someone calls me and they vouched for someone, then definitely, especially if I trust them. That's going to move you way [up]—because just reading through resumes, I don't know you. And I need to know you [for you] to get an internship. Because I would be terrified to hire someone who I didn't know their work. You have to trust them.

Evelyn contributed to this theme, as well:

The biggest thing I tell people is, if it's what they really want to do, just don't give up. I remember applying to the [professional sport] seasonal internships after graduate school, and again after my one-year internship [at the university]. And

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that's probably why I did the one year [at the university] instead of taking a full-time job. None of the full-time jobs really excited me. So, I was like, "Well, at least doing the internship was a stepping stone in terms of getting competitive D1 experience, and you know, a high-profile setting. It was a stepping stone. So just telling students, like, even if they maybe don't get what they want the first time around, keep trying. Then, in the meantime, try to think out opportunities that are stepping stones to where you want to be to continue getting good experiences that will make you more valuable and marketable to where you want to end up.

Knowing that positions and desired jobs required putting in the time, effort, and dedication was another theme that came up. There are conflicting theories that once someone has attained the minimum requirements (i.e., graduating from an accredited program, obtaining BOC certification, graduating from graduate school), that one deserves or should a certain amount of money, position, or benefits. This is a valid point, but it is not one that is necessarily understood by those who have not shared or experienced it within the profession of athletic training.

### *Desired Attributes*

There were a variety of personal attributes and recommendations to become the ideal candidate to work in male professional sports. The residing theme was "set yourself apart." One emphasis Donna shared was being willing to put yourself in front of potential employers. By not being afraid to pay to travel to conferences or employment sites and initiating interview opportunities, it creates dialogue and allows employers the chance to pay attention to you. From her experience paying her own way to travel to her specific professional sport's annual conference, she was able to get an interview with an organization (and an internship) by setting herself apart and presenting what she was worth. Her effort of putting herself in front of a (professional team's) athletic training staff proved to them that she was worth looking into.

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Catelyn shared that having a good reputation, with athletic training educators, preceptors, and with other athletic trainers was imperative. She also emphasized having attention to detail, being punctual, and ready to work were characteristics her organization surveyed in candidates. Donna shared that it was vital to know how to be professional, have self-awareness of how you're being perceived by various people, and try not bring attention to yourself in a negative way. Andrea emphasized being a team player; she recommended emphasizing and helping others with your strengths while allowing others to help with your weaknesses. Evelyn shared the importance of qualities she looks for in potential athletic trainers and emphasized the understanding of knowing your role.

I would say someone who is definitely set on doing athletic training [in professional sports], is that [internships] can be big, because a lot of people try to use it as a stepping stone, and then just go to PT school. So, I think it's valuable to take those students that are really excited about athletic training and staying in athletic training. Understand that it's obviously going to be hard work, and they understand that in the end, [interns are] an extension of us, and they're going to help us run our sports medicine facility the best that we can. So, whether that's cleaning things, or helping us with athletes, just understanding that everything needs to get done, and we need their help to help us achieve that. So, just the team attitude, and someone who's not going to roll their eyes at a task that maybe they don't want to do. You know, just someone who's excited about helping out in any way they can.

Beth shared a myriad of advice and recommendations. In addition to volunteering and getting a variety of experiences, she stated that being strong in the basics of athletic training and anatomy was critical, she recommended that one be strong in exercise prescription and manual therapy. She emphasized being confident in yourself and your abilities, while appreciating the roles in athletic training.

Catelyn emphasized being observant would enable others to be better in athletic training and help them in their pursuits of their dream careers.

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I've never taken a class or anything in leadership, but I guess just watching and observing some of my mentors and seeing how they handle things. I'm a big observer. You don't just learn things in books and in the (athletic) training room. I think you really can learn how to interact with people and how to deal with a coach or an athletic director, etc., if you're observant. I think it's helpful.

Lastly, Donna recommended having a thick-skin. Particularly with social media and the high profile of professional sports; scrutiny will always happen. She recommended to limit social media access because comments will always be made, and someone will always have an opinion. Understanding that every professional will and has made mistakes in this area is part of life.

### *Networking & Relationships*

Just as much emphasis was placed on the topic of networking and relationships as were the other two recommendations. Catelyn went back to networking and relationships numerous times.

Yeah, it's definitely however you can set yourself apart in a cover letter and things like that without being wacky and stuff. In general, not even just the females, just the students that we pick a lot of the time, a lot of them are from people saying "Hey, take a look at so and so," from the different people that I know or that coworkers know. "Oh hey, I got a call from so and so to take a look at this person," and I think, "Okay, this helps, I will."

Catelyn felt that one of the most important and vital ways at enhancing one's career was to maintain relationships with mentors, and to engage, interact, and learn as much from others as you could.

I guess I'm not really actually a good networker at all, but networking is probably pretty important or keeping in contact and keeping good relationships. All of my mentors and things, I'm still very close with and keep in contact with and try to do things with them when I can, so that definitely helped me because [my current boss] would have never even thought of me [for the job without my mentor's recommendation].

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Beth recommended meeting lots of individuals within athletic training and engaging in dialogue. She also pointed out that employers pay attention to how you present and carry yourself, as well as what your relationships and interactions are like. She emphasized being willing to put yourself out there, show initiative, and that will help you set yourself apart from other applicants.

In addition to the networking concept, several participants referred to social media and how they have seen it used for both personal and professional accounts. When dealing with athletic training students, Catelyn was exposed to their mindset and how they utilize social media now compared to when she was in school. When reflecting on conversations she had with athletic training students, Catelyn recalled that it is imperative to not have relationships with patients or athletes on social media when they are currently under your care.

You're set on a pedestal [as an athletic training student]. Because if something goes wrong or whatever, they're going to look to you as the medical professional, which you aren't yet, but they're going to look to you as that. There's all kinds of things that can happen. I'm not saying that you cannot be friends with your athletes, but there's a real fine line that you have to be careful about. I had a rule when I was in [the] college [setting]. I was never going to be friends [with athletes] on Facebook or Instagram or any of those social media things. When they graduated, I said, "Okay, now I can be your friend," because it's just my professionalism.

One participant, throughout the interview, was very worried about other female athletic trainers advancing in the organizations and their personal and professional behavior. A stressor for her were the conversations she would have with other head and senior assistant athletic trainers, administrators, and/or managers about the personal behavior of some female athletic trainers as they advanced in their careers. She noted that due to personal relationships between these athletic trainers and athletes, individuals in

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supervising roles were being notified of the personal and inappropriate relationship and the disturbances they were causing in the athletic training facilities. Due to the close-knit nature of professional sports, when professional conduct is not adhered to, rumors and situations ripple through the gossip line. The participant emphasized that women athletic trainers can advance their careers by not standing in their own way, particularly as it relates to who they have personal relationships with. By maintaining professionalism, seeking out mentors, having support at work and home, adhering to advice, working hard, and working for the love of athletic training and the sport, not the glamour of professional sports, will keep female athletic trainers will see success and advancement in this field.

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to explore the personal, leadership, professional, and educational experiences and perspectives of female athletic trainers who have worked or are working with male professional sports. A significant number of factors have changed for women working as athletic trainers, especially within the last 20 years and in the professional sports arena. One of the desires of this study was to identify the perspective of women working in male professional sports while mapping a pathway for future women to follow their footsteps. In addition to this, the researcher sought to bridge the gaps between future and current athletic training students, the clinically practicing athletic trainer, and the educating athletic trainer in order to open a more diverse and accepting dialogue in regard to student and professional development, perspectives, social injustices, demographics, and professional and educational outcomes. By interviewing women who have had the experience of working in male professional sports, the researcher sought to identify and call into question barriers (and the stereotypical assumption of barriers), means to attain these positions, and share another aspect and viewpoint of the field of athletic training. It is the researchers hopes that all can utilize this information to better themselves, others, and their environments.

The study sought to identify four primary research questions. In the endeavor to understand why these athletic trainers pursued careers within male professional, the researcher identified that these women always sought out these positions from the time of their youth or early on in their careers. This would dispute Gorant's finding of women having low aspirations (Gorant, 2012). A supplemental finding was that the participants were presented with the opportunity to work in male professional sports and find their

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niche, however this is secondary to the desire of working with elite athletes. The study identified various leadership and professional skills taught, learned, and innately possessed by the women in the study. The study also explored the importance of networking and having role models, as well as what the role model provided for the athletic trainer.

The third question of the study was to identify the changes within the sports medicine profession of male professional sports. The unanimous answer was that change is here, and there is more to come. It must be acknowledged that change was not easy. Overtime, and with the efforts of diligent and open-minded men and women, these opportunities blossomed. The final research question sought to identify the barriers female athletic trainers may have had and how they overcame them. The resounding answer echoed Momsen's (2014) findings in that barriers were identified by those who found them. This study proved that stereotypical ideologies no longer reign true for women working in this field. It also identified that women have played a vital role in the demographic changes that have occurred in athletic training and are to come.

### **Implications**

The data produced by this study chronicled five major themes from the research questions. The researcher found several unique findings as they pertained to Hakim's 2000 and 2004 Preference Theory and Gorant's 2012 study. The first finding that the researcher noted was that all but one of the participants identified as work-centered, thus linking their success to the same theory Hakim presented in that work-centered women aspire to succeed in and advance in their careers. Only one participant shifted preference over time from work-centered to family centered. The researcher feels that the

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participant's personality and qualities of giving maximal effort to her endeavors was the reason for her change in perspective. This trait still portrays her high aspirations of being successful in whatever she pursues. The researcher believes this study supports this finding as the participants did not allow any outside deterrents or opinions to affect their pursuit of working in male professional sports. All but one participant had a desire to work in this setting and they all found a way to obtain that. The participant who did not originally seek to work in male professional sports found that once she was encouraged to pursue that area by her mentors did she perceived it as enjoyable and attainable. Another finding was that some participants chose work locations closer toward their family and friends. Although not all participants fit this scenario, although they did actively consider proximity to their loved ones and discussed this in their future career plans. This was similar to what Gorant noted in her 2012 study, in that the women still felt compelled in some way to consider their loved ones (p. 158).

Another similarity between Gorant (2012) and her findings in regard to Preference Theory is that then women participating in this study identified the support of others, through encouragement, recommendations, and assistance, in addition to the confidence of the participants, differ from Hakim's perspective that career and advancement relies only on work-life balance. The aforementioned participant whose preference shifted following the birth of her child noted that this shift was not expected; she anticipated that she would become adaptive or remain work-centered. Another participant identified that she has always maintained work-life balance, from the time she was in undergraduate clinical rotations to her present career. The researcher believes that the same characteristics that drive each woman to be career-centered, are the same that

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enable their drive and perseverance for their other endeavors. In this instance, we may not be dealing with the nurturing component of women (i.e. taking care of others) as much as her values and priorities being the deterring factor to what makes her happy; ultimately enabling how she establishes and creates her own work-life balance.

A significant finding in the success of female athletic trainers related to the timing of having their families. Gorant (2012) notes that some females either did not pursue athletic training until their families were raised or they delayed their relationships and family to put their career first; starting a family after obtaining the position of head athletic trainer. In regard to either of these decisions, one participant, Beth, had this to say in regard to family versus career: “So I think that the best thing to tell women when they are going into this is that they have to make a decision and stick with the decision as far as what they are capable of doing. Once they do that, and they have the support of the people around them, they need to approach and propose different ideas to their administration.” (Gorant, 2012, pp. 110-111).

It is important to note that this population of participants are very special. These participants possess particular traits, characteristics, and personalities that set them apart from most people. Certainly, their high task or goal orientation is not seen in others, regardless of gender. These individuals identified that their perception of barriers is not what some may assume. Their interpretation of barriers were more obstacles that they were willing to problem-solve to surpass and continue on their endeavors of professional success.

The research questions of why the participants chose to work in male professional sports and what leadership or professional skills and weaknesses have assisted them in

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these roles echoed some of the findings from Momsen's 2014 study. Based on responses of the participants and their interactions with female athletic trainers wanting to pursue these careers, there is a motivation and desire of women to work in male professional sports. This is being encouraged in male professional sports by head athletic trainers, sports medicine programs, front office personnel, and upper management. It should be noted that these initiatives are at varying paces dependent on the professional sport. Thankfully, these findings contradict Dieringer's (2007) identification that male patriarchy and other barriers prohibit women from entering male dominated fields. It also disputes Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo's 2015 study in that these women did utilize a network of colleagues and mentors to obtain their positions. These opportunities identify the third research question of the changes occurring in male professional sports. These findings also highlighted the importance of educators and precepting athletic trainers to establish mentor-mentee relationships, encourage more discussion on leadership and/or psycho-social qualities, find solutions, and have candid conversations to work-life balance, and continue to create and promote opportunities in various positions and fields of athletic training, especially for all genders, races, sexual orientations, and other demographics. In addition to the mentor-mentee relationships, preceptors and educators may need to actively assist students in the direction of networking with athletic trainers, particularly in male professional sports so that these students begin engaging in professional relationships and learn ideal professional qualities as potential candidates.

In addition to the promotion and creation of specific positions (i.e., internships) of more women in male professional sports by front offices, upper management, and sports medicine personnel, these groups are actively trying to combat work-life barriers, for all

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genders. Creating scheduling incentives of working set times, knowing when to end a work day, accommodating and rotating time off, and assisting in family dynamics (i.e., child care or parent care) to be more conducive and balanced for personnel in this setting has enhanced the attraction and desire to get into and stay in the field. Each woman identified how supportive their athletic training and sports medicine staffs were of the women themselves and each other. Beyond these staffs, athletes, coaches, and the upper management or front office staffs were also complimented on these changes and behaviors. There is always room for improvement, but the changes that have and are occurring, especially for women in male professional sports, have shown to be beneficial and inclusive. Similar to Momsen's 2014 study, the women in this study did not identify barriers in the way that individuals within and outside of the field of athletic training perceived these participants would have (p. 75).

In regard to mentors, this study did not identify a difference or specification of the gender in the mentee-mentor relationship. As in the literature review, the significance of this relationship is the commonalities shared by each individual, including shared goals, professional and educational interests, and attributes such as work styles, beliefs, and even personal interests or qualities. "Studies show that mentors select protégés based on performance and potential. Intuitively, people invest in those who stand out for their talent or who can really benefit from help. Mentors continue to invest when mentees use their time well and are truly open to feedback" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 68).

As stated earlier, the mentor-mentee relationship is usually gravitational, but each member should actively pursue these opportunities in order to promote the field of athletic training. Having educators and clinicians in the field of athletic training guide

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athletic training students to potential mentor-mentee relationships instills the student's confidence, passion for the field, and promotion of the field. Another factor the researcher identified was the involvement and passion the mentors had for their domain and for the field of athletic training; being high in these two areas enables mentees to gravitate and share these endeavors, allowing them to mimic these efforts and make their own impact on the profession, however big or small they desire.

Another implication the researcher identified was the development, inclusion, and examination of a myriad of topics to engage the future athletic trainers, gender irrelevant. The findings of this study support Dieringer's 2007 study, in which she states that the athletic training educational programs need to dedicate time to ensure that students are prepared for work-life balance and socialization skills. This may be executed from athletic training education courses, competencies, continuing education courses, and in-services. These topics may include work-life balance, professional behavior, psychosocial concepts, leadership skills and theories, work place situations, personal and professional situations (ranging from deaths, traumatic injuries, financial situations, etc.).

Courses or presentations could include identification of mistakes or areas of improvement via case-scenarios, debates or discussions, or role-playing of such topics as work-life balance, professionalism, harassment, and other areas for which students and young professionals may feel unprepared. Even topics or courses which would prepare these athletic trainers for success in various career settings would be beneficial. These could include skills and attributes identified by head athletic trainers and what they seek in potential employees or by athletic trainers working in non-traditional fields, as well as lessons learned from athletic trainers who have gone into business for themselves. This

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echoes Momsen's 2014 implication that career path instruction or preparation should be incorporated into the academic curriculum. This should also be considered for future research, to identify specific preparation interests or domains athletic training students may need.

In light of the current social conversation, the discussion or perception of sexism and sexual harassment situations were discussed in various perspectives. This study identified that these situations include, but are not limited to, feeling that the women themselves needed to work harder to prove themselves, be more socially aware of their behaviors and interactions, as well as dismiss or not address sexual or gender belittling comments. It is important to note that gender is irrelevant when it comes to situations like this, however in male professional sports, this mentality has deterred women athletic trainers from pursuing careers in this field in the past. The researcher found it interesting to note that most of the participants described not wanting to be a distraction, being more aware of their situations (as in preventing inappropriate conversations due to their looks or comments, diverting the conversation, or removing themselves from the situation). The researcher did not want the current social conversations to impact the study in any way; this topic was not discussed unless the participant voluntarily shared various perspectives on sexism or sexual harassment or abuse. Although the self-reports from participants show that these situations may be improving, any experience presented 10 years following Dieringer's 2007 study shows that this is still an area that needs addressed.

### **Future Studies**

An area of interest the researcher did not include in this study was the identification of job descriptions for the female participants. Are job descriptions

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incorporating elements of bias or gender discrimination today? Gorant's 2012 study identified job discriminations as requiring experiences that only men could have fulfilled (i.e., football coaching experience for Athletic Directors). Another area within gender discrimination could involve the perspectives of how individuals self-identify with gender or how they identify other people's genders. An additional theme of investigation would pertain to how barriers are being understood. By this, are barriers occurring for individuals due to performance or are they due to specific population or group of people? The researcher believes this area should be acutely addressed, as barriers not based on performance and on populations contradicts social beliefs. This could be investigated in future studies or continuations of this study.

Areas of leadership, student development, and personality may be pursued, as these participants proved to possess special characteristics which set them apart from other populations. This investigation may be done through examination of gender, personal experiences (race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, regional perspectives, etc.), or other variables. It would also be beneficial, when looking at educational leadership and development, to evaluate how athletic training education programs select and determine the criteria of admission for athletic training students. The findings from this study identify that these women are endowed with strong, problem-solving, and determined qualities (both agentic and communal), which enable their success. If athletic training education programs select and develop students with these potential or attained qualities, we may then see a higher caliber professional student.

Additional future studies can relate to athletic training students and their educational needs as they pertain to a myriad of topics in the process of becoming a

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professional. Identifying skills, personal and professional situations, personal and professional attributes, as mentioned in the implications section. Another study could fall in the domain of sexual harassment. It would be interesting to understand how women athletic trainers may view themselves and their perceptions of sexual harassment and what qualifies as such, particularly in the current or next decade. Due to the various attitudes, perceptions, and understandings of sexual harassment and gender dialogue, it would be interesting to identify this at the athletic training student and professional athletic training levels.

Mentoring is another area of future study, specifically women working in male professional sports or in other leadership settings; are women being prepared the same way as men in mentoring relationships. This preparation may include, but not be limited to, career paths, career development skills, professional behaviors, etc. Additional research may warrant current student and professional understanding and implementations of work-life balance, particularly in various professions that are emerging in athletic training. After concluding this study, the researcher also felt that an investigation on generational perspectives and interactions would be beneficial to the profession of athletic training. Future studies may also want to evaluate The Women in Athletic Training Survey (Dieringer, 2007) as now would be a prime period to evaluate and examine the progress and perspectives which have occurred over the last decade.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The justification of this phenomenological investigation was to gain and present the perspectives and insight of the current females working as athletic trainers in male professional sports. Ideally, the researcher sought to answer, contradict, and identify

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previous beliefs, biases, and actual data to portray the current work environment, particularly for women at the professional sport level. This study contradicted, supported, and articulated previous research that was identified through the literature review process. The researcher was pleased that improvements were noted by all participants and is hopeful that these insights shared by the participants will contribute to the success and enhancement of opportunities for all athletic trainers. The researcher was relieved that barriers were debunked, women at the professional level, regardless of department, were uniting, and that support for women, particularly athletic trainers, is becoming contagious. As the study identified challenges and advancements, the trajectory is in positive route and the future holds endless opportunities.

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**APPENDICES**

PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

**APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND INFORMATION LETTER**

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

### **Appendix A: Participant Consent and Information Letter**

Greetings,

My name is Taylor Temnick and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University. I am writing to you today to request your participation in a qualitative study I am pursuing for my doctoral dissertation, Perspectives of Female Athletic Trainers Working in Male Professional Sports. This study seeks to investigate the perspectives of women working as athletic trainers at the professional sports level. This study has obtained IRB approval and been approved by my committee members; one of which is former NATA Past President, Dr. Robert Barton.

I selected your participation for my study because of your current/previous title of athletic trainer working within the National Football League, National Soccer League, National Basketball Association, National Hockey League, or Major League Baseball. It is my hope to utilize the information collected from this investigation to help advocate the advancement of women into this field for future females entering the profession and for those already in the profession.

I invite you to participate in a semi-structured, open-ended interview via in person or phone/video messaging call at your convenience that will last 40-90 minutes. This interview will be recorded on my personal laptop and transcribed, in hopes to find collective themes that can be further studied in my doctoral research. This data and your information will be confidential and eliminated following my graduation or discontinuation from the doctoral program at Eastern Kentucky University. Any demographic or identifying information will be omitted from the documentation submitted to my professor or any publications here after. You will also be given the

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

opportunity to review the transcripts to confirm and clarify any information collected for this study from today's date until the end of the semester, May 2018.

Please take the time to consider participating in this investigation. I will follow up with you over the course of the next week to explain any further questions you may have, find out your decision, and explore what time-scheduling works best for you. If you choose not to participate, perhaps you could recommend women working within the selected five male professional sports as an AT who is BOC certified and/or state licensed.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Taylor Temnick, MA, LAT, ATC

Doctoral Student Investigator

Eastern Kentucky University

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW FORMAT**

# PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

## Appendix B: Interview Format

### Demographic Questions for Interview

- 1) Name, Age,
- 2) Years in in current position, years within minor leagues, years as an AT
- 3) Education, degree(s), certifications
- 4) Resume/career path

### Research Questions for Interview

- 5) Why did the females in this criterion pursue and obtain positions as athletic trainers within the professional sports?
  - a. Intentional leadership positions/ motivations
    - i. Reasons for selecting or declining jobs/internships
  - b. Intent pursuit of professional sports or coincidence
  - c. Leadership/Career aspirations
    - i. *Did they ever feel discouraged or motivated by someone to pursue this job?*
- 6) What leadership or professional skills were taught or learned by the female, which assist(s) her now in her current position?
  - a. Developed leadership skills; what do they think are their strengths/weaknesses (hard-work, commitment, determination, communication, honesty, loyalty, etc.)
  - b. How would they describe their personality?
  - c. Mentors

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

- i. Who do they consider to be a mentor; How influential is this mentor; What significant lessons/skills were taught by mentor
  - d. *Were there any experiences you had that helped prepare you for your role as an athletic trainer in your pro sport?*
  - e. Preference Theory: Work/ lifestyle preferences
- 7) How do women working as athletic trainers describe/acknowledge the changes in professional opportunities in this field?
- a. Changes in leadership, policy/procedure, mentality of coaches/athletes/admin
  - b. Jobs/Opportunities available for women
  - c. Perspective on women in AT in the profession; in the world of pro sports
  - d. Perspective working men versus women's professional sports
  - e. Perspective on other women ATs they've interacted with in pro sports
  - f. Weekly schedule, hours per week/season, free time activities
- 8) What barriers have women working in professional sports faced and how were those barriers overcome?

*Why do you think there are so few women working in male professional sports, especially when more than 50% of the individuals working in the field are female? (Factors, experiences, opinions on this)*

*What do you think deters women from working in these professional sports?*

- a. Barriers/challenges experienced in position, career, internships/school

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b. *Can you share any experiences of barriers and how you overcame them?*

i. What tools/skills/methods have been used to overcome obstacles?

Support systems; stress outlets;

c. *What advice can you share about overcoming barriers in Athletic Training.*

d. *Katherine Dieringer addressed in her 2007 doctoral dissertation that women have struggled to earn equal salaries, award recognition, and leadership opportunities, particularly in the NATA. Do you think this applies to women working in male professional sports, if so, how?*

**APPENDIX C: MINI PROPOSAL CODING SHEET**

# PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

## Appendix C: Mini Proposal Coding Sheet

The goal of coding is to identify themes, not to interpret them.

### Research Questions

- 1.) Why did the females in this criterion pursue and obtain positions as athletic trainers within the professional sports? CODING RESPONSE 2
- 2.) What leadership or professional skills were taught or learned by the female, which assist(s) her now in her current position? CODING RESPONSE 1
- 3.) How do women working as athletic trainers describe/acknowledge the changes in professional opportunities in this field? CODING RESPONSE 4
- 4.) What barriers have women working in professional sports faced and how were those barriers overcome? CODING RESPONSE 3

CODING RESPONSE 5- Preference Theory

### Participant A: Bio

#### Career Influences (1)


#### Leadership Skills (2)


## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

Mentors (2)


Support Systems (4)


Catherine Hakim Preference Theory (5) *Researcher observations*


Perspective on Barriers (personal and in general) (3)


Perspective on advice (4)


PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

Perspective on Women ATs (4)


Significant Experiences for AT (3)


**APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT**

**Appendix D: Informed Consent**

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Perspectives of Female Athletic Trainers Working in Male Professional Sports**

**Why am I being asked to participate in this research?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the perspectives of women working as an athletic trainer (i.e. assistant, associate) in one of five male professional sports. You are being invited to participate in this study because your current title/position indicates that you are a female athletic trainer, who is certified and/or licensed, and works within one of the five specified professional sports. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about 45 women who match these specifications to do so.

**Who is doing the study?**

The person in charge of this study is Taylor M. Temnick (Principal Investigator) at Eastern Kentucky University. He/she is being guided in this research by Charles Hausman (Advisor). There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this research is to explore the personal, leadership, professional, and educational experiences and perspectives of women athletic trainers who are working as an athletic trainer with 1) National Football League, 2) Major League Baseball, 3) National Basketball Association, 4) Major League Soccer, and/or 5) National Hockey League. Research about women working as athletic trainers has only begun to surface over the past 15 years; the limited research has not only explored women serving as athletic trainers in the secondary school, collegiate, and clinical/hospital settings. As of

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

2006, more women have been certified and employed in the field of athletic training than their male counterparts.

By doing this study, we hope to learn why there are so few women serving as athletic trainers in the identified male professional sports. Goals of this study include 1) identifying professional, leadership, and/or educational skills that may assist women seeking employment in this field, and 2) create awareness and dialogue for the acceptance of women working with male professional sports.

### **Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research procedures will be conducted at Eastern Kentucky University. You will participate over the phone, over video-messaging, or in person (at ECU, conferences, etc.). Each of those interviews will take about 60 to 90 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 1-3 over the next times over the next year and a half.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

For your participation experience, you may expect to be interviewed via a semi-structured interview format describing and elaborating your personal experiences as an athletic trainer, beginning with your education and continuing through your employment and professional experiences. Your name and any identifying information will be concealed (via pseudonyms and omission of singular/specific details). The interview will last 60 to 90 minutes and may require follow up interviews to clarify or identify new information. The study and interviews will begin the spring of 2017 and last until the spring of 2018.

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The subject will undergo a voluntary, semi-structured interview where it is up to their discretion to disclose as much or as little information as they would like to.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed so that a script is available. Once the transcriptions are completed, the researcher will search for themes and code them for interpretation. The findings would then be disclosed in the dissertation. All information that would identify the participants will be omitted and kept confidential. Table D.1 shows this timeline of the present study.

Table D.1

### Timeline of Study

IRB Approval	March 2017
Contacting participants	April 2017-March 2018
Initial Interviews	April 2017-March 2018
Follow-up interviews	June 2017- March 2018
Transcription process	April/May 2017-March 2018
Coding and Interpretation	April/May 2017- March 2018
Presentation of Findings	March 2018- May 2018

Provide a lay description of the randomization procedures, if applicable, and describe the chances of being assigned to any one group.

N/A

### **Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?**

At this time, there are no reasons that would cause an individual to not participant. As long as the participant is a woman, is a certified and licensed athletic trainer, is not an

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

undergraduate student/intern, and is employed by one of the five male professional sports previously identified, there would be no reason to not participate.

### **What are the possible risks and discomforts?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

### **Will I benefit from taking part in this study?**

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

### **Do I have to take part in this study?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

### **If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

### **What will it cost me to participate?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

### **Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?**

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

### **Who will see the information I give?**

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you.

However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court (IF APPLICABLE: or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child or are a danger to yourself or someone else). Also, we may be required to show information that identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as Eastern Kentucky University (LIST ANY OTHER AGENCIES SUCH AS THE FUNDING AGENCY OR STATE/FEDERAL DEPARTMENT).

### **Can my taking part in the study end early?**

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

### **What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?**

If you believe you are hurt or if you get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Taylor Temnick at 740-403-8676 immediately. It is

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. That cost will be your responsibility. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the costs related to your child's care and treatment because of something that is done during the study will be your responsibility. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer's willingness to pay under these circumstances.

### **What if I have questions?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Taylor Temnick at 740-403-8676. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

### **What else do I need to know?**

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

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*I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and agree to participate in this research study.*

---

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

---

Printed name of person taking part in the study

---

Name of person providing information to subject

**APPENDIX E: TELEPHONE SCRIPT**

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

### **Appendix G: Telephone Script**

Hello,

My name is Taylor Temnick and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Kentucky University.

I am contacting you today to request your participation in a qualitative study I am pursuing for my doctoral dissertation. This study seeks to investigate the perspectives of women working as athletic trainers in the NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB, or MLS. Would you be interested and willing to participate in this study?

If NO: I understand, perhaps you could recommend another female athletic trainer employed by one of the five male professional sports selected who is BOC certified or state licensed. Thank you for your time and have a wonderful day!

If YES: Wonderful! If you currently have the time, I'd like to share with you the details of what you can anticipate for the study. Is now a good time?

If NO: I understand. Is there another time or means of communication that I could provide you with more information about the study?

If YES: The study you'll be participating in is a semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interview that will last 40-90 minutes. This interview will be conducted in person, over the phone, or over video messaging, whichever is most convenient for you. The interview may require a follow-up interview in order to clarify, elaborate, or further investigate any findings or themes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed in hopes to find any themes that may help advocate the advancement of women into this employment setting, help develop professional, personal, and clinical skills to develop female athletic trainers, and to create an open dialogue about equal opportunity in all aspects of athletic training. This data and your information will be confidential and

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

eliminated following my graduation or discontinuation from the doctoral program at Eastern Kentucky University. Any demographic or identifying information will be omitted from the documentation submitted to my professor or any publications here after. You will also be given the opportunity to review the transcripts and confirm and clarify any information collected for this study from today's date until the end of the semester, May 2018.

Do you have any further questions at this time?

If NO: Thank you again for your time and I look forward to arranging our interview and working with you! If YES: [allow for time to answer questions].

# PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

## VITA

**Taylor M. Temnick, MA, LAT, ATC**

521 Lancaster Ave. | Richmond, Kentucky 40475

E-mail: taylor\_temnick@mymail.eku.edu

## EDUCATION

Ed.D, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Eastern Kentucky University,  
Richmond, KY, May 2018

MAT, Physical Education, University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, KY, May 2013

B.A., Athletic Training, Otterbein University, Westerville, OH, June 2011

## PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Temnick, T. Perspectives of female athletic trainers working in male professional sports.  
(Southeastern Athletic Trainers' Association Symposium). Atlanta, GA. March  
10, 2018.

Temnick, T. Pursuing athletic training in college. (Western Hills High School). Frankfort,  
KY. September 2015.

Temnick, T. Pursuing athletic training in college. (Knoxville Orthopedic Center).  
Knoxville, TN. June 2015.

Temnick, T. Cardiorespiratory endurance and training. (Elkhorn Crossing High School).  
Georgetown, KY. September 2013.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**July 2016 – Present: Head Athletic Trainer, Outreach Athletic Trainer | Drayer  
Physical Therapy**

Madison Central High School, Richmond, KY

**August 2015 – July 2016: Clinical Education Coordinator, Athletic Training  
Program; Visiting Lecturer in Kinesiology and Health Studies**

Georgetown College, Kinesiology and Health Studies Department, Georgetown, KY

**June 2013 – July 2015: Assistant Athletic Trainer; Adjunct Faculty**

Georgetown College, Athletics Department, Kinesiology and Health Studies Department,  
Georgetown, KY

**August 2011 – May 2013: Graduate Assistant Athletic Trainer**

University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, KY

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

### PROFESSIONAL TEACHING

#### Georgetown College, Kinesiology & Health Studies Department, Georgetown, KY

Spring 2016:	KHS 273:	Practicum II in Athletic Training
	KHS 275:	Practicum III in Athletic Training
	KHS 279:	Practicum V in Athletic Training
	KHS 395:	Therapeutic Exercise and Rehabilitation (3 hours)
	KHS 410:	Measurement and Evaluation of Kinesiology (3 hours)
Fall 2015:	KHS 216	Emergency Care in Athletic Training (3 hours)
	KHS 271	Practicum I in Athletic Training
	KHS 273	Practicum II in Athletic Training
	KHS 277	Practicum IV in Athletic Training
	KHS 407	Organization and Administration of Athletic Training (2 hours)
Spring 2015:	KHS 180	First Aid, CPR, and Sports Safety (6 hours)
	KHS 216	Care and Prevention of Athletic-Related Trauma (2 hours)
Fall 2014:	KHS 180	First Aid, CPR, and Sports Safety (6 hours)
	KHS 200	Medical Terminology (3 hours)
Fall 2013/Spring 2014:		
	KHS 180	First Aid, CPR, and Sports Safety (6 hours)

### CLINICAL ATHLETIC TRAINING EXPERIENCE

#### Head Athletic Trainer, Madison Central High School, Richmond, KY

**2016-present:** Provided coverage for 6A Varsity, Junior Varsity, and Freshman sports including Football, Men/Women's Soccer, Volleyball, Men/Women's Basketball, Wrestling, Baseball, Softball, Tennis, and Track & Field. Coverage included game and practice events, emergency response coverage and first aid. Conducted on- and off-field injury and illness evaluations, referrals, therapeutic and manual treatments, in addition to assisting in the Drayer clinic. Also promoted Sports Medicine through a website and Twitter page to which the community had access. Responsible for ImPact testing, PPEs, AT supply inventory, budgeting, and ordering. While at MCHS, I obtained the NATA Safe Sports School Award (2017-2020) and networked with healthcare providers in the community to form the health care team. These providers included a nutritionist and strength and conditioning coaches to speak to athletic teams and coaches. I also served as the Kentucky AHA BLS, CPR, and First Aid instructor for Drayer Physical Therapy.

#### Assistant Athletic Trainer, Georgetown College, Georgetown, KY

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

National Intercollegiate Athletic Association, Mid-South Conference

**2013-2015:** Provided coverage for Varsity and JV Baseball, Varsity Men and Women's Soccer, Varsity and JV Football, Varsity and JV Volleyball, Varsity and JV Men and Women's Basketball, Cheerleading, Varsity Men and Women's Tennis, Varsity Softball, Varsity Women's Lacrosse

Responsibilities include providing practice and event coverage as an ATC, conducting pre-participation physicals, coordinating referrals, insurance claims, drug-testing and administering drug tests, acting as a preceptor to the Athletic Training Program students, oversee the budget and inventory, and administer the pre-season concussion testing (IMPACT). Assisting with the ATP website, the ATP Facebook page, and act as a co-chair for the college student Athletic Training club.

**Graduate Assistant Athletic Trainer, University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, KY**

National Intercollegiate Athletic Association, Mid-South Conference

2012-2013: Varsity and JV Football, Varsity Women's Wrestling

2011-2012: Varsity and JV Men and Women's Soccer, Varsity and JV Baseball, and Varsity and JV Men and Women's Basketball

### **CLINICAL SPECIAL EVENT EXPERIENCE**

Spring 2016 KHSSA High School Lacrosse, Outreach game coverage

Winter 2015 Bluegrass Orthopedics Soccer, Outreach Soccer Camp Coverage

Summer 2015 Georgetown College Men and Women's High School Basketball Camp

Rick Bolus Blue-Chip Men and Women's High Potential Basketball Camp

Spring 2015 LYLA High School Lacrosse, Outreach game coverage

Summer 2014 Georgetown College Men and Women's Youth Soccer Camp

March 2014 NAIA Women's National Basketball Tournament, Frankfort, Kentucky

January 2014 Touchstone Energy All-A-Classic High School Basketball Tournament, Frankfort, KY

Summer 2013 Kentucky Bluegrass State Games Rick Bolus Blue-Chip Men and Women's High Potential Basketball Camp

January 2013 Kentucky-Tennessee State Border Bowl, High School Football

March 2012 NAIA Women's National Basketball Tournament, Frankfort, Kentucky

January 2012 Kentucky-Tennessee State Border Bowl, High School Football

2008-2010 Columbus and Cap City Marathons, Volunteer First Responder, Columbus, Ohio

### **CURRENT LICENSURE & CERTIFICATIONS**

Certified by the Board of Certification ® as an Athletic Trainer (ATC) #2000012049, 2012 – present

Licensed by Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure as an Athletic Trainer #AT1068, 2013 – present

## PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS

Certified by American Heart Association ® as a Basic Life Support Instructor, 5/2017 – 5/2019, (05130171657)  
Certified by American Heart Association ® as BLS Provider (C-15921), April 2017 – 2019  
National Provider Identifier #1285042549, July 2014-present  
Provisional License/Certified by the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Education Professional Standards Board as a Physical Education Teacher #201158490, July 2013 – 2018  
Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT 200), Yoga Alliance, The Om Place, Winchester, KY, June 2018

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) #44377, 2011-present  
South Eastern Athletic Trainers Association (SEATA), 2013-present  
Kentucky Athletic Trainers Society (KATS), 2013-present  
National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), 2015-2016  
Ohio Athletic Trainers Association (OATA), 2010-2011

### **ACADEMIC DISTINCTIONS & AWARDS**

Jerry Rhea Atlanta Falcons Graduate Scholarship, February 2016  
Otterbein University: Mortar Board Honor Society, 2010-2011

### **VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

Public Relations Committee Member, District IX Representative National Athletic Trainers' Association, June 2018  
Chair, Public Relations Committee, Southeastern Athletic Trainers' Society, June 2018  
Committee Member, University of Kentucky's Sports Medicine Comeback Athlete of the Year Committee, January 2017  
Committee Member, Southeastern Athletic Trainers' Association, Hall of Fame Committee, 2016-present  
Executive Board Secretary, Kentucky Athletic Trainers' Society, 2014-present  
Volunteer Healthcare provider, KHSSA Women's Sweet Sixteen Basketball Tournament, 2014-2015  
Academic and Alternate Panel Judge, Clark County Junior Miss, Winchester, KY, 2013-2016  
Volunteer and Adoption Assistant, Scott County Humane Society, Georgetown, KY, 2013-2017  
Volunteer and Panel Judge, Elkhorn Crossing School, Georgetown, KY, 2013-2016  
KATS Breast Cancer Awareness Weekend. Georgetown, KY, Oct. 2013