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## Perspectives from Female Athletic Trainers in Men's Professional Sports: How Their Athletic Training Programs Set Them Up for Success

Caitlyn Champ

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**Perspectives from Female Athletic Trainers in Men's Professional Sports: How Their  
Athletic Training Programs Set Them Up for Success**

by

Caitlyn E. Champ

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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### **Abstract**

Female athletic trainers working in male professional sports are represented at a number strongly disproportionate to the number of female athletic trainers making up the profession. This research study works to focus on how athletic training education programs (ATP) have successfully set up the female athletic trainers who have made it to professional sports. The goal was to focus on what these education programs were doing to set their students apart from other athletic training programs. Three female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports were interviewed for this qualitative research study by utilizing semi-structured interviewing. The data was then coded using In Vivo coding, concept coding, and sub coding. Combining these techniques allowed the researcher to best analyze the data for common themes among the participant's responses. The paper will discuss these themes in greater detail towards the end of the paper, arguing there are specific things athletic training education programs can do to help propel their students to the professional leagues. Areas of future need and focus were described as well throughout the course of the study.

*Keywords:* athletic training, professional sports, female athletic trainers, athletic training programs, work-life balance

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A special thank you to Dr. Steven McCullar, my thesis advisor, for taking me on despite me being six months behind during a global pandemic. Without his guidance, support, and honest moments of truth, I would not have been able to write this paper. Thank you to Dr. Rachel Friedensen for reassuring me and teaching me the ins and outs of qualitative research at all moments of this journey. And a thank you to Dr. Emeka Ikegwuonu for providing thoughtful and necessary feedback, challenging me to think about things in new ways.

Thank you to the women who participated in my study; it is my hope the discussions we had will help to inspire someone to see there is potential within this career path for them. The stories you shared with me were impactful and gave me a sense of hope that the tides are changing.

Lastly, a thank you to Dr. Sara Shuger-Fox, John Roslien, Dr. Shelli Green, and Frank Neu, my first mentors, and the first people to believe in me and my future success within this profession. Without y'all showing me how to believe in myself I would not be where I am today.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

In the early Spring of 2016, a young female athletic training student entered the office of her program director and took a seat in one of the chairs. The student was meeting with the program director for an interview, the final step for program admission. This moment marked the culmination of a month-long process of applications, interviews, and nerves that the student had experienced and faced. Sitting there quietly and intently, her program director asked her where she saw her career going in 15 years. The student thought for a moment, pondering the question, and then responded by saying, “Working for the Kansas City Chiefs as a full-time assistant athletic trainer.” The program director then chuckled to himself and asked, “Do you know how many female athletic trainers are currently working in professional football?”

In order to fully understand this interaction and how problematic it is, it is important to first understand the field of athletic training as a whole. Athletic training encompasses the prevention, examination, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of emergent, acute or chronic injuries, and medical conditions (National Athletic Training Association, 2018). Athletic training is recognized by the American Medical Association (AMA), Health Resource Services Administration (HRSA), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as an allied health care professional (National Athletic Training Association, 2018). Since the founding of the National Athletic Training Association (NATA) in 1950, the profession has expanded greatly in not only the number of professionals but also the workplace setting, as many are now employed in colleges/universities, secondary schools, clinics, hospitals, professional sports, the performing arts, public safety, the military, and occupational health settings (National Athletic Training Association, 2018). Athletic training and NATA have produced a large number of

research studies on several injuries and illnesses and have the unique perspective of seeing patients on a daily basis in most settings, allowing for a greater spectrum of care.

Athletic trainers come from athletic training programs (ATPs), wherein students in undergraduate athletic training courses are taught the curriculum decided upon by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) (CAATE, n.d.). The education and support an athletic training student receives while in their ATP can set them up for long-term career success and opportunities. Preceptors often serve as mentors for athletic training students in the clinical setting, and they are viewed as paramount in socializing the student into their future roles (Mazerolle et al., 2016b). Often, a positive clinical experience can make or break an athletic training student's commitment, growth in, and passion for the career (Mazerolle et al., 2016b). It is of extra importance that female athletic training students find preceptors who come from similar backgrounds so they can picture what their lives will look like within the career one day. If female students cannot see a female athletic trainer achieving a successful work-life balance, they may feel discouraged about the prospect of finding a future balance themselves. A 2002 study by Mazerolle et al. found two factors as to why female athletic training students chose certain career goals over others: (a) employment setting dynamics and (b) mentorship received during clinical education.

When athletic training was first founded in Kansas City in 1950, it was done so by a group of 200 male athletic trainers who convened to talk about the profession and their hopes for the future of athletic training (National Athletic Training Association, n.d.). It was not until 1966 that athletic training gained a female perspective with Dorothy "Dot" Cohen becoming the first female member of the National Athletic Trainers Association (Martin, 2013). It was still several

years until Sherry Bagagian became the first woman to sit for the Board of Certification, Inc, exam in 1972 (Martin, 2013). Then in 1976, Gail Weldon became the first board-certified female athletic trainer to be hired by the U.S. Olympic Committee, working in the 1979 Pan America Games (Martin, 2013). Weldon later went on to become the first female athletic trainer to be inducted into the NATA Hall of Fame in 1995, some 45 years after the initial inception of the NATA (Martin., 2013). It was not until 1997 that Michelle Leget became the first female athletic trainer to work in a male-dominated professional sport, and she was hired as an Assistant Athletic Trainer in the NBA (Martin, 2013). Other professional sports did not catch on for another five years when the NFL finally hired Ariko Iso in 2002 to work for the Pittsburgh Steelers (Martin, 2013). Finally, in 2011, females broke potentially the largest barrier in men's professional sports when the MLB Los Angeles Dodgers hired Sue Falsone to be their head athletic trainer. This made her the first female head athletic trainer in major American professional sports leagues (Martin, 2013).

It is a wonder how these women were able to break down these barriers and become the “firsts” in their settings. What set them apart from other female athletic trainers and allowed them to achieve these heights and shatter glass ceilings? Could there be a link between their athletic training programs and their successes?

### **Statement of the Problem**

All of these remarkable women were able to make names for themselves within the profession of athletic training, despite the heavy odds against them. It was not until 2006 that females outnumbered males in membership within the NATA (Temnick, 2018). Now, females make up 55% of the total population of certified athletic trainers in the NATA but still find

themselves underrepresented in the pinnacle leagues of the sports world in America: the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Hockey League (NHL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA). Of these four professional male sports leagues, female athletic trainers only hold 45 positions out of approximately 400 total positions (Temnick, 2018).

Unfortunately, the college side of things is not looking much better, with only roughly 25% of the full-time division-1 athletic training jobs, and 16.3% of the head athletic training jobs, being held by women as of the 2009-2010 school year (Barrett et al., 2018). Worse still, the number of females involved in athletics at the college level has only decreased since the passing of Title IX in 1972. Before the new legislation, females were coaching 90% of women's teams at the college level, but now only 43% of women's teams are coached by females (Fryklund, 2019). Due to the monetization of women's sports through the passing of Title IX, females working for women's collegiate sports teams have seen a steady decline over the last thirty years. It is now to the point where there are more male head coaches of female sports teams than there are female head coaches of female sports teams.

The largest attrition factors for female athletic trainers are irregular work hours, inflexible work schedules, and travel (Buzuvis, 2015). This makes it hard for women to balance both having a family and a career (Mazerolle & Gavin, 2013). This hindrance to work-life balance is even more exaggerated at the highest level of sports in America, the professional leagues. The average workweek for some professional sports athletic trainers is  $75 \pm 12$  hours in-season and  $28 \pm 10$  hours in the off-season (Mazerolle & Hunter, 2018). Often having to miss important

family events because of work and travel, reaching the pinnacle of athletic training is difficult for many men and women in the profession.

These facts make it imperative that athletic training programs do more than just teach students the basic content of athletic training; they must also teach students about the importance of work-life balance. Kathy Dieringer stated in 2007,

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).

These adaptations to the educational programs need to be made, not only to take down the patriarchal biased perceptions of the current programs but also to set up future athletic trainers for greater success in managing both their personal lives and their careers (Dieringer, 2007).

The lack of women in athletic positions means fewer women getting the chance to advocate for themselves, their work in their respective professions, and future females who wish to enter these roles. Is this because women are not being given the opportunities to take these jobs, or is it due to women's lack of perceived ability preventing them from applying for these jobs in the first place? Martin (2013) suggests the lack of female athletic trainers hired into the administrative positions at an NCAA Division-1 level is because males control those leadership positions and "set the agenda regarding hiring and work policies," (p. 9). O'Connor et al. (2010) stated that females are evaluated negatively because they are stepping outside of the stereotype that was built around leadership roles (O'Connor et al., 2010). The combination of attrition due to work-life balance, role congruity theory, and gender stereotyping have severely reduced the

ability of female athletic trainers to work in male professional sports as well as high-level collegiate sports. Female athletic trainers are represented most prevalently at the high school and NCAA Division-3 levels, making up 48% of the graduate assistants, 59.3% of the assistant athletic trainers, and 39.7% of the head athletic trainers (O'Connor et al., 2010). At the Division II level, females represent 46.8% of graduate assistants, 57.3% of assistants, and 29.6% of head athletic trainers (O'Connor et al., 2010). Finally, at the Division I level, females, hold 46.6% of the graduate assistant positions, 47% of the assistant or associate athletic training positions, but only 18.8% of the head athletic training positions (O'Connor et al., 2010).

With women making up 52% of the NATA since 2006, this underrepresentation at the highest levels of sport is incomprehensible. There have been more studies done in recent years to discover why female athletic trainers are not working in male professional sports, but few have looked at how the ones working in the field have gotten there. The purpose of this research study is to discover what aspects of educational programs best prepared female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports leagues to get to their current positions.

### **Description of the Research**

Qualitative research is used to discover the humanistic approaches of a certain topic and to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Pathak et al., 2013). To best understand the perspectives of female athletic trainers, it is important to find out information that goes beyond just numbers and statistics on a page. For this reason, a qualitative approach has been used to address this research study. This allows the researcher to serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Fryklund, 2019).

Using a qualitative approach not only allows the researcher to have more control over the study, but it also allows the participant in the study to provide greater input by giving them an active role in the study (Pathak et al., 2013). Giving the participants a chance to voice their opinions on what is helpful and what is harmful to them personally as well as to the research study as a whole will allow for greater autonomy within the research and more open and honest communication between researcher and participant (Pathak et al., 2013).

While this methodology was once viewed in a negative light by the scientific community, it has since been appreciated for adding new dimensions to interventional studies that cannot be obtained through measurement variables alone (Pathak et al., 2013). This study used the narrative inquiry approach of qualitative research as the researcher interviewed three female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports in the United States. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to obtain the data for this study to get a better picture of the perspective of female athletic trainers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher analyzed the findings of this study using Standpoint Feminist Theory, which originally emerged in the 1970s and 80s (Harding, 2012). Though many major research studies done in this topic area have used Role Congruity Theory or homologous reproduction, I thought it best to look at things through a different lens. Feminist Theory can be defined as “both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms” (McAfee, 2018, p. 1). Even still, feminist theory is more than just listening to women; it is also paying attention to their roles and locations and asking them questions such as, “What are women doing? What social/political locations are they part of or excluded from?”

How do their activities compare to those of men?” and much more (McAfee, 2018, p. 1).

Standpoint Theory looks at the relationship between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Mazerolle et al., 2012a). It is used to shape and engage with concepts and situations from the arena of oppressed groups (Mazerolle et al., 2012a). Mazerolle et al. (2012b) went on to explain that the social division of labor is an accessible starting point to study the working conditions of women because that is where social life is being assembled. This theory allows the views of a group of people to be told from a particular standpoint, hence the name. Mazerolle et al. (2012b) explains how this pertains to females in sport by saying,

Further, feminist standpoint theory assumes that people develop different perspectives based on their location or position in society; women have a distinct standpoint, particularly in sport, given that the NCAA statistics have shown they are in the minority in many areas. (p. 695)

When Feminist Standpoint Theory is applied to athletic training, these questions and perspectives become more difficult to answer and understand. Using this lens, the researcher looked deeper into how women might not just be held back from these jobs but can be excluded from the conversation about these jobs entirely. The researcher also investigated how built-in gender stereotyping potentially affected their undergraduate and graduate educations, even if they were not obviously excluding them from anything. It has been made clear that gender discrimination is alive and well in athletic training, and that gender stereotyping is not an issue that is going away any time soon. The researcher learned from the perspectives of women who have beaten stereotypes and discrimination to gather information for those who wish to follow in their footsteps. Standpoint Theory provided the best vehicle for reading between the lines of

those who have been interviewed to bring to the surface the messages that perhaps they cannot even articulate.

### **Research Questions**

1. How did athletic training education programs prepare the trainers for work-life balance?
2. Did any preceptors in the athletic training education program have a significant impact on career trajectory?
3. What impact did collegiate coaches and players have on career preparation?
4. What role did collegiate mentors have in career trajectory?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports beat the odds to get their current positions. Having a better understanding of the common threads between these women is beneficial in shaping the future of athletic training education programs and informing them how they can better cater to their growing female populations. Ultimately, the hope is to reduce female athletic trainers' attrition rate at an early age, which is currently very high around the age of 28 (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). This study will also help female athletic trainers who aspire to hold positions in male professional sports by providing them with insight into the best practices for work-life balance that can be incorporated into their own lives, as well as the necessity of a mentor and clinical experiences. Using current female athletic trainers in the pro-sports world was advantageous to explore how they broke through current barriers, and to hear about aspects that would have made a difference in their career paths to help ease the paths of those who will come after them.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

I accept the following assumptions related to this study:

1. The female athletic trainers were open and honest about their experiences.
2. The female athletic trainers spoke about their own stories and experiences from their perspectives.
3. Based upon a review of the literature, the lack of female athletic trainers in male professional sports will continue to be an issue in the future.
4. Female athletic trainers can perform job duties equal to or greater than the abilities of male athletic trainers.

### **Delimitations**

There are currently only 45 female athletic trainers working in the male professional sports leagues of the NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL. This study focused on those 45 women and the women in the minor league systems of these sports. I did not interview any other female persons apart from one female collegiate soccer coach for the pilot study. Additionally, this study did not include any male athletic trainers at any level of sport and did not include any female athletic trainers who formerly worked in male professional sports but are not actively serving in this role at present. Lastly, only female athletic trainers in male professional sports were included in this study. It did not include collegiate, high school, club, or clinical trainers, and no female athletic trainers working in any level of female sports will be included.

As a current female athletic trainer working at the Division I level, I am a member of the athletic training community. For this reason, as a researcher, I bring an understanding of the demands of the profession as well as the professional community. I aspire to work in male

professional sports, specifically in the NHL, and I have a desire to listen to, learn from, and share the experiences of these female athletic trainers. This will not only aid my journey, but it will also impact the journey of all current female athletic trainers who wish to take this route and those who are to come.

### **Summary**

Using the theoretical framework of Standpoint Feminist Theory, the researcher interviewed three female athletic trainers who are currently working in male professional sports to ask about their undergraduate athletic training educational experiences. The field of athletic training has remained skewed in favor of men for the past 70 years, since its beginning in 1950, and it has continued to relegate women to the backburner. Despite the NATA current membership statistics showing that 55% of the total population of athletic trainers are female, only 45 positions in American professional sports are held by women. By performing semi-structured interviews in this qualitative research study, the researcher hoped to understand how the females currently working in professional sports were able to get these positions. After finding common threads among the women's interviews, the researcher created a framework for athletic training education programs to follow that will best set their female students up for success.

Chapter 2 will provide a literature review and the theoretical framework. The review of the literature focuses on athletic training education programs, work-life balance for female athletic trainers, perspectives of athletic trainers in professional sport, and the importance of mentorship for female athletic trainers. The theoretical framework being used is Standpoint

Feminist Theory, first presented in the 1970s, but for this study, it is being applied to athletic training.

Chapter 3 is the study's methodology. In this qualitative research study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to best survey the perspectives of female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports. Chapter 3 provides all the information pertaining to the research design, participants, data collection, analysis, data and study quality, institutional review board (IRB), and procedures and timelines.

Chapter 4 outlines and explains the results of the study. This section is intended to help the reader best understand the perspectives presented by these female athletic trainers.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the study. This contains a discussion of the results, future research needs, limitations, and implications of the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Athletic Training Student*- A student currently enrolled in courses while matriculating through a CAATE accredited professional education program (NATA, n.d.)
- *Clinic*- Athletic Training Facility (NATA, n.d.)
- *Clinical Education*- A broad umbrella term that includes three types of learning opportunities to prepare students for independent clinical practice: athletic training clinical experiences, simulation, and supplemental clinical experiences
- *Division I* – the highest level of intercollegiate athletics sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States (NCAA, n.d.)

- *Division II* – an intermediate-level division of competition in the NCAA offering an alternative to both the larger and better-funded Division I and the scholarship-free environment offered in Division III (NCAA, n.d.)
- *Division III*- a division of the NCAA in the United States consisting of athletic programs at colleges and universities that choose not to offer athletic scholarships to their student-athletes (NCAA, n.d.)
- *Immersive Clinical Experience*- A practice-intensive experience that allows the student to experience the totality of care provided by athletic trainers
- *Preceptor*- A certified/licensed professional who teaches and/or evaluates students in a clinical setting using an actual patient base (CAATE, n.d.)
- *Professional Socialization*- Process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, values and ethics, norms, skills, and knowledge of a subculture of a health care profession (NATA, n.d.)
- *Specialty Certification*- Specialty certification is a credential earned through a post-professional education and training process such as an accredited residency in a specialized area of clinical practice. The BOC Specialty Council oversees AT specialties. (NATA, n.d.)

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

To gain a better understanding of how this research study worked and why it was important, it is imperative to first have a working knowledge of the topic at hand. The following chapter will be broken down into the following subsections to provide ease of reading: athletic training education programs, women in sports, women in athletic training, and the theoretical framework. Each of these sections contains related subsections, and the chapter will flow from general research to more specific literature.

### **Athletic Training Education Programs**

All certified athletic trainers must go through a CAATE accredited athletic training program to sit for the BOC exam. There are many degree-level options that those interested in athletic training may obtain: bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and residency. Students must learn about specific subject matter taught through a medical-based education model, focusing on given domains of clinical practice: prevention, clinical evaluation, and diagnosis, immediate and emergency care, treatment and rehabilitation, and organized and professional health and well-being (CAATE, n.d.). The CAATE (n.d.) website goes on to further explain the educational program by saying, "The educational requirements for CAATE-accredited athletic training education programs include acquisition of knowledge, skills and clinical abilities along with a broad scope of foundational behaviors of professional practice," (CAATE, n.d., para. 2). There are multiple competencies laid out that the ATP must teach students to maintain accreditation, and they are as follows: evidence-based practice, prevention and health promotion, clinical examination and diagnosis, acute care of injury and illness, therapeutic interventions,

psychosocial strategies and referral, health care administration, and professional development and responsibility (CAATE, n.d.).

Yet, there is no competency to teach athletic training students how to manage their personal lives within this career, especially in the areas of mental health, work-life balance, and the emotional exhaustion that can come from this line of work. Mazerolle et al. (2002) found that despite an interest in athletic training, many athletic training students decide to leave the degree program due to the time commitment and the job demands, which can limit time for family and personal interests. A potential consequence of the lack of urgency to teach students self-care is that ATPs have had a decline in cohort graduation rates over the last three years, as seen in the table below (CAATE, n.d.).

**Figure 1***Student Graduation and Employment/Placement Rate*

		<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>2018-2019</b>
<b>Number of students graduated</b>	Bachelors	2,374	2,355	2,121
	Masters	1,551	1,655	1,570
<b>Total number in cohort</b>	Bachelors	2,964	2,937	2,883
	Masters	1,822	1,989	2,111
<b>Graduation percentage</b>	Bachelors	80%	80%	74%
	Masters	85%	83%	74%
<b>*see individual program websites for individual program data</b>				

*Note.* Table showing decreasing levels of athletic training students graduating over the last three years (CAATE, n.d.)

What is it that makes some athletic training students persist in their educational programs but not others? Bowman and Dodge (2011) did a research study on precisely this topic. They found that interactions with faculty and classmates, the environment of the ATP, and the educational experiences of the students were three of the largest factors that contributed to persistence in the program. Bowman and Dodge (2011) went on to say, “Program administrators should appreciate cultural diversity, develop the career goals of the students, promote healthy relationships, create interactive classrooms, and encourage campus involvement of the students”

(p. 670). Encouraging campus involvement promotes an early introduction into the need for work-life balance with ATP students, and it shows them it is possible to have a life in tandem with their work. When ATPs allow their students to have comfortable lives in and out of work, they are encouraging more students to matriculate through the program, to sit for the BOC, and to become confident, competent athletic trainers. These goals can be achieved by developing clinical experiences with diverse populations, integrating professional goals early on in the student's educational experience, developing peer mentoring programs, implementing class discussions involving critical thinking and student cooperation, and emphasizing the quality of clinical experiences instead of maintaining hourly requirements (Bowman & Dodge, 2011). It is important students realize the quality of the hours in the ATR is far more important than the number of hours.

As with many life experiences, female athletic training students have an entirely different viewpoint on managing the load during, and post-graduation from, ATPs. Mazerolle and Gavin (2013) did a study looking at female athletic training students' perceptions of motherhood and retention in athletic training, and they found that female students were considering the implications of work-life balance and how being a certified athletic trainer (ATC) would affect their potential to have a family life outside of work. The most commonly noted reasons for concern were extensive work hours and travel (Mazerolle & Gavin, 2013). Working at the high school level was a compromise most female athletic training students made to balance work and family. "Work hours and travel appeared to strongly influence the participants' impressions of the high school setting and why it would be a more suitable work environment to balance motherhood and athletic training duties" (Mazerolle & Gavin, 2013, p. 681). Not all of the

participants felt this way; instead, some cited, “Developing strategies for work-life balance, including a work environment that allowed integration, time-management skills, strong communication skills, and support from a spouse or supervisor (or both)” (Mazerolle & Gavin, 2013, p. 681). It was also repeatedly stated having a female role model and mentor that models having children and being a full-time athletic trainer was extremely beneficial for young students to see (Mazerolle & Gavin, 2013).

Work-life balance concerns for female athletic training students do not just hinder them from completing the program, they can also affect their career intentions right from the start. Mazerolle et al. (2002) found that two factors emerged as possible influences for a female student’s career goals: (a) employment setting dynamics and (b) mentorship received during clinical rotation. Mazerolle et al. (2012b) supported this notion in a later study which found that “Mentorship was defined as a critical factor in the professional socialization development of an athletic trainer because the relationship between the mentor and protégé can help reinforce professional roles, advance skill development, and promote lifelong learning for both members” (p. 680). It is clear that early support for female athletic training students that encourages them to pursue their careers to their fullest and best abilities is the most influential motivator for students to stay in the program and continue to build career aspirations.

With the importance of mentorship stressed so much by students and ATP’s alike, what kind of mentor is best for athletic training students to have? Often a student’s first mentor is a preceptor, and they are the first influence that pushes students towards participation in the program and provides networking bridges for the students (Mazerolle et al., 2016b). Mentorship has been mentioned many times throughout this research study so far, but to define it further

Mazerolle et al. (2016b) state that “Mentoring is a progressive process whereby 2 individuals develop a purposeful relationship that can foster growth, improve confidence, and renew interest in their professional role” (p. 73). These mentor-mentee relationships are critical for getting students to buy into their ATP. Additionally, they help the student to see longevity within their careers and provide the necessary role modeling needed to gain an understanding and respect for the roles and responsibilities that come with being an ATC (Mazerolle et al., 2016b).

Additionally, it is often the mentor who creates a positive clinical experience for the student to grow and learn within.

Even still, there are barriers outside of the athletic training student’s control that may hinder graduation from an ATP, such as sexual harassment (Shingles & Smith, 2008). Sexual harassment is defined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as, “unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature,” (Mansell et al., 2017, p. 4). Within the field of athletic training, 64% of female certified athletic trainers felt they had been sexually harassed as a student and/or professional during clinical rotations or in the professional workplace (Mansell et al., 2017). Perhaps even more disturbing, 49% of student interns have reported some form of sexual harassment within their athletic training internship setting through their program or major (Mansell et al., 2017). These numbers are alarmingly high and promote a culture that is not welcoming to athletic training students, particularly those who are female. According to an earlier study by Shingles and Smith (2008),

The lack of perception and understanding about sexual harassment and assault by female athletic trainers is disturbing and problematic. Similarly, the fact that the

women perceived they were the ones who had to change rather than recognize that the environment needed to change is also problematic. (p. 106)

The study later went on to say female ATCs, similarly to females in sport, may have been oppressed through male hegemonic sports practices and were expected to just deal with the normative sexualized environment or leave, or have equal acceptance in the male-dominant sporting environment (Shingles & Smith, 2008). This oversexualized environment is both unwelcoming to female athletic training students and female ATCs creating an impossible learning environment and workspace that ultimately drives females out of the profession.

Other frustrations expressed by athletic training students were a lack of respect during clinical experiences, burnout, and high-stress levels (Bowman & Dodge, 2013). Perceived future work-life conflict and inadequate compensation were other reasons found by Bowman and Dodge (2013) that explain why students are anxious about entering into the athletic training profession. Overall, athletic training students have the odds stacked against them concerning both finishing their ATPs as well as starting their careers. Concerns over work-life balance, pay, travel, and burnout lead to students dropping out of their ATPs or leaving the profession early on in their careers. For these reasons, it is important to study how female athletic trainers working at the highest levels have overcome these barriers to get to where they are today.

### **Women in Sports**

Women in athletics face a multitude of barriers not only to initially obtain their positions but also to keep them. With hiring practices done by university employees who are often men, it can be difficult for women to gain consideration for the positions in the first place (Buzuvis, 2015). Women must also overcome biopsychosocial factors to gain the respect necessary to be

taken seriously by their mostly male coworkers, team, and athletics fans (Buzuvis, 2015). Gender discrimination is by no means an experience limited to athletic training, and it is important to consider the difficulties women across all aspects of sport face before looking at athletic training specifically (Buzuvis, 2015).

Buzuvis (2015) did a study examining the barriers to leadership that women face in collegiate athletics. Buzuvis (2015) found that,

Women are excluded from opportunities within sport, whether through lawful or unlawful means, or their interests are suppressed by external forces that make their actions appear to be internal and agentic, or their opportunities to engage in the sporting enterprise are constructed on different terms to pose no threat to the gender order. (p. 274)

When women's sports were initially brought into the monetized and high-pressure world of collegiate sports already in existence, the burden of the college model forced a lot of women to leave their leadership positions because typically women would rather focus on their athlete-centered educational approach than the bottom line (Buzuvis, 2015). This gender gap stems from the origin of sport, which "Operated as a means to ascribe power to men, by creating highly visible, symbolic linking of power with masculinity in a way that makes that association appear natural and legitimate," (Buzuvis, 2015, p. 274). Typically, the urge to have power, status, and social comparison motivates men, while women are generally driven by a desire to do a good job and contribute deeply to organizational function (Martin & Barnard., 2013).

When entering male-dominated occupations such as athletics, women face unique challenges that their male counterparts do not. Among these challenges are inadequate resources,

biased infrastructure and policies, spill-over of stereotypical gender roles and expectations, and women's work identity and work-life balance needs (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Martin and Barnard (2013) also found that "the low prominence of females in their profession leads to sexist jokes, derogatory comments about women, and, on occasion, aggressive and sexist behavior from male colleagues," (p. 9). Often to offset these challenges, women must transform their personalities to fit into the group and rely on their natural instincts to nurture and care for everyone to gain an edge over their competition. Though this comes with its own set of consequences, as Hardin and Whiteside (2012) found. Females in all lines of work, but particularly athletics, find themselves in the role of "team mom" more often than not. This can be attributed to the softer and more compassionate nature expected of most women. Hardin and Whiteside (2012) said,

The friendliness trap addresses the cultural consequences of 'doing femininity' in the workplace, and suggests that although feminine qualities such as good listening skills may be valued at the entry level in communications professions in what is often called a 'female advantage', those same feminine attributes are often later recoded negatively when women are evaluated for leadership positions. (p. 310)

Women eventually become excluded by the very same traits that got them the job in the first place. This attitude keeps women in low-level positions and prohibits career advancement to more high-profile sporting environments such as football (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012). Women are forced into this balancing act of maintaining their femininity while also trying to display masculinity in their new work environments. Hardin and Whiteside (2012) saw that women

themselves had a double standard. While individually performing this charade of masculine and feminine, they were also criticizing other women for being either too masculine or too feminine. As a consequence, women in athletics do not have support from either their male or female coworkers. The women were found to have conflicting beliefs that, “their (stereotypically) feminine qualities gave them a female advantage, but that (stereotypically) feminine qualities as exhibited by other women were a detriment to the profession,” (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012, p. 317). Hardin and Whiteside (2012) said that women tried their best to fit into their environments by simply letting things happen to and around them,

Being privy to sexist jokes was translated into a symbol of acceptance. Being asked to do extra work was translated into men acknowledging they were simply better multitaskers. As long as women interpret events detrimental to their own advancement in ways that benefit men, they will continue to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo. (p. 319)

Unless women deem these practices unacceptable, society will continue to walk all over them. They will continue to be the silent workhorses, tirelessly toiling behind the scenes, while their sometimes less qualified male coworkers reap the rewards of simply being biologically male.

As if these barriers do not pose problem enough to women in athletics, underlying biased hiring practices exclude them from the conversation entirely. Second-generation gender bias has held women back from leadership roles without being noticed (Grover, 2015). Grover (2015) defines it as, “A hidden, invisible, planned, organized practice that has a more neutral face, but the underlying practices, values, and beliefs remain distinctly male-oriented,” (p. 1). Essentially, one group will discriminate against a gender because they do not reflect the traditional roles of

the gender who made and established the setting. Due to the lack of opportunity given to them in the world, women must work twice as hard to learn new skills needed to take on the position as well as lead. Ibarra et al. (2013) said,

Organizations inadvertently undermine this process when they advise women to proactively seek leadership roles without also addressing policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen, and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders. (p. 1)

It is not enough for jobs to try to make themselves look better by placing women in positions of power as “token” figures. There must be active work done to ensure the policies in place allow women to lead in their own uniquely feminine ways. Women should also be given the same learning opportunities as men so they have an equitable chance to succeed without having to work twice as hard just to prove themselves.

Despite all of these obstacles, there are still women who make things work and succeed both in careers within athletics as well as in their advocacy for other women. There are some women in the working world who “have it all” with the help of their spouse, “You have to love to work, and you have to love to parent... If you choose your employers wisely and choose your mate wisely, there is no question in my mind you can have it all,” (“Knowledge at Wharton”, 2012, p. 1). Some women navigate their professional and personal lives by delegating tasks to outside sources, receiving support from their employer, and having a spouse who is willing to take a back seat when necessary. When really looking at the facts and personality traits, women are better equipped than men to be leaders, and they have production as a natural trait, which is less common in men (Grover, 2015). Women should continue to strive for and seek out positions

of leadership in athletics because despite all of the obstacles, their presence adds depth and richness to athletics that would not exist without them and their experiences.

### **Women in Athletic Training**

Unfortunately, women in athletic training are not much better off than women in sports. Facing barriers similar to women in other careers, women in athletic training have the added burdens of lower compensation, exclusion from leadership opportunities, and greater difficulty finding work-life balance (Martin, 2013). This section will also go into greater detail on the thoughts and perspectives of female athletic trainers working specifically in the realm of professional male sports. Particular emphasis is given to females who have successfully reached the top of their careers and maintained those positions for a long time.

As the research has shown in previous sections of this literature review, females working in any position within athletics face a wide range of barriers that can hinder them from being successful. Some of these barriers for women in athletic training are similar to those of other women in sports, and some are very specific to the role of athletic training. Since the year 2016, it has been estimated that only 19.5% of head athletic training positions are held by women (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). As one looks down the chain of NCAA divisions, more women seem to be prevalent, with 36.8% of head athletic trainers in the Division III setting being women. However, it is interesting to note researchers have found no differences in career satisfaction or intentions among women working at any level of collegiate athletics (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). One upside many female athletic trainers have found working in non-Division I settings is that their contracts are shorter in length (less than 12 months), which allows for greater perceived ability to achieve work-life balance (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a).

One reason so many women have not successfully obtained high-level positions in higher-pressure jobs, Division I and professional, is due to the “good old boys club” subculture within sport (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). This gender stereotyping occurs across all divisions and has kept women out of athletic training rooms since the 1950s. One participant in the Mazerolle & Eason (2016a) study said,

I believe that society doesn't typically place a female in that role [of head athletic trainer], especially at the collegiate level, because the head [AT] is usually the person to take care of the major male sports. Some administrators feel that men are better suited to take care of men. (p. 560)

Women have faced these societal barriers their entire lives, and it is clear that the buck does not stop within the sports medicine world (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). Women have always been told their role is to “take care of” and men should “take charge,” which is a direct contradiction to athletic training. The nature of the job is to take care of athletes, but this viewpoint limits women's perceived ability to lead.

Interestingly, women who do hold the role of the head athletic trainer must also work twice as hard to create a positive work environment for the other women on staff. One research participant said, “Male or female: If someone on staff has a bad experience, the head AT should know about it and help to change the situation into something positive,” (Mazerolle et al., 2012a, p. 699). Not only must they navigate personal barriers and difficulties within the profession, but the women in these positions must also help the other staff members navigate their barriers and difficulties. All of this added stress leads to additional role strain, which can be described as, “a

subjective state of emotional arousal in response to the external conditions of social stress,” (Romero et al., 2018a, p. 184).

Athletic trainers already experience high levels of role strain due to the many hats they wear. For example, they must provide direct patient care while also serving as the medical liaison to athletes, coaches, management, and leagues (Romero et al., 2018a). This is in addition to any personal issues or barriers encountered at work. This role strain increases the symptoms of depression, anxiety, job-induced tension, and various other psychological factors, which can lead to higher attrition rates than those of other professions (Romero et. al, 2018b). The real issue with role strain is when problems travel out of the ATR and into the home; this creates work-family conflict and adds to the already tense work-family relations created by athletic training (Romero et al., 2018b). This role strain can also be exacerbated by the demands and pressures women face from society concerning childbearing and cultural issues concerning the “typical” role of women in America (Goodman et al., 2010). With athletics seemingly moving farther and farther away from having a true off-season, forcing AT’s to lack time off and breaks, these issues and role strain within athletic training become more heightened. A 2006 survey of more than 4000 NCAA athletics staff found that 57% of people were considering leaving athletics, and 35% believed negative consequences would occur if they had to take time off of work for personal or family matters (Goodman et al., 2010). With increasing stress levels from role complexity, athletic trainers saw a decrease in job satisfaction and a greater intent to leave the profession (Goodman et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, it seems that some women working in male collegiate and professional sports have had to endure quite a bit of discrimination and harassment to get to where they are. A

study done by O'Connor et al. (2010) looked at NCAA Division I football players' perceptions of women in the athletic training room, and they found 58% of those surveyed demonstrated evidence of gender-role stereotyping. Only 33.3% of respondents thought female and male ATs were the same or equal, and 8.7% of the respondents responded with "other" (O'Connor et al., 2010). Yet, these findings are in direct contradiction to the results from a survey done by The Women in Athletic Training Committee (WATC) in 1997, which found that "Women and men had equal knowledge, skills, and education required to be successful in the profession as well as in leadership positions," (Women in Athletic Training Committee as cited by Perez et al., 2002, p. 88). Despite this finding, women are still offered fewer opportunities for leadership positions and upward mobility in their careers. Women also experience lower financial compensation, to the tune of \$10,000 per year less than their male ATC counterparts (Perez et al., 2002). While this discrepancy has decreased to \$8,700 less per year as of 2018, the wage gap is astonishing (Simmons, 2019). Despite this unequal treatment, athletic training is still seeing a large increase of women joining the profession, with 69% of females in the profession currently labeling themselves as young professionals and only 46% of males in the profession currently labeling themselves as young professionals (Simmons, 2019). With young women on the rise in athletic training, the hope is that the current gender gap existing in professional sports will become more even since currently 86% of the jobs are filled by males compared to only 13% of the jobs filled by females (Simmons, 2019).

Against all odds, there have been women who make it to the top in these professional leagues, and their perspectives can be an invaluable tool for those wishing to enter the professional leagues. There have been many studies and dissertations on the topic of women

working in male professional sports. In their 2018 dissertation research, Temnick identified traits that were key for women to break into the professional sports world. Among them were hard work, commitment, determination, dedication, communication, honesty, and loyalty. Other aspects that the women interviewed stated as important were having role models, mentoring and networking, and having support groups available to work through difficult situations (Temnick, 2018). Perhaps though the greatest trait these women possessed was that “Their interpretation of barriers were more obstacles that they were willing to problem-solve to surpass to continue on their endeavors of professional success,” (Temnick, 2018, p. 84). There was also a brief mention of the importance of athletic training programs dedicating time to teach students about work-life balance and professional socialization skills. Overall, females in the professional sports setting often experience more conflicts towards the profession than females in other settings experience due to the increased workload expectations for professional sports ATs.

Women must be prepared to be capable leaders and mentors in their careers in the same way society expects men to be leaders and mentors. This fundamental shift needs to occur not just in athletic training, but throughout the field of athletics. Women have proven time and time again that they are capable of performing duties in the athletic training room and on the field in a manner that is equal to or greater than their male counterparts. O’Connor et al. (2010) said that females are seen negatively because they are stepping outside of the stereotypical gender and leadership roles. For this very reason, women must continue to work towards a more equal and inclusive workspace and break these stereotypes to be seen in an equal light with their male counterparts.

## Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory was originally brought about in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but feminist analysis came up in the second wave of feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as women were struggling with their identities as housewives and nothing more. As Hesse-Biber (2012) said,

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question- 'Is this all?' (p. 3)

Women such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan, were some of the first to speak of their internal feelings of exclusion from the prominent sections of life such as education, seeing their concerns and worth deteriorate by the central powers of their culture (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Hesse-Biber (2012) went on to say, "Feminist thinking and practice require taking steps from the 'margins to the center'... boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known," (p. 3). For one to properly engage with feminist theory they must challenge the prior perceptions, presumptions, and ideas they hold, "assuming that when we speak of the generic term *men*, we also mean women, as though what is true for the dominant groups must also be true for women and other oppressed groups," (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 3). It has been found that "The social relations between women and men in significant respects resembled those between workers and their bosses: gender and class relations had parallel structures," (Harding, 2012, p. 48). These social relations end up leaving women in a constant state of inferiority to men and renders them unable to overcome their current place in society.

Feminist research “disrupts traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings,” (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 3).

Stemming from Feminist Theory, Feminist Standpoint Theory was formed also in part by the women’s political movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Harding, 2012). Originating from Nancy Hartsock, “Feminist standpoint theory promised feminist scholarship a novel epistemology that could ground research in the truth embodied in women’s experience,” (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 135). Feminist Standpoint Theory was “intended to explain the surprising successes of emerging feminist research in a wide range of projects,” (Harding, 2004, p. 1). This theory was created to empower the oppressed groups by acknowledging and caring about their experiences and creating a consciousness of the opposition (Harding, 2004). This theory forms congruity in opposite terms such as “insider” and “outsider” conjoining them as one concept to show the magnitude of different standpoints (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Harding (2012) said, “In such a contradictory social location as an insider in one respect and an outsider in others, a researcher can learn to detect aspects of social relations not accessible by those who are only outsiders or only insiders” (p. 47). Hawkesworth (1999) stated, “As an analytical tool, feminist standpoint theory has a number of advantages. It suggests a way of gathering data for analysis that pre-supposes multiplicity and complexity” (p. 136). The change in the theory from a viewpoint of one feminist view to multiple feminist views, accounting in different intersections of being, has allowed the theory to become a steadfast analytical tool in feminist work (Hawkesworth, 1999).

Feminist Standpoint Theory was later adapted by numerous theorists who reframed the idea that, “As an analytical tool, feminist standpoint theory encourages researchers to consider

competing accounts of the same phenomenon” (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 150). This privilege can then be used as a launching point for inquiry into questions about both those who are oppressed and the oppressors. A great example of this as laid out by Bowell (n.d.),

Person A approaches a building and enters it unproblematically. As she approaches, she sees something perfectly familiar which, if asked, she might call ‘The Entrance’. Person X approaches the same building and sees a great stack of stairs and the glaring lack of a ramp for her wheelchair. The experience of person A is of the entrance to a building. Whereas the experience of person X is of a barrier to entrance and (at best) an inconvenience. Person X’s social location—qua person with a disability—means that the building presents differently to her from how it does to someone without a disability. (p. 424).

While both persons approach the same situation, their experiences about the situation are vastly different; the same goes for women in feminist literature and standpoint theory (Hawkesworth, 1999). The questions of Feminist Standpoint Theory should no longer be about how women can fit into men’s spaces, but rather, how women can create their own spaces, encompassing the needs of all women (Hawkesworth, 1999). Women should no longer be thought of and studied as men’s imperfect counterparts (Hawkesworth, 1999). Rather, they should be appreciated for their capabilities as just beings worthy of the same respect and dignity, without special circumstances or exceptions having to be made (Hawkesworth, 1999).

Feminist Standpoint Theory as it pertains to athletics is looked at through Catherine MacKinnon’s ideas of women’s oppression in liberal society from difference-based to dominance-based (MacKinnon, 1983). When women were first included in sport, they were

taken in under the established male-organized ideals and given positions under patriarchal and phallogocentric norms. There was little to no challenge to the gender order seen in greater society, which only allowed women to be further oppressed and excluded within the subculture of sport. As Burke (2001) said, “So, whilst sexism may have been challenged by the liberal inclusion of women into sport, opposition to patriarchy and phallogocentrism was contained,” (p. 242). Burke (2001) also argued:

One of the recurring themes... is that sport, play and games are institutionalized aspects of our culture which help to maintain male and masculine hegemony... specifically by how it is defined, by the direct control of women’s sports by men, and by ignoring, or at best trivializing, women’s achievements in sports. (p. 242)

Sports will remain a male-dominated field as long as women allow themselves to be placed into boxes that fit the status quo of what has always been. For women to continue to progress in sport, everyone must work together to make sure they do not simply overcome the barriers, but instead, abolish these barriers altogether. An enlightened liberal society is one in which women can work jobs they are qualified and educated for without first having to explain why they deserve to be in the room.

Moving further into athletics, Feminist Standpoint Theory has been explored in the realm of athletic training by Mazerolle et al. (2012a). As Mazerolle et al. (2012a) said, “Standpoint theory has rarely been applied to sport but has been espoused as a mechanism that could be the source of illuminating knowledge claims about the working experiences of women” (p. 695). Based upon NCAA statistics that show women are the minority in several areas across college athletics, women have the standpoint of the oppressed. Standpoint theory has been adapted many

times by feminists and then by sports theorists, and for this study, it will be applied to female athletic trainers working in men's professional sports.

### **Summary**

Athletic training education programs teach a wide range of competencies and proficiencies that prepare students to sit for the BOC examination, which qualifies them to become certified athletic trainers. However, these programs are not required to teach work-life balance, networking, and professional socialization, which have proven to be invaluable tools to those looking to move forward within their careers. Athletic training students, particularly females, also experience a wide variety of barriers that inhibit them from receiving the necessary support and hands-on experience needed to pursue the accomplishments they hope to one day achieve within the profession.

These barriers only increase as athletic training students become young professionals and assistant athletic trainers. The large disparity between the total percentage of athletic trainers who are female and the percentage of head athletic trainers who are female has not shrunk proportionally relative to progressive times. It is more obvious than ever that females looking to move forward within the career must do so despite the barriers of the status quo and the determination of some to keep things the way they have always been. Inspiringly, through it all, some women have been able to succeed in reaching highly touted positions within men's NCAA Division I and professional sports settings. When asked to identify what allowed them to overcome the obstacles to their progress in career advancement, these women said that mentorship, networking, and social support were integral parts of their success.

### Chapter III: Methods

This chapter contains information regarding the methodology of the research study in detail, including the research questions, selection of participants, data sources, research design, analysis, timeline, and the role of the researcher. This qualitative study intends to understand the perspectives and look for underlying themes between participants to determine if there are any threads found tying participants' athletic training program educations to their current positions via semi-structured interviews. Understanding and utilizing this information would prove invaluable for ATPs to build coursework into their programs to help future athletic training students, and as a general guideline for anyone looking to achieve these positions in male professional sports within their careers. The potential to also have a greater understanding of the barriers hindering women from reaching these top positions could prove useful in the quest for equality and diversity across all settings within athletic training. The potential information to destroy these barriers and make sports an inclusive and welcoming environment for all genders could be found in the participants' answers.

Qualitative research is used when the participant's experiences go beyond what data in numbers could show. It is crucial for understanding the answers to questions about "experience, meaning, and perspectives, coming from the standpoint of the participant," (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 499). This research has been carefully scrutinized to determine the correct interpretation of textual, verbal, or visual data (Hammarberg et al., 2016). When determining the level of credibility of qualitative research, one must understand the vigorous reflexivity, triangulation, and description of the entire interpretation process, which often includes verbatim quotations from the data (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The theoretical framework of feminist standpoint

theory provides the vehicle for which the researcher analyzes the data collected during this qualitative study. This framework is the basis for all interpretation and is the lens through which the entirety of the study has been done.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided all interviews in this study:

1. How did athletic training education programs prepare the trainers for work-life balance?
2. Did any preceptors in the athletic training education program have a significant impact on career trajectory?
3. What impact did collegiate coaches and players have on career preparation?
4. What role did collegiate mentors have in career trajectory?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research approach was utilized to explain the perspectives and experiences of female athletic trainers working in male professional sports within the United States. The qualitative study was done using semi-structured interviews which let the researcher better understand these athletic trainers' experiences. Qualitative research allows the researcher to be the instrument and the subjects to become participants who provide their own data interpretation and analysis (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

The qualitative approach allows the researcher to, "seek views on a focused topic or, with key informants, for background information or an institutional perspective," (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 499). Qualitative research is more concerned with answering the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) of a person's experience than getting directly to the answer.

The research design used semi-structured interviews to obtain data from the participants. Semi-structured interviews let the researcher better lead the conversation to get a more well-rounded and better understanding of the athletic trainer's experiences. Jamshed (2014) said, "Semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer preset open-ended questions" (p. 87). Jamshed (2014) went on to say that the semi-structured interviews follow a basic interview guide in which the same questions are asked of each participant to keep the interview moving in the right direction for the sake of time and data collection. This method allows the interviewer to use probing questions when a participant is being too vague to allow for proper clarification and further understanding.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was done using one NCAA DII female assistant soccer coach with the questions that were designed for the study. The participant of the pilot study was asked via email if she wanted to participate and then was told the purpose and intentions of the study. She was asked to sign a form of consent before the interview. During the interview, her answers were recorded. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and their answers were transcribed verbatim. The researcher took field notes during the interview. The pilot study indicated that the interview protocol was sufficient in pulling out the information the research wanted.

### **Participants**

All of the female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports were invited to participate in the study. Their contact information was obtained through the professional sports athletic training website of their assigned sports: Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society (PBATS), Professional Football Athletic Trainers Society (PFATS),

Professional Hockey Athletic Trainers Society (PHATS), and the National Basketball Athletic Trainers Association (NBATA). I then sent out a message explaining the intent of the research study and an offer to participate via email to all the women. A few weeks after the initial email was sent a follow-up email was sent to all the women who had not responded to the first email. Four athletic trainers responded to the email saying they were willing to participate in the research study. The remainder of this thesis will focus on the participants who participated in the study.

After all the participants stated they would do the study a formal letter that explained things in greater detail was sent via email, and the interviews were scheduled. All the participants were asked to sign a letter of consent and an audio/visual release form before participation. The pilot study that was conducted before the actual study found that there were no necessary changes that needed to be made to the interview protocol. The interviews were all done over the phone or on Zoom due to the global pandemic that was occurring during the study.

The interviews were scheduled with the researcher by the participants based on the availability of their time. Two interviews were conducted by phone and one interview was done over Zoom. All the interviews were recorded using a digital format and all interviews followed the interview protocol. The researcher then took the recorded interviews and transcribed them verbatim. The participants were emailed these transcripts to review and edit. To conceal the participants' identity all demographic information about the participants was excluded from the study. All the participants were given a pseudonym.

## **Data Collection**

This study intended to understand the experiences of female athletic trainers currently working in male professional sports. Phone or Zoom interviews were conducted and recorded using a semi-structured interview approach to find themes in the women's responses as to barriers they have faced and how their educations related. The researcher used a laptop, cellphone, and recording app to conduct the interviews. An interview guide was created to help the researcher do the study, and it can be found in Appendix A. This interview guide was used in the pilot study before the other interviews. Interviews took about 30-45 minutes to do, and the interview questions were open-ended with probing questions following their answers to allow the participants to explain their experience how they saw fit.

After the interviews were finished all of them were transcribed verbatim using the audio recording that was taken during the interview. The researcher then sent the transcripts to the participants to review and edit by the deadline given by the researcher. Upon completion of the edits, the researcher was able to use the transcripts as the primary data source for the study. The researcher took the information that was found in the interview and used it to identify themes for the results section.

## **Analysis**

“Data analysis is the part of qualitative research that most distinctively differentiates from quantitative research methods,” (Wong, 2008, p.14). Wong (2008) continued by saying that qualitative research analysis is the process in which data from transcribed interviews is systematically searched and arranged to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The data must be coded or categorized to make sense of the large amount of information found. The

coding and categorization are used to, “draw meaning from data and subsequently build a logical chain of evidence,” (Wong, 2008, p.14). Coding is the most important part of qualitative data analysis and is essentially just the process of the researcher sifting through the large amount of information and tagging various pieces to later identify themes and subthemes within the data set for further analysis and results. For this study, the researcher took the transcribed and edited interviews and worked through them to code them. The coded interviews were then used to find what themes were found across interviews.

The qualitative semi-structured interviews proved to be the most effective method for collecting data for this study. Once the participants and researcher were able to find a time to conduct their interviews the data was transcribed, edited, and analyzed by the researcher using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Coding was done utilizing various methodologies such as In Vivo coding, concept coding, and sub coding. Each of these provided another layer for the researcher to use as the data was worked through and results were formulated.

It is important to note that during data analysis the processes of data collection, interpretation, and writing occurred simultaneously. These steps are not distinct, but instead are all done in combination with one another, as they are related. During the process of scheduling and conducting interviews, other interviews were in various stages of being finished and were being transcribed, edited, and analyzed. These steps were not mutually exclusive of each other, and instead, the researcher utilized the time available to complete whatever step was necessary at that moment for each interview. Doing the study in this way allowed the researcher to improve techniques, look for themes faster, and be more precise with their interviews.

During the review process of the transcripts, some evident themes emerged while coding the data. As Sutton and Austin (2015) said, “It is important to consider not just what the person is saying but also what they are *not* saying” (p. 228). Things such as pauses in the participants' speech and the exact words that they use can help find meanings within what they are saying outside of what they are exactly saying. The use of coding to find themes within the data is important when it comes time to analyze and review the results of the study. Theming the data makes it easier for the researcher to put together a paper or presentation by making the headings the themes that were found within the results.

The researcher performed the coding and theming work until they were not able to come up with any new ideas from the data set. This meant the researcher and the study have reached “saturation” regarding the topic. The next step was to identify and lay out the themes that were found within this study to begin to understand the results that were found.

### **Coding**

Using different forms of coding helps aid the researcher in a deeper and more thoughtful analysis of the data. Miles et al. (2020) said, “We believe that coding is deep reflection about and, thus, deep interpretation of the data’s meanings. In other words, coding *is* analysis” (p. 63). Codes are used to condense the researcher's data into manageable and easily found sections to allow the researcher to quickly find answers to their research questions in all the material (Miles et al., 2020). Utilizing multiple coding styles allows the researcher to look at data in various ways to identify recurring patterns, then nodes, then ultimately themes (Miles et al., 2020).

In this study, the researcher first used In Vivo Coding by using, “Words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data recorded as codes.” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 65). This first cycle coding method is beneficial when studying areas of society that have their own

language, such as the medical field or athletic training. In Vivo Coding makes it easy to pick out specific words which each participant used to see if they are being used in similar or relatable ways. The second style of coding done was concept coding which, “Assigns meso or macrolevels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress... A concept is a word or short phrase that represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action---a ‘bigger picture’” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 66). Concept coding involves looking not at what the participant is saying, but how they are saying it and in what context to try and create more subtle themes from the data set. In qualitative interview-style research how the participant says things can be just as important as what the participant is saying. The last form of coding style applied was sub coding, “A second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry.” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 72). Once the broad sections of useful data had been found, the researcher broke these sections down further by sub coding to find additional threads and themes within the data. All these instances of first cycle coding helped to simplify data analysis.

Second cycle coding is the process of grouping the sections found through first cycle coding together into even more specific categories, themes, and concepts (Miles et al., 2020). Pattern codes are a type of second cycle coding and provide a way for large amounts of data to be further synthesized into themes, concepts, and categories (Miles et al., 2020). It also allows the researcher to begin analysis while still working through the coding process because the themes will start to come together while still doing the coding itself. “Pattern codes emerge from repeatedly observed routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 81). These second cycle codes allow someone to make sense of the various codes they have, and

create a timeline, or cause and effect relationship between all the codes. The analysis could be done without pattern coding, but it would certainly prove to be more difficult.

Other helpful coding styles used for this study were jottings, which are the researcher's thoughts on the material, without going into depth on the material itself. It was helpful to react to the data set as a human being and not just as a researcher, so the emotions of the conversation did not get lost within the data. The last tool the researcher used was memoing, so the researcher could begin to move the data from the initial realm of thought towards a higher and more nuanced realm. Using memoing is a great way to "first draft" the data before the real analytic thought has begun (Miles et al., 2020). In this study it was found to be helpful to utilize all these various forms and methods of coding, from the first form to the second form to jotting and memoing. Together these various styles brought a clear picture from the puzzle and allowed the researcher to move towards analyzing the results of the study.

### **Data and Study Quality**

Leung (2015) said, "Validity in qualitative research means 'appropriateness' of the tools, processes, and data" (p. 325). The research questions must be appropriate for the topic, the methods must be appropriate for the research questions, and the results are appropriate for the data and context (Leung, 2015). Leung (2015) went on to say, "Choice of methodology must enable detection of findings/phenomena in the appropriate context for it to be valid, with due regard to culturally and contextually variable" (p. 325). The research methods must match the intent and goals of the study as outlined in the introduction.

In this study, data collection was done by using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with each participant after the researcher reviewed the literature about the topic and the setting in

which the participants worked. Additionally, the athletic trainers all had the opportunity to review, edit, and confirm their transcripts before they were utilized as primary data sources. Through the use of member checking, “soliciting feedback on your preliminary or emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed,” (Fryklund, 2019, p. 57) the researcher was able to continually ensure correct interpretation and analysis of the data was occurring. The researcher is also involved in this community, albeit not in the same setting, which allows for a deeper understanding of the topic for interpretation.

To increase reliability, it is important that the researcher, “must verify their accuracy in terms of form and context with constant comparison, either alone or with peers,” (Leung, 2015, p. 326). This peer review must occur to ensure the accuracy of the data collected and the interpretations that have been yielded. For this study peer review was conducted with a female head athletic trainer at a DI/DII hybrid institution. To determine the transferability of the study the researcher will use a detailed but wide description of the data that was found so that those who were not included within the study can still find meaning and applicability towards their situations and scenarios.

### **Human Subject Approval – Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

An application to the Institutional Review Board at St. Cloud State University was submitted before the start of this study. The IRB’s main job is to determine the safety of the study for the participants, in this case, the mental safety, to ensure the study is not doing any harm to those who elect to be a part of it. This double-checks that all aspects of the study are ethical. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and provide anonymity. All transcripts were given back to the participants for editing, reviewing, and verification. Only

the edited transcripts were used as primary data sources, and all data was presented as a lump sum with quotations given only using pseudonyms. The participants' demographic information was taken for the researchers' purposes only and was left out of the study to provide increased confidentiality to the participants. Due to the small number of eligible women for the study, it was imperative that all measures to protect and conceal their identities be used by the researcher.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study was done using semi-structured interviews to gain the perspectives and experiences of female athletic trainers working in professional male sports. By studying and understanding these women's experiences the researcher hopes that athletic training education programs can begin to teach the necessary courses to set their students up for success.

Performing semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have one-on-one time with the participants to gain greater clarity and ask probing questions to determine the meaning and to gain further insight. Snowball sampling was used to increase participants for the study, which included three of the current athletic trainers working professional male sports.

After the interviews were done by the researcher the data was then recorded and transcribed before being sent to the participants to be edited. The data was then analyzed, coded, and themed by the researcher to understand the results of the study. All data was used in aggregate form in the results section. This study followed the IRB's ethical considerations and best practices for confidentiality throughout the research process.

The research findings, study results, participants, and synthesis of the study can be found in chapter four. Then in chapter five the study's conclusion, discussion, limitations, and implications can be found.

## Chapter IV: Results

The goal of this study was to present athletic training education programs with a blueprint for its female students to use to help advance them towards working in male professional sports. The researcher hoped to find detailed descriptions of how the participants ATPs set them apart from the rest of the field based on the concepts taught that fall outside of the main course load. These concepts include work-life balance skills, networking techniques, and professional socialization strategies. Common threads throughout the participants' educational journeys were analyzed and filtered through for ways in which they placed these women ahead of others in the field. Potential themes the researcher expected to find were work-life balance topics, networking, or professional socialization skills, and CEU or certification courses the students in some ATPs had gained over other students. The researcher formulated interview questions to help guide the participants to discuss these topics in the natural flow of conversation and then executed the interview protocol to lead them to the desired data. A conscious effort was also made to provide the participants a space to be open, honest, and emotional about their athletic training journeys, and to pass on any advice or wisdom to those who hope to follow in their footsteps. All the women were happy to participate and described their own individual journeys in great detail, opening themselves up to be studied for the future good of the profession.

The results found were structured around four main points: undergraduate education, graduate education, work history, and support. These themes came up in every interview the researcher conducted with participants and were incorporated into the interview guide. Each of these points had subpoints mentioned throughout the interviews and were studied in greater detail as the interviews went on. The rest of this chapter will provide these results and their

analysis in greater detail, starting with undergraduate education and moving towards social support. Chunks of interview data gathered will be included within each section to provide clear evidence of the analysis and the participants will all be going by a pseudonym to protect their identities.

### **Interpreting the Research Questions**

The research purpose of this study was to determine why some female athletic trainers make it into male professional sports and if their athletic training education programs had anything to do with it. Research questions were chosen for this topic to highlight key areas that might have been similar for all the participants. Each research question was formulated from areas of need highlighted in the literature review. All of them are centered around parts of athletic training educational programs that are crucial for female athletic trainers' success and retention rates. Work-life balance, preceptors, coaches and players, and collegiate mentors are all sections of an athletic trainer's experience that have a great impact on career trajectory. Studying these extrinsic factors alongside the intrinsic reasons as to why someone is working at the highest level of sport in America can hopefully paint a clear picture of a possible route towards the professional leagues.

### **Standpoint Feminist Theory and Female Athletic Trainers**

The researcher elected to use standpoint feminist theory as the lens to view the data through because of the way it shows different perspectives of the same phenomenon. Sport has long been a way for males to keep the status quo of masculine hegemony, so allowing female voices to be heard directly falls into the theory. As was mentioned in the literature review, standpoint theory has only been applied to sport a few times, due to the minority status women

have in the world of sports. Women have the standpoint of being oppressed before we even get into different intersections of people's identities. All three participants, Chloe, Anne, and Jade referred to this during their interviews said the following,

Anne: I'm the only female

Chloe: I am [the only female].

Jade: I don't know a whole lot of females working in the sport.

The women who are within the profession themselves, are viewing their positions as rarities within the sports world. While professional sports have started to allow more women into its world, it is still working against the gender-order of society at large, creating almost more issues than it solved. Standpoint feminist theory made the researcher be in the mindset of seeing the women interviewed from their perspective, rather than from the perspective of society. This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the issues they were discussing, in a lens closer to their viewpoint than what other theories might have offered.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance within athletic training is a hot-button topic at the forefront of everyone's minds. It is no secret that athletic trainers have difficulty finding work-life balance as they go about their day to day lives, and many seminars have been done to help coach people through this tricky harmony. Despite being so important though, athletic training education programs are not required to teach their students anything on the topic. Many researchers have looked at the topic of work-life balance and how athletic training students perceive its importance, but few have looked at how athletic training programs might teach on this subject despite not being required to.

Anne mentioned during the interview,

You always ask your preceptors like how do you do it all? I definitely went through a phase where I didn't think I could have both. I did not think it at all. I thought if I really wanted high level if I really wanted to be really good at my job, that I could not have both. And if I tried to have both I had to give up something somewhere, and I always picked career over personal.

Anne went on to discuss how she feels the amount of work she has put in has allowed her to reach the position she has now, and without having done that she would not be in her current position. Throughout her career, she has also found, "If you want personal, you have to make time for it. Just like if you want to exercise, you have to make time for it. I feel better when I make time for those things, even if I am a little bit tired." Anne also noted that now she is in her position surrounded by people she cares about she feels as if she has found the work-life balance she has always wanted because she loves going to work.

When prompted with the question, Jade said,

I don't know that we were really taught a whole lot, I think it's different in every setting that we were kind of seeing and stuff like that. I know that we've seen a lot of people that our preceptors if they're in the college setting, you see crazy weeks. Like oh I slept in the training room today, I slept in the locker room today, and I'm like oh yeah great, that's what we get to look forward to.

Jade noted during the season, "It was kind of like grind through it." She had an hour commute during her first season, which hindered her ability to have much of a life, "Sometimes I had time for some life balance in there but, you know, it was more of a let me just sleep and eat

well for the day and get back to work the next day.” She mentioned still working to figure out what work-life balance looks like to her, and how to navigate it for her situation. Jade did mention near the end of the topic, “I just feel like I have this whatever inside of me that I always need to help. So, I feel like finding that work balance, and work-life balance is always going to be a struggle for me.”

Chloe mentioned setting clear boundaries with her athletes, and how unnecessary being on the clock 24/7 is, “If somebody needs a Band-Aid because they cut themselves in the shower, guess what? That’s not our job. How would they handle that at home, right?” She also mentioned tactics she has implemented to help this dilemma, “For me, the biggest thing is that you do disconnect. Whether that’s within your drive home or whatever but I try very hard to leave all work at work.”

### ***Work-Life Sacrifices***

Athletic trainers often leave the profession because of the amount of sacrifices they must make to be what they see as successful. The pressure from work to be on-call and available at all hours of the day puts athletic trainers in a tough position. There are constant sacrifices made by all athletic trainers for the sake of their jobs. Anne mentioned,

I 100% feel like I've made sacrifices. Definitely, you know, you miss birthdays, you miss weddings, you miss things like that. I think I've definitely talked to my parents about it 100%. I've definitely talked to my friends about it because obviously your friends, they aren't athletic trainers. They miss you, they wonder, well, I haven't seen you for six months. It's like, well, it was season.

She believes, “everything happens when it’s supposed to happen” and that while she has chosen her career over certain things, it was all for the right reasons.

In contrast, Chloe said, “I would say absolutely not” when asked if she’s had to make sacrifices. She noted the need for making athletic training more of a career than a job due to the long hours. Jade also mentioned she feels like she has not had to make sacrifices by saying,

Personally, I think I have a very good support system, in my family life and everything. I don’t think that I have had to sacrifice a whole lot. I don’t know that my answer will be that way as I get older, as things change, but at this point in my life I don’t think that there’s a whole lot that I’ve had to sacrifice this far. So, I feel lucky about that.

Jade noted she has always felt supported professionally by her bosses, and that has been a huge help in not having to sacrifice things during her career so far.

### ***Work-Life Support***

Friends and family support was found by “Knowledge at Wharton” to be beneficial to young female athletic trainers to not only stay in the career but to succeed within it. Anne said during her interview, “My parents are so supportive, they are amazing, and my two closest friends back at home, we would do Zoom calls and Zoom parties to get in touch and hang out.” She also states that she has sought counsel from her parents on several career decisions, and they have expressed their support for her in the career on more than one occasion. Chloe said, “Friends are great, both college friends and friends from high school when I was growing up. My family is all for everything I do.”

Jade elaborated more on her social support when asked,

I'd say good. Other than my mom being sad that I'm not home. I think they're all super proud and very supportive of what I do. I think that it's cool for them to see females in my position doing what I do.

She also mentioned receiving support from her bosses or preceptors,

I think that I've been supported through every step whether it's you know old bosses that are trying to push me to get a position that I love even though other things had gotten in the way, like other positions that I had taken or whatever it was. But I think everybody was always supportive of me following my dreams. I mean it takes a lot, it takes a lot of travel and everything like that, and during the season it's hard to do a whole lot of anything else. But it's really rewarding, and I think everybody sees that I'm very happy in the position that I'm in and that in itself is something that they are in support of.

### **Preceptors**

The second research question of this study was to determine if Anne, Chloe, or Jade had any preceptors during their time in their athletic training education programs that had a significant impact on their career trajectory. It was left up to the participants to determine what a significant impact is or is not. As the literature review stated, having mentors early on in an athletic trainer's career can have a significant impact on whether they will stay in the career long term and what roles and settings they might pursue. Anne was quick to talk about a group of preceptors which she felt were good role models for her,

I latched on to those athletic trainers that were working [there]. And my preceptor blew me away with her knowledge. And then [the other one] definitely helps you to remember that there's a bigger picture and to just go with the flow. Like if you try to force it, if you

try to push too hard or go too far, like too strong, too fast, he's the one that kind of reels you in and keeps you grounded.

She discussed how all three of these preceptors had not just shown her the clinical skills she was supposed to learn with them, but also the kind of athletic trainer she wanted to be. These three were not her first good experience with athletic trainers though; the first athletic trainer who got her thinking about the career was in high school; “She was the coolest and most hardworking, dedicated, all-in athletic trainer I had ever experienced.”

Chloe shared she received support from preceptors as well:

There was one teacher, she's phenomenal. One of the class times was twice a week right in the middle of practice time for soccer. So, it was one of those classes that were offered every other year only in the fall. So, that would have meant if I missed it, I would have had to repeat two years, or not repeat but just wait through two years of school, to be able to graduate. Again, I don't know if it's just because I was excelling or because she trusted me and we formed that relationship or because I was double majoring in exercise science so I'd actually taken pretty much that entire course in the exercise science department so she knew I'd already had a pretty significant background with it. She actually let me enroll and we met outside of class once a week for several hours to catch up on what I had missed during the regular class time. So, she pretty much gave me a one-on-one class.

She noted that while in her program her other preceptors were supportive as well but wondered if it was just because she was putting in the effort or because she was excelling.

Jade shared about the impact her preceptors had on her. She stated being able to see

athletic training in the real world through her preceptors was helpful. They also continued to help after her time in the program by acting as references and writing letters of recommendation for her when she was preparing to move on from her ATP, “It was really helpful to see how they [her female preceptors] interacted in their role and [I] kind of shaped myself to just be independent and to figure out who I wanted to be as an athletic trainer.”

### ***Impact of Female Athletic Trainers or Preceptors***

Anne mentioned she attended a school where most of her preceptors at the sites she went to were male:

It’s interesting now because you still when you go to your sites and you meet your preceptor, even for me, I had maybe like two preceptors that were female. It was still all men that were teaching and working. I think even in my program, we had a couple of strong female professors, but I think only one of them was still practicing, everyone else was just a full-time teacher.

She noted how the profession was transitioning to be more female at the time, and yet still most of her preceptors and some of her professors were male.

Chloe mentioned seeing the athletic trainer for soccer have to work all hours of the day because of the coaching staff changing up practice and lifting times. This would be one thing that helped inspire her to want to work at the professional level.

She had to be there all day, and that’s working around class schedules for rehabs and treatments and everything like that. I just was not wanting that for my life, I think it takes a very special person to be able to handle that sort of work-life balance. I realized I either wanted professional sports or I wanted a club sport where all they care about when

they're at the facility or with that team, is playing. There's a couple of colleges or universities that could be that way but it's so rare and so few that I would much rather be in the professional setting.

### **Collegiate Coaches and Players**

The third research question was inquiring about the influence of collegiate coaches or players on career trajectory. The relationship with coaches and players in a young athletic trainer's career can influence how they perceive their time moving forward. Athletic training students who have created a relationship or bond with players or a particular coach can see the upside of what the career can offer. The relationships an athletic trainer has with their players and coaching staff are just as important as the relationship an athletic trainer has with their coworkers or colleagues.

Only one of the participants mentioned being greatly impacted by coaches or players during her athletic training education program. Anne said, "The head coach was amazing. And he really let me step in if I had the confidence and I was comfortable." She says the opportunity he gave her to lead the team warm-up while she was still in her ATP was a huge turning point in her career and self-perception. She had never led a warm-up before but just immediately said yes and then went with the flow, "I just jumped in, and because I did that he let me start doing other things too." Anne said, "If you're nervous or back off they're never going to ask you again." This interaction with the coach ultimately landed Anne her first job out of her athletic training program, a summer internship position. Anne said again near the end of our interview,

I think it [being a female in male-dominated sports] goes back to what I said about that one moment where that coach asked me if I wanted to do team warm-up, fake it till you

make it girls. And if you make mistakes, it's okay, because someone will let you know, and someone will teach you, and then you'll get to try again. But don't be afraid to try, even if you're not sure what you're doing.

Chloe mentioned how she sometimes struggled with the dynamic of being an athletic training student and being an athlete herself. There is a code of conduct in athletic training education programs that athletic training students should not be friends with the athletes. This boundary is obviously hard to navigate while being an athlete yourself and Chloe was written up from an interaction she had with a teammate. The teammate had sustained an injury during a collegiate game and Chloe asked if she was okay. Chloe's preceptors took this as her trying to get more information than what she should be able to know. This write-up caused Chloe to take a step back from her relationship with some of her preceptors in her ATP. The other participant made no mention of encounters with either collegiate coaches or players.

### **Collegiate Mentors or Influential People**

The last research question was centered on collegiate mentors and their impact on career trajectory. Mentorship was found by Mazerolle et al. (2002) to be one of the main reasons female athletic training students choose certain career goals over others. Having mentors allows female students to see themselves achieving success in the career the way the person they have looked up to did. Another key role of mentors is to provide the athletic training student with guidance and networking opportunities to give them opportunities they might not otherwise be able to get. Mentors can be the key holders to open doors for the athletic training students. While mentors often also serve as preceptors for athletic training students, there are instances where mentors fall outside of their athletic training education program. These mentors allow for further networking

opportunities and can have a more significant impact in some ways by providing other resources or knowledge separate from what the students learn within their programs.

Anne was the first to mention a mentor during her interview, discussing a preceptor she had at a site in her ATP. She notes the head athletic trainer at a school she was assigned to, “does such a great job mentoring people, if they want to be somewhere or they see their vision, he will help them get there.” She even sought counsel from him when trying to make a difficult decision later in her career about a job opportunity.

Chloe had a family friend help her get her first internship in the professional sports world and said, “No matter how much I would like to say that it’s all hard work and effort [getting the internship] because that’s how I feel it should be, it is definitely not.”

Jade had great networking skills built from people she met outside of school due to opportunities provided to her from her ATP.

I’d say I think the connections that I built outside school and that all stem from some connections that I had made from doing outside things and different experiences while in [my ATP]. Connections that I’ve made with those people probably were the best thing that came out of [my ATP], and it helped me in my professional career and making those relationships and kind of seeing what comes out of those and helping in all of those things. That’s really been the greatest thing for me, in my opinion.

She said getting to be around people and speak to people who had been in the profession for extended periods was helpful and provided great opportunities for everyone in her program. Being able to get close to people who could provide her a job she wanted was a great experience for her.

## **Other Themes**

Outside of the research questions, the researcher was able to gather data on other themes as they pertained to the subject matter at hand. Some of these themes accounted for most of the interview, while others were just brief glimpses into the lives of these women. The next section will go into these other themes in greater detail.

### ***Choosing an ATP***

Each of the participants had their specific reasons for choosing their ATPs but all of them had one thing in common for their educational experiences. All the participants were athletes during their undergraduate degree programs. Two of the participants were looking for ATPs that allowed them to be athletes and do athletic training. Chloe said,

So, I got recruited to play [ a sport] when I was out there. So, one of my questions when I was looking at different programs and things like that, were do they allow athletes? I'd heard many programs do not allow athletes. So that was one of my first questions with them, and they said that they were one that does allow athletes.

Jade had reasons besides just athletics for choosing a school, but it did play a role,

I was going back and forth between a couple of schools, and ultimately it came down to two. One was a D1 school, and one was a D3 school and when I went to see both of them and just kind of weighed different options I kind of liked the idea of smaller class sizes and more one on one instruction. And then like I said I kind of wanted to potentially continue my athletic career and I just walked on the team at a D3 school.

### *Opportunities*

The women each expressed how they would not be in their current positions without the opportunities they had during their education programs. Anne said, “I don’t think there’s any way that I would be as prepared or doing what I’m doing now if I had not done my program.” She was given the unique ability to gain extra certifications on top of becoming a certified athletic trainer during her ATP experience.

They had people come through to teach us instrument-assisted soft tissue mobilization and Kinesio-taping. So, not only did I have my BOC, but I had extra certifications on my resume when I graduated. And so that immediately brought me to the top of whatever resume pool I was in because I had extra certifications that other applicants fresh out of school did not have. So, that was definitely a leg up.

She also mentioned having access to all levels of athletics as options for clinical rotation sites, “I had a high-school rotation, I had a PT clinic rotation, I had a division one college, division two college, and a division three college. So, I had access to all levels.” She went on to say this allowed her to determine what level she wanted to work in for her career and provided a good sounding board for how to get to that level.

Chloe had an outside opportunity while in her ATP, as she was able to do a professional sports internship her senior year while still in her ATP.

That internship was crucial. Anybody that’s considering getting into professional sports of any kind, has to look to see what sort of internships they are offering before they are looking even for a position with the team. It puts people an arm and a leg above everybody else.

It was not always a great experience for Chloe though, as she said she did not feel prepared coming out of her ATP for the real world. “I felt like I was not ready to go straight into having my own team, I didn’t feel like I was prepared coming out of [my ATP].” She said she felt supported during the first part of her program, but the support was not felt throughout its entirety. She did not feel she was getting the best education, and when she compared herself to the interns the ATP would bring in, she felt there was no way she would be at the level they were at when she graduated. This prompted her to start reading her textbooks to try and close the gap she believed she had between what her classes gave her the ability to learn and what she needed to learn. It was not until she was in her next position that she understood how well she had been educated “I saw how well we were actually educated compared to the other people from other programs.”

Jade was pleased with the education she received from her ATP and the clinical rotations they had the opportunity to do.

The program was really good about helping us with patients and getting through each of the different sport-specific things we needed to and upper and lower body, and equipment intensive. [They were] getting us out to shadow different orthopedic clinics and shadow doctors, and physician extenders, and people working at high schools and a lot of different opportunities that we were able to look at while we were in [our ATP].

The best part of her program she felt though was the continuing education unit events they were given the chance to attend. “Seeing people working and just being around that atmosphere and being able to have conversations with people that have been in the profession for decades was

really helpful and a good opportunity for all of us.” Her ability to network was another large plus from her ATP,

We always talk about it, whether it’s in the ATP or whatever, it’s kind of a who you know and that kind of thing. I’m not the type that tries to schmooze everybody, but I’m pretty outgoing and I make a lot of connections just by being able to have conversations with people. So, I think that a little bit is coming from my personality, and then just being given the opportunity to have access to different athletic training people within the profession that I can have conversations with and network in that way.

These opportunities allowed each of the women a chance to work their way into internships and jobs that ultimately would lead to where they are currently at.

### ***Being Female Working Male Sports***

With a limited number of professional sports athletic training positions occupied by women, it was important for the researcher to ask how each woman’s individual experience has been in their sport. When prompted about the subject Anne said,

No, it comes up [being female]. I think it will come up forever, especially in male sports. You have your people that think it’s amazing and awesome, they’re so happy that it’s moving forward, which I’m eternally grateful because those people are the reason I’m here.

She then told a story about when she was trying to move into the professional sports realm,

I’ve been applying to pro and D1 jobs for a while when I knew I was ready to leave [my last job]. I wanted a higher level or a higher conference for my sport. I definitely had an interview that I made it to the final round in and they were about to fly me out and it

turned out the head athletic trainer went to the head coach and said okay we have Anne, and we have Steven, we're flying them out, and the head coach turned around and said hire Steven. The head athletic trainer told the coach I had more qualifications and experience, but the coach flat out said girls are a distraction. So, I didn't get the job.

Anne went on to talk about how in other interviews she was in she was asked questions about how she would overcome the obstacle of being a female. She did her best to assure them, "That it's not an obstacle, I can do my job and it's going to be good." She realizes the impact these decisions to exclude her have had on her career and her life,

I've chosen this career over certain things for sure, but I also believe everything happens when it's supposed to happen. I thought I should have been in professional sports years ago... and now honestly, I feel I'm supposed to have this job now. If I'd had this job five years ago I don't think I would've had the skills to be as good as I am now.

But despite her assurance that being a female would not affect her job or skills, it has affected her personally while trying to work. Some of the places she has worked during her time in the professional sports world were not structurally built with women in mind, so there can be difficulties logistically.

So, sometimes being a female can be a little tricky, but you kind of learn okay, as soon as I get there, do my logistics, where is this, what do I need to do? And then how can I take care of everybody? That's my kind of role, I guess.

Chloe shared a different experience of being a female,

It just is what it is. It's not bad in the sense that I'm like we need to flood this place with women. Honestly, it's more of an everyone's qualified, may the best person win. The job

should go to the best person, if that's a female then absolutely, if it's another male then it's another male.

She voiced later in the interview how she believes the jobs should go to the best person. Gender does not need to play a role in who is hired and who is not, there should just be qualified people hired. "I think we should let people enjoy what they want to enjoy."

Jade had also not experienced any discrimination based on her gender.

I'm thoroughly surprised on how professional it's been. I feel like you always hear about different things coming up when you're female with discrimination. But I've always felt super respected by the coaches and players. The only real difference is that you're really just around men all the time. But I don't think that's changed anything in the way that people treat me or anything like that. I feel like I'm pretty lucky in that regard.

She also stated that through changes in personnel in and around the team that nothing has changed, she is treated with the same respect by everyone. She offered this sentiment at the end of the interview, discussing this topic in more detail:

You hear a lot of you'll never see female athletic trainers in this men's professional sport or that or whatever. And I think that, I don't know what has to change with that, I don't know if it's certain types of people, people that have been around for forever, and I get where they're coming from, but those are the people that need to kind of help in getting the change across. You know, if a majority of people that are coming out of athletic training programs are women now, why is it the majority of men that get put in these higher professional sports [positions]. So, I think that that stigma has to change and that it is possible for women to do anything that a male athletic trainer has the ability to do, has

the opportunity to do. So, I think that's the biggest thing that I was kind of disappointed in throughout my journey and seeing that that was so widely accepted and people just, you know, took it and settled for it. But you see lots of strong women coming through and changing the way, and kind of making their own path outside of what people think and expect. And I love, love that and I'm hopeful that people obtain things like that.

### *Advice*

Near the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participants what they would like to add to the interview that they had not gotten a chance to say yet. Anne said,

I made sacrifices and I was so upset and I was like, why am I doing this? This is not what I thought and I actually thought about giving up athletic training for a moment. I really did. I started looking in medical sales and random things and I'm so thankful that I did not. Because like I said, sacrifices don't make sense in the moment. But looking back in hindsight, now, where I am now, I wouldn't change a thing. And it will make sense, you just have to let it play out because it does not make sense at the time.

She also mentioned the importance of not being afraid to try, and reiterated the need to have confidence in yourself, even if you must fake it for a while.

Chloe provided advice on dealing with athletes,

So, having expectations and upholding those expectations [is important]. If you allow the athletes to see that you don't have expectations and you don't require things of them, then they're going to run amuck. That even goes for treatments and things like that. I won't even do a treatment unless they can talk to me about what's going on and why it's going on. I am very hard on them about having reasons and understanding their body.

The data found in this study will be analyzed now in chapter five. There the researcher will discuss the implications, future studies, and closing thoughts for this study.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to gather more information on how females working in male professional sports were able to obtain their current positions. By asking the participants about their athletic training education program experiences, the hope was to find common themes between the women to create a picture of what ATPs could do better to improve their student's experiences. Improving in these areas could potentially reduce the attrition rates of female athletic trainers by giving them skills outside of the job they can rely on to cope with the daunting demands of work. With 55% of the NATA currently being female, it is time we see the tides turn in regard to the highest sports leagues in the USA. The study could also potentially be used as a blueprint for young female athletic trainers interested in becoming an athletic trainer in male professional sports one day.

### **Conclusions**

Using semi-structured interviewing and a theoretical framework of Standpoint Feminist Theory, the researcher was able to talk with three participants to gain further insight into their lives and experiences in the working world. The research questions were formulated after an extensive review of the literature in existence on the subject. Each question worked to highlight both an area of need, and potentially an area of commonality between participants. The first of the research questions was centered on work-life balance and strategies the participants were potentially taught during their ATPs. None of the participants said their ATPs taught them about work-life balance and all the strategies they have learned were from observing their preceptors and other athletic trainers while in school. Despite the heavy workload though, each of the women agreed they have not had to sacrifice much personally to hold their current positions. The

women also highlighted the amount of support they received from family and friends regarding their careers.

The second research question was about preceptors and career trajectories. There seemed to be some agreement that preceptors did play a role in getting the women to where they are at now. Two of the participants highlighted key preceptors or professors who helped guide them to the successful completion of their ATPs and into the profession. The third question about the impact of collegiate coaches and players found only one participant who felt these people had an impact on her young career. She highlighted a positive experience she had with a collegiate coach while in her ATP that launched her career into the direction she hoped it would go. This coach was able to place her in positions that challenged her and made her grow professionally.

The last research question was on collegiate mentors or influential people who helped guide the women to where they are at now. Each of the women discussed mentors or influential people who helped them get to where they are now. These people were able to guide them in areas they were questioning or give them the tools necessary to be able to succeed in the next stage of their career. This study has worked to show support for how athletic training education programs affect females reaching the pinnacle of the sports world in American. It has also worked to show how the field is changing in favor of women and there is hope for those who wish to pursue a career in this sector of athletic training.

## **Discussion**

The researcher was able to find multiple emerging themes from this research study such as the importance of extra opportunity experiences while in an ATP, the importance of mentors, and the need for support systems. Other important aspects discovered were time management

skills and job satisfaction. It is important to note there is a level of elite bias present within this research study due to the ability of the participants to take time to talk with the researcher. There is a level of privilege present for this to occur and it should be taken into account when considering the implications of this research study.

The study backed up the findings of Mazerolle et al. (2002) which found the reason athletic training students decide to pursue a career in athletic training was because of a love of sports, involvement with a team, an interest in the medical field, and/or a prior relationship with an athletic trainer. The participants of this study all stated their reasons for becoming an athletic trainer were due to their love of sports and their desire to work in a medical profession. Each of the three participants in the study played sports while in college and successfully navigated the responsibilities of being a student-athlete. The researcher believes this had an impact on their time management skills and allowed them to learn how to juggle multiple high-level demands at once. These tools could be transferable to managing work-life balance later in life, with both work and personal life duties being high-level demands. The participants all felt they had not had to make significant sacrifices to get to the level they are currently at, which could be due to their backgrounds as student-athletes. A typical student-athlete knows the challenge of having to make sacrifices to make the dream work and these women are no exception. The researcher believes their histories of being collegiate athletes plays a role in their success as athletic trainers. This also supports the Bowman and Dodge (2011) study which encouraged campus involvement of athletic training students to promote a successful career within athletic training. The ability to participate in collegiate sports while also being involved in their ATPs allowed for increased campus involvement and opportunities to get away from the educational side of athletic training

while studying. Only one participant stated she was not confident coming out of her athletic training program but quickly found when she entered the certified side of the career her lack of confidence was unnecessary.

While in their ATPs all the participants were exposed to opportunities outside of the classroom which they felt helped them grow. Mazerolle et al. (2016b) stated the need for socializing students into their future roles. Temnick (2018) also found a need for networking to reach the level of professional sports. This study supports these ideas, as the participants all expressed key opportunities outside of their ATPs and networking skills they obtained. Leadership skills were often taught to the participants by placing them in positions they did not always feel ready for, causing a growth necessary for high achievement within themselves.

Being able to handle this discomfort and use it to their advantage was an essential trait found in the participants, potentially allowing them to overcome boundaries without them even realizing it. Only one participant even mentioned having to deal with the direct factor of being a female in the male professional sporting world. The other two participants each mentioned it had not yet been a problem for them, and one said she felt lucky by this fact. While it is apparent having females working at this level is becoming more normalized and accepted in the “boys club” that sports are known to be, a different view of these barriers was evident in the participants. Instead of viewing the barrier of being female as a true stopping point, the women were persistent in their desired careers. This supports Temnick (2018) who found women who viewed barriers as opportunities to overcome instead of hard stops were able to achieve greater success in their careers than those who did not.

One of the participants highlighted how seeing female athletic trainers while in her ATP was beneficial to see how she would one day be able to juggle having both a personal life and work. This supports the Mazerolle and Gavin (2013) study which also stated female athletic training students who had strong time management skills were also more confident in their future ability to handle work-life balance. Two of the participants also mentioned having early support from mentors was critical for their ability to move through their ATPs and find employment in their desired career paths early after graduation. The mentorship took many different forms, from direct help from professors to clinical site preceptors providing guidance, to outside sources showing support and providing resources. All these different avenues of support promoted confidence in the participants and gave them a solid base of support to grow their careers on which supports Mazerolle et al. (2002).

Social support also highlighted itself as an important factor in the participant's success, with each of them stating they have the full support of their families. With their families providing the space for the participants to perform their job duties without any unnecessary guilt the women have been able to flourish. The importance of having social support from friends and family is critical for female athletic trainers to succeed in the career as was stated by "Knowledge at Wharton" (2012). These lines of support must understand the demands of the job, the athletic trainer's time, and the emotional commitment required to perform the job at this level. When women can dedicate themselves wholly to their profession without the societal pressures from family placed upon them, they can achieve just as much as men can.

Job satisfaction was also noted as a huge part of the participant's journeys. Each stated their love for their jobs has allowed them to feel as if work is not a chore. This has certainly

made it easier for the participants to make small sacrifices in their personal lives, such as missing social events like weddings or birthdays. Each of the participants also expressed an understanding that their work-life balance is significantly different when in-season as opposed to out of season. While in-season a lot of personal time and events are put on hold for the sake of performing their jobs at the level demanded of them. Then in the off-season, there is time to decompress and spend more time with friends and family, but an understanding of this balance has allowed the participants to find joy in their work. All the participants also made note of the support they received within their jobs from colleagues, coaching staffs, and athletes. The ability to trust one another to create a successful environment pushes everyone towards a high level of success and achievement. Support from bosses was also mentioned as a driving factor for some of the participants to reach their current level in their careers. Having someone within the profession to push them towards what they ultimately wanted, and to open doors which otherwise might have been closed was vital for success.

### **Limitations**

The researcher experienced more difficulty than anticipated finding and contacting participants willing to participate in the study. It took two additional months than what had been planned for the researcher to interview the first participant. This limited the number of participants who could participate in the study due to the time frame the study needed to be completed in. Due to this, there was limited data on the subject to work from providing a skewed view of the topic. Future research on the subject should create a realistic time frame to complete subject interviews with a willingness to extend interviews for up to one year. This would allow

the participants to interview during their “off-season” for whichever time of the year that may fall into.

### **Implications for Theory**

The researcher utilized Feminist Standpoint Theory for this research study to give the topic at hand a fresh new perspective. Other research studies done on similar topics have used Role Congruity Theory or homologous reproduction theory to attempt to examine their findings. Feminist Standpoint Theory fits the bill of this study because of the power dynamic men hold over women in these professional athletic training positions. While it is impressive the women were able to reach these positions at all, once there they often find themselves to be the only women on staff, or potentially within the entire organization. This creates a power dynamic in favor of men as they have all the control in higher, equal, and lower positions.

Feminist Standpoint Theory gives the researcher the tools and lens to view the data from the side of the oppressed instead of the oppressor. Doing so enhances the understanding of the situation at hand and provides a constant reminder to the researcher to look beyond just what is said but to also look at how it is said and what is not said. As Mazerolle, Gavin, Pitney, et al. (2012) stated, Feminist Standpoint Theory assumes people experience different perspectives based on which role they take within society, whether that be the majority or the minority, and women in sport have the perspective of the minority. This can create apprehension in participating in research studies or saying or doing certain things. It also forces the researcher to be that much more conscious of the verbiage used by the participants, like when they say they feel lucky to have not experienced gender discrimination. Lucky in that sentence allows the

researcher to understand the participants do still have the perception that gender discrimination is the norm in the world of male sports.

Feminist Standpoint Theory also presents itself in the limited number of people there were available to participate in the study. One participant expressed her experiences on being excluded from jobs based solely on her gender, despite the fact she had more experience than the person who was hired for the job. This supports the idea that women are not just being held back from the jobs but might not even be thought of at all when considering who to hire for jobs. Certainly, there are organizations in professional sports that do not discriminate based on gender, but it would be difficult to say all of them make an effort not to based on the number of women working in male professional sports.

The use of Feminist Standpoint Theory was key for this study, it gave the researcher the ability to look through the eyes of the women and allowed their experiences to be the only ones discussed in the study. As Hesse-Biber (2012) said, this theory merges the meanings of “insider” and “outsider” allowing the one studied to become both at the same time. This appeared to be true for the women working in men’s professional sports as they had breached the borders and made it into the “insider” grouping, but often as the only ones they were an outlier within the system. This is not to say they felt like outsiders, as all of them expressed how welcomed and respected they felt within their positions. Rather it points out how strange it is to have a limited number of women working in these positions when the organizations do support them so strongly, and why other organizations have not stepped up to be as accepting.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on the review of the study, the researcher recommends small changes be made to the field to ensure continued success for women in athletic training. Athletic training education programs should make a more conscious effort of educating their students on life skills before sending them into the working world. These skills include work-life balance techniques, communication techniques, networking, self-care habits, and mental health coping mechanisms. The field of athletic training is demanding on both the body and the mind, the emotional turmoil which comes from caring for the health and well-being of the population one works with is draining on every level. Preparing students for this and giving them the tools they need to survive as a person within the career would have the potential to reduce the attrition rate of all athletic trainers, not just female athletic trainers.

Another recommendation to the field would be to create and promote spaces for peer-to-peer support to occur. Currently, it seems there are limited resources available for those who wish to discuss with and receive support from peers working in similar job settings. Social media and other platforms have taken the place of a more organized structure, but the researcher believes it would be beneficial for there to be an open space for athletic trainers working in similar settings to support and learn from each other in a more structured way. The researcher also recommends women in athletic training continue to strive for these high-level positions in male sports because the opportunities are growing in number every year. The barriers are shrinking and being demolished by the women who are blazing the path to the top and it is time for the rest to follow.

## **Implications for Research**

Another area of interest which would be important to study involves intersectionality and athletic training. It is important to understand how different intersections of the human experience affect opportunities in both education and career paths. While it is impossible to study all areas of intersectionality at once, researching areas such as race, gender, and sexuality are essential to gathering a clearer picture of the barriers people in athletic training may face. These research areas will only continue to grow in their need given the current climate of today's world. The necessity of identifying barriers limiting opportunities for athletic trainers who do not identify as white, cisgender, or heterosexual will continue to grow with time. Research outlining these barriers and ways they can be broken is needed in the literature, as well as research looking at how different genders and ethnicities deal with working in the world of sports. A study identifying general work-life balance in sports issues and ones further broken down by gender and ethnicity could yield interesting results. Also, looking into athletic training programs headed by women and how those programs support their female athletic training students. These topics would do a lot for the future of athletic training programs in general to identify larger problem areas within the profession.

More studies also need to be done showing the need for work-life balance preparation lessons within athletic training education programs. Sending young professional athletic trainers into the workforce with no preparation on how to handle the demands of the career is reckless and will continue to be a main reason for burnout and attrition factors among the workforce. ATPs need to begin to add work-life balance, networking, and professional socialization skills into their curriculums if they wish to set their students up for the most success. Research on how

these areas affect athletic trainers has been done, but little has called for any systemic changes to the education programs. Once athletic trainers are in the workforce struggling with these issues it is too late, the work needs to be done while they are still in school.

Studies focusing on how athletic trainers who were collegiate athletes would also be interesting. Athletics has a positive impact on a lot of people during their lives but studying how those athletic trainers who were college athletes use the skills they learned towards their career could provide more insight into the importance of athletics. ATPs who allow their athletic training students to also participate in athletics are the exception and not the standard, potentially robbing their athletic training students of ways to get ahead of the pack of young professionals.

Further, future studies should investigate male athletic trainers and the work-life balance issues they face. Many studies identify how women handle work-life balance problems, while ignoring or excluding the issues men may face. This only further perpetuates the societal standards that women should be the ones taking care of the home while men are allowed to work with no consequence. As American society works to abolish these stereotypical gender roles so should athletic training research surrounding work-life balance practices. While the feminist standpoint is necessary, and often under spoken of within literature, it also works to place women on an equal plane to men. This means also seeing men as just as important roles in the home and child-rearing as women, and their needs and struggles should be examined in the same way women's struggles are.

### **Closing Thoughts**

This research study was able to find many key themes from the interviews conducted with the participants but is by no means a complete picture of the topic at hand. The researcher

had hoped to discover themes from participants regarding how their athletic training education programs set them up for success. The results showed key areas where the ATPs were successful in preparing the women for their future careers, but it also found areas where they had not been successful in preparing the women. This study was able to support many research studies which have already been conducted on various areas in athletic training. It also illustrated the need for different areas of research that need to be focused on. The amount of depth the participants went into regarding their lives and careers was critical for this study's success, and the researcher was grateful and thrilled with the outcomes of the study. The researcher hopes this study can be useful to any young female athletic trainers who hope to one day work within male professional sports and encourages everyone to strive for the level they want to be at despite any perceived barriers they may face.

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### **Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email**

Hello, my name is Caitlyn Champ. I am a graduate student at St. Cloud State University in the Higher Education Administration program. I am conducting research on female athletic trainers working in male professional sports and how their undergraduate athletic training programs set them up for success, and I am inviting you to participate because you meet the qualifications for my study.

Participation in this research includes taking part in one phone or zoom interview with me, which will take approximately 30-60 minutes. If you choose to participate, your total time commitment will be between 30-60 minutes.

I can email you a letter explaining my study in greater detail. If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at [REDACTED] or [cchamp@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:cchamp@stcloudstate.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, at [slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu) with questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time,

Caitlyn

### **Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Caitlyn Champ and I am a graduate student in the higher education administration program at St. Cloud State University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my master's thesis research project about female athletic trainers working in male professional sports and how their undergraduate athletic training programs set them up for success. You're eligible to participate in this study because you currently work in one of the major male professional sports leagues (NFL, NBA, NHL, or MLB). I obtained your contact information from \_\_\_\_\_.

If you decide to participate in this study, we will schedule one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30-60 minutes via Zoom. I would like to audio record your interview and then use the information to understand how your undergraduate athletic training program may or may not have set you up for successful work-life balance.

Upon completion of the interview, I will transcribe it verbatim and send the transcript to you for your own review and edits. Your privacy will be protected by using a pseudonym, not revealing which sport or league you work for, and all demographic data will be removed from the study. The only people with access to the data will be my project advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, the program director of the higher education administration program, and myself. All data will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected laptop. The data will be destroyed when my degree is awarded.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at [REDACTED] or [cchamp@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:cchamp@stcloudstate.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, at [slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu) with questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time.

Best,

Caitlyn

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

### Introduction:

- Introductions
- General overview of project

### Topic #1: Interest in Athletic Training

#### Possible Questions:

- Why did you get into the field of athletic training?
- Did you know any female athletic trainers when you were young?
- How did you choose which school to attend for athletic training education?
- What barriers did you face with getting into your school or athletic training education program?

### Topic #2: College & Graduate School Experiences

#### Possible Questions:

- How was your program overall?
- How was your experience within your program?
- How would you describe the female to male ratio of athletic training students in your program?
- What role did college mentors have in career trajectory?
- What impact did collegiate coaches and players have on career preparation?

### Topic #3: First Job

#### Possible Questions:

- What was the first job you took out of college?
- What did the support system in your life look like as you moved from your education program into your first job?
- How did your first job set you up for the job you have now?

### Topic #4: Life Now

#### Possible Questions:

- What does a normal day for you look like?
- What is your family life like?
- How would you describe your support system?
- What lessons learned in school have helped you with your professional life?
- How have you managed making professional or personal sacrifices to be successful in your current position?

## Appendix C: Informed Consent

### Informed Consent for Participation in Research for Master's Thesis

My name is Caitlyn Champ, and I am a master's student in the School of Education at St. Cloud State University. I am working on a class research paper that examines female professional sports athletic trainers and how their educations impacted their career protectory.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to allow the researcher to conduct an interview regarding your role as a professional sports' athletic trainer. The purpose of the observations is to gather empirical data to establish potential educational course themes necessary to prepare athletic training students for professional sport success. The interview consisting of either a phone call or a zoom meeting will last for approximately one-hour. However, if more time is needed, or additional interviews are required, they can be scheduled at your convenience. Your responses will be recorded on audiotape, but only so the researcher may transcribe your responses as accurately as possible for exact representation of our conversation. The participant, the researcher, and the researcher's thesis advisor will be the only people to have access to these interviews. The only alternative for which the tapes may be heard by anyone other than those listed is by written permission from you, the participant.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. At no point will your real name or title be revealed. A fictitious name will be used in the document. During the interview you may refused to answer any questions. After the completion of the interviews, you will receive your transcribed interviews. At this point, if you wish to make any changes to the transcription, you may. At any time, if you wish to withdrawal from this research project, you have the opportunity. Potential risks identified for participating in this study are your demographic or identity data being leaking out, resulting in risk of employment or professional disciplinary action. The benefits would include personal growth for each participant through opportunities for reflection and dialogue about their experience.

I truly appreciate your participation in this project. I want you to be as comfortable as possible. Please feel free to talk to me about any concern you might have. My phone number is [REDACTED], and my email is [cchamp@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:cchamp@stcloudstate.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, at [slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu) with questions or concerns.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have given consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form. Your refusal to participate will not affect your relationship with St. Cloud State University, the researchers, or your work as an athletic trainer.

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Audio/Visual Release**  
**Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video/Audio Recording**

Perspectives from Female Athletic Trainer's in Men's Professional Sports: How Their Athletic Training Programs Set Them Up for Success

Caitlyn Champ  
 cchamp@stcloudstate.edu  
 Steven McCullar  
 slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu

Please Print:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Legal Representative if Applicable

This form asks for your consent to use media for and from this study. We would like you to indicate how we can use your media. On the next page is a list of media types that we will use. Please initial where you consent for that type of use of your media. Legal representative initials will provide consent when needed.

Regardless of your answers on the next page, you will not be penalized.

We will not use your media in any way you have not initialed.

Questions regarding this form should be directed to the researchers. Additional answers can be found by contacting the IRB Administrator or an IRB Committee Member. Current membership is available at: <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/irb/members.aspx>

A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

Audio; no video	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

Video with audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

Transcription of audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

**I have read the above carefully and give my consent only for those items in which I initialed.**

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature (if 18 years of age or older) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name (Printed)

WHEN CONSENT IS NEEDED FROM A LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE, COMPLETE THIS SECTION. UP TO TWO LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE MAY SIGN.

\_\_\_\_\_

Legal Representative Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Legal Representative Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Second Legal Representative Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Second Legal Representative Name (Printed)

## Appendix D: IRB Approval



### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

**Name:** Caitlyn Champ  
**Email:** cchamp@stcloudstate.edu

### IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Exempt Review**

**Project Title:** Perspectives from Female Athletic Trainer's in Men's Professional Sports: How Their Athletic Training Programs Set Them Up for Success

**Advisor:** Steve McCullar

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email [ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu) and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

**IRB Chair:**

Dr. Mili Mathew  
Chair and Graduate Director  
Assistant Professor  
Communication Sciences and Disorders

**IRB Institutional Official:**

Dr. Claudia Tomany  
Associate Provost for Research  
Dean of Graduate Studies

#### OFFICE USE ONLY

<b>SCSU IRB#</b> 2005 - 2604	<b>Type:</b> Exempt Review	<b>Today's Date:</b> 1/14/2021
<b>1st Year Approval Date:</b> 1/13/2021	<b>2nd Year Approval Date:</b>	<b>3rd Year Approval Date:</b>
<b>1st Year Expiration Date:</b>	<b>2nd Year Expiration Date:</b>	<b>3rd Year Expiration Date:</b>