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Preparation and Support of Female Head Athletic Trainers in Collegiate Sport

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Preparation and Support for Female Head Athletic Trainers in Collegiate Sport

by

Bekki Turner

MS, California State University, 1999

BS, Nicholls State University, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Higher Education

Walden University

November 2015

Abstract

Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972 has significantly improved women's access to previously male-dominated areas of education in the United States, but few of these studies have focused on the experiences of women currently in the higher education field. This study explored female head athletic trainers' perceptions of the role of U.S. higher education institutions in preparing and supporting their achievement of leadership positions in U.S. collegiate sports: it also explored their views on potential changes in current higher education curricula and certification processes. This phenomenological study used Ridgeway's status construction theory as its theoretical lens for examining the role of higher education in participants' career progressions. Data were collected from a purposeful sample of 9 female head athletic trainers from various intercollegiate schools in the United States. The trustworthiness of findings was increased through use of the constant comparison data analysis method and sharing transcripts and excerpts of findings with participants. The study findings showed that the participants perceived higher education program preparation and support as limited in both helping women achieve collegiate leadership positions and overcome barriers to professional advancement. Suggestions for improving athletic training educational programs included adding mentorship and role models, experiential learning and interactions with sport personnel, networking opportunities, leadership training, and courses in gender roles and biases. This study promotes positive social change by identifying underlying gender biases inhibiting women's promotions into sport leadership roles and by providing policy and curricular suggestions for addressing these, thereby promoting greater social equality.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women who have made great strides to advance the status of women in leadership and whose achievements have directly or indirectly impacted generations of women in the athletic training profession.

This journey, as it reached culmination, was traversed in the company of my grandmother, Ruby P. Brown (1915-2002). Ruby was an exemplar and a remarkable servant in the fields of education and health care. Throughout her lifetime, even when blindness set in, she continued hospital volunteer work to help those in need. Because of my grandmother's incandescent spirit toward humanity, I came to understand labor in the light of unconditional love. This journey was also traversed in the company of Jennifer Abbott, who has been a beacon of light amid tempestuous moments. I have benefitted from her extraordinary patience and assistance in all phases of this dissertation process. This dissertation is also dedicated to these extraordinary women.

Acknowledgments

I want to take this moment to point out with the deepest gratitude Dr. Cheryl Keen, my mentor and committee chair, who has provided generous support and motivation in my research over the past few years. Because of her phenomenal knowledge, superb professionalism, and humble servitude, I owe her an inordinate debt.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Despite the enactment of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972
(Title IX) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), women in the United
States continue to struggle with being accepted into leadership roles in collegiate athletics
administration and subsequent career advancement (Bower & Hums, 2013; Hoffman,
2011; Swaton, 2010). Although the post-Title IX era has engendered unprecedented
advances in women's access and participation opportunities in U.S. collegiate sports, the
numbers of women occupying administrative leadership roles have significantly declined
(Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Henderson, Grappendorf, & Burton, 2011; Stromquist,
2013). This trend is in contrast to women's general representation in the field: In 2014,
more women (54%) than men (46%) made up the National Athletic Trainers'
Association's (NATA) active certified membership (NATA, 2014b).

Notwithstanding discernible progress in representing the majority of the NATA's
active certified membership, women in head athletic training positions remain
marginalized. This marginalization was evidenced in both the National Collegiate
Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics
(NAIA), where women made up 32% and 36% of the athletic training leadership,
respectively (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NAIA, 2014). Although women comprised more
than half of NATA's active certified athletic trainers in 2014, fewer women than men
lead athletic training programs across all NCAA divisions and NAIA conferences at U.S.
institutions of higher education (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NAIA, 2014).

This underrepresentation in leadership has significant potential repercussions. In 2014, women held 22.3% of all NCAA athletic director positions, representing a mere 3% increase since 1998 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Only 10.7% of all athletic directors within the 23 conferences of the NAIA system were women (NAIA, 2014), the first year for which the NAIA national office recorded these numbers; comparative data were thus unavailable (K. Gillette, personal communication, July 25, 2014). While all sport leadership and administrative positions are vital in promoting successful programs, the athletic director's role is significantly more impactful than most others (Hoffman, 2011; Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo, 2015; Schull, Shaw, & Kihl, 2013). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) noted that athletic directors transmit perspective and counsel (e.g., goals, budgeting, administrative hiring decisions, and commitment to equity) that structure campus sport programs. An athletic director's experience and commitment regarding equality influence both the program's vision and purpose and the individuals they hire (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). An athletic director's gender has specifically been found to influence the gender of employees in leadership roles for both women and men's sport programs (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Schull et al., 2013), suggesting that this imbalance is self-perpetuating.

The processes that construct and replicate inequality in U.S. college athletics are complicated and obscured by higher education's framework of segregated intercollegiate sports programs (Brake, 2001; Heckman, 2011). In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court determined that race segregation and the phrase, "'separate but equal' has no place in education" (347 U.S. 493, 495 [1954]). Two decades later, Title IX

permitted sex segregation in educational activities (e.g., physical education classes) and programs (i.e., collegiate athletics) that ossified links between sport and a culture of masculinity (Brake, 2001). Forty-three years since Title's IX's enactment, racial and sex biases in education still prevail in forms of segregation and exclusion in areas of physical education or sport, scholarships, resource allocations, and employment opportunities (Cohen & Levit, 2014; Swaton, 2010). Cohen and Levit (2014) added that segregated education depends on and enables the utilization of entrenched sex categorizing (e.g., proper roles and behavior, heterosexuality, emotivity, aggression versus passion, and difference).

Many educational institutions in the United States shape sport as a male-cultured realm (e.g., athletic, leadership superiority, and entitlement) and reinforce depictions of women having a devalued relationship to sport (e.g., traditional feminine image, lesbianism, and token career assignments; Brake, 2001; Heckman, 2011; Koller, 2012). Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) noted that the absence of women in collegiate athletic leadership roles fortifies negative stereotypes about girls and women (e.g., athletic disinterest and incompetence), which contributes to beliefs that male athleticism and leadership are superior. Swaton (2010) indicated that Title IX successfully increased women's sports participation, but underscored the act's failure to address discrimination in collegiate sport leadership. This failure resulted from higher education institutions' refusal to transform the male hierarchical structures in its sport programs (Swaton, 2010; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

Despite Title IX's prohibition of discriminatory employment praxis regarding sex,

the law's failure to acknowledge the gendered order of athletic leadership has, in part, encouraged the denigration and marginalization of women role models for student-athletes (Brake, 2013; Norman, 2013). Swaton (2010) suggested that excluding women from collegiate leadership positions reinforces an occupational division of labor and perpetuates sexual inequalities, thus contributing to the repression and exploitation of women. Koller (2012) noted that denying women top-level leadership roles deters women from pursuing sports careers due to stereotypes (e.g., lesbianism, incompetence, and inferiority) and a fear of failure or rejection. Kane (2001) summarized this when describing the gendered past of sport and how this has failed to fulfill its promise to women:

> When it comes to one of sport's greatest hallmarks—preparing our nation's leaders—a rather significant component appears to be missing; that of preparing half of the population to occupy positions of leadership in one of this country's most influential and all-pervasive institutions. (pp. 115, 117)

In 1964, Title VII [amended by Title IX] promised employed women change by becoming the first U.S. law that included the word *sex* and prohibiting employer discrimination against workers in government, organizations, and postsecondary institutions (Heckman, 2011). For a half-century, U.S. courts have explained the act with presumptions about women's career interests that have sanctioned their economic disadvantage. By presuming that women form employment goals prior to working, the courts have failed to address the ways employers develop women employees in "their images of who 'women' are supposed to be" (Schulz, 1990, p. 1756). Consequentially,

the law has failed to reach structural workplace features that gender occupations and workers, and denies women access to non-traditional or higher-waged employment (Heckman, 2011; Schulz, 1990). In 1990, Schultz argued that the U.S. judiciary system and higher education's constitutive authority should be used to develop a work world via which employed women are "empowered to choose the more highly rewarded work that Title VII has long been promising them" (p. 1843). To create such a work world, the courts and higher education institutions must reject claims that women thus far have been offered a choice (Schultz, 1990).

The process of dismantling embedded ideological notions of women's inferiority in sports participation and leadership begins with increasing the visibility of women in such roles (Bower & Hums, 2013; Norman, 2013). Brake (2013) suggested that once women's competency and success are socially observed, higher education institutions and sports organizations could begin to bridge divisions of labor and diminish inequalities in social relations. Moreover, the perceived roles of women in society can be altered such that the potential of women's transformative leadership can initiate changes in socialization processes via which gender differences are embraced rather than repudiated (Koller, 2012; Norman, 2013).

It is crucial to examine the ideology and assumptions encompassing leadership in the sports setting to understand gender discrepancy in sports leadership. Brake (2013) noted that the amalgamation of the masculine genre of sport and the masculine presumptions of leadership make sports careers arduous for women to successfully navigate. For this reason, exploring female head athletic trainers' perceptions of how

higher education institutions prepare women for athletic training careers might offer expository power and insight into why few women ascend to top-level sport leadership positions.

Little research has investigated the experiences of women in athletic training about obtaining sport leadership positions in NCAA Division I (Anderson, 1991; Burton, Borland, & Mazerolle, 2012; Mazerolle, Borland, & Burton, 2012). Fewer studies have examined the experiences of women in the role of the head athletic trainer at the NCAA Division I level (Gorant, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2015). An even smaller number of studies have explored women's perceptions concerning the importance of higher education experiences that prepared female athletic trainers for either secondary, collegiate, or clinical sport leadership roles (Booth, 2000; Shingles, 2001). At the time of this study, no prior research examined how both NAIA and NCAA female head athletic trainers perceive and experience educational preparations to navigate barriers towards opportunities required in leadership roles. I designed this study to bridge this research gap concerning the underrepresentation of women in collegiate head athletic training roles, and did so in part by using research literature in two areas closely related to athletic training: scholastic and athletic leadership.

The intent of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part higher education institutions played in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also included exploring the participants' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in

current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. This research addressed a gap in knowledge by collecting and analyzing the experiences of female head athletic trainers to generate greater insight into barriers that might thwart career advancement opportunities. The findings from identifying barriers to women's leadership in athletic training were intended for use in decreasing gender stereotypes that depict women as incapable of leading men within collegiate sport contexts. It was also expected that this research would bear insights into present conventions of postsecondary administrators and sport organizational practitioners who are instrumental in implementing and enforcing equality legislation already in place.

This chapter provides a background and synopsis of research about women's overall underrepresentation in leadership roles within intercollegiate sport programs. The problem statement was derived from the literature review and is, along with its application and purpose, offered as a theme for the research questions that guided study. The conceptual framework, nature of the study, operational definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study preface a discussion summarizing implications for positive social change.

Background

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 (CRA of 1866) was enacted to define American citizenship and affirm that Federal law would provide protection of all male citizens (Lash, 2011). After the Civil War (1861-1865), the CRA of 1866 was one of the several steps taken to integrate marginalized groups and provinces within Federal amendments that proscribed discriminatory praxis (Amar, 2013; Amar, Worth, & Geltzer, 2012;

Claiborne, 2013). Modeled on the basic theory of safeguarding citizens' fundamental and constitutional rights, the CRA of 1866 and its heirs were designed to address stereotypes associated with race, sex, ethnicity, age, disability, and religion (Heckman, 2011; Koller, 2012; Stromquist, 2013). The 20th century ushered in an array of civil rights statutes (e.g., Title VII, Title IX, and the Americans with Disability Act of 1990), which were designed to bar prejudice against citizens in areas of employment, educational, and general society (Heckman, 2011; Siegel, 2013). In 1970, drafts of Title IX emerged as a reaction against amassed evidence of ingrained misogyny against girls and women across all tiers of education (Anderson, 2012; Bayh, 2007). While the original implementation of Title IX did affect athletics in 1972, the Gender and Athletics Act of 1974 clearly applied Title IX regulations to sports programs (Anderson, 2012).

The initial aim of Title IX's drafters was to address discriminatory practices in U.S. higher education in the areas of women's admission and employment (Anderson, 2012; Bayh, 2007; Brake, 2013). An example of this discrimination was when Bernice Sandler earned a doctoral degree from the University of Maryland and applied for, but was denied, a faculty position in 1969 (Edwards, 2010; Sandler, 2007). Sandler was notified that she "came on too strong for a woman" (Sandler, 2007, p. 474). Thereafter, Sandler worked with the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) and endeavored to apply the Executive Order 11,246 (1964), which prohibited discriminatory hiring praxis in government contract agencies (Nathan, 1969; Sandler, 2007). Efforts to enforce this executive order directly led to an administrative class action complaint against all postsecondary institutions receiving Federal funds and, in 1972, to the enactment of Title

IX (Heckman, 2011; Sandler, 2007; Siegel, 2013). Dr. Sandler was immediately recognized as the Godmother of Title IX and went on to do other advocacy work (Edwards, 2010; Ware, 2013).

The U.S. Congress authorized Title IX with two essential objectives: (a) to evade utilizing Federal funds to endorse discriminatory praxis in educational activities and programs, and (b) to offer individuals effective safeguard against such praxis (*Cannon v. University of Chicago,* 1979). As a result, the Act supported unprecedented advances in women's access and participation opportunities in collegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Anderson, 2012; Henderson et al., 2011). Title IX's long path to sex equality, however, has been met with formidable resistance since its inception by organizations such as the Football Coaches Association (FCA) and the NCAA. This resistance was evidenced by a reluctance on the part of postsecondary schools that house collegiate sports to accommodate women's interests and abilities on equal terms with men (Anderson, 2012; Brake, 2001). This reluctance has contributed to ongoing institutional discrimination against suspect classes such as women and minorities in spite of Title IX, especially within collegiate sport programs (Cohen, 2011; Heckman, 2011; Stromquist, 2013). Also, institutional discrimination was highlighted by Burton's (2015) assertion that "men's intercollegiate sport is one of the last social institutions to exclude women" (p. 158).

The socialization processes that shape and recreate inequalities in collegiate sports are complex, existing in higher education's institutional sex-segregated athletic training programs since Title IX in 1972 (Brake 2001; Heckman, 2011). Peripheral entities such

as the NCAA and government agencies also play a significant role in perpetuating the underrepresentation of women at senior leadership levels (Brake, 2001). For example, Sandler (2007) noted that the NCAA and FCA suggested the 1975 compliance regulations to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which was housed in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Sandler added that women advocacy groups had opposed and battled these regulations but were unsuccessful (p. 483). Staurowsky (2003) argued that the U.S. Congress passed several bills in 1974 that represented the NCAA's desire to restrict Title IX's praxis to sport (p. 101). Despite ambiguity and the lack of standards for measurement, the 1975 Title IX compliance regulations foreshadowed ongoing unequal opportunities for women in athletics and employment. As a result of these issues, the male or college sport model within U.S. institutions of higher education has remained dominant (Brake, 2001, p. 31).

The ongoing problems of inequity in U.S. collegiate athletics administration were summarized in a study by Acosta and Carpenter (2014). In 1972, the authors found, women made up over 90% of the administrators of women's collegiate sport programs. The authors also reported that in 1998, women represented just 38% of the administrators of women's collegiate sport programs. From 1998 to 2014, this percentage of women in administrative roles for women's collegiate sports further decreased to 36%, representing an overall 54% deterioration in leadership since 1972. Significantly, the greatest increase in women's leadership was at the head athletic training position: a 3% increase at the Division III level between 1972 and 1998 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

This increase in Division III leadership is significant in part because Division III

represents largest number of NCAA schools, but also contains the smallest administration staff sizes (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Hoffman, 2010). Many Division III schools have just one athletic administrator; if that individual is a woman, then her voice (e.g., input, view, representation), albeit present, is an isolated voice. If the administrator is a man, then by the NCAA organizational structure, there is "no opportunity for a female voice" (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 36).

In the early 1960s, a new wave of progressive women entered competitive sports administration surfaced from physical educators and administrators of the Division of Girls and Women in Sport (DGWS). The DGWS was an affiliate of the National Association for Girls and Women in Sports (NAGWS; Hult, 1989; Verbrugge, 2012). These women conceived a new framework of collegiate athletics and sought to organize tournaments that differed from the NCAA's commercialized men's sport model (Verbrugge, 2012). This innovation spawned the Commission for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW), a predecessor to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). The AIAW became the governing body that authorized tournament play for women's sports and promoted nationwide championship games (Hult, 1989; Verbrugge, 2012). The CIAW merged with the AIAW in 1971 (Hult, 1989).

In 1971, the AIAW commenced with a comprehensible mission, its policies and the responsibilities of member institutions. It established procedures for managing nationwide championships, rules of eligibility for athletes and proposals for a participatory governance approach (Hult, 1989, Verbrugge, 2012). The AIAW espoused an educational sport model that focused on the student and established safeguards to avert

abuses (e.g., under table pay-for-play, exploitation of male athletes, lack of insurance for catastrophic injuries) witnessed in the male sport model (Staurowsky, 2012; Verbrugge, 2012). As an affiliate of the NAGWS, the AIAW implemented all existing rules, athletic guidelines, and officials, while preserving its nationwide administrative organization (Hult, 1989; Verbrugge, 2012; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

In the early- to mid-1970s, the AIAW set forth with 206 constituted institutional members and flourished to 971 collegiate members (Verbrugge, 2012). Hult (1989) added that the Association organized "750 state, regional and national championships under a unified membership plan with state and regional associations" (p. 254). Overall, the AIAW governed all athletes in women's sports programs at each member institution. Initially, the AIAW's yearly financial allowance was modest and contingent on institutional member fees along with the NAGWS funds (Swaton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012). As the Association expanded in charter membership and reputation, it gained sponsors who increased revenue to approximately $2,000,000; this revenue increase enabled the AIAW to reimburse members for traveling expenses (Hult, 1989). Notwithstanding the AIAW's autonomy, the NCAA challenged the leaders in a battle for jurisdiction over the women's athletic programs. This confrontation emanated from the 1960s when the male-dominated NCAA began its quest to parlay all women and men's amateur athletics under its governance structure (Swaton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012).

Along with the implementation of Title IX, the AIAW experienced an expansion of its women's athletics programs, enlarged budgets, and new television and alternative media contracts (Hult, 1989; Verbrugge, 2012). In 1981, these advances heightened the

AIAW's representation on the United States Olympic Committees (USOC) and National

Sport Governing Bodies (NGBs), which controlled Olympic sports. Thus, the prestige of

the AIAW began to overshadow the NCAA and in reaction, the NCAA decided to

provide national championships for women (Hult, 1989; Swaton, 2010). On the surface,

the NCAA's offer to promote national championships for women appeared as a positive

sign. However, the policy for women's inclusion into the male collegiate sport model

siphoned membership and lucrative media contracts away from the AIAW (Hult, 1989;

Swaton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012). Legal matters, combined with profitable media

arrangements that could spawn greater revenue for male sports, functioned as a thrust for

the takeover of women's athletics. With this seizure of women's sports, the AIAW was

compelled to halt operations in 1983 (Hult, 1989; Swaton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012).

A year following the 1983 athletic merger, both the NCAA and AIAW provided

championship tournaments, which pressured universities to select between the two for

different sport championships (Hult, 1989; Swaton, 2010). The NCAA devised a strategy

to incorporate women into leadership positions as a means to obtain votes from a greater

number of member institutions (Hult, 1989). As such, the NCAA implemented a 5-year

plan to ensure that women represented no less than 16% of the Association's Leadership

Council. Approximately 18% to 24% of the women's leadership positions were allocated

to NCAA committees (Hult, 1989; Verbrugge, 2012). The NCAA also downgraded

women's leadership to Chair positions in areas where only women, and not men,

competed athletically. Still, it was rare to find a committee comprised of only women that

dealt only with women's sports (Swanton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012). Hult (1989) noted,

"Few, if any, women were on committees in the all men's sports" (p. 256). Prior to the NCAA's acquisition of the AIAW, nearly 1300 women occupied leadership positions as executive council members, members of NGBs, national and state committees, athletic directors, allied healthcare professionals, coaches, and media correspondents (Hult, 1989; Swaton, 2010; Verbrugge, 2012). Under the 5-year plan, women were guaranteed fewer than 350 administrative roles with "only one or two in a powerful decision-making position on the council" (Hult, 1989, p. 256). And as Acosta and Carpenter (2014) noted, "the stark variation in representation across divisions [NCAA] and the overall low representation of females leaves open the question of the presence of non-skill based selection processes" (p. 44). Hult (1989) expressed this sentiment 25 years earlier.

An athletic director who oversees a collegiate sport department forms and manages programs therein (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). This management should align with institutional policies and procedures that are relied upon to promote equality throughout all levels (e.g., students, staff, and administration). White men dominate collegiate sport leadership positions and hold approximately 89% of these positions across all NCAA divisions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, Johnson, Loomer, & Martinez, 2014). White males also occupy 100% of all commissioners in the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Series schools, excluding historically Black universities and colleges (Lapchick et al., 2014). The dire absence of minorities, including women as conference commissioners and athletic directors, remains ever present in our universities and athletic departments (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick et al., 2014).

Civil rights statutes such as Title VII mandated equal opportunities and banned

discriminatory hiring praxis, excluding employees within the education sectors (Stromquist, 2013). In 1972, Title IX amended Title VII to include employees in education, thus making it illegal to discriminate against people concerning sex, ethnicity, religion, or nationality (Stromquist, 2013). As such, higher education institutions have a responsibility to ensure hiring practices that represent minorities and women within the labor pool via which employees receive equal opportunity (Heckman, 2011; Stromquist, 2013). Acosta and Carpenter's (2014) findings revealed that educational institutions have long neglected Federal equality mandates.

Historically, discriminatory hiring practices have occurred across multiple labor institutions that reach beyond the sports realm (Cook & Glass, 2014; Costello, Bieuzen, & Bleakley, 2014; Walters & McNeely, 2010). Cook and Glass (2014) noted an increased acceptance of women's leadership positions (e.g., legal and business), but added that women still faced obstacles that are not present for men. Moreover, perceptions that men are more effective leaders continue to restrict women's opportunities (Cook & Glass, 2014; Walters & McNeely, 2010). Discriminatory beliefs such women's emotivity, lack of assertiveness, and lack of strong networks have induced negative evaluations concerning qualifications to lead (Cook & Glass, 2014; Walters & McNeely, 2010). Although it might be doable to provide practical incentives for legal change, as previously suggested, there must exist a common desire to utilize the law to effectuate that change. In the United States history, a desire to employ the law to generate broad change, as related to gender and race, has occurred in reaction to crises (e.g., suffrage and civil rights). Such crises where concerns of people who profited from the status quo

united with others who endeavored to transform it (Bridgeman, 2008, p. 16).

Since the enactment of Title IX, research has examined reasons for women's underrepresentation in U.S. collegiate sport leadership roles (Cunningham, 2010; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). Emerging from this body of work are various frameworks (e.g., liberal feminism, hegemonic masculinity, institutional theory, and multilevel analysis), which have endeavored to explicate this situation from structural and cultural approaches. From these approaches, women's underrepresentation in athletic leadership roles has reflected societal norms and a segregated gender ideology. As such, cogent links between career choices and traditional beliefs concerning gender and sex role expectations have been deeply embedded (Burton, 2015; Connell, 2012).

The underrepresentation of women in collegiate sports leadership roles has been attributed to a "matrix of social relations" (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 318) or intersectionality of racism, classism, and sexism. Moreover, this underrepresentation has been attributed to "gender as an interacting force" (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 320). Brake (2013) noted that women who demonstrate power, strength, and athleticism threaten masculinity by dispelling stereotypes (e.g., lesbian and feminist) and going against the grain of traditional mores. Research has suggested that the lesbian label has been a tactical weapon used against women who are at odds with traditional notions of femininity (Fink, Parker, Cunningham, & Cuneen, 2012; Harden & Greer, 2009; Messner, 2011). Ongoing subjection to sexual connotations that might provoke negative perceptions for some women has served to reinforce gender typing or role expectations. Such subjection spawns stigmas that often pose conflicts for women in collegiate sports

and institutions of higher education (Heckman, 2011; Koller, 2012). In all likelihood, strategies employed to maintain power involve a dehumanization of employees both for the dominator and the dominated (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Eagly & Chin, 2010).

The passage of Title IX was intended to enhance women's equal participatory opportunities across every activity and program in U.S. educational institutions receiving Federal financial assistance (Heckman, 2011; Siegel, 2013; Swaton, 2010). While Title IX has contributed to enhancing participation for women in athletics, "it has not been an unbridled success" (Swaton, 2010, p. 8). Swaton (2010) added that Title IX failed to confront discriminatory practices about administrative leadership roles; thus, multiple barriers remain that have restricted attainment of equal status in college sport programs.

Some research exists that has explored female athletic trainers' experiences about obtaining leadership roles within NCAA Division I athletics (Anderson, 1991; Burton et al., 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2012). Fewer studies have examined female head athletic trainers' experiences at the NCAA Division I level (Gorant, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2015). Further, scant research has investigated female head athletic trainers' perceptions related to the importance of postsecondary experiences that trained these women for high school, college, or clinical leadership positions (Booth, 2000; Shingles, 2001). Research in this area has yet to examine how both NAIA and NCAA female head athletic trainers perceive and experience academic preparations to navigate barriers towards opportunities required in leadership roles. Thus, this study explores female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part higher education institutions play in supporting the achievement of leadership roles within U.S. collegiate sport programs. Investigating such

experiences could garner insight into exclusionary practices that pose as barriers to career

advancement opportunities. This insight is important because recognizing challenges and

barriers to employment might help bring more women into a field with too many

gendered barriers.

<div align="center">**Problem Statement**</div>

The enactment of Title IX augured a revolutionary shift over American terrains by

granting women access and opportunities for participation in collegiate sport programs

(Anderson, 2012; Henderson et al., 2011). Across decades, these shifts have coincided

with vast social changes about public acceptance and support for U.S. collegiate women

athletes (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Koller, 2012). Title IX's role has been incalculable

in this shift and the recent opportunities that rendered it possible (Brake, 2001). And as is

so frequently demonstrated with the law's relation to societal change, the aforementioned

victories only begin to story forth half the tale. The other half of the tale would reveal the

inadequate reach of Title IX to end prejudice against women in sport (Brake 2013;

Heckman, 2011; Stromquist, 2013). For example, the immoderate attention given to the

rise of women's participation has contrasted with the moderate inattention paid to an area

where Title IX coexisted with a crushing loss: leadership opportunities for women in

collegiate sport administrations (Blackmore, 2014; Hoffman, 2011; Swaton, 2010). One

such leadership role has been, from inception, in the professional domain of athletic

training.

In 2014, female certified athletic trainers broke historical trends in NATA's

membership by surpassing their male peers by 8% (NATA, 2014b). Still, women remain

marginalized by representing only 36% of NAIA and 32% of NCAA athletic training

leadership positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Goodman et al., 2010; NAIA, 2014).

Thus, while constituting 54% of the NATA's (2014b) active certified membership, fewer

women than men were hired to direct athletic training programs in higher education

settings (NAIA, 2014). Noteworthy is that many academic institutions have engaged in

preserving a male culture of sport and reinforcing this culture via structuring athletic

leadership and administration (Brake, 2013; Maguire, 2011). This phenomenon was

evidenced by the NCAA's overall 4% increase of female head athletic trainers and 3%

increase of female athletic directors from the years 1998 to 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter,

2014). Brake (2010) noted, "Women today are severely underrepresented in the ranks of

coaching and athletics administration" (p. 141).

A few studies have explored female athletic trainers' experiences about obtaining

leadership roles in NCAA Division I athletics (Anderson, 1991; Burton et al., 2012;

Mazerolle et al., 2012). Still less research has investigated the experiences of female head

athletic trainers at the NCAA Division I level (Gorant, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2015). A

dearth of studies has addressed female athletic trainers' perceptions about educational

experiences that prepared them for leadership roles in secondary, intercollegiate, or

clinical settings (Booth, 2000; Shingles, 2001). Research has yet to examine how both

NAIA and NCAA female head athletic trainers perceive and experience academic

preparations to navigate barriers towards opportunities required in leadership roles. To

advance positive changes in women's top-level sport leadership opportunities, both

women and men should recognize and understand the part higher education institutions

play in structuring such leadership. Foremost, this study is important because recognizing challenges and barriers to employment may bring more women into a field with various gendered barriers. This study filled the gap in research by exploring female athletic trainers' perceived experiences regarding the role of higher education institutions in preparing and supporting their career goals and pursuit of U.S. collegiate sport leadership positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part higher education institutions played in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also included exploring the participants' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. This study was important because understanding challenges and barriers to employment may help bring more women into a field with too many gendered barriers. Burton (2015) noted, "men's intercollegiate sport is one of the last social institutions to exclude women" (p. 158). Therefore, I hoped that this research would provide unique views from a group of female athletic trainers who have uprooted exclusionary mechanisms to become leaders in a male-dominated collegiate sport arena.

The literature review for this study did not identify any previous research that specifically examined how both NAIA and NCAA female head athletic trainers perceive and experience academic preparations and navigate barriers to attain leadership roles.

This study, therefore, addressed this gap in the literature. The research findings can be used to provide a higher education curriculum framework that more adequately addresses sociocultural issues. Such curriculum changes could also effectuate positive social change by enhancing collegiate administrators, policymakers, and sport practitioners' recognition of underlying gender biases thereby improving the numbers of women in top athletic training leadership roles.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was designed to answer three primary research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding higher education experiences and preparations into their respective positions?

2. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education experiences might have informed their capacity to overcome barriers in obtaining their respective positions?

3. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education can transform curricula and certification processes to augment opportunities in leadership?

Conceptual Framework

This study used the expectation states (Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and the status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories as its conceptual framework to explore female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part

higher education institutions play in supporting the achievement of leadership roles in U.S. collegiate sport programs. With the application of both the expectation states and status construction theories, I entwined conceptual strands, which informed the purpose, research questions, and data analysis. The application of this conceptual framework also allowed for a more holistic phenomenological inquiry.

Beneath the umbrella of expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998), the status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) was afforded greater theoretically conceptualized weight. The expectation states and status construction theories were selected to understand whether higher education institutions serve to augment women's opportunities in sport leadership or give rise to status restricting views that might impact navigation through barriers to success. Ridgeway's status construction theory was highlighted to examine how societal mores concerning gender might sway perceptions of women's competency and chances for achieving sport leadership roles.

The expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories are complementary. The expectation states theory attends to pluralistic interactions while status construction theory focuses on individual relations (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006). Ridgeway's (2001) status construction theory posits that "status beliefs" (p. 638) shape gendered rules when individuals interact with collective or group goals, which then disrupt leadership and influence among individuals. Ridgeway noted, "it is the status element of gender stereotypes that cause such stereotypes to act as distinctively powerful barriers to women's achievement of

positions of authority, leadership, and power" (2001, p. 638). Women's opportunities to achieve high-rank leadership roles, therefore, could be determined by societal beliefs and biases attached to the category of gender (Ridgeway, 2009). In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed account of the theoretically conceptualized assumptions and implications.

The expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories support a phenomenological approach to examine women's perceptions of how higher education experiences have prepared them for head athletic training roles in U.S. collegiate sport. The conceptual framework is dynamic, multileveled, and contextually flexible. Both theories attend to social relations with an emphasis on the resiliency or persistence of gender as a frame for sex-segregated occupations: an aim that touches every facet of an individual's daily interactions. This conceptual framework aligned with study's purpose, the research questions and methodological approach, as leadership within higher education's sport programs is a social and cultural process (Ridgeway, 2011). Dominant status beliefs with salient characteristics of gender guide performance expectations, which has led to inequalities (e.g., exclusive hiring practices and wage disparity; Ridgeway, 2011; Berggren, 2011). As such, gender and leadership are social constructions, which are influenced by sociocultural contexts.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative phenomenology approach was applied to attend to the role of higher education institutions in preparing women for an athletic training career and in hiring these women to lead collegiate athletic training programs. While Creswell's (2014)

suggested population size of 5 to 10 participants for phenomenological studies, Starks

and Trinidad (2007) recommended a participation standard of 1 to 10. The sample for this

study was comprised of nine participants with an assumption that, at a minimum, six

participants would complete two interview sessions (e.g., initial and follow-up).

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 2014) was applied to identify nine

participants who satisfied the following criteria: (a) female head athletic trainers at 4-year

NAIA and NCAA schools, (b) located in regions across the United States, (c) passed the

Board of Certification exam, and (d) held the position of head athletic trainer for a

minimum of one year. Members of that sample (e.g., head, assistant, and associate levels)

recommended additional participants. I selected participants from the initial sample as

well as some from snowball sample suggestions from previously selected participants.

Women as head athletic trainers had an opportunity to describe their experiences

on a journey from career preparation to advancement into leadership positions.

Implementing a phenomenological approach that fostered an in-depth examination, I

sought to grasp the essences of participants' experiences about the part higher education

institutions play in preparing women for athletic training careers and leadership in U.S.

collegiate sport programs.

The phenomenological approach was suitable for this research as it enabled

exploration into complex matters such as gender bias and cultural barriers that the

participants confronted in higher education programs and real-world leadership

experiences. Creswell (2014) noted, phenomenology allows for exploration of concrete

experiences of each participant and the meanings they communicate from experiences.

Moustakas (1994) added that participants would be able to reflect upon past experiences utilizing in-depth descriptions from two interview sessions (e.g., initial and follow-up). As such, this study collected and analyzed data to reveal "a comprehensive story that is portrayed in vivid, alive, accurate, and meaningful language" (p. 19). A modified design of Seidman's (2013) interview protocol was implemented to collect data from women who led collegiate athletic training programs across the various regions of the United States.

Operational Definitions

This study used the following operational definitions of terms.

Athletic director: An individual who serves to administer, coordinate, and govern sport programs. Additional responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the hiring of staff, evaluating performance, overseeing budgets, and fundraising. An athletic director's ideological perspective is a significant factor in shaping their athletic department (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 35).

Athletic training profession: Health care profession that collaborates with physicians to maximize client and patient participation and activity in sports, employment, and life. The profession abides by mandated codes of responsibility established by the governing Board of Certification, including patient responsibility, competency, professional standards, research, social responsibility, and business practices (NATA, 2010, pp. 26-28).

Athletic trainer: This study uses the NATA's definition of athletic trainers (AT) as "healthcare professionals who collaborate with physicians. The services provided by

ATs comprise prevention, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions" (NATA, 2014c, p. 1).

Head athletic trainer: The highest position to which an athletic trainer can advance in the field. Duties include, but are not limited to (a) supervision of training staff concerning the prevention, evaluation, treatment, and rehabilitation; (b) instruction of prevention modalities such as taping, bracing, and proper fitting of equipment; and (c) demonstrate the ability to design and apply conditioning programs conducive to an individual athlete's record of injuries and illnesses. The head athletic trainer reports to a physician and to the athletic director (NATA, 2014a).

Assumptions

An initial assumption for this study was that participants would provide genuine, unabridged, and introspective responses to interview questions that represented female head athletic trainers in NCAA and NAIA collegiate sport programs. It was also assumed that each participant would voluntarily make inquiries to ensure clarity of questions during the interview process. Moreover, it was presumed that the female head athletic trainers would offer in-depth or insightful knowledge concerning personal career expeditions to achieve leadership roles in higher education's athletic programs. These assumptions were essential to promoting my explicated worldview as the researcher and managing any theoretically conceptualized inclinations, biases, and alliances to the research topic that might sway the analysis, as suggested by Merriam (2009).

Scope and Delimitations

The central aim of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore female

athletic training perceptions regarding the part higher education has played in supporting

career opportunities to attain a leadership role in collegiate sport programs. Because of

the research gap on female head athletic trainers and the power that higher education has

in shaping the culture of sport leadership, it was imperative to identify employment

barriers, which could help bring more women into a field with too many gendered

barriers (Brake, 2001; Heckman, 2011; Stromquist, 2013). This research consisted of

diverse women, practicing as head athletic trainers, at various 4-year tertiary institutions

(e.g., NAIA and NCAA) located along the various regions of the United States. To

participate, all women must have held a full-time head athletic trainer position for a

minimum of one school year. The rationale regarding the large geographic region

pertained the possible use of snowball sampling, which expanded a sample via requesting

participants to suggest other potential interviewees (Babbie, 2012; Maxwell, 2013).

Purposeful sampling was selected based on the necessity of locating participants with

specific attributes as dictated by the study's purpose and research questions.

This research study did not specifically attend to matters of intersexuality, sexual

orientation, transgendered individuals, and presumptions regarding degrees of

masculinity in sport. Individuals not included were male head athletic trainers and

women and men in the roles of assistant and associate athletic trainers. The above issues

and roles are salient considerations in exploring the lack of women in intercollegiate

athletic leadership positions today. While issues of intersexuality, sexual orientation, and

transgenderism might be mentioned in the literature, further elaboration would go beyond

the scope of this study. Male head athletic trainers and certified athletic trainers, as

auxiliary staff members, were not included because this study focused specifically on women in the head athletic trainer position. Investigating the phenomena of female head athletic trainers' experiences of academic preparation and ascendency into leadership roles offered opportunities to gather data via interviews.

From the outset of this study, I reflected on social psychology and gender theories such as the expectations status theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and the status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) as the conceptual framework. Adoption of a constructivist perspective allowed for data collection and analysis that reflected the participant's perspective and contextualized results (Creswell, 2014). Concerning the feminist interpretive lens, I elected to avoid identifying with a specific feminist approach, as feminist theories are manifold and overlapping. For the sake of aligning paradigmatic lenses with the purpose, research questions, conceptual framework and topic, both perspectives seemed suitable. Due to the small sample for this study, the findings are not generalizable or transferable to larger populations.

Limitations

An inherent limitation in qualitative research involves the lack of generalizability to larger populations (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). This research was limited to a purposeful sample of women who have achieved a head athletic trainer status within either the NAIA or NCAA intercollegiate systems. A small sample size of nine participants might pose a restriction. Regarding small sample sizes, Willis (2007) noted that a researcher ceases data collection when a saturation point has been reached. That is, saturation occurs when data cease to be fresh or no longer ignites new understandings or

unveils novel properties. The selection of one group restricts the study's scope in terms of transferability; however, selection of a homogeneous group can generate fresh hypotheses and findings that might transfer to a population of similar characteristics or goals.

The timing of data collection during the school year may have been a limitation as well: head athletic trainers have manifold responsibilities in the training facility, on the field, and in the classrooms. An interview schedule (e.g., initial and follow-up) was established during the weekend or at the participants' convenience to avoid infringing on the participants' valuable time.

Another limitation was that researcher bias might impact literature reviews, participant interviews, data analysis, and results. The conflict of researcher bias was averted via recognizing the limits of objectivity or privileging one epistemology over another. As the researcher of this study, it was important to disclose that I have had unique experiences as a collegiate athlete, student athletic trainer, head coach, director of intramural sports, and adjunct faculty in the domain of Exercise and Sports Science. The role of an athlete and head coach expanded beyond undergraduate years into the international realm, as did my student athletic training experience. As such, a self-reflexive approach was used to curb identified partialities while gathering and analyzing data as well as developing conceptualizations.

Significance of the Study

Research exploring female athletic trainers' perceptions of the part higher education plays in supporting career opportunities to achieve leadership roles was

important for various reasons. As previously mentioned, Congress authorized Title IX to evade utilizing Federal funds to endorse discriminatory praxis in educational activities and programs and to safeguard individuals against such praxis (*Cannon v. University of Chicago,* 1979). This study was important because understanding challenges and barriers to employment might help bring more women into a field with too many gendered barriers. Burton (2015) noted, "men's intercollegiate sport is one of the last social institutions to exclude women" (p. 158). This study sought to provide distinct perspectives from a group of female athletic trainers who have removed exclusionary mechanisms to become leaders within a male-dominated sport arena. The findings from this study might provide evidence or understanding for policymakers who develop and oversee strategies to balance gender leadership within higher education and sport organizations (e.g., NAIA and NCAA). No known study had addressed the role of higher education in preparing women for an athletic training career or in hiring women to lead athletic training programs. This study extended the body of knowledge as it aimed to identify potential barriers, which might thwart women's career advancement in the hierarchical framework of postsecondary settings. The results could effectuate positive social change by producing suggestions for policy solutions for how higher education can develop sociocultural curricula and certification processes to improve women's leadership in athletic training for both women and men's sport programs.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the problem, the purpose of the study, and a background section on the evolution of Title IX with its educational successes and failures. A

synopsis of a lack of female head athletic trainers at the collegiate level was provided.

Next, enacted Federal statutes, designed to safeguard citizens from social inequality, were

presented to contextualize developing background historical events. Early discrimination

statutes, amendments, and the AIAW's battle with the NCAA were included to provide

context for how Title IX evolved. Information about discriminatory practices in higher

education was addressed, as this issue was vital in the drafting, advocacy, and enactment

of Title IX. The exclusion of women in senior level leadership positions within higher

education's collegiate programs continues to this day. My objective in Chapter 2 was to

insert the concepts above alongside the conceptual framework molding the study.

       Chapter 2 focuses on a current literature review pertaining to theoretical

constructs of the study and emphasizes the following sections: introduction that presents

a synopsis of current literature, problem and purpose of the study, and a preview of the

chapter; literature search strategy with of key terms and databases pertinent to the

literature review; theoretically conceptualized foundation that introduces status

construction theory, supporting research, its application to the current study, and rationale

for the theory as related to the study and research questions. Women in head athletic

training leadership roles will be highlighted along with women in other athletic

leadership roles. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the major themes from the

literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Since 1950, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) has made

notable progress regarding the gender composition of its membership. After having only

male members in 1950, the NATA accepted its first female member in 1974 (Martin,

2013). In 2014, women constituted the majority of the NATA's active certified

membership, with the number of female members surpassing men by 8% (NATA, 2014).

Despite this achievement, women continue to be underrepresented in athletic training

leadership roles across all levels of the U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association

(NCAA) and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) systems (Acosta

& Carpenter, 2014; NAIA, 2014; NCAA, 2014).

A significant body of research has investigated women's underrepresentation at

the NCAA Division I level in roles such as coaches and athletic directors, but few studies

have examined women in the athletic training profession. At the time of the study, no

published research studies had examined how both NAIA and NCAA female head

athletic trainers perceive and experience academic preparations as barriers towards

opportunities required in leadership roles. This qualitative phenomenological study was

specifically designed to address this gap by exploring female athletic trainers'

perceptions on the role of higher education in attaining leadership roles within U.S.

collegiate sport programs.

The literature review includes a detailed discussion of research on women's

underrepresentation in collegiate and national sport leadership roles due to the lack of

prior research specifically on female head athletic trainers. This literature provided

empirical evidence about stereotypes and gender frames in U.S. collegiate sport programs

(Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo, 2015; Walker &

Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013) and international sport organizations

(Hovden, 2010; Sibson, 2010). The examined literature about women, leadership, and

gender addressed both national collegiate sport programs (Hoffman, 2011; Schull, Shaw,

& Kihl, 2013) and international sport organizations (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013;

Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). The latter literature documented men and women's

experiences in pursuing leadership roles and serving as board members. The literature on

institutional sex segregation focused on gendered organizational practices

(Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012), institutional policies about collegiate cultures of sport

leadership (Bower & Hums, 2013), and perceptions of women's leadership competency

(Burton, Grappendorf & Henderson, 2011).

This review of literature is presented in four sections. First, the description of my

literature review strategy offers a list of Boolean phrases and key terms, along with the

affiliated databases or search engines that were accessed to locate research. Next, the

conceptual framework is introduced, with discussions of expectation states (Berger et al.,

1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006).

Third, the literature review explores empirical studies that addressed the multifarious

issues facing women pursuing leadership roles in intercollegiate athletic programs in the

United States. In the final section, a summary and conclusion coalesces the major themes

in the literature to the extent of what is known and unknown about the topic under

investigation.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted the foundational searches for this literature search using Walden University's online library system. My foundational searches were executed via the following databases: Elsevier, Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), Emerald, Google Scholar, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Maney Online Publishing, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Sage Publications, Springer, and Taylor & Francis Online. The primary search keywords were selected on the basis of my professional experiences with the topic, and consisted of: *athletic training*, *barriers to women's sport leadership*, *culture of collegiate sport*, *expectation states theory*, *gender and sport*, *gender bias*, *higher education*, *history of sport*, *history of women in athletic training*, *history of women in sport*, *intercollegiate sport*, *leadership*, *masculinity and femininity in sport*, *NCAA and higher education*, *occupational sex segregation*, *organizational culture*, *power structure*, *sex roles*, *social environment*, *socialization*, *stereotypes*, *status constructions theory*, *Title VII*, *Title IX*, and *underrepresentation of women in sport*. I also used variations of these search terms including *equal rights laws*, *higher education and discrimination against women*, *higher education and unequal employment*, *male culture and domination in higher education*, *male domination in collegiate sport leadership*, *higher education and NCAA*, *NCAA's equity versus equality policies*, *NCAA's quota system for women leaders*, and *university presidents hiring protocols for athletic directors*. To keep up with current research, I also set up email alerts from Google Scholar, HeinOnline, Human Kinetics, JSTOR,

Knowledge Engine (KNGINE), and Sage Publications to receive notifications when new journal articles, legal documents, blog entries, journalism entries, and current events were published that matched the keyword strings *underrepresentation of women in sport leadership* and *female head athletic trainers*.

This literature review includes significant research on the more general topic concerning the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership due to the paucity of research specifically on female athletic trainers and head athletic trainers. In addition to examining academic peer-reviewed journal articles, I also searched for relevant legal briefs and analyses on discriminatory policies and laws (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954], Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII, Title IX, Reconstruction Amendments, and United Nations gender policies) and issues (e.g., women's wages, employment discrimination, division of labor, and gender segregation in higher education). I also collected United States federal documents about Title IX hearings, development of compliance regulations, oversight committees, and legal disputes between the AIAW and NCAA. Finally, searches were conducted on women's sports foundational websites and organizations such as the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics, the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association, the NCAA Presidential Advisory Group, and the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics.

Doctoral dissertations were notably underrepresented in the sources identified. I located very few doctoral dissertations regarding female athletic trainers in general, much less specifically on female head athletic trainers and their experiences of educational

preparations and leadership opportunities in higher education settings. The dissertations that I identified on these topics were all two decades or more in age, which were written prior to the implementation of postsecondary professional athletic training education programs. Dissertations that predated the implementation of professional athletic training education programs would not have addressed the research questions. The more recent dissertations that I examined about the overall underrepresentation of women in collegiate leadership (e.g., athletic directors, student athletic trainers, coaches, and senior woman administrators) provided a bibliography of journal articles that I had already obtained, indicating saturation in research.

Conceptual Framework

This study used expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories as a supportive conceptual framework for the literature review and analysis of results. Ridgeway's status construction theory offers a cognitive and social-psychological approach that more narrowly attends to an interpersonal or micro-level analysis of gender as a system. The expectation states theory attends to a pluralistic analysis. Such micro-level conceptualizations of gender include cultural stereotypes and gendered frames; women, leadership, and gender; and institutional sex segregation. Research on macro- and meso-level processes (Reskin, Branch-McBrier, & Kmec, 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 2004) has included examinations of gendered systems of inequality. This study, however, addressed micro-level processes as research has linked interpersonal processes to the "persistence of gender inequality at this moment in time" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 18).

Considering the assumptions of the conceptual framework for this study, both theories draw attention to gendered employment structures that give rise to inequalities regarding authority, wages, and promotional practices. Ridgeway (2009) argued, "we cannot understand the full implications of a particular organizational logic for the gender structure it will produce without considering how that organizational logic interacts with the background effects of the gender frame" (p.156). With this in mind, the expectation states theory assumes that group stability depends on status beliefs and individual desires that uphold authority and prestige positions in specified social contexts (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998). Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) status construction theory assumes (a) gender is a fundamental, socially complex construction based upon a moderate biological pretext; (b) the biosocial system of gender amplifies cultural conventions built upon moderate and resilient biological matter; and (c) gender inequalities are revised for emerging social and economic arrangements, preserving inequalities in amended forms across socio-economic transformations (1991, pp. 7-8).

Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) status construction theory's core premises are delineated into three conceptualizations of gendered cultural processes. These conceptualizations were used in this chapter as a frame to analyze gendered sport leadership: (a) cultural stereotypes and gendered frames; (b) women, leadership, and gender; and (c) institutional sex segregation. After addressing each of the three conceptualizations of gendered cultural processes, I present an analysis of recent empirical literature as related to women's leadership status in collegiate sport programs. Prior to embarking on the premises and empirical analyses, I provide a context for

understanding Ridgeway's status construction theory as related to women's general status in mixed-sex social relational settings.

A social relational approach to persistent gender inequality emanates from status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). Attending to gender research of previous scholars (e.g., Acker, 1990; Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Blau 1977; Eagly & Wood, 1982; West & Zimmerman, 1987), Ridgeway (1991) developed status construction theory to ascertain "how nominal characteristics of people such as gender and race acquire status value in society once they are cognitively distinguished" (p. 367). Vital to a social relational approach is how to conceptualize gender. As defined, gender is "a system of social practices within society that constitutes distinct, differentiated sex categories, sorts people into these categories, and organizes relations between people on the basis of the differences defined by this sex category" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 9). Gender, as a system of societal practices, constitutes females and males as dissimilar and orchestrates relations between women and men on a principle of assumed disparity (Ridgeway, 2006). The social relational construction of gender and difference is by nature an abstract and dichotomous process of differentiating between femininity and masculinity, which results in inequalities or discrimination (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). Examining ways that people understand and assign meanings of gender might offer insight into how gender inequalities are widely diffused, reinforced, and sustained in organizations, including educational institutions (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006).

Far more than just a trait assigned to people, gender is used to frame masculinity and femininity as dissimilar and structure biases relative to dissimilarities (Ridgeway &

Smith-Lovin, 1999). Common gender stereotypes in the gender order have been shown to establish cultural arrangements by which individuals perceive and approve of gender dissimilarities and inequalities (Beauchamp & Eys, 2008). The expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) considers gender as embedded in social ranks and structural leadership. As such, norms for the gender order are encrypted in stereotypes that include core status or positional beliefs (Berger & Webster, 2006). Moving beyond structural norms of the gender order to social relations, coordinating personal behaviors with others requires a widespread knowledge. Ridgeway (2006) noted, "Common knowledge is cultural knowledge that we all assume we know" (p. 147). This common way of defining and categorizing self and others allows individuals to coordinate actions in any given setting.

Systems for defining and categorizing entities are based on contrast and thus, a difference (Ridgeway, 2006). Utilization of categories helps to specify self as related to others and focuses people on locating shared beliefs of social distinction. Ridgeway (2009) observed a coordination hurdle inherent to structuring social links. Such a hurdle drives people to identify with another and develop a widely dispersed "social-category system" (p. 147) grounded on "culturally defined standards of difference" (p. 147). Some categorical sociocultural systems should be simplified to manage social relations and apply framing schemes to the process of interpreting self and others within various settings (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Fiske, 1998).

Beliefs about status are common cultural patterns regarding positionality within social groups such as race, gender, occupation, and education (Wagner & Berger, 1993).

Presumptions regarding the social status of groups have been expressed in and justified by competency differences (e.g., ability, age, ethnicity, and sex) among individuals within groups (Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). Eagly and Karau (2002) added that in employment settings, beliefs about status could impact practices via which people are: (a) offered rewards such as promotions and wages, (b) evaluated on performance, and (c) encouraged or discouraged from positions of authority and wealth. In essence, status beliefs concerning gender provide an account for barriers that women encounter while in leadership roles on a level equal to men.

As previously mentioned, traditionally held cultural ideas regarding gender (i.e., men and women) are stereotypes. When people share gender stereotypes on macro, meso or micro levels of interaction, these stereotypes serve as cultural rules or specifications for framing gender within the United States (Ridgeway, 2011). Ridgeway's (2011) emphasis on "the rules of the gender game" emanates from Giddens (1984) and Sewell's (1992) assertions that various societal structures have an intrinsic binary nature. These societal structures have implied rules or cultural arrangements via which people approve the system and identify allocations of power, resources, and behaviors. Sewell noted that "structure is dynamic" (1992, p. 27) such that it is a constantly evolving result and a matrix of social interactional processes. The replication of structures also renders possible transformation via means of exchanging rules and reorganizing resources (e.g., human and non-human or objects). This transformation makes novel structures observable as reconstructions of the old (Ridgeway, 2011; Sewell, 1992). Sewell maintained that structures "are not reified categories" (1992, p. 27) that are invoked to explicate the

inescapable contours of social conditions. Instead, to invoke structures (i.e., cultural rules) is to examine interactional reasoning via which humanity fashions history (Sewell, 1992).

The expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories support a phenomenological approach to examine women's perceptions of how higher education experiences prepared them for head athletic training roles in collegiate sport. This conceptual framework is dynamic, multileveled, and contextually flexible. Both theories attend to social relations with a specific focus on the resiliency or persistence of gender as a frame for sex-segregated occupations: an aim that touches every facet of an individual's daily interactions. This conceptual framework aligned with the study's purpose, the research questions, and the methodological approach, as leadership within higher education's sport programs is a social and cultural process (Ridgeway, 2011). Dominant status beliefs are associated with salient characteristics of gender that function to guide performance expectations. These status beliefs have led to inequalities (e.g., exclusive hiring practices, lack of promotion, and wage disparity; Ridgeway, 2011; Berggren, 2011). Gender and leadership, therefore, are social constructions that are influenced by sociocultural contexts.

This literature review attends to cultural stereotypes and gendered frames, which are the first of three status construction theoretical conceptualizations (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). The second theoretical conceptualization of women, leadership, and gender leads to the third theoretical conceptualization of institutional sex segregation. After each section, a discussion of current empirical literature about women's underrepresentation in

sport leadership positions ensues. That is, a discussion that attends to the "staying power of gender" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 34) as a social matrix of cultural stereotypes and gendered frames of inequality.

Literature Review

Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) empirical research on cultural stereotypes and gendered frames revealed how gender operates via avenues of status beliefs and organizational biases in workplace environments. These systematic workplace biases include evaluative approaches, authoritative structures, and task-oriented behaviors. In the women, leadership, and gender section of this review, the analysis shows the power of status beliefs on presumptions of leadership competence. Such presumed competence, for example, implies that high-status individuals or men have impartially won U.S collegiate sport leadership roles and thus, higher wages based on personal merit. In the context of higher education institutional and national organizational sports programs, the cutting-edge of gender inequality is also analyzed. The empirical literature on institutional sex segregation exposes how assumptions about an individual's gendered status or traits influence the hiring of workers for U.S. collegiate sport leadership positions. This sex typing and sex segregating of employment in U.S. higher education sport programs lays bare authority constructions associated with masculinity and femininity. These gendered authority constructions lead to women's lower wage status, which establishes them as second-class citizens and legitimizes sex inequality in U.S. institutions of higher education. The literature review begins with an elaboration on the first conceptualization of status construction theory: cultural stereotypes and gendered frames. Following

thereafter is a brief discussion of current empirical literature about women and these cultural stereotypes and gendered frames.

Cultural Stereotypes and Gendered Frames

In socially valued domains, gender stereotypes have been shown to incorporate beliefs that connect more general competence with men than with women. These stereotypes also confer upon the sexes separate skills such that athletic skills suit males while domestic skills fit females (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2009). Inequality is based on status beliefs about men and women's group membership more so than on perceived differences associated with material assets or power. As a result, status beliefs disadvantage women more than men who are wealthy and influential (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Phelan, Lucas, Ridgeway, & Taylor, 2014; West & Zimmerman, 2009).

Status beliefs evolve and create a component of stereotypes among members of involved groups (Lucas & Phelan, 2012; Ridgeway, 2013). While stereotypes such as those based on race, gender, occupation, and education can vary contextually, cultural beliefs can establish a "status characteristic" (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006, p. 32) for the group's identity. Correll and Ridgeway (2006) added that this identity is metamorphic when social classifications amalgamate with an "element of many widely shared group stereotypes" (p. 32), which ultimately form a "status element" (p. 32). Thus, individual members' various cultural beliefs, performance attributes, general competency expectations, and a degree of worthiness all merge to form a consensus on the basis of shared beliefs (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006).

Gender is a "diffuse status characteristic" (Phelan et al., 2014, p. 16) that reaches beyond skill sets, education levels, and occupational performances. Ridgeway (2013) proposed that status beliefs about gender suggest both distinction and inequality. Ridgeway also noted that the product of such status beliefs is a persistent linkage to a higher order group with universal competence and skills that are socially valued at specific times. While women's perceptions of gender stereotypes have become somewhat more optimistic over time, the male-dominated hierarchical group structure has endured. As a result of this persistence, men generally receive more favorable evaluations than women in the socially significant domain of competence (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Phelan et al., 2014; Ridgeway, 2013). Ridgeway (2011) noted that the more male-typed the occupation, the more relevant gendered status beliefs become for evaluating competence. Thus, the more powerful gender biases become that favor men for performance, especially in the domain of athletic training.

As a type of integrated representation, status beliefs are different because members share these beliefs as descriptors of what the majority of people accept, by both privileged and underprivileged groups (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Charles & Bradley 2009; Lucas & Phelan, 2012). At the core of gender stereotypes and status beliefs lay consent (Ridgeway, 2013). Ridgeway (2013) noted that shared status beliefs versus opposed beliefs about in-group supremacy will most likely evolve among members who must frequently collaborate to accomplish that which is needed or wanted. Whether or not group members uphold culturally advantaged status beliefs, their perception of such beliefs as broadly accepted leads to another assumption: that other members' behaviors

will reflect these shared beliefs (Phelan et al., 2014; Ridgeway, 2013).

This presumed consensus affords a status belief the authority to construct societal relationships on unequal conditions over multiple settings (Ridgeway, 2011). Research on individuals' gender stereotypes has revealed a pattern of inequalities via which higher-ranked status groups (e.g., men) are perceived by society as proactive and instrumentally competent. The lower-ranked status groups (e.g., women) are viewed by society as reactive and expressively communal (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Wagner & Berger, 1997). Therefore, codetermination of inequality and difference exist in a group's mutual gender assumptions and behavioral coordination. And on the basis of these assumptions, this codetermination creates social relations of both inequality and difference (Wagner & Berger, 1997).

Individual interests shape the extent via which the gendering of behavior takes place (Ridgeway, 2009). Societal beliefs are a nexus of beliefs that advantages men above women, granting nearly all men and women who profit from male superiority a stake in sanctioning and sustaining the gender order (Ridgeway, 2009). This gender system, as a principal category for comprehending self, periodically offers the majority of people a potent incentive to endorse traditional assertions of gendered differences (Ridgeway, 2011).

Ridgeway (2011) described widely recognized gender stereotypes as the "rules of gender" (p. 68) that are both individual notions and hegemonic cultural axioms or accepted truths. Hegemonic cultural axioms are systematized in media portrayals and in normative symbols of women and men suggested by Federal laws and governmental

policies (i.e., Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII, and Title IX; Ridgeway, 2011).

Institutionalized axioms are found in an array of presumed organizational canons (e.g., higher education, and athletic programs; Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). While gender beliefs appear as universal characteristics of men and women, these beliefs exemplify the impressions and experiences of gender by authoritative groups or people that exert power to shape social institutions (Ridgeway, 2009). Ridgeway (2011) added that the women and men in conventional gender stereotypes resemble Caucasian, middle-classed heterosexuals (p. 89). Cultural hegemonic beliefs regarding gender "act as the default rules of gender" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 150). Thus, these default rules render the public sanction of gender more labyrinthine for people who vary from Caucasian, middle-classed heterosexuals.

Although people are aware of hegemonic beliefs about gender, many also embrace shared alternative gender beliefs via subgroups along the lines of politics, religion, race or immigrant groups (Ridgeway, 2011). Alternative cultural gender beliefs that are non-hegemonic shape behavior and criticism when people relate to others who are assumed to share similar beliefs (Filardo, 1996; Milkie, 1999). Several empirical studies have been done on women and cultural stereotypes, gendered frames, and hegemonic notions of competency within collegiate sport programs. These studies draw on several theories related to status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). Mazerolle, Burton, and Cotrufo (2015) interviewed eight women serving as head athletic trainers at the NCAA Division I level. Two of these women worked at a U.S. Football Bowl Series (FBS) University while six women worked at U.S. universities with no

football program. Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) results indicated that because men make up the majority of athletic administrators (e.g., athletic directors), women who pursue athletic training leadership roles might find it a long and difficult process. In reference to applying for and being denied a head athletic training position early in her career, one participant noted, "I feel like sometimes they [male athletic directors] just aren't willing to break out of what they already know . . . I found it was, 'Well, this is what we've always done, this is what we've always known,' you know?" (Mazerolle et al., 2015, p. 6). The female athletic trainer participants expressed frustration and perceived inequalities to be inherent in their organization's willingness to acknowledge women's qualifications while at once denying opportunities for career advancement (Mazerolle et al., 2015). Some athletic trainer participants perceived significant obstacles related to male administrative and peer respect. One form of perceived respect dealt with having to "fight harder than their male colleagues to receive resources needed to perform their jobs" (Mazerolle et al., 2015, p. 7). Social constraints on women were perceived to be an organizational matter as one participant expressed:

> I still think that there's a good ol' boys' club, and being a female, you will never get invited to that club. It doesn't matter how good you are, your pedigree, how great a job performance you have. You're never going to be one of the guys. (Mazerolle et al., 2015, p. 7)

The women who led the U.S. FBS athletic training programs provided direct medical treatment services to all men and women student-athletes with the notable exception of the student-athletes in the football programs.

Walker and Bopp's (2011) phenomenological study explored how and why

female coaches are nearly non-existent in men's NCAA Division I collegiate basketball.

The authors interviewed 10 women and used homologous reproduction (Kanter, 1977)

and masculine hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) lenses to understand coaching experiences and

barriers the women faced at the top level of U.S. collegiate sport. The findings revealed

three dominant themes concerning barriers: organizational suitability issues, double

standards, and social networks. Walker and Bopp (2011) found many gender barriers

existed to dissuade women from pursing a coaching career in men's U.S. collegiate

basketball, which led to "access discrimination" (p. 58). Overall, the women's abilities

and contributions to the organization and team were perceived as unaccepted or

unwelcomed. Similar to Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) female head athletic trainer'

experiences, Walker and Bopp (2011) indicated that most of their female coach

participants felt pressured to go "above and beyond" (p. 60) that of their male peers. The

authors' findings also revealed a general perception of entrenched ideological biases and

status beliefs against female coaches within the NCAA's Division I system of men's

collegiate basketball (Walker & Bopp, 2011). When considering established networks,

the female coach participants viewed the men's basketball domain as unreceptive to

women. Walker and Bopp added, "A double standard in sport exists in the segregation of

women in men's sports and the integration of men in women's sports" (2011, p. 60). This

finding supported what Acosta and Carpenter (2014) observed in their longitudinal study

of women's sport leadership where such double standards existed in nearly all NCAA's

athletic departments. Walker and Bopp (2011) suggested revising Title IX to require

Federally funded U.S. universities to demonstrate equal employment for women in U.S. sport leadership roles: leadership roles at all NCAA Division I schools, including men's sport programs.

Extending Walker and Bopp's (2011) study, Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) interviewed eight NCAA Division I male basketball coaches concerning attitudes and perceptions about women in the male-dominated culture of U.S. organized sports. The results from Walker and Sartore-Baldwin's phenomenological study indicated that a culture of hyper-masculinity existed in men's U.S. collegiate basketball. A majority of male coach participants recognized that this culture of hyper-masculinity was gender biased and opposed to change. One male coach noted that sexism is deeply rooted in men's U.S. collegiate basketball, including locker room communications and administrative meetings. Most of the male coach participants reported that the greatest obstacle for female coaches in men's U.S. collegiate basketball was "just getting in the door" (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 309). One male coach expressed, "I don't think the biggest challenge is a woman being on the staff or being with the players. I think the biggest challenge is getting hired" (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 309). Other male coaches noted that any woman coach entering men's U.S. collegiate basketball would need to be unique and climb above the bureaucracy. In essence, "if a woman steps into that, she would be under a microscope" (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 309). These results supported Walker and Bopp's (2011) findings regarding the constraints on women's access to positions of coaching in men's U.S. collegiate basketball. Walker and Sartore-Baldwin's (2013) findings also revealed treatment

discrimination in which women are not welcomed in the male-dominated NCAA Division I basketball programs.

Burton, Barr, Fink, and Bruening (2009) analyzed gender stereotypes of athletic administrative subroles (e.g., athletic director, life skills coordinator, and compliance coordinator) at two large universities in the northeast portion of the United States. Implementing social role theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), 248 students (59 women; 189 men) in advanced sport management courses completed the managerial subroles survey. Results from Burton et al.'s (2009) multivariate analysis of variance revealed that masculine attributes (i.e., assertiveness and tactical decision making) were perceived as most significant for the athletic director role. Women were perceived to have the abilities and qualifications for the athletic director position but were automatically disadvantaged due to prescriptive beliefs (e.g., abilities women should exhibit). Women were also perceived to violate prescriptive standards and were subject to unfavorable evaluations when in positions that are predominantly held by men. Finally, women were ranked highest in the life-skills and compliance coordinator roles and were perceived to require skills of consulting, organizing, planning, supporting others, and communicating. Burton et al. concluded, "even if feminine managerial roles are valued for the position of athletic director, women may still not be perceived as effective for this position as a result of the stereotypical masculine characterization of the domain of sport" (2009, p. 424). These results support findings from the prior studies about gender biases that overshadow women's skills and qualifications for U.S. collegiate sport leadership (Mazerolle et al., 2015; Walker & Bopp, 2011). These deeply entrenched ideological biases combined with

systematic inequalities result in the denial of access to and opportunities for career advancement in U.S. collegiate sports (Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

Sibson (2010) conducted a 15-month case study to investigate the governance structure of two Australian volunteer sports organizations' Board of Directors. One women's and one men's sport association merged under the umbrella of a single company with three women and three men on the Board of Directors. Although there was equal representation of both sexes, the positions assigned were based on assumed gender roles. The gender equity (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000) and exclusionary power (Rao, Stuart, & Kelleher, 1999) theories were applied as paradigmatic lenses. Through the use of participant observations, semistructured interviews, and evidentiary documents, Sibson concluded that men held high-status roles (e.g., chairman, design and construction, and maintenance) while women were relegated to positions of lower rank (e.g., kitchen, cooking, and secretary). After nine Board meetings, Sibson observed that the women participated far less in discourses regarding agenda issues. When women did present issues for debate, the men addressed these issues vaguely and, at times, ignored the women altogether. If the women called for a meeting to address a specific facility issue, the chairperson was the only male board member who attended. One female participant perceived the treatment of female board directors by noting, "I realized that we weren't going to get anywhere and I was banging my head up against a brick wall" (Sibson, 2010, p. 394). Sibson added that Australian volunteer sport organizational operations reflect socially manufactured sex distinctions where "men are

privileged and women are devalued or ignored" (2010, p. 380).

Hovden (2010) also studied national sport organizations to identify prevalent gender constructions underlying prototypes and portrayals of women's leadership. Drawing on gynocentric (e.g., caring, relational, and team-oriented) and androcentric (e.g., heroic, competitive, and rational) discourses (Brandser, 1996), Hovden analyzed how perceived notions of women's leadership reflect gendered relationships and power. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, eight women and eight men serving as executive board members for Norwegian national sport organizations were interviewed. The findings revealed that men perceived women's potential leadership as a negative gender difference in three ways: (a) women were resistant to making difficult decisions, (b) women were less determined and aggressive, and (c) women lacked adequate tactical competence and were unfamiliar with the "rules of the game" (Hovden, 2010, p. 197).

Concerning perceived decision-making skills, one male board member stated, "women are often afraid of making mistakes" (Hovden, 2010, p. 197). The female board member participants felt there was a need for additional time due to (a) representing a minority and (b) leading while subjected to more scrutiny than that of their male peers. These findings support Burton et al.'s (2009) conclusions about different or unfavorable evaluations between women and men regarding qualifications for national sport leadership positions. Several of Hovden's (2010) male board member participants perceived women as unwilling to "compete with men on equal terms" (p. 197) due to a lack of determination and aggressiveness. In other words, several male board member participants believed that women would prefer to dodge such affairs. In contrast, the

female board member participants indicated that female candidates in male-dominated sports organizations were not contenders on equal grounds (Hovden, 2010).

Female board member participants viewed sport as culturally hegemonic, with codes and norms that influence women and men differently: a perceived influence that limits women's opportunities in Norwegian national sport organizations. Several arguments surfaced from male board member participants concerning women's competence and qualified experience to hold a senior leadership role. Hovden (2010) noted one male board member participant who perceived female executive sport leaders as "grey mice" (p. 197) or rodents that contribute very little to Norwegian national sport organizations. Another male board member participant described women as lacking strategic skills and an intellectual comprehension of the "rules of the game" (Hovden, 2010, p. 197). The female board member participants expressed concern regarding a lack of experience and competence to deal with a national sport organization's decision-making processes. Also, the female board member participants indicated that the gender variances, as described above, were an organizational matter rather than women's leadership inadequacies. Hovden's findings about gender bias in Norwegian national sport organizations echoed those of other studies that emphasized how the good ole boys' club constrained women's participation and contribution in leadership roles (Burton et al., 2009; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Sibson, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

Hovden (2010) suggested that creating more symmetrical sport leadership opportunities for women required transforming "men in leadership positions from

naturalized heroic individuals and organizational symbols into gendered persons and a political category" (p. 202). Such a reconceptualization could serve to transform men from the universal standard into a "specific something" (Hovden, 2010, p. 201). Placing men on equal status levels with the female genders' postmodern aim is somewhat similar to Ridgeway's (2011) position about ending the utilization of gender as a disparate system. Ridgeway proposed that to end both the branding women and men as dissimilar and coordinating societal relations on the basis of dissimilarity, people would have to "stop automatically sex-categorizing everyone" (p. 191). Still, considering gender's relevancy to sex and procreation, it is improbable that women, men, and children will cease discerning the sex of self in relationship to others. As Hovden (2010) argued, "we need new conceptualizations of gender" (p. 201) to bring balance to leadership in the realm of sports.

The above empirical studies indicated that gender bias in sport institutions and organizations are hegemonic cultural axioms or stereotypes that evolve into the "rules of gender" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 68). The literature also suggested that U.S. collegiate sport institutions are fortified through mechanisms (e.g., gender bias and inequality) and culturally understood status belief systems. These studies supported Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) position about how widespread gender stereotypes function to establish and support cultural arrangements via which individuals perceive and approve of gendered rules and inequality. The empirical literature also supported status construction theory to the extent that gendered status beliefs legitimized inequalities among the sexes by linking group distinctions with presumed differences in competence. The following section

provides a discussion of current empirical literature regarding women, leadership, and gender.

Women, Leadership, and Gender

The expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) posits an explanation regarding the development of influential and esteemed hierarchies among people and how behavioral processes are configured by status beliefs (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006). Formation of hierarchies is key to the procedures via which individuals attain access to leadership positions and apply leadership in employment settings. Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that leadership has two basic propositions: (a) decisive, task-oriented characteristics of the potential leader; and (b) allocated, socially formulated evaluation of appropriate behavior in varied contexts. Collectively, evaluations and behaviors produce the inferred status of the favored and unfavored that molds decisions regarding leadership (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002). In expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998), the two elements of leadership emerge at once since both are controlled by "self-other performance expectations" (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006, p. 42).

The expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) also assumes that group members labor toward common goals and in so doing, will seek cues about how to behave. Institutional positions (e.g., director and assistant) offer general standards, but within such standards there is flexibility. Decisions about voicing opinions or exercising restraint within the confines of sanctioned roles are impacted by individuals' presumptions of the value of personal contributions compared to what other

members can contribute (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These incognizant assumptions are also known as "self-other performance expectations" (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006, p. 42).

Self-fulfilling by-products of an individual's behavior evolve via expectations placed upon performance (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2013). As such, an individual's lower expectations for performance, as compared to others, results in (a) decreased input or suggestions, (b) increased requests for other's input, (c) decreased evaluation of other's ideas, and (d) increased influence from and agreement with others (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2013). Thus, behavioral processes and esteemed hierarchies are sustained when a person's perceived contributory worth is compared to others on the basis of unequal participation, evaluation, and attention (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995).

Ridgeway (2013) argued that gender is lured into practices where prestigious hierarchies, authority, and performance assumptions depend on an individual's search for clues to appropriate behavior in relationship to others. Individuals will also reflexively categorize sex and any definitive other to solidify the connection. Categorizing sex initiates gender stereotypes and status beliefs and prepares these features to influence judgments (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2013).

Both the expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories posit that gendered status beliefs become central when gender serves to either single out actors in a given situation (e.g.,

mixed-sex setting) or links cultural beliefs to a task at hand. Correll and Ridgeway (2006) maintained that gendered status beliefs regarding general competency and particular skills subconsciously mold an individual's expectations about performance or task suggestions. As such, sex categorization and biased assumptions can adversely impact an individual's confidence, task-oriented behavior, performance assessments, and the probability that they appear as persuasive leaders (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2013; Wagner & Berger, 1977).

Because people have collective identities (e.g., age, race, and education), no person can be delineated into just a woman or a man. In task-oriented or workplace settings, dignified roles and associated authority and resources influence competency expectations (Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). To understand how gender impacts individual behaviors and performance assessments in various contexts, both the expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) theories have considered the multiple roles, talents, and statuses people bring to various contexts. Correll and Ridgeway (2006) argued that group members merge both favorable and unfavorable outcomes of roles, talents, and positional characteristics, each measured via relevancy to a task, to assess performance of one member compared to another.

In employment settings, reflexive sex-categorization situates gender as ever enmeshed in practices of performance, self-affirmation, assessment, and influence via which individuals achieve leadership and power (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Still, the effect of gender status upon a member's behavior can fluctuate

across contexts. Administrative task-oriented roles, credentials, and skills are located in the foreground for individuals and most cogently shape performance assumptions for other group members (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Ridgeway, 2009). Gender, as a general or diffuse social status, is "almost always a background identity for individuals" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 152). Thus, when gender is framed as a background identity, it becomes powerful for group members due to biases that shape how others perform activities and execute general roles not overtly specified via institutional standards (Ridgeway, 2009).

The following empirical literature on women's sport leadership in collegiate athletic training is limited therefore; other domains of collegiate and national sport programs attend to women's sport leadership and the "effects of the gender frame" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 29).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) interviewed 32 board members (20 women; 12 men) and 15 sport journalists (5 women; 10 men) of Dutch national Olympic associations. The aim of their qualitative study was to explore how "doing gender" (p. 406) or practicing gender lead to skewness in both sport leadership and journalism. The discourse analysis revealed that while both male and female participants recognized male dominance in Dutch sport governance, few reported engaging in organizational practices that would result in change. This repeated praxis in Dutch sport organizational leadership signals what Claringbould and Knoppers termed as the "paradoxical practice of gender" (2012, p. 407). The authors applied a conceptual framework of liminality (Martin, 2006), which is a "practice of doing gender that individuals engage in without questioning

underlying assumptions" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 405). Claringbould and

Knoppers (2012) described doing gender as the utilization of gendered stereotypes while

engaging in sexist behaviors and reinforcing gendered differences. That is, individuals

engage in gendered sport organizational practices routinely and systematically to

accomplish sex-categorized divisions of occupational labor (see also West &

Zimmerman, 1987).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) found that perceptions about gendered

neutrality, normalcy, and passivity were instrumental to women's underrepresentation in

Dutch national sport organizational leadership. Both male and female participants were of

the opinion that the skewed leadership ratio needed to change, however; they continued

to construct gender as nonexistent. Thus, the awareness and subsequent denial of

gendered praxis led the participants to engage in practices of "gender neutrality"

(Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 407). This gendered neutrality was evident when

male and female journalists and board members perceived that the recruiting and hiring

practices were equal for all employees. To the extent that women espouse gender-neutral

positions (e.g., altering feminine behaviors, decreasing emotivity, and remaining silent at

meetings), men will appraise women's performance, ability, and competence based on

difference, thereby fortifying gendered stereotypes (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012).

Neutral hiring criteria highlighted the element of quality as a decisive factor in the

employment selection processes. One male journalist reported, "If there is a vacancy, we

always stress that these positions are open to women, if the quality of their work is

proven" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 407). The authors noted the quality issue is

seldom considered for Caucasian men but is often emphasized when women and other disenfranchised groups apply for a leadership position. Thus, the probability of locating a woman who could fill a top management role decreased while the likelihood of finding a man to fill such a role increased. Claringbould and Knoppers pointed out:

> So-called neutral views of competence in sport governance are always based on criteria set and used by those in positions of authority, and a degree of subjectivity is always involved when decisions based on so-called competence are made . . . Key competence often turns out to be male competence . . . Women often become constructed as deficient. (2012, p. 409)

In essence, the qualifications for women who pursue board member and journalist positions in Dutch national sport organizations "are not gender neutral" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 409).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) noted that gendered normalcy emerged in two related organizational practices. For example, if more men than women hold leadership positions, then the job is perceived as typically a man's role. It thus follows that the "paradoxical practice of gender normalcy" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 409) is viewed in light of differentiating organizational praxis when inequalities are self-evident or normal. The participants' perceptions of gendered normalcy were observed via acceptance of sex inequality in board member representation as typical. For instance, participants presumed that women should hold specific sport positions related to their issues while men should assume leadership positions requiring decision-making (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Both male and female participants reported that male-

dominated sport governance was so customary that women should not assume leadership, as sports governance was "men's work" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 409). In contrast, if the leadership dealt with women's issues, then women were considered more appropriately fitted to assume leadership.

Gendered passivity was revealed when both the male and female participants acknowledged a skewed gendered ratio in sport leadership but did nothing to personally or organizationally alter such ratios (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). The authors also found that employment positions and duties were assigned "gendered meanings" (p. 411). Jobs and tasks were frequently gendered and thereby branded as biased although individuals involved might have perceived such meanings and beliefs as gender passive (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). One male board member expressed, "Policy measures are a waste of energy since we will not win them [women] with that. They are just not interested in those [international board positions]" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 411).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) concluded that women and men's willingness to "engage in practices of gender neutrality, gender normalcy, and gender passivity," (p. 412) served to reinscribe gender inequalities. Thus, existing organizational practices that reproduce gender inequalities "will change very slowly even if more women were to occupy positions of leadership in sport" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 414).

Burton, Borland and Mazerolle's (2012) interviewed 14 female assistant athletic trainers at the NCAA Division I level. The authors examined how issues of gendered stereotypes of female athletic trainers by male sport coaches, within formal and informal

settings, affected their capacity to execute their professional duties. Applying a

poststructural feminist framework, Burton et al. (2012) found that NCAA Division I

athletic training sport programs "operate as gendered organizations" (p. 314). That is, the

social interactions and practices in the U.S. collegiate sport setting had a negative effect

on the female athletic trainers' occupational experiences. The female athletic trainer

participants reported that fellow athletic trainers, male athletes, and male coaches used

language and clothing attire to communicate and reinforce an occupational division of

labor along gendered lines. Burton et al. also noted that the division of labor in the

athletic training setting was socially constructed to enact male dominance. The female

athletic trainer participants also identified presumptions about the sexuality of athletes

and appropriate clothing for women, which influenced both their work and daily lives.

Burton et al. concluded that U.S. male coaches were perceived to exercise power, which

in turn, exerted authority over who would provide treatment or medical services for U.S.

student-athletes. To the extent that this control is rooted in gender frame stereotypes (i.e.,

background identity), the authors concluded that female athletic trainers will remain

trivialized and sidelined from men's NCAA Division I sport in U.S. collegiate programs.

Hoffman (2011) conducted a qualitative analysis, drawing data from a broader

study, which examined the aftermath of Title IX and "the NCAA takeover of the

Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1982" (p. 15). The

broader study focused on women's sport leadership within athletic departments in the

"Far West" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 15) Conference of the United States (Hoffman, 2011).

The focus of Hoffman's study was to investigate "the old boy's network through the

context of the athletic director search process among institutions and conferences that have promoted women to the athletic director roles" (2011, p. 10). Criteria for data collection consisted of identifying: (a) higher education institutions within the Far West Division I conferences with a history of promoting women to top-tier administrative positions, (b) the Division I conference affiliation of both public and private universities, and (c) the Carnegie ranking status pertaining to high-level research production and NCAA U.S. football programs. From the above criteria, six female participants were purposefully selected on the basis of senior leadership status and years of experience at the NCAA Division I FBS (DI-FBS) level. This criterion allowed for ample time to observe hiring trends and decision-making processes at institutional and departmental levels. All female participants were former athletes, former Senior Woman Administrators, and had earned a masters degree in athletic administration or related domain. Homologous reproduction (Stangl & Kane, 1991) was applied as a conceptualized framework to explicate the reproduction of male athletic directors at U.S. universities with revenue-producing football programs. Three themes emerged from the interviews that highlighted criteria for candidacy, committee search processes, and the involvement of a search firm.

The criteria to function as an athletic director at a Division I FBS (DI-FBS) university included prior athletic director experience, fundraising, and managing of coaches, which all directly corresponded to U.S. football (Hoffman, 2011). Each participant described how difficult it was for male athletic directors at smaller Division I football schools to advance to the athletic director chair at the DI-FBS level. To acquire

experience, male athletic directors would, therefore, have to leave the smaller schools to accept associate athletic director positions at DI-FBS programs. In contrast, women perceived personal career mobility to be limited to acquiring experience and advancing to the DI-FBS level. The criteria for moving to the final stage in the hiring process reinforced the old boy's network as acquiring experience was more accessible for men than for women (Hoffman, 2011). The participants perceived that job qualifications and performances had little bearing on who would be hired. From the vantage point of one female participant, men were considered more capable than women to lead a DI-FBS football program.

Concerning the university's search committee, all participants agreed that it was widely assumed that women were perceived incapable of handling the job of an athletic director. That is, women were not regarded as viable contenders for such positions (Hoffman, 2011). One female participant perceived that the search committee was unable to envision a woman in the athletic director position. Hoffman (2011) added, "Because women are perceived as unqualified candidates, despite their qualifications for the job, many choose not to participate at all" (p. 20). From the female participant's point of view, U.S. universities included women in the applicant pool to satisfy legal requirements (e.g., equal employment anti-discriminatory laws). One female participant was of the opinion that women should be aware of this institutional practice and "never go on a token interview" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 20). Another female participant disclosed how a highly qualified associate declined to apply for an athletic director position at a U.S. university after considering gendered barriers. Hoffman noted that when discrimination is

recognized as an element in recruiting and hiring practices, women would likely opt out of the process (2011, p. 20).

Despite an intensive protocol of interviews, the university president at each NCAA DI-FBS institution ultimately renders the decision and selects the athletic director (Hoffman, 2011). One female participant recounted several years of applying for athletic director positions and experiencing the process of multiple interviews with staff members, large committees, secondary committees, and alumni (Hoffman, 2011). Hoffman (2011) concluded that perceived rejection had led this participant to feel that becoming an athletic director at a Division I FBS school was no longer realistic. Along this same line, the female participant disclosed that there was no longer a desire to become an athletic director at any level. Hoffman also noted, "the president is the most influential factor in shaping the search committee process and selecting the successful candidate that emerges from the list of finalists" (2011, p. 21). Beyond having to acquire experience, the approval of the president and the search committee added another dimension to the old boy's network that women had to confront in an athletic director search (Hoffman, 2011). The female participants' perspectives regarding qualifications and disadvantages in professional advancement support both Burton et al. (2009) and Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) research on female athletic directors and head athletic trainers, respectively.

Schull, Shaw, and Kihl (2013) also focused on the processes that block women's access to the top athletic director position at the NCAA DI-FBS level by conducting a single case study. The purpose of Schull et al.'s (2013) study was to analyze the

bureaucratic gender processes involved in the pursuit of an athletic director. This study was conducted on women and men's collegiate sport programs after they were amalgamated on one U.S. campus. The authors applied gender theory (Acker, 1990, 1999) as a conceptual lens and interviewed 55 U.S. collegiate sport stakeholders (12 administrators; 7 coaches; 9 sport staff; 17 booster members; 2 chief academic administrators; 3 faculty members; and 5 search committee members) from a sizable NCAA DI-FBS university in the northern region of the United States. The results indicated that the male sport stakeholders' exclusive access and connection to media outlets demonstrated gendered sociocultural interactions and gender-specific behaviors. Use of exclusive media networks is noteworthy as deliberate symbolic performances of gender are a business strategy of various multiplex organizations, especially media networks (Schull, Shaw, & Kihl, 2013). Thus, the gendering of social relations and behavior pointed to the thrust of political and economic processes that reinforce gender inequality (Schull et al., 2013).

Boosters affiliated with women's sport programs engaged in confidential political deliberations with top-level university administrators, which also demonstrated gendered sociocultural interactions and gender-appropriate behaviors (Schull et al., 2013). Women's private deliberations functioned to reinforce cultural ideas regarding gender, which are frames that individuals and groups use when responding to constraints of employment and resources (Schull et al., 2013). For instance, the women negotiated criteria for the athletic director that were intrinsically connected to men who possessed (a) notable Division I experience and (b) a history of advocating for gender equality

(Schull et al., 2013). As such, Schull et al. (2013) noted that the gender equality requirement privileged a specific kind of masculinity within the athletic setting: a man who respects gender equality. The consolidation of the male and female sport departments and the politicized gender context generated an environment where women formed an alliance to welcome and lobby for a male athletic director. Lobbying for a male athletic director served to decrease an already small pool of potential female applicants, which in turn, preserved male domination in sport leadership roles (Schull et al., 2013). It could be argued that women's negotiated requirement of a gender equality male candidate was at once nullified when these women consented and acted to lend support for men and not women.

The literature has demonstrated the gendering of leadership in collegiate and national sport organizations via women and men's experiences who have either pursued leadership or engaged in recruiting and hiring for sport leadership roles (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Hoffman, 2011; Schull et al., 2013). Adriaanse and Schofield (2013) conducted a multi-case study, which examined how gender functions in the athletic governance of National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in Australia. The authors' findings supported unequal power found in the previous studies yet also provided evidence of equal leadership in one NSO. Adriaanse and Scofield's study was executed in two phases: (a) an audit of gender diversity on the Australian boards of 56 NSOs that were recipients of public financial support and (b) in-depth interviews with chief executive officers (CEO) and board administrators (9 women; 17 men) representing five NSOs. A gender regime (Connell, 2009) framework was used to understand better how gender

operates to create cultures within sport organizations.

This multiple-case study highlighted three NSOs but included only one mixed-sex Olympic sport organization (NSO-E) for a more thorough examination and discussion (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013). As such, despite representing a minority of directors, women were perceived to exercise authority via prominent board appointments (e.g., financial director and director of elite athletes). Men in the president and CEO positions were perceived as actively acknowledging and supporting women's leadership roles and contributions, which fostered a culture of equality between women and men in the organization. Adriaanse and Scofield (2013) added that an approach of gender mainstreaming was, for the most part, conducive to promoting gender equity in sport governance. It is important to consider that an approach of gender mainstreaming to advance equal employment opportunities for women is "contested terrain" (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013, p. 511). Another charged issue in the findings was the authors' advocacy of using of a gender quota system for board members, in combination with the gender mainstreaming, to promote balanced leadership representation of men and women. Adriaanse and Scofield added, "A significant limitation of quotas is that they can be perceived as a maximum rather than a minimum value" (2013, p. 511). The authors did not mention further limitations or potential perceptions for using such quota rhetoric (e.g., divisiveness and racial intolerance). However, Adriaanse and Scofield did point out that in 2010, NSO-E accomplished the desired quota of female board directors but had not gone beyond it thus, "rendering the quota a ceiling rather than a base" (2013, p. 511).

Finally, four of the five NSO's governing hierarchies mirrored cultural status

beliefs about gender similar to those discussed by Claringbould and Knoppers (2012),

Hoffman (2011), and Schull et al. (2013). Adriaanse and Scofield (2013) argued that the

findings were in glaring contrast to Sibson's (2010) results that pointed to blatant

discrimination against women, as board directors, in sport organizational governance.

Adriaanse and Scofield (2013) noted how four of the five NSOs employed a gendered

division of labor and power in which "men in these sport organizations were clearly

favoured because they performed the majority of all roles and tasks and occupied the

most influential positions of Chair and CEO" (p. 509). Sibson (2010) asserted that

organizational operations reflect socially manufactured sex distinctions when "men are

privileged and women are devalued or ignored" (p. 380). Adriaanse and Scofield (2013)

indicated that male directors believed that matters such as "the lack of suitable, qualified

women and women's unwillingness to be nominated or to assume leadership positions"

(p. 509) were primary reasons for the lack of women on four NSOs board. The men

perceived women had "generated the problem through their individual choices, priorities,

and competencies, all of which were beyond the control of the organization" (Adriaanse

& Scofield, 2013, p. 509). Sibson (2010) concluded that although male and female board

representatives were quantitatively equal, women were still relegated to positions based

on presumed gender roles (e.g., kitchen, catering, and secretarial work). At a bare

minimum, all results, inclusive of NSO-E's gender mainstreaming and quota system,

suggested that inequality is rooted in shared assumptions about differences in leadership

competence in Australian sport programs.

The empirical literature provided evidence on how gender is practiced in the

workplace via hiring procedures at the levels of postsecondary education and national sports organizations. Recurrent themes in these studies point to illusions of equality (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012), practice of gender (Schull et al., 2013), qualifications and performance (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013), and women opting out of applying for jobs (Hoffman, 2011). All of the latter issues support both the expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction theories (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006). Expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) suggests that in any given situation or setting, status beliefs regarding gender can influence the degree via which women are viewed as "legitimate candidates for positions of leadership and authority" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 80). The principle hierarchical component of gendered status beliefs allocates more status value and competence to men. This hierarchical feature promotes the idea that men are more socially suitable, competent, and legitimate for positions of leadership (Ridgeway, 2011). Such ideas become institutionally inscribed and set the expectation that women are less suitable, competent and legitimate as candidates for sport leadership positions. The following section focuses on a discussion of current empirical literature about women and institutional sex segregation.

Institutional Sex Segregation

Institutional sex segregation is the third theoretical conceptualization that addresses the most pressing issue for women in U.S. institutions of higher education, "the persistence of gender inequality" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 53). Sex-segregated domains of study (e.g., science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and the humanities) in U.S.

higher education institutions fuels a most sustainable and consequential gendered structure of contemporary societies; sex segregation of professional occupations (Charles & Bradley; 2009; Ridgeway & England, 2007). Charles and Bradley (2009) noted that wealthy societies have a tendency to espouse a postmaterialistic code of individual realization and expression. In the context of affluent nations that, for the most part, free citizens from fear of poverty and respect self-expression, the background of gender identity impacts the domains of education that individuals pursue (Charles & Bradley, 2009). Fundamentally, if an individual's understanding of self is rooted in gender identity, then the individual will revert to cultural values concerning gender, which frames life options that reveal self. Hence, there is a tendency to "indulge our gendered selves" (Charles & Bradley, 2009, p. 924). Charles and Bradley discovered that wealthy postindustrial nations had greater gaps between girls and boys in their affinity for mathematics, accounting for boys' greater math performance. Moreover, Ridgeway (2009) added, "these culturally gendered affinities more strongly predict the sex-segregation of higher education fields in these societies than in less-developed ones" (p. 157).

A paradox exists when structured freedoms of wealthy nations offer citizens broad space to revert to entrench deeply cultural frames (i.e. status). Through these structured freedoms, citizens try to understand self in relationship to others and manage behaviors and opportunities accordingly (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & England, 2007). When considering the context of legal, political, and economic processes that resist gender inequality within such nations, this gender frame

retrenchment manifests via reinvesting in social customs of gender differences (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & England, 2007). Gender differences have been socially determined to suggest gender hierarchies (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Ridgeway, 2013). Although inequality might decrease to some extent, Ridgeway (2009) claimed that people "are unlikely to fully eliminate the ordinal hierarchy between men and women in a society that intensifies its organization on the basis of gender difference" (p. 157).

Social processes that construct and replicate inequalities in sport are complex and lie obscured within higher education's framework of segregated U.S. collegiate athletic programs (Brake, 2001; Heckman, 2007, 2011). This reflects Sartore-Baldwin's (2013) assertion, "the person who studies sport without studying its history will never truly understand any given state of sport or the forces operating to change it" (p. 3). As such, the juxtaposition of contextualized internal socialization and voluntary external U.S. sport processes (e.g., higher education institutions and NCAA sports organizations) establishes a context to understand practices of inequality that resist change. That said, the empirical literature on institutional sex segregation pertaining to women, Title IX, higher education institutions, and sport leadership considers the inequalities inherent in the NCAA, which sets the standard of leadership for all university members (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012, p. 5).

Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) examined related issues of women's underrepresentation within all divisions of the NCAA's governance by applying a descriptive statistical approach via a feminist lens. A descriptive analysis approach that

used a transformative lens was employed to ascertain gender ratios about leadership (e.g., directors, managing directors, or higher status roles) in the NCAA national staff office. A content analysis method was also used for the qualitative component by acquiring primary documents (e.g., policy manuals, policy statements, and executive materials) to deconstruct language in the NCAA's equality programs. Data about gender and minority representation and national governance structures were collected from the NCAA national office in May 2011. Participants who were mentioned in this study were the NCAA's national office personnel and the human resources staff who compiled reports on minority and gender representation and NCAA leadership, respectively.

The results of Yiamouyiannis and Osborne's (2012) found inequalities in nearly all ranks of the NCAA's governance in spite of Federal laws (e.g., Title IX) and initiatives (e.g., NCAA gender equity; p. 9). The authors noted that the higher the status or importance in the governing structure (i.e., Executive Committee), the lower the numbers (15.8% or three women) were for women in leadership positions. The Executive Committee (e.g., Divisional board and presidential councils) was the authoritative body responsible for assuring compliance with the NCAA's "general principles of gender equity" (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012, p. 9). Yiamouyiannis and Osborne also observed that the Playing Rules Oversight Panel had zero female representatives, "perhaps reflecting that men know more about sport" (2012, p. 9). An enduring stereotype of women as moral nurturers and guardians might have been applied in the overrepresentation on the Committee on Sportsmanship and Ethical Conduct and more so on salutary scholarship committees pertaining to postgraduation (71.4%). Women were

remarkably underrepresented on the leadership council (25.8%), which had extensive

oversight and policy responsibility (e.g., financial recommendations, sport competition

and championships, academic progress, policy decision-making, and advising the board

and presidential councils). Paradoxically, the leadership council is also entrusted with

determining "policy recommendations concerning opportunities for women in athletics at

the institutional, conference and national levels, and other issues directly affecting

women's athletics" (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012, p. 9). The authors noted that the

lack of women on the leadership council might be a serious barrier to women's career

advancement in Division I U.S. collegiate sport programs.

According to the May 2011 NCAA national governance report (NCAA, 2010-

2011, Division I manual) on specific sport committees, just 2 out of 14 female members

served on the men's basketball committee. Likewise, just 2 out of 17 male members

served on the women's basketball committee. Notably, not a single female committee

member served on the U.S. football committee. At face value, women were supervising

women's sport and men were overseeing men's sport hence, the upper echelon of sex

segregation in U.S. collegiate sport. Notably, the NCAA's men's football and basketball

programs at the Division I level have been credited with producing revenue via media

contracts. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne noted, "Lack of access for women to these two

incredibly powerful committees is a substantial, if not insurmountable, barrier for

women's advancement within the leadership of college athletics" (2012, p. 10).

Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) also pointed out that the U.S. University

Presidential Advisory Group (i.e., former and current university presidents) represents the

Division I Football and Conference Subseries. This Advisory group has direct oversight

of steering committees charged with hiring U.S. collegiate athletic administrators

(NCAA, 2011, p. 394). University presidents also have the duty of ensuring compliance

with the NCAA policies (e.g., gender equity principles) and Title IX regulations, which

are not entirely compatible (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012, p. 9). Yiamouyiannis and

Osborne's results supported Hoffman's (2011) conclusion about presidential authority in

deciding whom to hire for U.S. collegiate athletic leadership roles and illusionary gender

equality policies. Likewise, Yiamouyiannis and Osborne's (2012) findings supported

Claringbould and Knoppers's (2012) observation about the symbolic nature of gender

equality policies that become taboo within sport organizations.

Bower and Hums (2013) conducted a mixed-methods study that explored the

influence of Title IX on U.S. sport administrative careers for men (61%) and women

(39%), working in NCAA, NAIA, or junior colleges. A majority of participants were

employed in one of the three NCAA levels, with women holding a smaller percentage of

assistant and associative athletic director positions than men. The average age for women

was from 45 to 54 years while men's average age was from 35 to 44 years. As for race

and ethnicity, a majority of men and women were Caucasian across all postsecondary

schools (Bower & Hums, 2013). For the descriptive analysis, the Female Sport Manager

Career Survey (FSMCS; Hums & Sutton, 1999) was administered while a content

analysis of open-ended questions was used for the qualitative data. The FSMCS also

posed several open-ended questions, focusing on one primary question: "What impact did

Title IX have on your career opportunities in intercollegiate athletic administration?"

(Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 219).

The results of Bower and Hums (2013) study indicated that both male and female participants perceived that Title IX offered more career opportunities for women in sport leadership roles. As such, the authors noted, "the literature provides a different outlook on career opportunities within intercollegiate athletics for women and men" (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 221). Referring to Acosta and Carpenter's (2012) 35-year longitudinal study on the status of women in U.S. collegiate sport leadership, Bower and Hums (2013) added that women held 1503 NCAA administrative positions compared to 2700 positions held by men. Some male participants supported the aforesaid statistical discrepancy by stating, "Because of Title IX I am currently in this position . . . Instead of adding more female sports at my university [,] they cut men's sports [,] including baseball" (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 221).

The Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) role was developed in 1981 after the NCAA seizure of the AIAW (Bower & Hums, 2013). While the SWA role was created in response to men assuming nearly all the U.S. collegiate athletic director roles. Prior to the SWA position, women were active in decision-making administrative roles at the conference, institutional, and national ranks of NCAA's U.S. sport programs (Bower & Hums, 2013). Male participants commented on the SWA role and the expanded opportunities for women. One male participant wrote, "Some jobs were closed off to me because they [universities] were seeking a female to assume the role of SWA in addition to the open position" (Bower & Hums, 2013, pp. 221, 224). Bower and Hums (2013) posited that discrimination in hiring was cited most by male participants.

Concerning having no impact, both male and female participants agreed that Title IX did not impact their career opportunities, which contradicted the men's previous statements. For women, there was either no awareness regarding the impact of Title IX on career advancement opportunities or the participants were not yet born when the U.S. Act was implemented (Bower & Hums, 2013). Some female participants who worked at U.S. Christian colleges viewed Title IX as having "Very little [impact]," (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 224). Other women who worked at single-sex U.S. universities perceived Title IX as having no impact on their career opportunities. One male participant expressed, "To be honest [,] I don't think it has had an impact on my career path because I have never been in a position where I was a finalist for a job with a woman" (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 224). Bower and Hums noted that the pre-Title IX responses from male participants might have been a result of not being subjected to discrimination in hiring practices. The authors concluded that while male participants perceived Title IX as a form of inverse discrimination, women might have been hired as a means for U.S. colleges and universities to comply with the Title IX regulations. Such compliance to regulations would have allowed U.S. postsecondary institutions to demonstrate a history of expanding leadership opportunities for women as an underrepresented group.

Burton, Grappendorf, and Henderson (2011) explored the underrepresentation of women (57%) and men (43%) in U.S. collegiate sport administrative roles (i.e., athletic director, life skills coordinator, and compliance officer) at the NCAA DI FBS level. The authors conducted a quasi-experimental online survey by using Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974). The BSRI instrument allowed sport administrative

participants to evaluate the likelihood of a candidate's success in achieving an athletic administrative role. Burton et al. (2011) used vignettes that described a woman and man in a U.S. university athletic department, which had men's basketball and football programs to analyze data via the lens of role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Burton et al.'s (2011) vignettes offered status information about a woman and man's qualifications for a U.S. collegiate athletic director position such as educational level, competence, collegial support, and masculine traits. The authors observed that despite offering status information about the female candidate, the information was still insufficient to alter the evaluator's perspective about women as viable candidates for the U.S. athletic director position. Burton et al. also noted that this finding "clearly puts women seeking the highest leadership position in intercollegiate athletics at a disadvantage to equally qualified men" (Burton et al., 2011, p. 42). Although participants did not view differences between women and men candidates, they did indicate that women were less suitable for a U.S. collegiate athletic director position. Burton et al. suggested, "If this is happening in the hiring processes within intercollegiate athletics, men will continue to dominate the ranks of athletic director" (2011, p. 42).

Similar to the female candidate vignette, the male contender was perceived as capable of success but was unlikely to be hired for the life skills director role. Burton et al. (2011) explained that the later finding contributes to a continuation of informal procedures that place men in leadership versus supportive sport roles. Overall, the findings showed that restraints of institutional demography (e.g., hierarchical patterns) are prohibiting women from opportunities to choose U.S. collegiate athletic careers in

non-traditional settings (Burton et al., 2011). In conclusion, Burton et al. noted, "work environments can become sex-segregated so that certain jobs and roles are deemed more appropriate for men or for women" (2011, p. 38).

The empirical literature provided evidence of the relationship between U.S. higher education institutions and the NCAA. Despite gender equity policies at both institutions, the lack of women in decision-making leadership roles for male and female U.S. collegiate sports revealed evidence that the concept of gender equality was more symbolic than actionable (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). The perceived impact of Title IX on women and men's career opportunities provided a contrasting view as women believed that the Act overhauled U.S. educational institutions and opened doors along the lines of both U.S. athletic participation and sport leadership (Bower & Hums, 2013). From the perspective of males in administrative roles, women continue to be scrutinized as unsuitable for the U.S. collegiate athletic director position. When qualifications, experience, and additional credentials are presented, the background identity of gender overshadows achievements thus, prohibiting women from opportunities to partake in careers of personal choice (Burton et al., 2011). The above research supported the status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) to the extent that Federal legislation (e.g., Title IX) generates incentive for various employers to apply procedures that, at best, appear as universal and non-discriminatory (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 95). Ridgeway (2011) contended, "Sex segregation of occupations is the deepest and most pervasive gender structure in the organization of paid work" (p. 98). In U.S. institutions of higher education, the developmental timing of academic career advancement rituals (e.g., tenure

or promotions) occurs during a woman's primary reproduction years. This developmental labor structure creates greater challenges to career advancement for women than for the majority of men (Ridgeway, 2011).

Gendered sociocultural presumptions associated with women in sport leadership remains persistent and foremost, unchallenged (Hovden, 2010; Sibson, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). As Mazerolle et al., (2015) and Acosta and Carpenter (2014) noted, men comprise the majority of U.S. collegiate athletic leaders and altering such an imbalance seems a towering goal.

Scholars have been pivotal in illuminating constraints and barriers that lead to the underrepresentation of women in U.S. collegiate sport leadership roles (Hovden, 2010; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Schull et al., 2013; Walker & Bopp, 2011). Structural and collective approaches might, however, be insufficient for diminishing entrenched cultural beliefs and inequalities in workplace social relations (Burton et al., 2009; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Hoffman, 2011). Where previous research has left frayed threads or spaces to be explored, a status construction (Ridgeway, 1991, 2006) and expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) theoretical approach can press further to expose gendered ideologies and status beliefs within the context of collegiate sport. As might be expected, gendered processes at macro, meso, or micro levels of analysis are interdependent. For instance, gendered processes at an interpersonal or micro level fall back on widespread common gendered status beliefs at a collective or macro level. In turn, these gendered processes are cognitively encoded by individuals at a micro level and are applied to frame social assumptions about self and others (Ridgeway, 2011).

Gendered ideological beliefs operate to marginalize and ostracize women from U.S. collegiate sport leadership roles (Bower & Hums, 2013; Burton et al., 2012; Burton et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2011; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

Overall, the empirical literature provided evidence that suggested women are underrepresented in sport leadership roles and across all administrative positions in U.S. collegiate sports programs. Concerning the qualitative literature, scholars emphasized the experiences of participants by sharing the essences of meanings with the reader. The phenomena, participant perspectives, and reflections provided thick descriptions to understand how gender is used to frame women and men through cultural stereotypes or institutional processes (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013; Bower & Hums, 2013; Burton et al., 2012; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Hoffman, 2011; Hovden, 2010; Mazerolle et al, 2015; Schull et al., 2013; Sibson, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). In contrast, quantitative studies (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012) extended the dimension of findings in nearly all of the qualitative studies, specifically Acosta and Carpenter (2014). Acosta and Carpenter's (2014) 37-year longitudinal analysis on the status of women in U.S. NCAA collegiate sport leadership were cited in all articles gathered for this study's topic. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) provided a descriptive study on the NCAA's governance structure, which is comprised of U.S. higher education institutional executives, boosters, alumni, presidents, provosts, chancellors, faculty members, and student-athletes.

The gender frame concept of the status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991,

2006) provides a strong context to address the research questions, purpose, and data analysis for this study. The empirical literature has provided ample evidence regarding the male-dominated realm of U.S. collegiate sport and the double standards applied to women, creating persistent inequalities. The majority of the NCAA (68%) and NAIA's (64%) head athletic trainers are men who also serve as educators within U.S. collegiate athletic training education programs. The majority of female student athletic trainers, therefore, will most likely receive a male-dominated education (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NAIA, 2014; NATA, 2014). Central to the research questions of this study are female head athletic trainers' perceptions of higher education experiences regarding career preparation, barrier navigation, and curricular reformation. The empirical literature and conceptual frameworks support all of core tenets of this study's research questions. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) indicated that a lack of access for women to decision-making leadership roles in sport governance is a significant, "if not insurmountable" (p. 10), barrier for career advancement in U.S. intercollegiate sport. This sentiment has been evidenced by the enactment of Title IX in 1972 and has endured 43 years in its wake.

Summary and Conclusions

A thorough literature review was conducted to collect current research associated with the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership roles. The literature clearly documented the lack of women in various U.S. collegiate sport leadership roles and contexts. The primary themes that emerged were stereotypes, gender, male-dominated sport culture, and institutional hiring practices (e.g., higher education). What is unknown

is how women perceive higher educational experiences and the part U.S. higher

education institutions play in supporting women's career goals to achieving U.S.

collegiate sport leadership. Because so little research exists regarding the lack of women

in U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership roles, I examined literature in domains akin

to athletic training: athletic and academic leadership. This study aimed to extend the body

of scholarly research by addressing this gap through a qualitative phenomenological

approach. In Chapter 3, the methodological research design includes the following

sections: purpose, research questions, central phenomenon, research tradition and

rationale, role of the researcher, ethical considerations, sample population and selection

processes, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, ethical

procedures, and summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part higher education institutions played in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also included exploring the participants' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. As allied health care professionals recognized by the American Medical Association (NATA, 2010) and a gender minority in collegiate athletics, female head athletic trainers present both an opportunity and challenge for stakeholders working to foster an institutional environment that emboldens academic and professional success. As a result, it was important to examine how both NAIA and NCAA female head athletic trainers perceive and experience academic preparations to navigate barriers towards opportunities required in leadership roles. This study collected female head athletic trainers' insights on potential growth and development in program policies and equal opportunity procedures.

In this chapter, I discuss the selection of the research approach as it supports the research questions and explain my role in identifying and mitigating potential biases as the researcher who conducted this study. Next, I describe the methodological design include the selection of participants, recruitment process, sample size, data collection instrumentation, and a data analysis plan. The chapter ends with a discussion of trustworthiness (e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and

reliability) and ethical concerns. The chapter's summary provides an account of the above research design elements.

Research Design and Rationale

The aim of this research was to explore female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part higher education plays in supporting the achievement of leadership roles within collegiate sport programs. Three primary research questions guided this research:

1. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding higher education experiences and preparations into their respective positions?

2. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education experiences might have informed their capacity to overcome barriers in obtaining their respective positions?

3. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education can transform curricula and certification processes to augment opportunities in leadership?

The literature review for this study established that the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership roles in the United States is associated with sociocultural stereotypes that frame gender as a background identity. This framing functions to embed inequalities within higher education's collegiate sports programs. Except for a few athletic training studies specifically related to the tenor of higher education institutions and athletic organizations' conduct, women's underrepresentation in sport leadership is

systematic. These systematic inequalities in employment have been demonstrated largely via quantitative research approaches such as surveys and laboratory experiments. As a result, I designed this study to use a qualitative research approach to investigate and expand understanding of the problem. A phenomenological approach was especially suitable for this study because the research questions examined how female head athletic trainers perceive and experience academic preparations.

I selected a descriptive-interpretive phenomenological research approach as the most suitable approach because interpretation and description span a continuum regarding what the participants chose to share in interviews. Langdridge (2008) noted that no inflexible boundaries exist between interpretation and description, as "such boundaries would be antithetical to the spirit of the phenomenological tradition that prizes individuality and creativity" (p. 1131). This perspective stems from a debate where scholars lacked consensus related to Heidegger's (1962) ontological questions (Finlay, 2009). In the final analysis, what the participants chose to share in the study interviews was what Finlay (2009) termed "more or less interpretive" (p. 11). Moustakas (1994) argued that phenomenological research provides a systematic process to introduce the human experiences as recounted by individuals who define the essence of experience. This systematic process is necessary to address the research questions regarding female head athletic trainers' detailed experiences of educational preparation, barrier navigation, and proposed curricular reformations.

At the heart of phenomenology is an inquisitiveness concerning the life narratives of other individuals' fundamental purpose within the intricacies of human understanding

and behavior (Seidman, 2006). Processes of sorting out details from the start to the midpoint and the close of experiences incorporated reflection for both the researcher and participants who offered fresh meanings. While limitations might impede an individual's comprehension of others' life experiences, the pursuit of understanding is linked to individual, societal, and cultural impulses to share common meanings of existence with others in the environment (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Seidman, 2006).

I considered several alternate qualitative approaches that could have been employed to explore the lack of female head athletic trainers in collegiate sports. For instance, an ethnographic study has the "overall intent to see the culture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 35). Researchers who use ethnographic designs chronicle and interpret the common and learned system of language, beliefs, values and behaviors of a "culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 1998, p. 153). As a systematic approach, ethnography requires prolonged observations of the sample group, usually by way of participation-observation; ethnographic investigators engage in the daily lives of the group to observe and interview participants (Agar, 1980; Garfinkel, 1967). This approach was logistically infeasible because the participants in this study lived in various regions of the United States and had pre- and post-Title IX experiences, so an ethnographic study was not an appropriate alternative for this study.

A narrative inquiry research approach could have captured participants' authentic experiences through the researcher's organizational techniques and narration of the participants' voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although I could have conducted a narrative inquiry, this approach most likely would not have coalesced around a specified

moment experienced by many participants, who might have had experiences of unique (rather than shared) events. Various female head athletic trainers might have described distinct events and social interactions where gender was central to career advancement opportunities. However, not all female head athletic trainers would have likely experienced and described the events in the same manner.

Previous scholars have used a case study approach to understanding the lack of women in sport leadership roles and to gain insight into how postsecondary athletic training education programs prepare women for careers. Qualitative case studies have been used to comprehend a single event, an institution, or a social constituency bounded in a specified time and setting (Merriam, 1998). Because moments of learning and associated personal meaning transcend both setting and time in the athletic training profession, a case study approach would not have addressed this study's research questions. Moreover, it would not have been plausible to attempt binding or fencing in such dynamic conceptions due to the centrality of gender and the multifaceted realities that evolve in socialization processes.

Akin to a narrative inquiry, this phenomenological study used semistructured, in-depth interviews that generated "detailed accounts rather than brief answers to general statements" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). Van Manen (1990) posited that the objective of phenomenological data collection and analysis is "to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (p. 41). Thus, female head athletic trainers' experiences regarding higher education's contribution to career goals were collected and analyzed to represent the participants' experiences as unique events in time and across

multiple settings (Moran, 2000, p. 4). As such, the participants' experiences could lead to social change by challenging stakeholders' policies and equal opportunities within higher education's sport programs.

Role of the Researcher

I collected all of the data for this qualitative, phenomenological study. I served as the interviewer-participant who both collected and analyzed the research data; in keeping with Seidman's (2006) approach, I was accountable for documenting the setting and themes of participants' life experiences and considerations. To correctly discern the essence of the participants' experiences, I took steps to enter into the research as a reliable witness to the data and maintained integrity and awareness concerning personal beliefs and viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). My role as the researcher was to gather interview data from female head athletic trainers and to acknowledge their perceptions and experiences pertaining to higher education's role in preparing them for an athletic training career or in hiring them to lead athletic training programs.

Because the participants' conveyed experiences and the meanings these experiences exemplify are at the epicenter of phenomenological inquiry, matters of experiential exploration and confidentiality are of paramount importance. Throughout this study, no research dilemmas, ethical concerns, or conflicts of interest surfaced during the data collection and analysis processes. I was previously employed at a university in southern California 20 years before the study, and thereafter maintained a professional relationship with a woman who was the head athletic trainer at the time. While this woman relinquished her head athletic training position in 2009, she maintained active

certification, sustained higher profile community involvement, and provided a list of

potential interviewees for this study that included her. With the exception of this collegial

relationship, I did not know and have not had professional relationships with any of the

other participants. At no time have I been employed at any of the potential or final

participants' higher education institutions. For this study, services, material goods, or

financial incentives were not offered to barter participation.

My conduct of this study was strongly informed by my combination of

experiences as a collegiate athlete, student athletic trainer, head coach, director of

intramural sports, and adjunct faculty in the domain of exercise and sports science. My

roles as an athlete and head coach extended beyond my undergraduate studies into the

international realm, as did my student athletic training skills and experience. When

reflecting on the contexts of the above sport experiences, I see that gender inequalities

existed in both implicit and explicit ways. I did not fully recognize the existence of

gender inequalities, however, until delving deeper into the topic of this study. From this

reflection, I believe that any presumptions or biases that I have become aware of have

stemmed from the overwhelming evidence of empirical literature and not so much from

personal experiences. However, I specifically sought to refrain from interjecting personal

perspectives and experiences into interviews, so as to achieve representing the

participants' vantage point. This restraint was intended to allow me to discover the

participants' perspectives, as in Moustakas's (1994) suggested approach to epoché.

Following these guidelines required that I maintain notes on personal assumptions about

gender inequalities in women's collegiate sport leadership and bracketing these

assumptions from the data collection and analysis processes (Moustakas, 1994).

Methodology

This qualitative study applied a basic phenomenological approach that focused on female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part higher education plays in supporting the achievement of leadership roles within collegiate sport programs. To adequately address the research questions, I employed a modified form of Seidman's (2013) in-depth interview guidelines. This modification served to encourage female head athletic trainers to recall their educational and sport leadership experiences via concentrated, yet unbound questions (e.g., open-ended). Seidman's proposed sequence of three interview phases was designed to:

- build a contextual foundation by requesting that the participant fully explain her educational experiences and career path to sport leadership,

- encourage a detailed account by requesting that the participant express details of sport leadership and potential barriers she may have experienced, and

- reflect on experiences regarding the participants' postsecondary programs and sport leadership.

In the context of this study, I used these phases so that derived meanings could be used to positively change the participants' and other women's experiences in collegiate sport leadership. Seidman's interview guidelines also suggested various points of participant contact to attain rich, thick data to ensure achieving data saturation, which I followed.

I elected to modify Seidman's (2013) interview guidelines because I expected that female head athletic trainers would be more willing to participate in this study and

sacrifice time from their demanding schedules if I requested a smaller time commitment.

I accordingly modified Seidman's (2013) interview guidelines by combining the three

phases into a single 60–90-minute interview. This interview was followed by member

checks of the interview transcripts and summary of the findings in (see Chapter 4). The

member checks allowed participants to validate the accurate representation of their

experiences and perceptions and adequate measures of confidentiality.

> To understand a phenomenon, Hein and Austin (2001) noted:
>
> There is no single so-called correct way to conduct phenomenological research.
>
> Rather the specific method used depends, to a large extent, on the purposes of the
>
> researcher, his or her skills and talents, and the nature of the research question and
>
> data collected. (p. 3)

Hein and Austin (2001) suggested that the selected method "should be viewed as

providing only a general guideline—one that the researcher then modifies to meet the

particular needs of the study" (2001, p. 3). Phenomenological designs are modified to the

features of the notable phenomenon under investigation (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 3).

Adding to Hein and Austin's assertion, Seidman (2013) provided further support for

alterations in phenomenological designs via noting modifications in his three-interview

sequence:

> As long as the structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and
>
> reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the
>
> three-interview structure and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly
>
> be explored. (p. 25)

Anchored in a framework that suggests three distinct points of participant engagement, Seidman (2013) emphasized the significance of establishing a context, a precise narrative, and the essence of experience that either expands or is more fully discovered via each engagement phase. Accordingly, Seidman linked the marrow of phenomenology to the qualitative tenets of philosophy by noting that interviewing is not just information or data. Mishler (1991) added that by nature, meaning is the understanding and such understanding is unique to an individual and how an individual expresses meaning. So meaning is transcendent of how an individual expresses language, perceives such expression, accepts inbound information, and then processes information to convey experiences to self and others (Mishler, 1991).

Recent empirical research has applied a modification of Seidman's (2013) procedures. For instance, Krell and Dana (2012) used Seidman's (2013) phenomenology guidelines without conducting individual interviews. Using an interview guide that emphasized Seidman's three primary phases (e.g., life history, detailed experiences, and reflection), Krell and Dana (2012) used two focus groups to examine how professional or action research coaches experience their influence on teachers' inquiry processes. Reddick's (2011) research on the challenges and contributions of Black faculty mentors for Black undergraduate students modified Seidman's (2013) interview structure to conduct two in-depth interviews. Reddick's (2011) interview questions for interview one focused on the mentor's life history with various probing questions pertaining to experiential details of mentoring Black students. For interview two, Reddick focused on gaining more details and eliciting reflections on experiential meanings. Both research

studies had modified Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interview guidelines to respect the time commitments of the participants while maintaining the integrity of Seidman's structure.

Participant Selection Logic

Participant selection for this phenomenological study consisted of women who have worked or are currently working full-time as head athletic trainers at 4-year NAIA and NCAA schools across the United States. All women participants must have held both the collegiate head athletic training position for one year and a current license by passing the Board of Certification exam. To practice in a professional setting, all athletic trainers are required to maintain current educational and professional certification via the Board of Certification, the National Athletic Trainers' Association, and the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (Goodman et al., 2010).

Narrowing the scope of the study to full-time female head athletic trainers at the collegiate level was designed to recruit women who were or are immersed in sport leadership and the collegiate faculty culture. While several studies have attended to women in collegiate sport leadership in various areas, no known study has established the criteria of female head athletic trainers at NAIA and NCAA schools. Including only women who were or are full-time NAIA and NCAA head athletic for one school year was intended to focus on women with adequate experiences of athletic training educational programs and sport leadership. Because high schools and community colleges do not offer professional athletic training educational programs, athletic training staff from these school levels would be unable to address issues regarding the research

questions (Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education, 2013).

To collect sufficient and relevant data, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who could contribute rich insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 2014). While I had planned to use a snowball strategy (Babbie, 2012; Sandelowski, 1995) to increase the representation of female head athletic trainers and to reach the desired sample of participants, it was not necessary. The first round of invitations brought an adequate number of participants. Verification of each participant's official status as the head, associate, or assistant athletic trainer was obtained by visiting the college or university athletic department's website to obtain contact information for the head athletic trainer (e.g., name, biographical sketch, photo, phone number and email address).

Determining the size of purposeful samples in qualitative studies is based foremost on the research purpose and questions. Patton (2002) noted that researchers should consider the study's sample size relative to the following: benefits and risks to participants, stakeholders and community; the elements of design that account for credibility; and availability of resources (p. 244). Seidman (2013) suggested that two measures amalgamate to ascertain when a study has completed its natural development: sufficient numbers that represent the population and data saturation. Data saturation occurs when fresh information or themes cease emerging from the data (p. 58). Bowen (2008) added that an adequate sample relates to demonstrating data saturation, which represents achieving both breadth and depth. While Creswell (2014) suggested a sample size of 3 to 10 participants for phenomenological studies, Starks and Trinidad (2007)

recommended a participation standard of 1 to 10. The sample for this study was comprised of nine participants with an assumption that, at a minimum, six participants would complete one interview and two follow-ups contacts. Following Seidman's (2013) suggestion, all participants in this study had the opportunity to contribute across various points of contact (i.e., interview, member checks, and validation of findings). Contributing across various points of contact ensured a sufficient and representative sample of the study's phenomenon and population. Noteworthy was that member checking of transcripts and validating findings in Chapter 4 allowed for appending and amending personal interview information throughout both data collection and analysis processes. Such checking and validating of data helped establish rich, thick descriptions regarding the participants' experiences.

Participants were recruited from personal or professional contacts in the field of athletic training or collegiate sport that were located at NAIA and NCAA schools across the United States. I used the NAIA and NCAA's direct public Internet links and contact information to institutional athletic departments and athletic training personnel to retrieve lists of potential participants. Each NAIA and NCAA school have an athletic website that publishes data about administrative staff along with telephone numbers, email addresses, staff positions, and biographical sketches of athletic training personnel. The names of potential participants were drawn from personal or professional contacts and such sport association's website information.

Upon gaining approval to conduct this study from Walden University's Internal Review Board (#04-13-15-0072243), I began the process of recruiting participants. I sent

invitation email letters to personal or professional contacts, along with consent forms, to request their participation in the study and to provide suggestions for other potential participants (e.g., snowball sampling) from their professional networks (Appendices A and E). Cascading over a 3-day period, I sent email invitation letters, along with consent forms, to potential participants from the personal or professional list (Appendices B and E). I also sent email invitation letters, along with consent forms, to potential participants from both the NAIA and NCAA public Internet website lists (Appendices C, D, and E) to take part in the study. Initially, I had planned to send follow-up email invitation letters a week after sending the first invitation letters, but it was not necessary. During the first three days of the recruitment process, I had received over nine participant consent email responses and was able to schedule nine participant interviews.

As soon as responses and consent forms from nine potential participants were received, no further email invitation letters were sent out to recruit more participants. I selected participants from the personal and professional contact and NAIA and NCAAs' lists to achieve sample variation of collegiate institutions where the participants had worked or were working. Sample variation of collegiate institutions included both public and private as well as single-sex, mixed-sex, and denominational schools. Because the participants resided in various regions throughout the United States, interviews were conducted either in person, via telephone or through private Skype video conferencing. Salmons (2015) noted that researchers might need to make a methodological design choice that favors the use of "ICTs [information and communication technologies] as a medium for interviews since online communications allow for significant reduction or

elimination of constraints that would make in-person interviews impractical" (p. 39). For this study, the flexibility of using private Skype video conferencing for interviews increased the pool of participants, including women who were geographically or regionally dispersed, disabled, or difficult to reach. Salmons suggested that researchers could employ a virtual appearance in a context where a physical appearance would be impracticable or where an outsider's presence would be disruptive (e.g., hospitals, travel lodges for road games duties, and training rooms or clinics).

Salmons (2015 also noted that participants might find video conferencing less taxing and more suitable because interviews can take place at their residence or work and in an informal, non-threatening environment. To foster inclusiveness and afford the participants some degree of power in the research approach, I incorporated options or flexibility regarding interviewing in-person, via telephone or through private Skype video conferencing (Salmons, 2015). Regardless of the mode of communication, participants were notified that interviews and each follow-up correspondence would be recorded via two hand-held audio devices.

Seidman (2013) suggested that establishing a reliable and ethical relationship between the interviewer and participant was imperative to gain open responses and fruitful data. When a participant responded to the invitation letter, expressed a desire to participate, and returned an email indicating informed consent, I contacted her within 24 hours to gather data regarding interview dates, times, and contact information (i.e., telephone number, email address, and Skype address). I also asked her to suggest other potential participants who might be willing to take part in the study. During this contact

phase, participants were also informed that a pseudonym would be used as an identifier during all phases of the study (e.g., data collection, data analysis, and dissertation document submission). In compliance with Walden University's Internal Review Board, I designed the invitation and consent documents (see Appendices A-E) to ensure that each participant was informed of the study's requirements. These requirements included, but were not limited to, the study's purpose, potential implications, expectations, ethical considerations, and voluntary nature of participation (Salmons, 2015; Seidman, 2013). My contact information and the contact information for my committee chair and Internal Review Board representative were provided (see Appendix E). This contact information allowed participants to contact my committee chair, my university research representative, and me with concerns or questions that might have arisen throughout the study.

After the information described above had been gathered, individual interviews of 60 to 90 minutes commenced. I, as the sole researcher, conducted all interviews within approximately 3 weeks, transcribed new interviews in 3 to 5 days, and distributed interview transcripts within a week of the interview. Excerpts of the findings were available and sent via email to each participant when data collection and analysis reached saturation. Allowing participants to perform member checks of personal transcripts and the summary of findings (see Chapter 4) ensured accurate representation and validation of their experiences. Follow-up dates and times were confirmed either in-person, via email, telephone or private Skype video conferencing and when necessary, revised at the end of the interview.

Instrumentation

This study used an interview guide that was slightly adapted from Epps's (2012) qualitative research of women in collegiate sport leadership roles and the relevance of higher education (Appendix F). I contacted the author via email and requested permission to use and modify the interview guide according to the participant's professional field. Dr. Epps responded via email, which included her authorization and an attached copy of the interview guide (Appendix G).

Epps's (2012) case study focused on women in sport leadership positions (i.e., athletic directors, assistant and associative athletic directors, and senior woman administrators) at three NCAA levels (i.e., DI, DII, and DIII) from the Eastern coast conferences (2012, p. 58). Epps employed purposeful and homogeneous sampling techniques to aid in selecting participants with similar traits and career characteristics (p. 59). The sample represented a culture of women in collegiate sport leadership roles in the context of historically Black and predominantly White postsecondary institutions. Content validity for Epps's semistructured and open-ended interview guide was established via an independent content analysis scholar in the domain of women's sport and administration (2012, p. 62).

Adapting Epps's (2012) interview guide required inserting phrases into questions that specifically addressed female head athletic trainers and athletic training careers (see Appendix F). The insertion of athletic training did not alter the cultural or contextual design elements of Epps's interview questions. Themes that emerged from the literature review (i.e., gender discrimination, work-related and leadership competence, women's

exclusion from working with men's sports, and the lack of administrative experience) also aided in listening to participants and developing probative questions to gain more details or rich data. Appendix F illustrates the alignment of the interview guide questionnaire with the purpose, research questions, and conceptualized framework.

Phase 1 interview questions. To provide context for the experiences of female head athletic trainers, I used a sequence of interview questions directed at encouraging each participant to recount information regarding self, student experiences in higher education, and athletic training career paths (see Appendix F). Aligning the study's research questions with Seidman's (2013) interview guidelines, Phase 1 interview questions aimed to establish a context for understanding the participant's personal narrative and career history. More generalized questions provided a historical context while probative questions served to ignite the process of digging deeper into the bedrock of personal experiences, recalling the beginning of a career journey. It is important to note that this study did not seek to ask the sweeping *why* question about, the persistent lack of women in collegiate sport leadership and gender inequality. Instead, this study posed the question of *how*, which is, to a greater extent, proximate (e.g., close, near, and around). The question of *how* is necessary to any attempt to "intervene in the perpetuation of gender inequality" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 4), especially for women who desire and pursue collegiate sport leadership positions at the highest levels of intercollegiate sport.

Phase 2 interview questions. For Phase 2, Seidman (2013) suggested further stimulating participants to express greater detail while piecing together life experiences

(Appendix F). The focus of this phase dealt with recalling and describing experiences of real-life or present events that might be probed and clarified by allowing questions and responses to merge, when appropriate, with questions intended for reconstruction further along in Phase 3. The interview questions were building blocks via which information from previous questions and responses could be verified, and information in a new phase would be enhanced. The Phase 2 interview questions addressed female head athletic trainers' perceptions of educational leadership preparation and potential barriers they encountered while in pursuit of a sport leadership position. As per Seidman's second phase guidelines, recollection and description were facilitated via probative questions, which encouraged reflection and elaboration on former questions.

Phase 3 interview questions. The Phase 3 interview questions allowed the participants to provide suggestions on how postsecondary athletic training education programs could be enhanced to create more opportunities for women's advancement in collegiate sport leadership (Appendix F). In Phase 3, the participants reflected on their past and recent experiences to articulate experiential meanings that might have aroused or reframed their perspectives. Seidman (2013) noted that participants should revisit recent experiences in the setting via which the experiences occurred. Exploring former events to understand current events, as a detailed and coherent whole of present experiences, engendered reflection upon personal status in various situations (Seidman, 2013).

At the conclusion of the interview, I recognized each participant for their contribution and thanked them. All participants were notified that their final typed, verbatim transcript would be provided, which reflected the interview data and potential

member check changes. The participants were also informed that a 1- to 2-page summary report of the findings would be sent to them via email in a feasible time frame. However, I decided to send the participants the whole of the Chapter 4 findings so that they could see the way I interpreted their contributions, in context. I sent the findings to the participants one by one and edited the chapter in between their feedback so that later participants would have a more accurate report of the findings. Contact data was updated so that participants could communicate further concerns, questions, or comments relevant to the study. The participants were reassured that personal data was secured and remained confidential and that data from the study would be used solely for this research. The participants were notified via email that any use of the data for purposes beyond the research would require their approval.

Data Analysis Plan

This study explored female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the role that higher education has played in bolstering career opportunities to achieve leadership roles within intercollegiate sport programs. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted that the aim of phenomenological inquiry is "to investigate the meaning of the lived experience of people to identify the core essence of human experience or phenomena as described by research participants" (p. 32). The challenge across data collection and analysis is to find meaning in large sums of data, decrease voluminous information, ascertain notable patterns, and create a framework (Merriam, 2009). This challenge can be dealt with by making data collection and analysis a concurrent activity to evade the risk of repetitive, unfocused, and inordinate data. Qualitative data analysis involves a range of options,

which includes ushering in codes to the data or discovering codes within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At a general point along the continuum, a researcher could have prespecified codes. At an interval point, a researcher could commence coding without prespecified codes to let data proffer codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 63). The decision to implement a coding scheme is related to other decisions pertaining to the study's purpose, research questions, and conceptualized framework (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Even though a prespecified coding system served to guide initial coding for this study, I manually coded the data and remained vigilant and receptive to tags, labels, different categories, and emergent themes. Considering the aforesaid, data for this study was organized into five prespecified categories as addressed by the interview and research questions: (a) career path, (b) role of higher education, (c) leadership preparation, (d) barriers, and (e) educational reforms. The data coding strategy was manually undertaken via formatting textual datum in a Microsoft Word software review program and colored coded index cards. Creswell's (2007) systematic analysis strategy juxtaposed with the prespecified categories identified above was implemented to guide the alignment of emergent units of meaning, codes, categories, patterns, and themes from transcribed interviews.

Creswell (2007) proposed a phenomenological data analysis strategy that is delineated into the following phases:

- Describing the researcher's personal experiences to detect biases;
- Developing a record of participants' significant responses or statements;
- Organizing participants' significant statements into categorical units of

meaning;

- Providing a description of how, when, where, where, and with whom the
  experience occurred; and

- Writing a final report or synthesis about the phenomenal essence or
  meaning of the expressed experiences (p. 159).

Seidman's (2013) modified interview guidelines allowed time for data from each participant's interview to be transcribed verbatim and analytically applied, which served to inform subsequent communications. In the wake of each individual interview session, I transcribed the interview within 3 to 5 days while my memory was fresh enough to allow for noting important shifts in voice and tone. Upon the initial transcript reading, I used Miles et al.'s (2014) approach and color-coded or tagged words and phrases that were outliers of the prespecified categories. The participants' responses assisted in developing potential probes that I might have neglected to ask during the interview: probative questions that I could ask during follow-up contact time frames. The follow-up contact time frame flexibility functioned to maximize the thick and rich textual details from the participants' life experiences. After each follow-up contact, the data collected from each participant was analyzed again to compare and combine data from fresh patterns and emergent themes. This comparison and combination of data was constant or reiterative throughout the entire data collection and analysis phases. The follow-up contacts allowed each participant to perform member checks to ensure the accuracy of their transcript and to validate findings in Chapter 4 as related to the final report.

Qualitative research pertaining to human phenomena was not intended to produce

cause and effect or predictable results (Patton, 2002, pp. 480-481). Miles et al. (2014) maintained that researchers should "find the outliers and then verify whether what is present in them is absent or different in other, more mainstream examples" (p. 302). As such, an outlier could be a way to strengthen the generality or replicability of more findings while safeguarding researchers against bias (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Maxwell, 2013). For this study, there were no outliers or discrepant cases.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Phenomenological inquiry endeavors to uncover and make sense of life events by individuals who have experienced such events. At the intersection of the participant-researcher crossroads, Creswell (2007) noted that the researcher should philosophically understand the phenomenon under investigation and have in mind the lot or form via which personal views could be infused into the research. In other words, a researcher should remain cognizant and reflective of any preceding tenor about the phenomenon via personal life experiences or literature analyses. At the intersection of the participant-researcher crossroads, the voices of the participants were allowed to articulate the narrative such that their story was revealed versus the tale perspective of the writer.

Maxwell (2013) asserted that research credibility could be jeopardized via both researcher reactivity and bias. Allowing participants to verify the accuracy of their transcripts and to validate excepted findings averted discriminately taking into account data that suited a predetermined conclusion (Maxwell, 2013). With respect to potential reactivity or the researcher's sway during the interview or follow-up contacts, I employed bracketing to the greatest extent possible (Maxwell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As such,

allowing the participant to convey her experiences versus guiding the participant in a single direction that reflected my understanding was paramount.

Credibility of this study was achieved via extended communication with each participant (i.e., email, telephone, interview, and member checks) such that rich, thick descriptions could develop to establish greater insight into the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014). Member checking allowed for an examination of data, systematic categories, meanings and conclusions by participants from whom the interview data were obtained. Formal and informal member checks were used to establish the validity of the participants' statements and accounts throughout the course of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified member checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). By sharing the transcripts and excerpts of the findings, as well as using a constant comparison method within and across participants' interviews, I engaged in the triangulation of the results, increasing trustworthiness.

Transferability of the study's findings to similar contexts or population requires an attentive interpretation of data and not just an amalgamation of previous findings in the study. Miles et al. (2014) proposed that transferability could be enhanced via thick explicit descriptions, which could be achieved by establishing well-informed comparisons and a diversified sample from which the data emerges. Because qualitative findings can be contextually specific, I reported results from the participants' in-depth interviews in a rich and comprehensive manner (Patton, 2002). Acquiring rich data and thick descriptions was useful in this study and can also benefit future investigators who may conduct comparable research in the athletic training field. Teddlie and Tashakkori

(2009) noted, "Thick description involves making detailed descriptions of the context and other aspects of the research setting so that other researchers can make comparisons with other contexts in which they are working" (p. 296).

Dependability pertains to the long-term consistency or reliability or the research (Miles et al., 2014). The application of audit trails (e.g., committee reviews, sharing of transcripts and findings, and constant comparison within and across interviews) aided in ensuring the dependability of research findings. I had noted earlier that confirmability regarding data collection and analysis procedures is associated with the researcher's reactivity or biases. To ensure confirmability, I was cognizant of philosophical presumptions throughout all phases of the research processes (Maxwell, 2013).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures for this research study were grounded in Miles et al.'s (2014) guidelines, which included the meritorious contribution of the research, personal competence as a qualitative interviewer and researcher, participants' informed consent, declaration of the study's purpose and research information, and the benefits associated with participants and future scholars. The reciprocity and costs of the research were accounted for in addition to potential risks or harm regarding participants. Issues of integrity between the participants and researcher considered the participants' anonymity or strict confidentiality. Miles et al. added that support and intervention should be safeguarded. Furthermore, researchers should remain cognizant of integral and professional research, propriety rights to data and research findings, and dissemination and potential abuses of findings (pp. 58-66).

Institutional Review Board

I gained approval from Walden University's Internal Review Board (#04-13-15-0072243) and conducted this research in compliance with all required procedures and regulations. The protocol for disseminating specific research information about this study to participants and gaining their informed consent is documented in Appendices A through G. As per Walden University's Internal Review Board requirements, a copy of my National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certification was submitted with the research application. The NIH certification provided evidence of my qualifications to perform human research and comprehend limitations and outcomes of this qualitative phenomenological study. Matters of confidentiality throughout this research between the participants and me were paramount. Upon completion of this study, all records or data and additional notes were placed in a locked file in my home office for a 5-year period.

Ethical Concerns

I did not experience any ethical dilemmas regarding the recruitment of participants or interaction with female head athletic trainers. I handled the collection of all data and ensured confidentiality of participants throughout all phases of this research. The participants' confidentiality (e.g., names and college or university institution) was preserved via the use of pseudonyms. I stored all electronic data in a password-protected and encrypted folder on my home computer and a personal desktop hard drive. All forms of written records (e.g., transcripts and notes) were placed in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Again, other than the researcher, only the committee supervising this

research was able to access interview data. The rights of participants in this study were discussed prior to each interview session and were outlined in Appendix E. As discussed earlier, participation in this study was voluntary. During this study, any participant could have refused participation or elected to withdraw, however, none did.

Treatment of Data

Data were obtained in-person, via email, telephone, private Skype video conferencing, digital audio recorders, and paper was secured and kept strictly confidential. All digitally recorded data and email correspondence and forms are stored in a password-protected and encrypted folder on my password-protected home computer as well as a personal password-protected desktop hard drive. All physical data (i.e., paper copies of documents, interview paper notations, and backup transcripts) are also stored in a locked file cabinet located in my home office. Upon conclusion of the study, all data will remain secured via the procedures discussed above for 5 years. At the end of 5 years, all digital data files or folders will be erased. Physical paper copies of documents, interview paper notations, and backup transcripts will be shredded and disposed of properly.

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Summary

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Chapter 3 commenced by reiterating the purpose of this study, which is to explore female athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part higher education plays in supporting the achievement of leadership roles within collegiate sport programs. The research questions were recounted to emphasize an alignment with the study's data collection instrument. The role of the researcher was expounded and a modified version

of Seidman's (2013) interview protocol was explicated as a suitable approach for collecting data. The selection of participants, inclusive of selection logic, instruments, and an interview strategy preceded a justification for the adaptation Epps's (2012) interview guide. I introduced the goals and processes for the interview session and included an explanation of Creswell's (2007) thematic data analysis plan. Matters concerning trustworthiness were presented with pertinent strategies to comply with all criteria. This chapter was brought to a close with a discussion of ethical issues relevant to human research, Internal Review Board regulations, confidentiality and storage of data, and treatment of data upon completion of the study.

In Chapter 4, I put forward the findings of this study. Sections on demographics, participant selection, data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness are taken into consideration. The findings are elucidated with segments of the participants' interview transcripts that were used to substantiate their perspectives and experiences of higher education's athletic training programs. The participants' responses to interview questions correspond with the study's research questions and are discussed accordingly.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore female head athletic trainers' perceptions regarding the part higher education played in supporting their achievement of leadership roles in U.S. collegiate sport programs. I specifically examined the role of higher education institutions in preparing, hiring, and supporting women to lead collegiate athletic training programs. The study was designed to improve scholarly awareness of the intricacies involved in their real-world experiences so that the findings could be used to foster a work environment where women have an opportunity to progress as head athletic trainers. Research in this domain is important to aid higher education administrators, policymakers, and sport practitioners' in recognizing underlying gender biases so that these biases can be combated, ultimately increasing the number of women in head athletic training roles at U.S. collegiate institutions. The findings showed that the role of higher education institutional preparation and support was limited relative to the participants' career goals for achieving collegiate athletic training leadership positions and overcoming gender barriers. The participants suggested improving athletic training education programs through mentorship and role modeling, experiential learning and interacting with sport practitioners, networking, and training courses in leadership and gender roles and biases. The chapter first includes a review of the research questions and a discussion of their alignment to the methodological approach and interview questions. Background information about the participants' demographics, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness issues, and phenomenological results follow.

Research Questions

Three research questions steered the study's design and methodological approach. For the interview questions, I employed Seidman's (2013) guidelines for interview protocols to form context, conjure up descriptions via recollection, and educe reflection on the essence of experiences. Moustakas (1994) noted that participants' phenomenological detailed descriptions can establish the foundation for analytic reflection and interpretation in which careful attention should be applied to ensure alignment of interview questions with the study's research questions; I used this guidance to develop the interview guide questions (see Appendix F). The objective of establishing a foundation for analytical reflection and interpretation with the participants' detailed descriptions was accomplished by aligning the interview questions with the primary research questions for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding higher education experiences and preparations into their respective positions?

2. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education experiences might have informed their capacity to overcome barriers in obtaining their respective positions?

3. What are the perceptions of women who are collegiate head athletic trainers regarding how higher education can transform curricula and certification processes to augment opportunities in leadership?

Demographics

The participants in the study consisted of nine participants who were active certified athletic trainers; participants ranged from their late-20s to early-60s in age. At the time of this study, seven of the participants were employed full-time as head athletic trainers from 3 to 17 years at 4-year NAIA and NCAA Division II and III schools. Another participant had previously worked as a full-time collegiate head athletic trainer for nearly a decade at the same institution but abdicated her position and assumed sports medicine directorship roles both at and beyond the university. Still yet another participant had previously worked full-time as a collegiate head athletic trainer for five years but resigned her position and accepted a high school head athletic training position.

The participants had a mix of successful career progression histories. Six of the nine participants had applied and interviewed to obtain head athletic trainer positions at collegiate institutions where they had no prior affiliation. Three participants were promoted within institutions at which they were already employed. Eight of the nine participants had set career goals to become collegiate head athletic trainers; one participant's goal was to achieve athletic training leadership at the professional sport level. Five of the nine participants who led collegiate head athletic training departments designed and built the sports medicine programs in their institutions. All participants had earned their master's degree while one participant had earned a postgraduate degree. I separately confirmed the successful leadership status of each participant and verified this status by visiting the participants' college or university departmental website. I also used information from these websites to obtain contact information and design interview

questions related to demographic information.

All of the participants in the study were active certified athletic trainers. Six of these participant's career progressions followed the internship route while three participants had held graduate assistantships. Six of the participants who progressed through either the internship or graduate assistant routes had been assistant athletic trainers while three participants assumed the head athletic trainer position after completing their graduate programs. All of the participants had worked with men's football in some capacity at the high school or collegiate levels, either as a student-trainer, graduate assistant, or head athletic trainer. At the time of this study, six of the nine participants worked at collegiate institutions that had a men's football program and provided medical treatment services for football student-athletes. The participants' individual leadership experience ranged from 3–25 years, which did not necessarily correspond with age. Some of the participants began their education in pursuit of leadership roles several years after high school while other participants went directly from high school to college.

Three participants were introduced to athletic training in high school while four participants learned about the profession via a career interest survey, a sports medicine course, a family member or friend, or by observing student athletic trainers on a practice field. Two participants initially sought a physical therapy degree but changed majors when learning about an athletic training career. Five of the nine participants claimed they did not know about athletic training or what an athletic trainer was when they were seniors in high school. Three participants learned about the profession from treatment of

their personal athletic injuries. All the participants had been athletes in high school, with five also having played competitive collegiate sports. Six of the nine participants indicated an initial interest in pursuing a degree in medicine (i.e., emergency, physical therapy, and medical school), but were drawn to athletic training because it blended medicine with sports.

Five of the nine participants in this study were single, with three who raised at least one child while pursuing an education and leading a collegiate athletic training program. Two single-parent participants pursued an education and upon graduation, one led at a high school and assisted at collegiate athletic programs, while the other led both male professional sports and collegiate athletic training programs. Four participants were married, with two who raised two or more children while concurrently pursuing a career and leading collegiate athletic training programs. All participants began working as athletic training professionals after the passage of Title IX in 1972, and they represented five out of 10 NATA districts across the United States.

Data Collection

Considering the methodological design, I modified Seidman's (2013) in-depth interview guidelines and used open-ended questions that encouraged nine female head athletic trainers to recall educational and collegiate sport leadership experiences. The implementation of Seidman's guidelines for interview protocols required modification such that three proposed interview sessions were combined into three phases for a single 60–90-minute interview. The Phase 1 interview questions included creating a context by detailing female head athletic trainers' perceptions of higher education experiences in

preparing them for a career and collegiate sport leadership. The Phase 2 interview questions built upon the contextual foundation and attended to detailed accounts of specific events, delving deeper into potential barriers in higher educational experiences. The Phase 3 interview questions enabled the participants to apply their experiences to facilitate positive change for women in the athletic training profession.

Sample Size

I projected the sample size for this study as including nine participants who would complete one interview with two follow-up contacts; the execution of the study matched this projection. Seidman (2013) noted that two measures amalgamate to ascertain when a study has achieved its natural development: sufficient numbers that represent the population and data saturation. Data saturation occurs when fresh information or themes cease emerging from the data (Seidman, 2013). An adequate sample produces data saturation, which ensues by achieving both breadth and depth (Bowen, 2008). The nine female head athletic trainers who participated in this study had the opportunity to contribute over various points of contact. All participants contributed via performing transcript member checks, validating excerpts of findings, and clarifying information via email throughout both the data collection and analysis processes. These verification techniques allowed each participant to append and amend personal interview information resulting in rich, thick descriptions of experiences and data saturation. All participants engaged in each follow-up contact to verify that their perspectives and experiences were accurately represented.

Participants

For this phenomenological study, I collected data via individual interviews with nine former or current full-time NAIA and NCAA Division II and III female head athletic trainers. The recruiting of participants began when approval to conduct the study was gained from Walden University's Internal Review Board (IRB; #04-13-15-0072243). This recruitment process entailed sending email invitation letters and consent forms to personal or professional contacts to both participate in the study and to provide suggestions for potential participants from their professional networks (Appendices A and E). Separate individual invitation emails and consent forms were also sent to potential participants from the informant recruit lists and public Internet lists obtained from the NAIA and NCAA (Appendices B, C, D, and E).

One day following IRB approval and the distribution of the invitations, I received nine email consent responses from participants to take part in the study. Within 24 hours, I contacted the participants via email to gain information regarding interview dates, times, alternative telephone numbers, and a Skype address. Because nine email consent responses arrived promptly, no participant beyond the first two was asked to suggest other potential participants. During the following two days, four additional email consent responses arrived from potential participants to take part in the study. The individual participants were contacted via email within 24 hours to gain information regarding interview dates, times, alternative telephone numbers, and a Skype address.

Over a 3-day period, I received email consent responses from 13 female head athletic trainers who indicated a desire to participate in this study. Concerning referrals

from personal or professional contacts, 11 women were listed as potential participants.

Because many NAIA and NCAA schools were within 1 or 2 weeks of final exam

sessions, participant selection was based on the participant's availability to schedule an

interview date and time within a 3-week period. The first nine respondents to schedule an

interview were selected for participation in this study. In summary, 3 of the 11 potential

participants from two personal or professional contact lists responded promptly to

establish an interview date and time. The remaining six participants who promptly

established an interview date and time were from the public Internet NAIA and NCAA

lists. As such, nine participants were scheduled for an interview and the process of

recruitment was discontinued.

Interviews

Depending on geographic location, the nine female head athletic trainer

participants were offered three interview format options: in-person, telephone, or private

Skype video conferencing. A majority of interviews were conducted via telephone with

some interviews conducted either in-person or via private Skype video conferencing.

Despite the participant's preferred mode of the interview, the themes that emerged from

the analysis of the interviews did not reflect the mode of communication. Concerning

location, all participants chose to engage in one 60- to 90-minute semistructured

interview from either their home or workplace offices. The average duration of interview

sessions was 61 minutes. The individual interview sessions were audio recorded via two

mobile digital recorders. Interviews were transcribed via the audio recordings on two

mobile digital devices.

Variations

One variation occurred because all nine of the participants who initially scheduled an interview date and time remained throughout the study. It was, therefore, unnecessary to send follow-up invitation letters to other potential participants. A second variation arose due to receiving multiple responses from potential participants that went beyond the original plan of including 6 to 9 participants in the study. Because of the influx of responses over a 3-week period, there was no need to implement a snowball sample strategy to recruit more participants. A third variation surfaced concerning the allotted time to transcribe and send interviews to the participants within 3 to 5 days. Due to the broad nature of the participants' experiences and interview data (e.g., 21 or 35 double-spaced pages), some interviews required more transcription time. Apart from the variations described above, no unusual circumstances were encountered during the nine individual interviews.

Data Analysis

I employed a phenomenological method of data analysis that draws on Creswell (2007) and Moustakas' (1994) work, which included an explanation of bracketing of researcher reflexivity and biases. Both authors noted the importance of identifying the participants' significant statements, organizing such statements into meaningful units, providing a descriptive context, and synthesizing the essence of experiences and events. Moustakas emphasized the researcher's role in maintaining the participants' descriptive accounts during the reduction or bracketing process to hone in on the essence of meaning within variant expressions. Starks and Trinidad (2007) noted, "phenomenological

analysis is primarily a writing exercise, as it through the process of writing and rewriting that the researcher can distill meaning" (p. 1376). And van Manen (2006) added, "The writer must enter the dark, the space of the text, in the hope of seeing what cannot really be seen, hearing what cannot really be heard, touching what cannot really be touched" (p. 719). As presented in the following section, the descriptive text or interview transcripts served to launch the process of interpretation, providing an updraft to the exercise of writing.

Data Organization

In the first stage of the writing process, I transcribed the interviews to initiate immersion in the participants' life experiences and settings and to engaged in rich data analysis (Creswell 2007; Seidman, 2013). The individual interviews were transcribed verbatim from a mobile digital audio recorder or encrypted computer audio files, which were uploaded and secured in encrypted Microsoft Word document folders. The cumulative interview word count was slightly over 80,000 words. I revisited and replayed the interview recordings numerous times to consider emotive nuances or vocal intonations of communication and to attain experiential accuracy. As part of the data analysis process, I manually coded the interview data. Notes and memos were recorded on each participant's interview session document, which were reviewed and systematically compared to the interview transcripts. Absorption in the collected data helped to identify recurrent themes and discover apertures or insufficient data proffered by participants. Original (e.g., verbatim) and modified (e.g. masked identifiers) transcripts were sent via email to the nine individual participants. I included written

directions on the interview transcripts so the participants could clarify, rectify, or further communicate thoughts regarding the research questions and their responses.

I first organized the data in five preselected focal points or themes in the interview questions, which in turn represented the research questions. While each theme aligned with all research questions, the first two themes *career path* and *role of higher education* furnished a contextual overlay. The later three themes of *barriers*, *leadership preparation*, and *educational reforms* specifically addressed the study's research questions. New categories such as *ancillary social support*, *national organizational non-support*, and *limiting numbers of athletic trainers* were created for data that fell beyond the five preselected themes described above.

In the second stage of coding, recurrent emergent themes had similarities that allowed for clustering. Based on Creswell's (2007) systematic analysis strategy, the excerpts (e.g., phrases and statements) were reduced to primary and secondary category themes, respectively. Because the *career path* and *role of higher education* themes overlapped with the other three themes, I often included the same quotes in more than one theme.

I employed the *comment* feature in the Microsoft Word program to code the data by tagging words, phrases, and significant statements with the primary and secondary categorical data. After the initial coding of individual interview transcripts, the tagged responses were merged into separate Microsoft Word documents for the first research question, the second research question, and the third research question, respectively. The process of reviewing individual participant responses was repeated to determine the

consistency of coding within and across participants' interviews. This process also allowed for apertures to surface, which necessitated contacting several of the individual participants to clarify information. For the final stage of data organization, all quotes and codes were transferred to a summary document that displayed the contributions of individual participants to each research question code.

Emergent Codes and Themes

Codes were ascribed to exemplify the participants' perspectives, experiences, and common narratives throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Three central themes emerged from the original, preselected five themes and were ordered according to the research questions.

The interview questions that reflected the first research question allowed participants to share their initial interest in pursuing an athletic training career and later in achieving a collegiate sport leadership position. Both the initial pursuit and athletic training leadership attainment questions were situated in the context of how higher educational experiences contributed to career goals. I initially organized the results by one of the three emergent themes from the central five preselected categories. For instance, the primary theme of *higher educational experiences and preparations* had subthemes regarding the participants' academic *program contributions*, *internships or graduate assistantships*, and *trusted advisors*.

The second research question addressed the participants' experiences of career barriers and the role of higher education institutions in helping them to overcome obstacles. The participants matched the theme of *higher education's role in breaking*

barriers with important educational contributions as they described challenges they might have experienced while pursuing a collegiate sport leadership position. This theme also included the participants' rationale for experiencing barriers, perceived assistance in overcoming barriers, and perspectives on adequate education preparation in obtaining collegiate leadership roles. These subthemes are *experiences of challenges or barriers*, *the male-dominated sport world*, *assistance with breaking barriers*, and *adequate educational preparation*.

The third research question focused on the participants' propositions for higher educational reform that could lead to augmenting women's opportunities to achieve collegiate athletic training leadership roles. The theme, *proposing higher educational curricular reform*, addressed the participants' reflections on ways to enhance professional athletic training education programs. This theme also focused on the participants' experiences of navigating through personal and institutional barriers to achieving their athletic training career goals. The proposing higher educational curricular reform theme included four subthemes, which were ranked according to their frequent occurrence in the data: *mentors and role models*, *networking opportunities*, *experience and interactions*, *leadership and gender*, and *advice for female athletic trainers*.

Discrepant Cases

It is implausible to presume that all phenomenological experiences are homogeneous or symphonious. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) advised researchers to be mindful of outlier data throughout the collection and analysis processes. While attention was given to potentially aberrant statements, events, or settings

throughout data collection and analysis phases, no atypical data surfaced.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Creswell (2007) noted that the phenomenological qualitative research design is grounded in philosophy and, while subjected to the thoroughness that coexists with any meaningful research, it is not statistically quantifiable. I applied validity strategies to ensure trustworthiness throughout all phases of the data collection and analysis processes, as reviewed in the section below.

Credibility

Based on Miles et al.'s (2014) suggestion, the credibility of this study was established via extended communication (i.e., electronic mediums and member checks) with each participant. This extended communication strategy allowed for the emergence of rich, thick descriptions and the development of reflective meanings about the phenomenon. I followed Maxwell's (2013) advice for assessing potential threats to internal validity by using probative questions so participants could elaborate and provide more detailed descriptions of experiences. The cumulative interview transcripts were 169 pages (double spaced) in length and included just over 80,000 words. As such, the interview probative questions and peripheral clarifications let to a broad range of contextual details, experiences, and meaningful reflections.

Maxwell (2013) and Miles et al. (2014) also suggested member checking as a technique for ensuring credibility, which was applied by allowing the participants to review original interview transcripts and excerpts of findings. Moreover, the member checking technique offered the participants an opportunity to add information, clarify

statements, or to retract information. This collaboration with the participants on accurate representation of experiences in transcripts yielded four responses with minor alterations, which were included in the narrative. Concerning ethical procedures, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality throughout this study. All nine participants sent emails indicating approval of their transcripts or accurate representation of their perspectives and experiences. As a result of sharing transcripts and excerpts of the findings with the participants, as well as using a constant comparison method within and across participants' interviews, I was able to triangulate the data to increase trustworthiness.

As an additional means of assuring rigor and credibility, a committee member reviewed coding for two interview transcripts during the initial data collection and analysis phases. This collaboration prompted the creation of further memos and notations and encouraged a deeper engagement while examining how the data evolved. Thematic notebooks were kept to record feedback from the committee member. These thematic reflections helped to organize further data as themes emerged and developed more fully.

Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

Upon concluding the study, it was imperative to ascertain if the findings were applicable to comparable research to demonstrate potential transferability. Heedful interpretation rather than the amalgamation of manifold data sources was essential to demonstrate independent results that might be applicable in future research studies. A constant comparison method within and across participants' interviews ensured the accuracy of interpretation. Thick and detailed language that included quotations from the

participants' interviews were used to establish transferability of the data shared.

Miles et al. (2014) indicated that dependability pertains to the long-term consistency or reliability of the research. Audit trails were implemented (e.g., committee reviews, sharing of transcripts and excerpted findings, and constant comparison within and across interviews) to ensure the dependability of research findings. Maxwell (2013) noted that confirmability relevant to data collection and analysis procedures was affiliated with the researchers reactivity or biases. With this in mind, establishing confirmability required constant awareness and reflection of philosophical presumptions throughout all phases of the research process.

Results

In this qualitative phenomenological investigation, the nine women who participated in this study described their initial interest in pursuing an athletic training career. The participants explained how their U.S. higher educational programs assisted them in achieving a leadership position in their profession at NAIA and NCAA Division II and III schools. Due to the participants' high profile status and the importance of maintaining confidentiality, I presented composites regarding their initial interest in an athletic training career and leadership role in the demographic section above. A synoptic review of the participants' demographics is interlaced in the following sections as a means to establish context. The participants offered rich descriptions about the phenomena of higher education institutional program experiences and preparations. The results revealed the part U. S. higher education institutions played in assisting the participants in breaking barriers while pursuing an athletic training career or while

leading a collegiate athletic training program. The interview query culminated by exploring the significant role of mentoring and networking for professional growth and improvements for athletic training educational programs. In conclusion, I also analyzed advice that all the participants offered to current and future generations of female athletic trainers who desire to become leaders in their profession. A summarization of the findings, in alignment with the primary research questions, was arranged accordingly with the thematic development of the participants' experiences as leaders in the profession of athletic training.

Research Question 1: Higher Education Experiences and Preparations

I began the interviews by focusing on the participants' perceptions of U.S. higher educational experiences and preparations for a collegiate athletic training career and sport leadership role. Three subthemes emerged under the primary theme of higher education experiences and preparations: reflections on the participants' *program contributions*, the importance of *internships or graduate assistantships*, and the significance of *trusted advisors* with academic advisors, athletic departmental staff, colleagues, faculty members, and mentors.

Program contributions. The participants spoke about the sports medicine knowledge they had gained in higher education programs and how they applied this knowledge in both classrooms and clinical internships or graduate assistantships. They also described diverse experiences dealing with integrated clinical proficiencies including knowledge of prevention and health care promotion, clinical evaluations and diagnoses, acute medical care and therapy interventions, psychosocial stratagems, and healthcare

management or administration. To some extent, all nine participants perceived their educational programs as contributing to or preparing them for achieving an athletic training career and work at the collegiate level. Five of the nine participants regarded their educational programs as essential. It is worth noting that the athletic training educational competencies and clinical proficiencies (e.g., knowledge, diverse team assignments, and experiential learning) all overlap in the classrooms, training rooms, laboratories, and sport assignments at high schools, colleges, and sport medicine clinics. The importance of knowledge and skills were both didactic and application-oriented and cut across all the themes in this analysis.

During her postgraduate program, Annie began preparations to develop the first athletic training education program in her state. She used a capstone project to develop some scholarly tools and proudly reported that these tools were implemented nationwide in U.S. athletic training education programs. Annie explained that her college degree was in healthcare education, which emphasized the content areas of leadership and curriculum development. When Annie was asked to describe how her postgraduate program influenced or contributed to her career goals and leadership role, she recounted that it "was really important because it . . . had leadership and curriculum development, which prepped me for that . . . directorship role. That was significant as far as keeping me in a higher education role."

Akin to Annie's postgraduate experiences, Lyndi's career started when she researched higher education programs that did not have, but reportedly needed, athletic training graduate assistants. When asked about the significance of her educational

program contributions to her general career goals and leadership position, Lyndi
explained:

> Well, that's probably the most meaningful part, honestly, of the whole journey for
> me because my master's program gave us a lot of freedom about what we wanted
> to use for our capstone project. And throughout . . . It was the most hands-on
> learning I could get . . . I was able to take what I was getting out of the classroom
> . . . right back to the athletic training room . . . I used it [capstone project] to
> develop a marketing plan for our athletic training education program that didn't
> even exist at that time.

Other participants expressed satisfaction with their educational program
contributions where knowledge, diverse experiences (e.g., sport assignments and clinical
experiences), and hands-on learning fostered intangible traits of autonomy, confidence,
and empowerment. For instance, Chaise obtained her graduate degree and shortly
thereafter, reported creating leadership roles by searching for schools where opportunities
existed to build and launch sports medicine programs. When considering how
postsecondary programs contributed to developing her career goals, Chaise
enthusiastically recounted:

> Both [undergraduate and graduate programs] gave me the tools necessary to not
> only have knowledge to do my job successfully, but definitely to feel the power to
> do it and do it on my own . . . At the undergraduate level, we had team sport
> assignments and . . . were making decisions on their [student-athletes] health care
> . . . that gave me the tools and the courage so-to-speak to do the job . . . At the

graduate level, I was . . . at a high school by myself. So it [graduate program] definitely gave me the tools necessary to do this job successfully with minimal peer [supervisory] resources.

As a freshman, Erin's collegiate athletic training career began when she entered into her college's athletic training room to work on basic taping skills. Although expecting to practice these skills, the head athletic trainer directed her to provide medical treatment for inbound football student-athletes. Erin claimed, "It was kind of like an initiation by fire, but it worked for me . . . I got a good breadth of experiences, working with different populations." With an undergraduate degree emphasis in athletic training and a graduate degree focus in educational leadership and administration, Erin reported that her collegiate athletic training experiences were, "really good and allowed me . . . [to] build my knowledge independently from being supervised or being instructed outside of my classes."

Similarly, Drew walked into a career at a university where she had used her extensive experience and skills to build a thriving and reputable sports medicine program. She described her psychology and sports medicine education programs as "definitely a good base: a foundation." Drew further explained, "My graduate program was essential in that there was an emphasis in sports medicine injury studies . . . that was very helpful in my professional growth."

Regarding the application of skill sets, Tess characterized her educational experiences as contributory by asserting, "I was able to get my hands on injuries . . . I was in the trenches with the athletes." Echoing Tess's perceived experiences, Bryn

expressed, "I believe that hands-on work in situations is the best way to get to know if this [athletic training] is what you want to do . . . You cannot possibly know what you're in for unless you experience it."

Returning to and underscoring the importance of diversified experiences, Kenzie described both her undergraduate and graduate university degree programs as quite contributory. She noted that an undergraduate degree in sports and fitness gave her, "a good understanding of what . . . the profession of athletic training was about." And just as Bryn had described above, Kenzie further conveyed, "I got to see many different realms of athletic training . . . in the clinical settings, in the medical settings, and obviously working with our sports teams." Although Kenzie emphasized the diversity of clinical experiences in her undergraduate program, she did not mention any specific coursework, clinical experience, or the prestige of the university she attended. Instead, Kenzie described her graduate program in the context of social relations:

> I have to say that we had a head athletic trainer there [in the graduate program] that I worked under who was absolutely fantastic. And I think she really, I guess, just led me to the path that I'm at now. You know, great experience: really was able to give me confidence in my abilities.

Jaime's university programs were also contributory by preparing her to utilize and integrate skill sets when working in various settings. Jaime recounted:

> I worked a year in a PT [physical therapy] clinic right after undergrad and I think that was really important for me . . . I really honed my rehab skills and learned how to . . . develop there and that is where I . . . learned very quickly to multitask

. . . and to be able to work with all sorts of different athletes at different times and to juggle everything, which is what I have essentially had to do at every other job I've been at.

Bryn, Chaise, Drew, Kenzie, and Lyndi all indicated that their higher education programs contributed directly to help in developing their career goals. However, four of the nine participants expressed different perspectives about how higher education contributed to assisting them in developing either general career or collegiate leadership goals.

As noted earlier in this section, Annie had earned a postgraduate degree that was helpful in achieving and sustaining an academic and allied healthcare role in higher education. Concerning her university undergraduate and graduate programs, Annie commented:

I think the important thing is obviously, it [undergraduate program] prepared me to be an ATC [athletic trainer, certified] . . . Initially, my goal was to be a clinical athletic trainer. So . . . my master's degree, I think, went along those lines. What it didn't prepare me to do was jump into that male-dominated world . . . I never had that [educational preparation] and it would have been valuable back then to have that as a clinical person.

When asked about how her overall higher education experiences contributed to preparing her for an athletic training leadership position, Annie expressed, "It probably didn't. I don't even remember taking any leadership classes that would have prepared me for jumping into a men's world." Instead of communicating how her overall higher education

experiences contributed to her leadership goals, Annie recalled the issue of gender in which she reportedly did not receive educational preparation. At this point in Annie's interview, gender had not been mentioned, however; she did recall gender as a factor in the context of higher educational experiences. It is also worth noting that when Annie was placed into the directorship role for the university's athletic training education program, she was forced to relinquish her head athletic training position. When the university's athletic training education program was discontinued, so was Annie's directorship position. At the time of this study, Annie retained her university tenured faculty position and accepted an allied healthcare leadership role in a different or non-athletic training department. However, her athletic training position in sports at the university was gone. During the interview, Annie intensely conveyed a continued passion for her profession and asserted, "I just loved the field. I loved athletic training. And I was good at it [Loudly]!" Annie's postgraduate degree prepared her for a collegiate athletic training role that presented an opportunity to be an administrative director. However, in the absence of the university's athletic training program and directorship position, Annie expressed details of her athletic training career experiences in past tense.

Also noted in the above section, Erin began her career as a student who walked into a collegiate athletic training room and was given the responsibility for administering medical treatment to football student-athletes. Seizing the initiative launched her into a collegiate athletic training environment that enabled her to gain considerable experiential or hands-on learning that, from her perspective, could not be taught in a structured classroom setting. Upon reflection, Erin explained:

I do not feel like I got a lot out of the athletic training courses there [renown undergraduate program]. That's not to say I didn't learn things: I did . . . sports psychology class, ex. phys. [exercise physiology] and things like that. [Courses] that you're not going to get through work experiences I think, helped me develop more so than the straight athletic training classes. But, I really feel like . . . I just had to get through it . . . I already had all the experience . . . So I'm not sure how much it [undergraduate program] really contributed.

Jaime specifically decided to attend a large, prestigious university, which is known for its athletic training programs and connections to professional football teams, to develop her skills and to become an excellent athletic trainer. When recalling her graduate program and the contribution it made towards helping her to develop career goals, Jaime indicated:

I chose [name] State for that [athletic training focus] and with that program: I don't think it was everything I was hoping it to be. But, I think it taught me . . . a lot about deeply looking at different ways of doing athletic training. I ended up [working] at [name] University and it was a great experience. That is where I learned the most about getting my foot in the door on creating policies and starting with the idea of, 'I could potentially be a leader.'

Similar to the emphasis Kenzie placed on social relationships at the graduate level, Tess also perceived higher educational experiences more socially interactive. She recounted:

It wasn't necessarily the coursework; it was the head athletic trainer at [name]

State who taught me things that you don't learn in books. He taught me the things that no one teaches in the coursework anymore or I guess, they didn't teach it then. He taught me his experience.

While Tess had held numerous collegiate head athletic training positions, it took a decade of sending applications for male professional job opportunities, particularly in football, to land the first one. At the time of this study, she had accomplished that goal, which was her career objective from the beginning.

Internships or graduate assistantships. Internships or graduate assistantships emerged from the participants' perceptions of higher education's institutional influence on, or contribution to, developing their athletic training sport leadership goals via the routes of internships or graduate assistantships. Eight of the nine participants believed their internship or graduate assistantship experiences were influential or contributory towards helping them to develop career goals and a collegiate athletic training leadership position. As mentioned in the demographic section, six participants advanced through internships while three participants progressed via graduate assistantships to achieve an athletic training career. The age of the participants in this study had no bearing on the choice of athletic training clinical experiences.

When recalling her educational internship, Bryn pointed out the hands-on experiences in various sport settings reinforced that unequivocally, athletic training was what she wanted to do. For Bryn, personal and professional rewards of being an athletic trainer were foremost, hanging out with younger people who were pursuing an athletic career in colleges and at high schools. She pointed out, "The chances that I had to work at

different high schools, in different clinics, and at the colleges gave me a very huge look

into what I would be doing for my career. For me, it was exhilarating." Similar to how

Bryn expressed varied internship experiences, Chaise, who proceeded via the graduate

assistantship route, explained:

> I was in a lot of clinical internships. I did a contact sports rotation at a high
>
> school. I did a physical therapy rotation at Children's Hospital of [name] County.
>
> I did a PT [physical therapy] rotation at a regular PT clinic. I did another PT
>
> rotation with a sports training clinic in a southern region that was really cool. It
>
> was a private clinic with physical therapists and athletic trainers and . . . They had
>
> a lot of professional athletes that filtered through there.

In the context of undergraduate studies, Drew developed a passion for athletic

training but due to a lack of mentoring, she focused on completing her initial degree

studies in psychology. After entering her graduate program, Drew connected with a

mentor who challenged her to reflect on academic areas that she most enjoyed. From this

reflection, Drew decided to pursue an athletic training career and when advancing

through her internship opportunities, she recounted:

> I felt like I had a good mix of high school football . . . the physical therapy clinic
>
> and the junior college where I got to work a variety of sports. And so I thought
>
> that really set the tone and gave me the experience I needed to be able to work in
>
> the college setting. So it [clinical internships] was very influential and I think,
>
> important educational experiences for me.

And Kenzie, who has led semiprofessional athletic training programs, progressed

somewhat differently than the other participants. As a result of numerous athletic injuries

and surgical procedures in her youth, she interacted with athletic trainers and university

physicians who afforded her internships at both the high school and collegiate levels.

Kenzie's recounted, "I did an internship when I was in high school with the team

physicians at the university, which was a fantastic experience. And you know, that really

solidified wanting to go into athletic training as a career." In the previous section, Erin,

Jaime, and Lyndi perceived their internship experiences as positive. Tess, who had led

male professional athletic training programs, also advanced via the internship route.

Adding to what she perceived as positive experiences in the above section, Tess

remarked, "Same as mentorship . . . They [mentors] taught me how to deal with people.

They taught me how to deal with athletes. They taught me the mental side of it [athletic

training]."

Notwithstanding Annie's high profile in the athletic training profession, she was

the only participant who felt her internship experiences did not contribute to helping her

achieve a leadership role in collegiate sports. When asked to elaborate on her

experiences, Annie indicated:

I did an internship [clinical] all through my undergraduate and graduate

[programs]. My experience when I worked at some of my student internship hours

was at the [name] college. There were 20 students in there [with a few clinical

facility] and I was one of them. And we'd have to get 20 hours a week because we

were trying to get all those hours, but there wasn't enough work for 20 kids

[student athletic trainers] to do all that. So we would just sit . . . We didn't learn a

lot: we sat . . . That wasn't a good thing.

Trusted advisors. All nine participants referenced mentoring as a significant or influential factor in helping them to develop career goals. The participants were asked to describe how academic advisors, athletic staff, faculty members, mentors, or anyone else influenced them in developing athletic training career goals. Each participant recounted trusted advisors or mentors who were their academic advisors, assistant or head athletic trainers, assistant curriculum directors, clinical internship instructors, faculty members, professional colleagues, and program directors. Two participants mentioned the importance of mentoring in the wake of choosing to pursue an athletic training career. One participant recalled a high school mentor as the most influential advisor along her career path.

Concerning how faculty or mentor interactions helped her to develop athletic training career goals, Erin decisively remarked:

> I wouldn't be where I am today without the education I received at the [type] college . . . and certainly not without the interactions that I had through grad school as far as really more mentorship and role models . . . The assistant athletic trainer at [name] College during the last year I was there . . . she had a pretty profound influence: just affirming that this [athletic training] was something I could do.

Echoing Erin's sentiments, Kenzie commented on having "two big mentors," who were both "very strong women." She recalled one mentor from both her undergraduate and graduate programs who had held either the assistant curricular directorship or the head

athletic training position at large, prestigious football schools. From Kenzie's vantage point, "they gave me the confidence to move forward and to kind of take charge . . . you know, to have a leadership position."

When questioned further about having a particular career strategy that guided her to a collegiate leadership position, Annie did not refer to a program or specific goal. Instead, she recalled, "Yeah. He [head athletic trainer mentor] steered me into grad school, which I really appreciated." Annie spoke sparingly about what her mentor might have observed about her skills as an athletic training student, mentioning that he, her head athletic trainer mentor, must have thought her grades were good. Still, she specifically recalled her mentor's encouraging words: "he's [head athletic trainer mentor] like, 'I think you could do this you know. You can make it in this world [athletic training].'" Chaise did not pause when recounting how her mentors influenced her decision to pursue an athletic training career. She energetically shared:

> Actually, I think if it weren't for the program director's influence, I would have never been allowed in the [athletic training] program to begin with. Because the head athletic trainer at the time was not a big fan of athletes being athletic trainers and because of the time commitment involved. And she [program director] kind of was that supporter initially and got me in the [athletic training] program: certainly her. The head athletic trainer, [name], was very good at his job and definitely gave us great skills and the education was top notch . . . So I would say definitely the undergraduate level had more of the mentor-type situation with both the program director and the head athletic trainer at the time.

Three of the four participants have mentioned having women mentors, except for Annie, who had a male mentor. Chaise indicated having both female and male mentors, but without the advocacy and support of the female mentor, Chaise believed she "would never have been allowed in the program to begin with."

Concerning Tess's mentor experiences, she had primarily worked with male contact sports in various arenas, competitive levels, and geographic regions (i.e., domestic and international). Looking back on those experiences, Tess remarked, "Mentors I think are invaluable." She further expressed:

> When I went through undergrad, we did a little coursework but most of my educational work was the mentorship, which I did in my graduate program. The head athletic trainer there took me under his wing and further molded me, molded my ideas. So it wasn't necessarily the coursework; it was the people that I met.

Although Lyndi had already decided to pursue athletic training, she still referred to her mentor as being influential throughout her career. Lyndi explicated:

> Yes, I had a mentor when I was an undergraduate student, and I would consider that person still a mentor today . . . I've always been able to go back to her and talk to her, and we've kept that [mentor-mentee relationship]. So I talk to her pretty frequently [two to three times per quarter] . . . I would say that she pushed me to be an athletic trainer though I'd already decided that [pursuing an athletic training career]. Similar to Lyndi's experience above, Bryn recalled, "Once I got into the program of athletic training in my undergrad work, I felt like faculty and mentor [academic advisor] folks became very important to me."

As mentioned in the internships or graduate assistantships section, Drew's career path in athletic training began when she connected with a mentor at the graduate level. Upon reflection, she divulged, "I didn't actually feel like I was mentored very well as an undergrad." Drew added she had, "mentors along the way in different internships that just helped me in different [athletic training] components: be it you know, in a PT [physical therapy] clinic with my rehab skills." Like Annie's mentor helped her, Jaime claimed, "She [undergrad head athletic trainer] kind of helped me see why that one [educational route] would be the best for me. So I guess she probably was [a mentor]. My high school athletic trainer was probably the biggest mentor."

Three subthemes of program contributions, internships or graduate assistantships, and trusted advisors emerged from the primary theme of higher education experiences and preparations. The findings revealed that to some extent, all nine participants perceived their higher educational programs contributed to helping them to develop career goals and achieve a U.S. collegiate sport leadership positions. Four of the nine participants expressed mixed perspective about how higher education athletic training programs assisted them in developing goals for achieving U.S. collegiate leadership. Eight of the nine participants indicated that their internship or graduate assistantships prepared them to achieve an athletic training career and U.S. collegiate leadership position. All nine participants referenced mentoring as a significant or influential factor in helping them to develop career goals.

Research Question 2: Higher Education's Role in Breaking Barriers

To understand better the challenges that female head athletic trainers faced, I

attended to the participants' perceptions about how U.S. higher education experiences informed their capacity to overcome barriers to achieving their U.S. collegiate leadership positions. Themes emerged from individual experiences consisting of the participants' *experiences of challenges or barriers*, *the male-dominated sport world*, *assistance with breaking barriers*, and *adequate educational preparation* to overcome barriers.

Experiences of challenges or barriers. The experiences of challenges or barriers theme emerged from the participants' perceived general athletic training career and U.S. collegiate or professional leadership roles. While this theme could be broken down into subthemes, the issue of gender, as a background identity, played multiple roles in the participants' lives, making it difficult to separate it from other challenges or barriers that the participants described. Adding to gender and age biases, the participants identified gender as the primary underlying career barrier that influenced multiple interactions across intersectional settings. These biases included, but were not limited to, proving athletic training competence, interactions with male coaches or male athletic directors or male university administrators, being allowed to work with male sport teams, and being ignored as female athletic trainers while working with male sport teams. Furthermore, the theme of experiences of challenges or barriers encompasses gender biases described above.

All nine participants described experiences of gender bias while either in pursuit of an athletic training career or while leading U.S. collegiate or professional athletic training programs. Three of the nine participants identified the career barriers of gender and age, with one participant who specifically described age as primary career barrier in

her leadership position at a U.S. university athletic training sport program.

Bryn had held the assistant athletic trainer position at her university for several years. She indicated that when the head athletic trainer to whom she reported vacated his position, she applied for promotion to that position. Despite her diverse experience and years of service, the athletic director decided to eliminate the head athletic training position, replacing it with two assistant athletic trainer positions. Bryn remained in her position though with a substantially increased salary and the athletic director hired a male assistant athletic trainer to fill the second position. Ironically, despite Bryn's salary increase and the hiring of another fulltime employee, the university and athletic director's rationale for eliminating the head athletic trainer position was that the title came with a salary they could not afford to pay. When asked about the rationale for eliminating the head athletic trainer position, Bryn replied, "They [university and athletic director] say it's because the title comes with a salary that they cannot afford to pay." Bryn further conveyed:

> I still feel like my athletic director has a slightly skewed view of me because I just feel like I'm still battling that male/female gender difference in head athletic training. I kind of feel like if I was a male assistant at the time that the other head athletic trainer left, I would have slid right into the head [athletic trainer] position without any issues . . . So I kind of feel like because I was female that they decided—he decided—that we weren't going to have a head [athletic trainer] position.

Bryn's perceived experiences of gender bias touch upon gendered hiring practices

that Jaime also felt she had experienced. After working as an assistant athletic trainer several years at a large football university, Jaime spoke about an opportunity to apply for a head athletic training position at this university. She recalled:

> They [university and athletic administrators] pretty much wanted a male to work there: for a male to be in the head [athletic training] position. Because the head [athletic trainer] would work football, they did not want to have a female working football. And whether it was said or not said, they ended up hiring someone that was three years younger than me to come in . . . So the fact I had three more years of experience didn't really serve because this other guy just happened to have the right title, be the right gender, and so he got the position.

Somewhat akin to Bryn's experiences, Jaime intimated that having the right title does not necessarily equal the right leadership experience. As a graduate who had attended and worked at a large, prestigious university, she had gained extensive experience with football. However, she had not yet been hired as a head athletic trainer. Although she was working as an assistant with the goal of professional advancement into leadership, the athletic director used the lack of a head athletic trainer title as a reason for dissuading her from applying and then, for not hiring her. When questioned about potential reasons for having faced this barrier to professional advancement, Jamie felt that being confident and assertive, as a woman, could have been viewed as negative traits. She elaborated:

> I think I have the ability to be a good athletic trainer and to run an effective program. But because I am a young head athletic trainer—I think if I was male—I honestly don't believe that I would be viewed as thinking I'm getting something

before I have earned it. Even females have told me that sometimes: 'you haven't

done anything yet. You're still young. I don't know why you think that you

should be going for this head [athletic trainer] position.' And I kind of look at

them and I go, 'Well, at what point is it appropriate? I was certified at a young

age, and I'm now older. Eight years is a long time in a profession: a long time.

And then to be going to a smaller school to become a leader: at what point am I

good enough to become a leader?'

Jaime further explained that if an athletic trainer waits too long, she could not be viewed

as anything other than an assistant athletic trainer. If an athletic trainer pursues a

leadership position too soon, then she would not have the experience. Jaime concluded, "I

think I just have a passion for it [athletic training] and I think I have a drive. And I think

that sometimes it does not sit well with some men and even some females." The athletic

director that dissuaded her from applying for the head athletic training position and

reportedly hired an inexperienced male was a woman.

Considering Jaime's experiences, Bryn could face such a hiring dilemma if she

elected to apply for a head athletic training position at another college or university.

Jaime disclosed that she had to apply to a much smaller school that was willing to

overlook her lack of a head athletic trainer title to become a head athletic trainer and gain

experience. Both Bryn and Jaime had the choice to either hold on to their assistant

athletic trainer position or to move onward to another school where they could gain

leadership experience. Bryn chose to stay while Jaime decided to leave the university and

accept a head athletic training position as a small school. The small school that offered

Jaime a head athletic training job did not have a football program.

In keeping with hiring practices, Erin also described an experience where she felt hiring practices were skewed towards men by an athletic training staff that consisted primarily of women. Erin recounted:

> The only time that I've felt gender was an issue was when I applied for positions where the staff was predominantly female . . . Or one head athletic trainer was a female and they were looking to hire another co-head athletic trainer and it was probably going to be a guy.

Erin elaborated and shared her belief that both men and women should constitute athletic training staffs. She noted that while there seemed to be many U.S. higher education institutions consisting only of male athletic trainers, there also appeared to be a pendulum sway in the opposite direction where only female athletic trainers formed the staff. Erin concluded her thoughts by admitting: "But you know, I've done the same thing in hiring my staff . . . I really feel it's important that both genders be represented regardless of which one I need to hire . . . So you know, I'm guilty of it as well."

The influence of athletic directors and male coaches surfaced when other participants spoke about challenges they faced while attempting to perform their professional duties. Chaise indicated, "I do think that gender is automatically seen as, you know, as a hindrance by especially the male-dominant sports: something like football." She reflected on how some coaches might perceive female athletic trainers and conveyed:

> You get a coach where you know; they see a female coming in and it's like, 'Oh great. She's not going to understand the sport or she's not an athlete.' You know,

there's gender bias and preconceived notions of a female coming and they're [coaches] thankful for me being an athlete.

Along this same line of thought, Drew shared, "There are challenges with you know, certain male coaches . . . not respecting females." When asked to elaborate on the aforesaid, Drew replied, "I experienced that [gender bias] at the high school level and I experienced that here [university] . . . I can honestly think of one or two coaches where the female aspect, I think, has played a large role."

Similarly, Kenzie had been an accomplished athlete who had worked as a student athletic trainer at a large, prestigious university, and who led athletic training programs for semi-professional sport teams. Despite her career experiences, she claimed, "the only setback I have had was working with an old-school coach: an older coach, myself being young and female. That seemed to be a little difficult. I was here longer than he was." When asked if she felt that the coach's bias was due to both her age and gender, Kenzie replied, "I think it was more so because I was female . . . Um [pause], you know I think, I mean, I think he [older coach] was or he is more comfortable with my male counterpart just because he's male." Kenzie later revealed that she worked with her university's football team for only a short period until the athletic director could hire a male athletic trainer to work with the coach. So the older coach created a hostile and unwelcoming environment for a female head athletic trainer, which resulted in her barring her from working with the team. Also, the athletic director's decision to hire a male athletic trainer with football experience reinforced stereotypes of incompetent female athletic trainers thus, maintaining an all-male athletic team environment.

The expressed experiences from Bryn, Jaime, Erin, Chaise, Drew, and Kenzie point to institutional gendered hiring practices. When the participants' athletic backgrounds, postsecondary credentials, athletic training football experience, and extensive qualifications were overlooked or ignored, their U.S. higher education institutions engaged in gendered hiring practices. In Kenzie's case, she was automatically disqualified from carrying out her job responsibilities with a male football team based solely on the fact that she was a woman.

Jaime, Annie, and Lyndi felt they experienced either gender or age bias or both as career barriers while pursuing an athletic training career or leading a U.S. collegiate athletic training program. I noted earlier that Jaime had perceived gender as a greater career barrier than age when seeking a head athletic training position. When Annie began working on her graduate degree, she recalled age as a significant career barrier for both her and another female classmate:

> [We were] by far the youngest . . . And we were ostracized because of our age from the rest of the students there. They [university faculty and staff] told us we didn't belong because we didn't have any life experience. I do remember that. And that was from the females [faculty or staff members] [loudly] who were older. It wasn't a female [gender bias] thing; it was age discrimination on the other side. It's like, 'You guys are too young and you don't belong here.' I do remember age discrimination from everybody.

In keeping with gender and age bias, Lyndi noted that with very few women in her university athletic department, the workplace environment was predominantly male.

While she did not view a male-dominated work environment as negative, she did mention that it was "just a different culture." Moreover, she perceived age and gender as significant barriers that she dealt with when accepting the head athletic trainer position at her university. After several years in the head athletic trainer role, these age and gender barriers lingered such that at the time of this study, she was still attempting to resolve. Lyndi explained:

> So when you move into a small school setting with people who have been doing the same job for many years—that was probably the hardest thing for me and I'm still overcoming it honestly—is being female but not only female, but being someone who's only been practicing athletic training for 6 years. So I would say being young and being female are the two hardest things I've had to overcome and I'm still working to overcome. And as time passes, it gets easier because we learn about each other and we learn how to work with each other and it [social acceptance] grows.

Seven of the nine participants touched on the need to demonstrate their intellectual ability and athletic training competence to athletic directors and coaches. Of these seven participants, four emphasized the importance of proving that they were well-qualified athletic training professionals who could work with any male sport team. Chaise had expressed in the above section, "you get a coach where you know, they see a female coming in and it's like, 'Oh great. She's not going to understand the sport or she's not an athlete." This reported presumption from male coaches of males teams reinforce stereotypes of female athletic trainers as intellectually inferior and physically

incompetent to handle the job prior to their arrival on the field of play.

Annie recounted earlier years at the high school level where she had to deal with numerous catastrophic injuries and had to pass through the male locker facility to access the athletic training room. When passing through the men's locker facility, Annie was exposed to teenage boys and adult men dressing and undressing on a daily basis. Aside from other matters, Annie reported, "They [football coaches] saw how I handled it [catastrophic injuries and locker room passage] and was just professional, and I did my job." Annie admitted that over an entire year, she had moved briskly through locker room with her head down and eyes affront. She remembered being asked to stand outside the locker room while football coaches shouted expletives at players during game halftimes. Annie further explained that she kept to herself because coaches did not communicate with her. Perhaps because in the end she surmised, "I was a safe professional."

When reflecting back on her career, Annie elaborated on who or what assisted her in overcoming such challenges and concluded, "You keep it professional and you work hard. And I don't think you have to work harder, you just work well. And then your work is respected once everybody knows what you can do." I asked Annie if she felt she had to prove herself and she energetically replied, "Definitely at the high school: yeah [Laugh]. I had to prove that I knew what I was doing."

While considering challenges faced in the pursuit of an athletic training career, Bryn interjected the term "equality" and commented, "I hate that word. Equality is dumb. I don't want special treatment because I'm a girl and I don't want to be treated differently because I'm not a man." Directly following, Bryn intensely expressed:

So I feel like you should just base me on my professionalism and the way I act

and the way I talk to you . . . And how I perform and just you know, completely

be blind to what you see and just take a look at how I do my job. And so I know

that it's a lot to ask but in this day and age, it's much more prevalent to see a

woman in a leadership roles and it's much more respected.

When Bryn was asked about how many women leaders there were in her athletic

department, she replied, "Zero." And when asked about how many women were

employed in her athletic department, Bryn mentioned one other woman beside herself.

Tess spoke about challenges she had experienced during her career and recounted

one instance when she wanted to work with the collegiate football team as a student

athletic trainer. She explained that the university did not support her in this quest but

eventually had to permit her access and opportunity that all other student athletic trainers

were afforded. Notwithstanding her willingness to work hard and accept the challenge of

demonstrating her skills, she recounted:

I performed the menial jobs, and nobody would teach me anything. So I started

hitting the books hard, whatever I could get or find, and reading them on my own

time. I observed how they [athletic trainers] worked and learned as much as I

could. And when the athletic training staff finally recognized my commitment and

determination, they began working with me.

To an extent, Tess echoed Bryn's notions of what it takes for female athletic

trainers to be recognized for their skills, work ethic, and intellectual capacity. Bryn had

expressed a desire for others to observe her working hard, performing well and to

evaluate her based on merit and professionalism. Again, throughout Tess's interview, she repeatedly spoke about the importance of determination and perseverance and a desire to work hard to achieve goals. Tess did admit that this early career experience, as described above, was not an easy path but then again, she asserted, "I'm a determined person."

Two of the nine participants in this study described early career experiences in which male athletic administrators, head and assistant athletic trainers, and male coaches who oversaw football would not communicate with them. Considering Tess's comments in the previous section, she had indicated that the athletic administration tried to get her to quit by assigning her to menial jobs. She also recalled having to receive orders from younger student athletic trainers because the head athletic trainer and staff members would not speak to her. She recounted how the university and athletic administrators disregarded her, ignoring that she was present. The head athletic trainer reportedly refused to teach or instruct her about athletic training although she was a student in the educational setting. When asked to further explain this experience, Tess indicated that several stakeholders had played a role in giving her the silent treatment including the U.S. higher education institution, university administration, athletic director, head athletic trainer, student athletic trainers, the head football coach, and male football assistant coaches.

Along a similar vein, Annie was in her first year as a head athletic trainer when she was hired at both a local high school and university. While some portion of the challenges she faced were mentioned in the previous section, Annie further explained:

I got the job at a local high school . . . as their head athletic trainer because the gal

before me had been fired. They [athletic administration] didn't want a female . . .

but there was nobody else, so I was available. They did hire me because it was

close to football season: they had no choice really. I didn't know this backstory

[firing of the female predecessor] until like, a year later. I did wonder why,

though, the coaches, the football coaches wouldn't talk to me that whole first

year. I thought, 'what is wrong with me? Why is nobody like, nicer?' You know?

And I didn't know until the end of the first year that they [coaches] were told not

to talk to me because the last female had gotten into some trouble. And so they

[athletic director and school] just said, 'If you have a female coming in, just don't

speak to her. You know, stay away from her. Don't talk to her.' No problem kind

of thing. I'm like, 'Really, I didn't know that' [Laughing].

Noteworthy is that Annie's reference to the "trouble" with the former female

employee was never disclosed. From Annie's report, her presence in the male domain of

football negatively altered the behavior of the entire athletic department. Prior to stepping

into the position, she had already been targeted as a threat and instead of men having to

demonstrate professionalism; it was Annie who had to prove her capacity to be

professional. However, at the end of the first year, the athletic administration and coaches

had started a positive relationship with Annie that extended years beyond her work at the

school. The last comment that Annie made about this particular career barrier was, "You

change the whole environment of the place by stepping through those doors." Annie's

final remark begs of the question: what would or could happen if more female head

athletic trainers would walk through such doors?

In contrast to blatant disregard of female head athletic trainers by U.S. higher educational administrators and its athletic departments, Tess shred instances of exemplary support. Such support was exhibited by a group of young collegiate football men who ensured the safety of Tess, their head athletic trainer, during her early years while they traveled through high crime and racist regions and faced teams that were unwelcoming to women. Tess recalled:

> Very early in my career, there was no place for me to go to the bathroom because once I came in [athletic facility], the [football] guys would surround me. They would surround me so nobody could see me—to get in the dressing room—and I couldn't leave. So if I had to go to the bathroom, I'd just tell them, 'I need to go,' and one of the linemen would stand in front of the toilet so I could go to the bathroom. Yeah, everywhere we went the team would surround me . . . If I needed to dress, sometimes they would surround me facing outward so I could dress. You know, I was in those sorts of situations.

The male-dominated sport world. The male-dominated sport world emerged from all of the nine participants' perceived experiences of working in the profession of athletic training. The role of gender filtered into the participants' experiences such that they felt the need to educate U.S. university administrators, faculty members, athletic associations (i.e., NAIA and NCAA), and the National Athletic Trainers' Association on equal standards of health care for student-athletes and resource allocations. This education was viewed as necessary to reduce their perceived need to fight for equal standards of health care for student-athletes, resources, and equal opportunities to work

with all sport teams, and professional respect.

Three of the nine participants mentioned the need to educate faculty members, university administrators, athletic directors, and the national organization that represents their profession. When describing barriers encountered while coaching and leading a U.S. collegiate athletic training program, Annie conveyed, "I felt we got it [backlash] more in coaching, fighting for the right to salaries." She pointed out awareness about the need to talk by recalling:

> I remember the conversation I had with the same Dean, you know, 'Oh, we
> should have the same salaries as the male coaches and the same equipment, and
> same budget.' And I remember his words to me were, 'Well, women don't want
> to sweat.' So he thought the practices were really low level, you know, that we
> just had fun out there. I said, 'Oh, no, no. This is a very competitive program.' So
> it was educating the Dean here [university] even as to what competitive sports
> were here for women back then.

When considering reasons for experiencing barriers while leading a U.S. collegiate athletic training program, Drew quickly highlighted the need to educate the university administrators, athletic department, and the National Athletic Trainers' Association that represented all members and the profession. Drew perceived the need to educate the above personnel and organizations due to the:

> Lack of understanding: there was a lack of knowledge. There wasn't a strong
> foundation of sports medicine here at this university. And so there were
> challenges in educating personnel about what appropriate coverage [medical

treatment] was, how many staff [members] we should have and so on and so

forth: policies and procedures that should be established. On the national level,

with our organization [NATA], it was similar. It was ignorance in understanding.

My philosophy was always that the standard of care . . . should be same for the

health and safety of the student-athlete. And so just a lot of ignorance and

education I would say were [reasons for challenges].

Reportedly, Drew's response raises the question of how the national organization that

represents athletic trainers at NAIA and NCAA schools does not know about the unequal

standard of health care provided for student-athletes. This issue also has huge

implications when considering that the NATA created professional athletic training

education programs and established the standards of health care in U.S. institutions of

higher education nationwide.

Considering the challenges faced while leading a U.S. collegiate athletic training

program, Tess also pointed to a lack of understanding among university faculty members.

While not all U.S. higher education institutions have professional athletic training

education programs, many do offer athletic training education programs that offer core

courses. Since faculty members handle educating students who pursue a degree in athletic

training, it thus follows that faculty are responsible for providing quality education for all

students and athletes who desire an athletic training career. Tess explained that her

university did have an athletic training department but did not have an athletic training

education program. She also pointed out that many sports medicine students at her

university were not fully cognizant of what athletic training is or what to expect of

athletic trainers.

At the time of this study, only Chaise, Kenzie, and Lyndi had attended an U.S. undergraduate or graduate university where a professional athletic training education program existed. The other six participants predated the implementation of such U.S. collegiate educational programs and had to take courses via other college or university departments. At the time of this study, seven of the nine participants were leading U.S. collegiate athletic training programs where no formal professional athletic training education program existed. Lyndi was the only participant who was in the process and nearing successful implementation of such a professional program at her university. I noted above that other U.S. postsecondary institutions exist where the athletic training education curriculum must draw on faculty from several departments. These interdisciplinary departments reach across academic fields of anatomy, physiology, exercise physiology, leadership, nutrition, physiology, sport conditioning, and sports medicine that are standard in the athletic training curriculum. When asking Tess about the role faculty members, mentors, or career networks played in her collegiate head athletic training career, she remarked:

> Oh, gosh. Faculty members: I'm still training them as to what an athletic trainer is
> and how I can help some of them and how we can work together. They don't
> quite understand. So that's a challenge that I'm working on as we speak.

Reflecting on the demographics section of this analysis, I mentioned that three of the nine participants were introduced to athletic training in high school. Four of the nine participants learned about the profession by completing a career interest survey, taking a

sports medicine course, hearing a family member or friend speak about the profession or observing other student athletic trainers on a practice field. Two of the nine participants pursued a physical therapy degree but changed their program emphasis to athletic training once they learned that the career existed. Jaime was introduced to athletic training in high school and was the only participant who indicated that she knew at the age of 14 years that she wanted to be an athletic trainer. Considering that the participant's athletic training leadership spans from 3 to 17 years, Annie, Drew, and Tess specifically identified the need to continue educating U.S. athletic directors, university administrators, faculty members, sport associations, and the National Athletic Trainers' Association about athletic trainers, women's athletics, resource allocation, and healthcare standards for women's collegiate sport programs, especially national championship sport events. Because of educating U.S. university administrators and regional or national athletic organizations, Annie and Drew reported improvements in resource allocation and standards of health care for student-athletes across time.

One challenge or barrier that the seven of the nine participants reported to some degree or another was the exclusiveness of male contact sports. Four of the nine participants pointed out the need for athletic training education programs to allow for mandatory sport rotation assignments so women could gain hands-on experience with male contact sport teams. Other participants felt that female athletic trainers should be afforded the same opportunities as men athletic trainers to work with male sports in general. Three of the nine participants specifically shared their opinions or experiences about the exclusive nature of the male-dominated sport world. During Annie's interview,

the issue of traditional athletic training sport assignments surfaced (i.e., female head athletic trainers working with women's sports and men athletic trainers working with men's sport). I asked Annie if she felt that the traditional assignments had evolved across time into barriers that excluded female head athletic trainers from working with male sport teams (i.e., football and basketball). Annie did not pause and vehemently expressed:

> Absolutely! I certainly think you're going to see more men athletic trainers working with women's [sports] programs. But, trying to find female athletic trainers that work with men's [sport] programs is very rare even today. But the other way around, no, [athletic training] men work with female [sports teams] all the time. But trying to get a female into a men's dominated world, I think it's such a hard barrier to break through.

Considering her postsecondary clinical graduate assistantship experiences, Jaime reflected on one prime reason for selecting and attending a reputable university that was known for its internship opportunities with high profile football teams within the local area. She spiritedly recounted:

> I think I've definitely seen gender biases and gender play out. Kind of how I've seen it in the past was coming out of graduate school with [university] or with a football position. That GA [graduate assistantship] position almost always if not assured you an internship with one of the two local professional football teams. I was told, in no uncertain terms, 'they don't accept female applications at all so you're not going to get those.' So I was the first to not get that position [internship with a professional football team] after working football at that school

[university].

As Annie expressed above, "trying to get a female into a male dominated world, I think it's such a hard barrier to break through." In Jaime's case, the university that recruited certified athletic trainers on the basis of offering male professional football internships was unable, according to Jaime, to bring that goal to fruition.

Bryn detailed how a U.S. male baseball coach insisted that she should not be stationed in the dugout. She described how the male baseball coach would make inappropriate comments that pertained to her physical characteristics. Bryn shared, "one of the statements was, 'You're too cute to be in the dugout.' So Bryn explained that she went to the school administrator and when she spoke to him about the inappropriate comments, Bryn related:

> And the [administrator], when I spoke to him about it, he leaned back in his chair, put his hands on the back of his head, and he said, 'Well, you know the truth be told, if you were as ugly as a string of suckers, you wouldn't be having this problem' [laughs].

So Bryn further conveyed that going to the administration did not help her because the administrator acted the same way. Although I included Bryn's comments earlier in this analysis, it bears repeating: Bryn reported that she was the only woman in the U.S. university athletic department other than a secretary. When asking her about who or what assisted her with overcoming challenges or barriers in her career, Bryn explained:

> I have spoken to the university president before and he of course, takes a very objective role . . . But I feel like going to these folks outside of my athletic

director you know, I'm just getting their perception and seeing how they feel. And they're all men. All of these people are men . . . I have no women to reach towards to ask because that might be an interesting perception: is having a woman to go to in more of a leadership role. But, there aren't any. So I kind of feel like I'm sort of battling, you know, uphill.

Two of these three participants who reported their perceived experiences, as will be included later in this analysis, were the only participants who believed it was important to educate both women and men athletic trainers on gender, gender biases, and gender roles. One participant specifically felt that women would benefit by being taught about their underrepresentation and exclusion from male sport teams in the profession of athletic training.

Assistance with breaking barriers. Eight of nine participants mentioned mentors and educational colleagues when describing who or what assisted them in overcoming barriers they encountered while pursuing an athletic training career or a U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership position. Again, the significance of trusted advisors who helped the participants to development career goals surfaced as academic advisors, athletic directors, athletic training colleagues, faculty departmental chairs, professional colleagues within networks, and the university administrators as a whole. Notably seven of the nine participants who mentioned trusted advisors did, at some point in their interview, refer to them as mentors, however; three indicated that these mentors were not dedicated or consistent. Drew did not feel that she had faced significant challenges or barriers when pursuing her career goals. One other participant, Bryn, revealed that her

mentor had been a family member who, at the time of this study, had passed away just months before her interview. I included her comments in the previous section pertaining to other mentors that she reported when describing challenges and barriers in her career. She later shared that the family member had also been a public leader in the community and was instrumental in helping her to develop and grow, and to maintain a balanced perspective early in her collegiate leadership role.

Drawing on her reported experiences of having to educate U.S. university administrators and athletic organizations, Drew described the assistance she received from her university athletic director and the Dean of Students. She also shared:

Ultimately, the president was influential in financially supporting things [requests for staff, resources and improvement in standards of care] . . . And then similarly our liaisons at the [athletic association], the people that were medical liaisons, and the board approving and supporting what [proposals] we presented to them.

Directing attention to a long-time sports medicine partner, Erin immediately recalled who assisted her in overcoming career challenges or barriers and explained, "I think the colleague that I've worked with the last [number] of years. Absolutely, he has been the one that's pushed and helped me to overcome most of the issues that I've had." In the gender and age bias section, it was noted that Kenzie had faced the challenge of gender bias when working with an older football coach. When responding to who or what assisted her in overcoming challenges, Kenzie replied, "My athletic director . . . He was very supportive: anytime I needed him, he was there . . . I felt 100% supported by him."

Other participants specifically mentioned the importance of mentors who had

helped them to navigate barriers they encountered throughout their careers. As Jaime recounted:

> I think talking with other females [head athletic trainers] . . . I am also the senior woman administrator here. So that, to me, has almost been more helpful for learning how to be in this leadership role and how to kind of battle the daily battles of being a female leader . . . we have to be leaders, and we have to be mentors and we have to be supportive of each other.

When considering those who assisted her in breaking barriers, Tess did not hesitate to mention three men who helped her to overcome career challenges by recounting:

> Well, there were three people actually in different steps in my career. In the beginning, it was my head athletic trainer at [undergraduate university]. As I moved on, it was my head athletic trainer at [graduate university]. And then it was my head athletic trainer at [professional football level].

Concerning implementing the first U.S. athletic training education program within her state, Annie recalled reaching out to neighboring U.S. university athletic training colleagues because of how the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) "made it so insanely hard to get through [the accreditation process] back then." She also shared that long-term friendships developed among the head athletic trainers who worked so diligently to implement athletic training education programs while trying to "jump through [the difficulties of accreditation] at the same time." When Annie was asked if the NATA helped the program directors to navigate successfully to implement the new

athletic training education programs, she replied, "The NATA didn't offer help . . . we were rookies going to the same conferences, and [asking each other], 'How do you get through this? How?' [Laughing] and we would commiserate together . . . and we supported each other."

Without hesitation, Lyndi directed attention first to a long-term mentor and secondly, to an academic colleague at her U.S. university. She spoke affectionately about who had helped her to navigate the barriers of gender and age bias that she encountered when accepting the university's athletic training leadership position. Lyndi explained:

> Honestly, I think two people come to mind: one, my mentor who was my undergraduate academic advisor and also my academic boss . . . the two people I would say that have really influenced me and really helped me grow are my mentor and then, my . . . department chair in kinesiology.

Taking time to reflect on her career, Chaise asserted, "I haven't had any issues. I've always been the head athletic trainer, and I haven't had any kickback [backlash] as far as from organizations or administrations." When considering other potential career challenges, Chaise added, "I've had a few coaches that were difficult to work with. But usually once they figure out that you're good at your job, they are easier to work with at that point." When asked to describe who or what had assisted her in overcoming barriers to her career, Chaise indicated, "Perseverance, communication definitely. The better you communicate with coaches and administration, the easier things are." She also noted how beneficial her undergraduate and graduate programs were in teaching her the core athletic training and providing hands-on clinical education. Thus, the didactic and clinical

education also assisted her in overcoming challenges she might have faced in her career.

In the introduction of this section, I included Bryn's comments about a personal family member who had assisted her in overcoming career challenges and barriers. At the U.S. collegiate level, Bryn recalled that the athletic administration was not willing to offer her the head athletic training title. At the high school level, she mentioned that principal and athletic administrator supported the male baseball coach who had reportedly made inappropriate comments concerning her physical appearance. When asked about who or what assisted her in overcoming career challenges or barriers, Bryn shared, "It used to be a family member . . . but [this family member] passed away in [month], so [this family member] hasn't been around for me to do that [share complaints, talk about situations, and get advice]." Bryn also explained that she had spoken with her U.S. university president whom she reported as being objective and that the only people she could go to, whether within or outside of the athletic department, were men. Outside of the university, Bryn indicated that she frequently communicated with other female head athletic trainers.

Adequate educational preparation. Adequate educational preparation emerged from the participants' perceived experiences of the role that higher education played in preparing them to overcome challenges or barriers to their athletic training leadership success. To some extent, all nine reported that transitioning into a U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership role was not an easy task. The multiple roles gender played in the participants' lives made it quite difficult at times to separate their foreground professional medical expertise from the background identity of gender. That is; automatic sex-

categorization of the participants' gender often overshadows other identity traits such as skilled or competent or athletic trainer. Gender will almost always push an individual's collective identity attributes such as age, race, or qualifications into the background where these attributes will remain as long as gender is what others see first or in the foreground. When considering how U.S. higher education institutions prepared the participants to navigate through challenges and break barriers, four of the nine participants indicated that their programs did prepare them. Three of the nine participants reported that U.S. higher education institutions helped to prepare them in some ways. Two of the nine participants expressed that U.S. higher education institutions did not prepare them to overcome barriers to achieving U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership positions.

The participants who indicated that U.S. higher education institutions did help them to overcome career barriers while leading a U.S. collegiate athletic training program were Bryn, Chaise, Kenzie, and Lyndi. Bryn felt that college prepared her for any endeavor she desired to achieve. Chaise recalled the knowledge she acquired both in the classroom and applied clinical assignments with different teams. Kenzie once more reflected on her mentors and how much they helped to boost her confidence as an athletic trainer. Lyndi went further and explained:

> Well, I think the biggest thing was the fact that my degree was in leadership. So my master's degree really prepared me for the different avenues that I could experience as a leader—the different things, the different people and how they might respond, and the emphasis that was placed on personality and strengths and

then, how to deal with conflict, confrontation, and that kind of thing—they

[program instructors] put a lot of emphasis on developing people.

The participants who indicated that U.S. higher education institutions helped to

prepare them in some ways to lead a U.S. collegiate athletic training program were

Annie, Erin, and Jaime. Annie mentioned her goal to become a clinical athletic trainer

and that her master's program aligned well to help her reach that goal. However, she also

recalled how higher education did not provide preparation to jump into a male-dominated

role or establish expectations for what she would be doing once she became an athletic

trainer. Jaime reflected on her graduate program and felt that it indirectly helped her to

gain more insight into what it was like to be a woman in the athletic training world. She

also mentioned that she learned new ways of thinking about how athletic training could

be done and honed her rehab skills in multifarious ways. Erin elaborated on experiences

and expressed:

> Yes . . . I think the education was a contributing factor . . . I know it alone is not
>
> enough because you have the same people going through the same curriculum,
>
> making different choices and not ending up in leadership positions. So the
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> education in and of itself is not the sole indicator of whether or not you're ready
>
> for a leadership position. I think that you have to have it [education] . . . but there
>
> are other things that are at least as important if not more important: experiences,
>
> mentors, networking, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. I think all of
>
> those are important, if not more so, than the institution itself or the education
>
> itself.

The two participants who indicated that U.S. higher education institutions did not prepare them to overcome career barriers in their collegiate athletic training leadership roles were Kenzie and Tess. Tess straightforwardly claimed, "No, because they [higher education athletic training programs] didn't address the real world." One of the real-world issues that Tess referred to was informing female athletic trainers on what to expect in the athletic training profession. Tess also noted issues of rape, hostile environments created by male coaches, and the unwillingness of U.S. higher education institutions to allow female athletic trainers to earn a living by working with male sports. Kenzie responded by asserting, "I don't think that it [higher education] necessarily helped contribute to [overcoming career challenges or barriers] - honestly, I would have to say no." Kenzie also noted that if women have experience and clinical skills and can apply skills effectively, then U.S. higher education institutions have nothing to do with helping them to break barriers to gain U.S. collegiate leadership roles.

Four subthemes of experiences of challenges or barriers, the male-dominated sport world, assistance with breaking barriers, and adequate educational preparation emerged from the primary theme of higher education's role in breaking barriers. The findings showed that to some degree, all nine participants identified gender bias as a career barrier. Gender overshadowed the participants' professional competence and skills such that they faced stereotypes, exclusionary praxis, questions of competence, and resources from the blatant discrimination in U.S. intuitions of higher education. Four of the nine participants reported that their U.S. higher educational programs adequately prepared them for overcoming barriers in obtaining a collegiate athletic training

leadership role. Two of the nine participants indicated that U.S. higher education institutions did not prepare them to overcome barriers to achieving leadership in U.S. collegiate sport programs.

Research Question 3: Proposing Higher Educational Curricular Reforms

The third research question focused on the participants' propositions for higher education curricular reform, which could lead to augmenting participants' opportunities to achieve U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership roles. Subthemes emerged from individual experiences comprised of the participants' experiences regarding the *mentors and role models*, *networking opportunities*, *experiences and interactions*, *leadership and gender*, and *advice for female athletic trainers*. It is noteworthy to mention that the subthemes had similarities that were overlapping.

Eight of the nine participants' educational programs predated the formalizing of the athletic training education program competencies in 2011 by the National Athletic Trainers' Association (CAATE, 2013). This formalization of program competencies synthesized Clinical Integration Proficiencies (CIP) and integrated knowledge, ability, and clinical or functional decision-making into real-world patient care. For example, the comprehensive nature of such proficiencies such as therapy interventions does not just transpire when a student athletic trainer engages in real-world patient care but rather, therapy interventions may be evaluated across various interactions with the same patient. The subthemes thus (e.g., mentors and role models, networking opportunities, experiences and interactions, and leadership and gender) overlap in the participants' expressed experiences within postsecondary classrooms, training rooms, laboratories, and

sport team assignments. The participants also noted that these proficiencies were further developed in the clinical internship requirements via sport team assignments at high schools, colleges, and sports medicine clinical settings.

Bryn and Kenzie did not feel that higher educational coursework should or needs to change to enhance participants' opportunities to achieve a collegiate athletic training sport leadership role.

Mentors and role models. The instrumental role of mentors emerged once more along with the importance of role models. Six of the nine participants felt that incorporating either mentors and role models or both, whether at undergraduate or graduate levels, could enhance U.S. athletic training education programs and credentialing. Three of the six participants felt that including mentorships would be most beneficial while the other three participants believed that implementing both mentorships and role models was also important. The importance of mentors occurred most frequently, with the expression role models only mentioned by Erin and Jaime. However, after gaining further clarification, Erin reported that both mentors and role models would help to enhance U.S. higher education institutional athletic training education program curricula.

Role models can be anyone that a student athletic trainer admires and desires to emulate. The student athletic trainer does not need to be acquainted with the role model just as the role model does not need to be acquainted with the student athletic trainer. A mentor, however, is active in guiding student athletic trainers, either with life pursuits or with particular career, employment, or educational goals.

All participants mentioned having at least one mentor at some point in their careers. The participants spoke about mentors who had fostered experiential learning and offered effective management strategies and relationships with them as inexperienced students or employees. The participants noted that mentors also facilitated professional development, which benefited both them as students or employees and the educational institution. The participants characterized their mentor(s) as men and women who incorporated psychosocial reinforcement including counsel, career networking, challenge, acceptance, guidance, and motivation. At the time of this study, seven of nine participants recalled maintaining contact with initial mentors from the time of entering an athletic training career to achieving a leadership role, and beyond. Four of the seven participants reported that they had maintained their mentor-mentee relationship throughout their careers and further described their mentor's role in helping them to develop professionally was invaluable.

Throughout her interview and the context of leadership experiences and professional growth, Drew mentioned the importance of *mentors* 23 times. When asked about how higher education programs and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities, Drew suggested:

> I think what [student athletic trainers] need is to get a mentor. Get someone and get mentors in a variety of ways. Get a personal mentor or get a professional mentor, and just to continue to be involved in the [athletic training] network with different people that can be resources to you as you progress.

At the time of this study, Drew, who had extensive collegiate head athletic

training experience, was asked if she had a mentor. She replied, "No I don't. Well, not a

dedicated one. I'd say my boss [athletic director] is a mentor, but that's something we've

talked about and I have a couple of people I go to [for guidance]." I asked Drew if she

would want a mentor, and she spiritedly exclaimed, "Oh yes, absolutely. Yes." At the

beginning of Drew's leadership career in U.S. collegiate athletic training, she was quite

young and securing a mentor was her priority. As she reported, "I asked for a mentor, and

they [university] didn't have any." After numerous years of leading her U.S. university's

athletic training program, Drew claimed, "it's a work in progress."

As seven of the nine participants at the time of this study, Lyndi also worked in a

male-dominated university where both athletic and academic departments were

predominantly male. When asked about how U.S. higher education institutional programs

and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership

proficiencies and opportunities, Lyndi suggested:

> One thing that institutions could do or be encouraged to do is to have a
>
> mentorship program for female faculty members . . . It would be nice to have
>
> another female faculty member who is kind of doing the same things [applied
>
> athletic training duties] you've been doing but been doing them for longer
>
> [periods].

When recounting the importance of mentoring, Tess provided an example that

attended to the balance of challenging and supporting student athletic trainers. She

believed, "Mentoring is going to be your best way . . . We need to take these young

women under our wing and tell them, 'Hey, you're doing great: continue the way you're

going.' And put challenges in front of them."

Annie spoke about the importance of learning from female athletic trainer role models who have reached the upper echelons of athletic training leadership (e.g., large big-time or football sport universities and professional men's sport teams). She suggested graduate students and entry-level athletic trainers connect with this handful of women via athletic training conferences or public speaking engagements to gain insight into how they broke barriers to achieving elite sport leadership positions. Annie asserted, "Get them out there saying, 'this is how we did it . . . These were the obstacles, and this is what I did, and this is how I achieved it [elite athletic training position].'" She also noted that if there were only four women in elite athletic training positions then, "They're the only ones [elite athletic trainers] who know how to do it . . . let them start mentoring everybody else." Annie also agreed that women who had achieved elite sport leadership status should help guide others by demystifying the pathways that led to an actualization of career goals.

Jaime suggested that increasing both mentoring and role modeling opportunities would be helpful to female athletic trainers. From a perspective of taking responsibility to mentor others, Jaime asserted, "we have to be leaders, and we have to be mentors . . . and give back to other students who are looking into this [athletic training] profession." Jaime then added, "I think trying to do that and trying just to reach out to other women that have done it [led athletic training programs] and pick their brains."

Erin reflected on potential U.S. higher educational curricular reforms and replied, "I think one of those things [curricular reforms] is encouraging female students [athletic

trainers] to . . . interact with strong female role models. I think that is huge . . . And as leaders in the profession, we have to be open to that." Erin also explained that student athletic trainers often look to and seek out head athletic trainers as role models "to become like us." Erin also explained that the time eventually comes when students realize that they become more completely themselves by merely interacting with female head athletic trainers versus imitating female head athletic trainers.

Networking opportunities. Networking opportunities emerged from five of the nine participants who suggested that developing networks could augment athletic training education programs and credentialing. When asked about how U.S. higher education programs and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities, Bryn remarked:

> You can have professional networking through your [athletic] conference with the different athletic trainers in your league, which I think is super important . . . Schools in our conference have females in leadership roles in athletic training . . . and we do share a lot. We do a lot of communicating.

In reference to educating student athletic trainers on the available resources and professional athletic training support, Erin conveyed, "I think that [information on available resources and professional support] has to be included in whatever curriculum is presented. She also added, "I think they [student athletic trainers] need to . . . have the opportunity to interact with people who are facing the same types of challenges."

Without hesitation, Jaime emphasized that reaching out to women and men head athletic trainers and interacting with them was imperative. As she suggested:

You need to network. You need to get out there and meet people. I think it's also

important because we are still underrepresented; the females need to be told, 'you

need to be seeking out these [leaders] . . . Here are females that have been in

leadership positions. You need to reach out to them, and you need to learn from

them: how to be that leader as a female. You need to be able to network with men

and you need to be able to do all that.'

Kenzie's reported experiences of networking underscored Jamie's expressed

sentiments above. Kenzie indicated, "I think it's [networking] huge . . . I've been in this

state for several years and I've never been [to a State annual athletic training conference].

I made some great connections with athletic trainers around this area . . . So it's great."

When Tess was asked about how higher education programs and credentialing

could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and

opportunities, she suggested, "Networking definitely. That's the main thing."

Experience and interactions. Experience and interactions emerged from four of

the nine participants who suggested developing application-oriented skills and athlete and

coach interaction skills in autonomous settings. The participants' reported suggestions

were in response to how higher education curricula and credentialing could be

reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and

opportunities.

Throughout her interview, Chaise referenced either having or gaining *athletic

training experience* 31 times. Moreover, while she recognized the importance of

acquiring knowledge within the classroom, the real-world experience was paramount.

When asked about how higher education programs and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities, Chaise expressed:

> We need to go back to more autonomy, more hands-on, you know, get these kids [student athletic trainers] the experience and the confidence to do their job well when they're coming out [of their programs] . . . I don't think that we're preparing them [student athletic trainers] as well as we used to . . . it would be good . . . to make sure that we're [higher education programs] giving them enough experience so that they can make proper decisions on patient care.

As part of gaining hands-on experience, Chaise emphasized the significance of allowing undergraduate athletic training students to, "interact with both athletes and coaches," and offering more opportunities to, "Work in more of the contact sports realm, as [athletic training] students, on their own . . .Yeah, I think it's just experiential." But, a student athletic trainer's skill set reaches beyond the clinical proficiencies and hands-on experience. Chaise also referred to the importance of student athletic trainers understanding sport biomechanics, sport functions and rules, and different sport cultures. When considering female athletic trainers having the same opportunities that men have to work with male sports, Chaise expressed, "They [female student athletic trainers] need that experience and they need to be put in the male-dominated sports . . . I think that's got to be in football." She concluded by noting that both male and female student athletic trainers need to gain more hands-on experience (e.g., evaluation of injuries and rehabilitation skills) in a one-on-one setting.

Echoing Chaise's expressed opinions above, Jaime conveyed, "It's also important that [athletic training] females have the opportunity to oversee male sports." She mentioned that women should have the same opportunities as men to be the senior student athletic trainer in charge of football teams, whether the women be in an undergraduate school or at a higher competitive sport level. In the context of the credentialing period of learning, Jaime further explained:

What I noticed most often is the male student [athletic trainer], even undergrad, ends up being the student [athletic trainer] directly . . . in charge of football or hockey . . . And I think a lot of it's not to necessarily put the female [athletic trainer] down, but that's where they [athletic administrators] go, 'Well I want a male [athletic trainer] with a male [sport team].' And I think that does a disservice to these [athletic training] females who are trying to gain experience and just that ability to learn, and for the coaches and the athletes to learn to work with female athletic trainers.

Drew explained, "When it comes to athletic training education programs . . . I think we shelter them [student athletic trainers] so much that I don't think they get enough opportunities to be independent and make decisions: to have interactions [coaches and staff members]." Drew felt it was important to couple sports medicine and administrative, academic coursework with real-world experiences in clinical settings. She envisioned developing an "advanced track master's [degree]" program for her university where student athletic trainers learned "hands-on skills" and "administrative skills." In addition to gaining hands-on learning and administrative or leadership skills, student

athletic trainers would also receive mentoring. As Drew indicated: "We [athletic training staff would] have them one-on-one [to learn] about how to deal with coaches and how to write end-of-the-year reports, and those kinds of things that they don't get in the undergrad setting." Drew concluded, "That's where I think our profession would really behoove itself for both men and women."

In the context of attracting graduate student assistants to her university, Tess offered examples of what she was trying to do within her program. She noted, "I'm constantly trying to think of ways that they [student athletic trainers] can actually be hands-on and progress." Tess underscored what Chaise, Jaime, and Drew had suggested above. When asked about how U.S. higher educational curricula and credentialing could be changed to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities, Tess provided an example that fostered working autonomously and integrating the proficiencies of accountability, critical thinking, empowerment, experiential learning, interaction, leadership, mentoring, and problem-solving. At the time of this study, Tess noted that there were few monetary incentives to draw graduate assistants to her athletic training program. To recruit graduate assistant student athletic trainers, she advertised by expressing:

> When you [graduate assistant athletic trainers] come to me: 'you have to be
> certified, and then I'll put you with a sport and that is your sport to manage. I'll
> stay out of your way. I'm here if you have questions. You will run it [sport
> team].' And I'll expect them to do their work in the training room as if they were
> a head athletic trainer. In fact, on the sidelines sometimes, I'll walk up to one of

them and say, 'I'm tired of being the head trainer: you are the head trainer.' It freaks them out, but then they have to start thinking: and I'll do that just randomly. So, 'You're the head trainer today,' and it all falls on them. I won't make decisions. I'll say, 'what are you going to do? You're the head trainer. I'm going to go carry water.' And I'll carry water. But, it makes them think.

Leadership and gender. Leadership and gender emerged from three of the nine participants who suggested that leadership courses should be incorporated: leadership courses that teach student athletic trainers more than just the basic management of, and functioning in, a training room. One of the three participants, Lyndi, reported the need for U.S. institutions of higher education to implement positive interdisciplinary dialogues to break stereotypes of women in leadership. As noted in the introduction to the third research question, two of the nine participants did not believe that U.S. higher education coursework should or needs to change to enhance female athletic trainers' U.S. collegiate sport leadership opportunities. The two participants who reported this perspective are included in this section on women and leadership. The following suggestions are the participants' responses about how higher education curricula and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities.

During her interview, Jaime referenced the word *leadership* 56 times. In response to how higher education curricula and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership, Jaime reported:

I think a lot of it comes with teaching leadership, and I think it needs to be taught.

You know, leadership curricula needs to be taught from both a male and female perspective because we can try to pretend that we all need to lead the same way, but women lead differently than men.

Jaime added that she did not believe that the difference between women and men's leadership styles was a bad thing rather; she thought that women "need to be taught about . . . gender norms and leadership because I don't think anyone does themselves a good service by saying, 'I'm going to lead like a male does as a female,' it's not going to work." She also underscored the importance of women leading others based on their potential, strengths and understanding of "gender roles and gender biases." Jaime further remarked:

I think it's important that you have to address that [leadership, gender roles, and gender biases]. It's [gender] the elephant in the room saying, 'Okay, males are going to perceive me as this is a norm. I might not be this, but how am I going to combat their . . . preconceived notion of me? How am I going to lead in a way that's going to make them accept my leadership?'

In a former section, I included Jaime's reported suggestions about the importance of networking with both men and women. Aside from networking Jaime expressed, "the other piece that is missing in the [athletic training] curriculum is how to be a leader in athletic training." She also reported having basic leadership courses (e.g., budgeting, developing policies, and managing a training room) in both her undergraduate and graduate programs. However, Jaime added, "The majority of my [athletic training] education on how to run a program was through experiences as a certified [athletic

trainer]: as I watched others do it." She concluded by noting that there was a minor emphasis on managing an athletic training program or "being a leader of a program."

From an organizational leadership perspective and a core belief in using education as a vehicle for social change or change that positively influences the curriculum Lyndi explained:

> I think one of the best things that can happen is you have professors or faculty in higher education who are talking about it [women's leadership] in a positive way: women in leadership roles and how they are impacting and leaving a mark in their sphere of influence. So I think as it [women's leadership] becomes talked about, and it becomes, for lack of a better term, the social norm to be heard and to be talked about, and when you see it, it's not as surprising that a female is in that role.

Earlier in this analysis, I included Lyndi's account of age or youth as one career challenge or barrier she faced. Concerning the aspect of youth, Lyndi's expressed:

> And then also really getting people to start hearing the idea that, you know, you don't have to be older to be a leader . . . young leaders, they come up as well . . . I think education really is the key to helping eliminate some of the stereotypes.

In conclusion, Lyndi expressed the potential for social change by suggesting:

> I think as it [women's leadership] becomes more talked about, and it's okay to talk about, and it's something that becomes more normal, social norming, then, it becomes a good thing. But as long as it's talked about positively, that's the only way it's [social change] going to happen.

During Lyndi's interview, she mentioned *leadership* 49 times. When asked about how U.S. higher education curricula and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities, Lyndi's suggestions reached across the U.S. higher education institutions to society as a whole.

At her university, Drew reported that there was much room for improvement when it came to offering and teaching leadership courses. Her ideas about how higher education curricula and credentialing could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership incorporated learning with and from leaders already in place: applied leadership from athletic administrators to faculty and staff to coaches. Drew remarked about enhancing female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities:

> I don't think we do a great job [of enhancing female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities]. I think as an instructor for our athletic training program . . . we offer leadership opportunities. I don't think in the classroom setting, at least where I'm at, they [faculty or staff] do a great job of that [teaching leadership]. I think there are classes like administration of athletic training that could be very helpful that I think should be carried up with more people in the trenches that are working with athletic directors and working with coaches: that would better prepare student-athletes.

At the time of this study, Drew mentioned that her undergraduate and graduate programs did not offer formal leadership courses. She also noted taking some leadership training from her university's human resources department and then, reading books that her athletic director had reportedly suggested.

In contrast to what Jaime, Lyndi, and Drew reported above, two participants did not think that U.S. higher educational coursework should or needs to change to enhance women's opportunities to achieve a U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership role.

At the outset, Kenzie believed that gender should not bear on whether or not women get a collegiate athletic training leadership job. She was of the opinion, "We're all learning the same material. We all have different experiences . . . My experiences could have been better than his [a male] in terms of hands-on and clinically and all that: so I was able to apply it better." Kenzie also reported, "I don't feel like . . . curriculum wise we would have to change anything so that females could get into head athletic training positions."

Because Kenzie did not believe athletic training education programs needed to be reorganized, I then asked about how U.S. higher education institutions could better prepare female athletic trainers to handle various personal and institutional barriers to achieving career success. Kenzie contextualized her response about work-life balance issues, particularly decisions relating to marriage and family:

> I think it's all about the way that some women carry themselves. Unfortunately, I met some females in our profession that [pause] maybe should not be in this profession. It [athletic training] comes along with a lot of compassion and sometimes they don't have it. And I'm not saying that it's just females, but females tend to have that reaction.

I asked Kenzie to elaborate on what she meant by "females tend to have that reaction," and she reported that some female athletic training leaders seemed to be "harsher that

some should," and they "wear their emotions on their sleeves." Kenzie indicated that the

athletic training profession has extensive time constraints and that it is difficult for

women to have a family. She also reported, "I feel like that's [decision of having a

family] where you really decide . . . what sort of setting [college level] you see yourself

in." While Kenzie received her degrees from large universities, at the time of this study,

she was leading an athletic training program at a small U.S. university. Concerning taking

leadership courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, Kenzie reported that the only

leadership course she took was leadership in coaching.

Prior to asking Bryn about how U.S. higher education athletic training curricula

could be reorganized to enhance women's proficiencies and opportunities for a collegiate

athletic training leadership position, I asked if she thought any additional credentials or

certifications were necessary to obtain a collegiate athletic training role. Bryn replied, "I

feel like maybe leadership courses on how to manage situations or folks might be

helpful." However, when inviting Bryn to describe how U.S. higher education curriculum

could be reorganized to enhance women's leadership proficiencies and opportunities for

U.S. collegiate leadership, she laughed and indicated, "I hate that there has to be . . . the

thought process of how can we improve coursework to make sure that women get into

leadership roles." From her perspective, she asserted, "I just don't feel . . . like some

women belong in leadership roles no matter which role it is: they just don't possess the

ability. And some women absolutely belong in a leadership role." Bryn was of the

opinion that if women or men wanted to become leaders, they should enroll in a

leadership course. On the other hand, Bryn conveyed:

I think you either are, or your aren't [a leader]. And you can hone your skills as a

leader by learning from others or maybe taking coursework dealing with

leadership or something like that . . . you either have it [leadership skills] or you

don't. And if you don't, it should be clear you know [laughing]. If you don't

[know if you can lead] then, you're just completely blind, you know?

At times, Bryn expressed that leadership was something that could be taught and

at other times, it could not. She further reported, "I don't really know that it exists, or that

is should exist for coursework to improve a woman's chances of getting into a [collegiate

athletic training] leadership role." I rephrased the question and asked Bryn about how

U.S. higher education policies, and not coursework, could be reorganized or created to

enhance the numbers of women in U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership roles, Bryn

concluded, "I feel like we sort of already have the policies in place to lead to fairness in

hiring." Although Bryn reported that she was the only woman other than a secretary in

her university athletic department, she indicated, "I don't really know that my particular

institution needs to change policy or has a problem with hiring females."

Earlier in this analysis, I included Bryn's reported career challenge or barrier

pertaining to the lack of a head athletic training title that, as she had recounted, was based

on the administration's unwillingness to offer her the title. Following up with the

question of how U.S. higher education curriculum and credentialing could be enhanced

for women pursuing an athletic training leadership role, I asked Bryn about how U.S.

higher education could prepare female athletic trainers to handle various personal and

institutional barriers to achieving success, Bryn remarked:

I don't know how higher education could play a role because I . . . feel like we're [society] already there. We're [society] already saying you can be whoever you want to be: it doesn't matter what your gender. So I feel like the permission is already there and women [in general] are taking hold of it [career opportunities]. Women [athletic trainers] are doing what they've got to do . . . You know, women [athletic trainers] are grabbing hold and taking whatever they can take: whatever somebody will allow them to take.

The question arising from Bryn's expressed viewpoints is: can leadership be taught for both men and women in classroom settings? If, as Bryn suggested, courses of leadership could be taught to benefit both men and women, and the permission has been granted for women to achieve athletic training leadership roles, then who or what is it that will or will not allow female athletic trainers to take the reigns of leadership. During this study, Bryn could not recall taking undergraduate leadership courses, but reported taking a sports psychology leadership class when completing her online degree.

Advice for female athletic trainers. The interview with each participant culminated with the final question about the advice they would offer to present and future generations of female athletic trainers who desire to become leaders at the collegiate or any level of sport. Four of the nine participants emphasized the importance of making connections by seeking out mentors, networking, and continuing and sharing education. Three of the nine participants underscored professionalism and the importance of making a memorable impression. Two of the nine participants suggested finding one's calling and attending to the emotional aspects of athletic training. The themes somewhat

overlapped, which reflected the participants' reported experiences throughout this analysis.

About making connections by seeking out mentors, networking, and continuing and sharing education, Drew's believed that connecting with a mentor was of utmost importance. As she indicated, "Get a professional mentor, and just continue to be involved in this [athletic training] network with different people that can be resources for you as you progress." Drew also suggested, "Continue your education, whether formal or informal, through different learning. I have grown immensely through just volunteering on committee work . . . So being involved . . . you learn a lot when you're giving and you learn a lot in different venues."

Along this same line of thought, Erin believed that female athletic trainers needed to "embrace all of the learning opportunities that are presented to them." For example, Erin explained that if there is someone who needs help while working, female athletic trainers "can make themselves available: they need to take those learning opportunities." Concerning networking, Erin believed that female athletic trainers should make sure "that they are memorable to every professional that they interact with: memorable in a positive way."

For Jaime, connecting with others for the purpose of building career networks should begin at earlier stages for female athletic trainers:

> My suggestion to becoming a leader as a female is to learn each level of the
> staffing chain. I don't think you can be an effective leader if you don't really
> understand what an assistant [athletic trainer] does or a graduate assistant [student

athletic trainer]. Understanding what that role looks like and how that person understands their duties helps to create a compassionate leader.

Jaime further explained that, unfortunately, women have to work harder and "always be the go-getters." At the time of this study, she noted that women do not have the "good ole boys club" and she had found that women are "still not welcoming of other females in the leadership roles." Jaime indicated that because both men and women leaders do not welcome women leaders, "We have to continue to prove ourselves as stand-outs in each aspect of athletic training, including the business side." In conclusion, Jaime expressed:

> When we are seen as excelling in our craft, you will get people noticing. This is when you start to monopolize on those that offer praise of your work ethic and ability. These people become your network. These people will be the ones to vouch for you for jobs.

And when Jaime was explaining the aforesaid above, she conveyed, "I'm realizing that this is exactly what men do to get ahead. We just seem to have only been relying on our work ethic alone."

While Chaise offered advice somewhat different than Jaime, she too pointed out the importance of compassion or empathy in the athletic training profession. Chaise's advice to present and future generations of female athletic trainers who desire to pursue a leadership role was:

> Don't be afraid to pursue your dream and make a difference. Although you may come across obstacles as a female when working with male athletes or coaches, stay the course and lead with confidence and empathy. And everyone around you

will accept you as an integral part of the sports medicine team.

Incorporating all aspects of making connections by seeking out mentors, networking, and continuing and sharing education, Chaise advised about "staying the course." Lyndi advised female athletic trainers to "embrace the journey and to not get hurt personally by things because a lot of things aren't directed at you: they're directed at the idea of something new." Lyndi elaborated by directing attention to the significance of seeking a mentor who can listen and guide female athletic trainers through thick and thin situations. From her perspective, "Go find some mentors and be actively involved . . . Whatever you learned, be eager to share with other people who ask you questions . . . the best leaders are the ones that are developing others: developing other leaders."

About professionalism and making memorable impressions, Annie shared, "Strive to be an exceptional professional in all you do. Let your work ethic and competence set the standard. Be known by the care and effective treatment you provide. And be the athletic trainer everyone wants to hire." Bryn expressed:

> If you want to be seen as a professional . . . then you need to act that way
> consistently. Just be the best athletic trainer you can be and be the best leader you
> can be so that people can see you for what you are as a professional and as a
> person.

Adding to what Annie and Bryn advised, Erin also suggested that female athletic trainers "need to do the very best job that they can and make really good first impressions on the athletic training professional that they are working for or working with."

Two participants suggested finding one's calling and attending to the emotional

aspects of athletic training. When asked about the advice she had for present and future generations of female athletic trainers who desire leadership positions, Kenzie offered, "Be yourself: be yourself and find a position [or] location [that best suits your life goals]." She also indicated, "I think females need to experience a lot of different places that they can work in and really decide what . . . calls to them. And don't take any crap from the guys [laughing]!" As for Tess, she was more straightforward when offering advice and remarked, "Get your emotions in check and don't get on the gossip bandwagon. That's pretty much it."

The findings regarding the third research question revealed five subthemes related to the major theme of proposing higher educational curricular reforms: mentors and role models, networking opportunities, experience and interactions, women and leadership and advice to female athletic trainers. To some extent, seven of the nine participants felt that U.S. higher education institutional athletic training education programs could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities at the U.S. collegiate level.

Summary

The three research questions that constituted the base of this study steered the interview questions that encouraged thoughtful and expressive responses during the interviews. Drawing on Creswell (2007), Miles et al. (2014), and Patton's (2002) research approaches, the rich data from individual participants was collected and organized relevant to the participants' significant statements, emergent themes, and meaningful units of data via which codes evolved. The findings of this study are based on emergent

themes from the data, which were analyzed in alignment with the three research questions.

The interview questions for the first research question established a context to learn about female head athletic trainers' perceptions of U.S. higher education program experiences by reflecting upon career interests and goals. To some degree, all nine participants felt that their U.S. higher educational programs, whether postsecondary or postgraduate, adequately contributed to or prepared them to achieve an athletic training career and work at the U.S. collegiate level. Five of the nine participants regarded their educational programs as essential while four of the nine participants reported mixed experiences. The athletic training educational competencies and clinical proficiencies (e.g., knowledge, diverse clinical assignments, and experiential learning) overlapped in the classrooms, training rooms, laboratories, and sport assignments at high schools, colleges, and sport medicine clinics. A majority of the participants also reported that hands-on experience via internships or graduate assistantships and trusted advisors were paramount to achieving their athletic training career goals.

The interview questions for the second research question yielded the majority of responses about how U.S. higher education institutional experiences informed the participant's capacity to overcome barriers to obtaining a U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership position. At some point, all nine participants reported experiencing gender as a barrier. The very nature of gender and the multiple roles it played in their lives made it difficult to separate gender, as a background identity, from all other challenges or barriers that the participants described. Four of the nine participants reported that their U.S.

higher educational programs helped to prepare them for breaking through barriers to achieving a U.S. collegiate athletic training role. Despite breaking through gendered barriers as leaders of U.S. collegiate athletic training programs, the participants still felt the need to educate collegiate administrators, athletic directors, faculty members, athletic associations, and the national organization that represents the field in the U.S.

The third research question focused on the participants' propositions for higher educational curricular reform, which could lead to augmenting participants' opportunities to achieve athletic training leadership opportunities roles with collegiate sport programs. As with the first and second research questions, the participants reported the importance mentors or role models to help women navigate through the nexus of U.S. higher educational leadership structures. Such navigation required seeking out leaders who could offer life and career guidance to achieving athletic training career goals. Along with mentoring, more networking opportunities, interactions with collegiate administrators, athletic directors, athletic training professionals, coaches, and athletes was juxtaposed to gaining hands-on experience for making informed decisions about patient care. Three of the nine participants reported that leadership beyond mere athletic training room administration should be incorporated into the athletic training education program curriculum. While all nine participants had reported gender as a challenge or barrier in the section for the second research question, only two participants felt that gender issues should be incorporated into the curriculum. To some extent, seven of the nine participants reported that U.S. higher education athletic training programs could be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities at the U.S.

collegiate level.

This chapter provided detailed accounts of the data collection and organization processes along with an analysis of the perceived experiences of nine female head athletic trainers who had worked or were working full-time at 4-year NAIA and NCAA Division II and III schools. The participants represented five of the 10 National Athletic Trainers' Association districts in the U.S. The findings of this study were drawn from individual interviews and follow-up email communiqués of the female athletic trainers' experiences of pursuing career goals and U.S. collegiate sport leadership. Chapter 5 will further present an analytical discussion about how the study's findings bear in comparison with and support for recent empirical literature and the contextual framework, respectively.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part higher education institutions played in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also included exploring the participants' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. An improved understanding of female head athletic trainers' experiences is imperative in empowering stakeholders and policy makers to develop informed strategies for balancing gendered leadership within both U.S. higher education institutions and sport organizations.

The study findings revealed that the participants perceived U.S. higher education institutional program preparation and support as limited in both helping women to achieve U.S. collegiate leadership positions and overcome barriers to professional career advancement. The participants suggested improving U.S. higher education curricula for professional athletic training education programs that included mentorship and role modeling, experiential learning and interacting with sport practitioners, networking, and training courses in leadership and gender roles and biases. This study promotes positive social change by identifying underlying gender biases that inhibit women's professional advancement into U.S. collegiate sport leadership positions and by providing policy and curricular suggestions for addressing such gender biases, promoting greater social equality. In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings, the interpretation of the

findings, recount the study's limitations, offer recommendations for additional research, and consider viable action steps and theoretical implications to effectuate positive social change.

Summary of Findings

I collected the study data through in-depth interviews with nine former or current NAIA or NCAA Division II and III female head athletic trainers. These interviews underscored the significance of U.S. higher education institutional assistance for women in domains of career preparation, barrier navigation, and curricular reformation. Five of the participants reported that their higher educational programs contributed significantly to help in developing their athletic training career goals. Four of the participants described mixed experiences in higher education related to their goal of attaining leadership positions. All of the participants identified gender as a barrier to professional advancement at some stage in their athletic training career. Four of the participants reported that their postsecondary athletic training programs did not offer adequate preparation for overcoming barriers to their achieving a U.S. collegiate sport leadership position.

The participant experience statements included feedback on their former and current U.S. collegiate athletic training work. At the time of this study, over half of the participants reported their ongoing efforts to educate U.S. university personnel, intercollegiate athletic associations, and the National Athletic Trainers' Association about equal standards of health care and resource allocation. To some degree, seven of the nine participants suggested reforms that U.S. postsecondary athletic training education

programs could implement to augment women's leadership proficiencies and opportunities at the collegiate level. Common emergent themes from the interviews included the need for mentors and role modeling, experiential learning and interacting with sport practitioners (i.e., athletic directors, coaches, and athletes), networking, and training courses in leadership and gender roles and biases.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I offer an explanation regarding how the research findings support, counter, or expand knowledge about the part U.S. institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting female athletic trainers' achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership roles. These findings are interpreted with Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) conceptual framework, which accounts for gender as both an individual and group background identity frame. The interpretations of the research are ordered sequentially according to the corresponding primary research questions. The interpretations are further organized into emergent themes from the participants' interviews and the theoretical and empirical literature introduced in Chapter 2.

Due to overlapping descriptions of experiences in Chapter 4, I coalesced and analyzed the themes and subthemes in relationship to each research question. I also interpreted the themes and subthemes in light of the theory and empirical research. The participants' experiences and descriptions connected with higher education preparation, commonalities and career trajectories, program contributions, internships or graduate assistantships, and trusted advisors were combined and explored in the context of the first research question. The participants' experiences and descriptions linked to higher

education's role in breaking barriers were also combined and explored via themes of experiences of challenges or barriers, the male-dominated sport world, assistance with breaking barriers, and adequate educational preparation in the context of the second research question. Finally, the participants' experiences and descriptions related to proposing higher educational curricular reforms are discussed via themes of mentors and role models, networking opportunities, experience and interactions, leadership and gender, and advice for female athletic trainers within the context of the third research question.

Research Question 1: Higher Education Experiences and Preparations

The participants' didactic and clinical education experiences were the bedrock upon which socialization into the role of an athletic trainer and subsequently a head athletic trainer career began. The commonalities found among the participants included ethnicity, educational attainment, and a desire to become leaders in their profession. The recruitment of participants did not stipulate ethnic or racial criteria for participation in this study. While no effort was made to recruit a particular race or ethnic sample population, all participants who had consented to participate were of the Caucasian race. This finding supports Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) position that hegemonic cultural beliefs or stereotypes are inscribed in an array of assumed rules, laws, or principles such as those found in higher education institutions and athletic organizations. Although gender may appear as a universal trait of men and women, stereotypes exemplify the impressions of gender and race by authority figures that exert power to shape U.S. social institutions (Ridgeway, 2009). When considering sport leadership positions in U.S. higher education

institutions, the conventional stereotypes regarding both gender and race resemble Caucasian, middle-classed, heterosexual males (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 89). These leadership stereotypes "act as the default rules of gender" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 150) that render the social sanctioning of gender and race more enigmatic for individuals who differ.

All participants had achieved a graduate-level degree and had navigated significant gendered barriers to attaining leadership status. Six participants deliberately applied and interviewed for a collegiate leadership position where they had no prior employment. Of these six participants, four sought out schools with opportunities to create programs and thus, developed sport medicine programs in their universities from bottom to top. I also discovered that three of the nine participants vertically advanced in their respective institutions. Two of these three participants used their capstone educational projects to develop the first athletic training education programs within their institutions, which would be more calculated than opportunistic. These findings contrast with Mazerolle, Burton, and Cotrufo's (2015) conclusion that female athletic trainers who pursue collegiate leadership might advance by being "in the right place at the right time" (p. 77), suggesting more opportunistic than strategized career planning.

Mazerolle et al. (2015) observed that none of their athletic training participants engaged in networking with colleagues or seeking guidance from mentors to attain leadership positions. In contrast, five participants in my study either networked with colleagues or sought guidance from a mentor before and after accepting a collegiate leadership position. Thus, it appears that the participants strategized and gained an advantage regarding networks and mentorship. This finding aligned with Ridgeway

(2011), who indicated that when competent women strategically plan and attain leadership status, they earn legitimacy as a reliable person (p. 111). This finding suggests that using networks and seeking guidance from mentors strongly benefits women who pursue collegiate athletic training leadership positions.

Two of the eight female head athletic trainers in Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) NCAA Division I study worked at schools with football programs. Despite having participants that led athletic training programs at universities with football programs, the authors found that none of the participants worked with or provided medical services to football student-athletes. However, six participants in my study worked at NAIA and NCAA Division II and III institutions with football programs and provided medical services to football student-athletes. This finding might relate to the sample of participants in my study as NCAA Division I schools with football teams tend to exclude women from working with male football student-athletes (Burton, Borland, & Mazerolle, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2015). Burton, Borland, and Mazerolle (2012) noted that working with men's collegiate basketball and football teams has become a requisite for career advancement in the athletic training profession. If female head athletic trainers are barred from working with collegiate football teams, as one participant reported in Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) study and two participants reported in my study, then they lose educational opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and apply clinical experiences. When gender is used to impose limitations on women's educational opportunities, they are thus limited in career advancement and the chance to better their lives (Ridgeway, 2011).

Three participants in this study entered athletic training leadership positions with

no prior assistant athletic training experience. However, not one participant indicated that the path to achieving career goals and leading a U.S. collegiate sport program was easy or free from gender bias. This finding regarding gender bias in U.S. collegiate sport programs supports Ridgeway's (2011) position that emphasized the "staying power of gender" (p. 34) with institutions of higher education. Ridgeway also noted that the presence of women in leadership positions applies pressure to change workplace cultures (e.g., male-dominated athletic training). While these findings represent a different population of participants, they support and extend Claringbould and Knoppers's (2012) conclusion about how women's presence in leadership can disrupt gendered praxis in organizations and contribute to the "undoing of gender" (p. 404).

I did not identify any prior studies that collected and examined the perspectives of female head athletic trainers about how institutions of higher education programs contributed to their career goals and the desire to achieve collegiate leadership positions. To interpret the program contribution findings, I drew on Mazerolle et al. (2015), who published the only extant research on female head athletic trainers' experiences of pursuing leadership while working at the NCAA Division I level. My query into how higher education programs helped the participants develop career leadership goals was intended to gain insight into the participants' socialization experiences (e.g., formal and informal) prior to entering the workforce. I wanted to learn about the participants' postsecondary athletic training educational experiences to ascertain if their programs prepared them the same as men. If this was the case, and all athletic training students are allowed to work with all sport teams and all are treated equally in classrooms and clinical

practicums, it thus follows that gendered stereotypes would not pose barriers in the professional socialization of certified athletic trainers. However, gender was a reported barrier for the participants in this study, who cited their clinical education programs as holding double standards that socialized women differently than men. This finding is congruent with those reported by Burton et al. (2012) and Mazerolle et al. (2015), who found that their athletic trainer participants were not allowed to work with male football teams or when some did work with male football teams, they were not allowed to administer medical treatment to football student-athletes.

Prior to entering the workforce, all the participants in my study perceived their athletic training didactic and clinical education programs, to some degree, as contributory by helping them to achieve general career goals. Such education programs included knowledge in core competencies and clinical proficiencies, hands-on clinical experiences, mentors or trusted advisors, as contributory to achieving general career goals (e.g., certification and professional growth). While just over half of the participants perceived their educational program contributions (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities) as essential, four participants reported competing perspectives about achieving collegiate leadership positions. Although Mazerolle et al. (2015) did not focus on their participants' educational program contributions, the authors did emphasize the importance of self-confidence, leadership skills, communication, supportive others, and mentorship for career advancement. The findings of my study complement Mazerolle et al.'s conclusions about the professional development of skills in leadership and communication and the contribution of mentors and supportive others or trusted advisors.

Burton et al. (2012) examined female athletic trainers' experiences of gendered organizational power and practices in NCAA Division I athletic training programs. Again, educational program contributions were not addressed, but Burton et al. noted the importance of sport administrators and athletic training staff in resisting gendered practices, thereby retaining female athletic trainers in the profession. Returning to the four participants in my study who held competing perspectives about their postsecondary experiences, there was reportedly a lack of leadership courses regarding gender, unaddressed work-life balance issues, denied opportunities to work with male contact sports, wage disparity, and limited hands-on learning in athletic training programs. All of the latter issues are consistent with Burton et al. and Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) conclusions.

And as it bears on the discussion of educational preparation and support, two of Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) participants reported obtaining the head athletic trainer role because their male head athletic trainers at the U.S. universities were not certified or licensed. One participant in my study reported working for a male head athletic trainer who was also practicing without certification and a state license at her U.S. university. This particular issue raises questions about hiring practices and the lack of governance oversight across all departments, tiers, conferences, and divisions in higher education (athletic association members), NATA, NAIA, and NCAA, respectively. In 2014, Acosta and Carpenter observed, "the stark variation in representation across divisions [NCAA] and the overall low representation of females leaves open the question of the presence of non-skill based selection processes" (p. 44).

The finding that some men have been hired to lead NAIA and NCAA athletic training programs or a national and voluntary sport organization without certification or state or national licensing is potentially the most important study finding. This finding is particularly significant because many men have questioned women's competency in sport leadership both domestically (Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Burton, Borland, & Mazerolle, 2012; Hoffman, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013) and internationally (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013; Hovden, 2010; Sibson, 2010). Athletic training is an allied health care profession recognized by the American Medical Association (NATA, 2010) that provides medical services to high injury sport teams including men's basketball, ice hockey, football, and Olympic sports. Because these sports include a risk of potentially catastrophic injuries such as spinal cord injuries and concussions, the hiring of unqualified or even incompetent men over qualified and competent women to provide medical services places student-athletes and Olympic contenders at significant risk. I concur with Sibson's (2010) conclusion: "more evidence regarding the individual experiences of women in such situations needs to be accumulated" (p. 396).

Notwithstanding the gender issues introduced above, I found that all the participants in my study perceived the integration of classroom knowledge (e.g., basic competencies) and clinical proficiencies (e.g., injury evaluations and therapy interventions) across diverse real-world settings resulted in increased self-confidence, independence, and a sense of decision-making empowerment. With regard to clinical internships or graduate assistantships, the participants considered their experiences (e.g., variety of clinical settings, rotational assignments with male contact sports, hands-on

learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration) as significant educational contributions.

These data complement those of Burton et al. (2012) and Mazerolle et al. (2015) who

observed that women's opportunities to merge into athletic training leadership roles

foster an professional environment that legitimizes the students' experiences and

promotes career growth. As a result of their educational programs and guidance from

mentors or trusted advisors, I found that the participants in my study believed they were

highly competent and qualified professional athletic trainers.

Research Question 2: Higher Education's Role in Breaking Barriers

In Chapter 4, the four subthemes (i.e., experiences of challenges or barriers, the

male-dominated sport world, assistance with breaking barriers and adequate educational

preparation) overlapped, accounting for some repeated quotations. For purposes of this

discussion, I consolidated the four subthemes into the two subthemes of gendered barriers

and adequate preparation for the second research question. The theme of gendered

barriers touched upon the participants' reported experiences of biases in pursuit of career

goals and while leading U.S. collegiate athletic training programs. The theme of adequate

preparation addressed the participants' reported experiences about the part U.S.

institutions of higher education played in helping to prepare them to overcome gendered

barriers throughout their careers. As a considerable obstacle, I also discussed the

participants' reported experiences of having to educate U.S. university and athletic

administrators, faculty, athletic associations, and their representative national governing

organization.

At some stage in their careers, all participants in this study reported gender as a

barrier to professional career development, especially concerning male coach interactions or U.S. university and athletic administrative support. This finding confirmed research in other sport areas pertaining to women's experiences of gender biases regarding hiring practices (Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Hoffman, 2011; Shull, Shaw, & Kihl, 2013) gender and age biases (Burton et al., 2012), perceptions of women's inadequate professional competency (Hovden, 2010; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012), men's objectification of women as sexual deterrents to male athletes (Burton et al, 2012), and disregard for women's professional contributions (Claringbould & Knoppers 2012; Sibson, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2011). These issues raised by the participants in this study cogently merged under what Ridgeway (1991, 2006) referred to as cultural segregation of institutions and gendered frames.

A plethora of studies found that women had been disadvantaged when perceived to breach prescriptive societal status beliefs (e.g., assumed abilities that women should exhibit). These prescriptive beliefs subjected many women to unfavorable evaluations, especially in collegiate leadership positions that are endemically held by men (Burton et al., 2009; Hoffman, 2011; Mazerolle et al. 2015; Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Such prescriptive social status beliefs were evidenced when the youngest participant in this study reported that she perceived her leadership of male sport teams often posed a threat to older male coaches. That is, her athletic training leadership threatened the enmeshed ideological beliefs that older male coaches held about women in sport leadership.

One comparable study pertained to well-qualified women coaches' entry into

men's collegiate basketball at the NCAA Division I level. After interviewing NCAA

male coaches, Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) observed, "gender bias and sexism

might be more deeply rooted in the culture of men's intercollegiate sports than racism"

(p. 311). In reference to age, Ridgeway (2011) highlighted shared categorical systems

that are founded on culturally accepted standards of disparity. Accordingly, "Obvious

examples in American society are shared category systems based on race, gender, age,

occupation, and education" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 37). The age barrier reported by the

participant in my study somewhat supported Walker and Sartore-Baldwin's (2013)

findings of gender and racism by including age as a central identity category in social

relations. Ridgeway (2011) indicated that identity categories such as gender, racism, and

age are particularly relevant in mixed-sexed workplace environments such as educational

institutions and male-dominated collegiate sport programs (p. 72).

Ridgeway (2011) suggested that women "typically manage the risk of criticism

they face as they reach for authority by balancing a strong representation of professional

confidence and agency" (p. 200). One participant in this study reported a denied

opportunity to apply for a head athletic trainer job at a large university that had a football

program. She recounted that her passion and drive to excel in leadership roles often posed

a threat to the ideological status beliefs of both men and some women as was also found

by Burton, Barr, Fink, and Bruening (2009). Ridgeway (1991, 2006) confirmed that

women who exhibit traits such as expertise and authority are socially perceived as

particularly undesirable because they defy cultural assumptions of women's inferior

status to men. These socially prescribed standards of enforced behavioral displays of

what people should or should not do become the "rules of the gender game" (Ridgeway, 2011, p 59). So women who violate presumed sociocultural gender rules are punished or in the case of the participant's reported experiences above, leadership positions are denied, and career advancement opportunities are thus restricted.

In a closely related study, Hoffman (2011) noted that to acquire experience, male athletic directors had to leave smaller schools to accept associate athletic director roles at NCAA Division I Football Series (NCAA Division I-FBS) programs. I found one participant who reported that she had to leave an NCAA Division I-FBS program to gain experience as a head athletic trainer at a U.S. smaller school that did not have a football program. Athletic directors who reportedly refuse to hire women to lead athletic training programs for a university's football team restrict the career mobility of the pool of women who might want to apply for the job (Hoffman 2011). Criteria for professional advancement also reinforce a male-dominated sport culture when acquiring head athletic training experience. Such criteria filter women to lower level jobs where experience cannot be gained in U.S. high-profile sports (e.g., football), and they cannot develop towards their career goals. The findings of this study also extended Acosta and Carpenter's (2014) longitudinal research on the status of women concerning the double standard of access to athletic training leadership in NCAA sport programs.

Burton et al.'s (2012) findings revealed that male coaches of male teams were perceived by their female athletic trainer participants to use gender to question the female athletic trainer participant's professional competence. Such questioning of competence based on gender adversely affected the female athletic trainer participants' workplace

experiences and ability to perform duties. Burton et al.'s results were evident in my

research with a somewhat different population. Seven of the nine participants in this

study perceived overt biases about how male coaches of male teams exerted power over

their ability to perform their jobs or ensured that the participants did not work with their

male teams. This finding was also evident in Claringbould and Knoppers's (2012)

research where the organization's male-dominated sport culture limited women

participants' professional skills. Claringbould and Knoppers noted that limiting the

women participants' skills further framed them as "different from the majority group"

(2012, p. 412). When women are only allowed to exhibit competencies that conform to

those of the male-dominate majority, the ways via which they can differentiate their

contributions from men are ignored or denied thus making them invisible.

Gendered stereotyping alters perceptions regarding female athletic trainer's

competence when working in male-dominated sport institutions and organizations where

they are perceived, despite equal qualifications, as "less competent when compared to

men" (Burton et al., 2012, p. 306). The authors also pointed out that unlike men, the

professional competencies of women are often based on bodily appearance, which poses

inimical consequences in the form of objectification and even dehumanization. For

example, the objectification of women as objects or things establishes them as vulnerable

and weak where others become less concerned when they are injured or harmed. Also,

when women are objectified, their feelings and experiences are ignored, boundaries are

disregarded, and competence and ability are considered replaceable (Ely & Padavic,

2007). Ridgeway (2011) added, "Sex segregation of occupations is the deepest and most

pervasive gender structure in the organization of paid work" (p. 98). This gender structure in higher education's institutional sports and male-dominated leadership is evidenced in the sex segregated athletic training departments where women are excluded from working with male sport teams based solely on perceived competence or sex (Burton et al., 2012; Ely & Padavic, 2007).

I found that two participants' experiences in my study underscored Burton et al. (2012) and Ely & Padavic's (2007) conclusions above. One participant reported that sexist comments about her physical appearance from male coaches and the school administrator's support of the male coach's behavior led her to accept employment elsewhere. Another participant spoke about working with an older football coach who created a hostile environment, which the athletic director resolved by hiring a male athletic trainer with football experience. In both instances, the coaches were allowed to continue working with their teams, but the participants were ostracized and refused opportunities to perform their professional duties for male teams. When male administrators allow coaches to exert power over female athletic trainers and their professional obligations, the male-dominant institution of men's sport programs are reinforced and inequality is reinscribed. These findings also confirmed those of Mazerolle et al. (2015) and Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013), who found that female head athletic trainers and female basketball coaches' abilities and contributions to the sport establishment and team, respectively, were perceived as unaccepted or unwelcomed.

Male-domination in collegiate sport leadership and organizational governance has

been long established in research (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton et al., 2012; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Another important finding surfaced when the participants in this study reported the need to educate university and athletic administrators, faculty members, national organizations, and athletic associations (i.e., NAIA and NCAA) about equal standards of health care for women student-athletes, adequate staffing, and resource allocations. One participant recalled the need to educate university administrators about equal salaries, safe and equitable sport equipment, and equal budgets comparable to what male sports receive. This finding lends support to Burton, Grappendorf, and Henderson's (2011) assertion about opening dialogues for athletic administrators to understand how gendered assumptions influence women and men's representation in collegiate sport leadership. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne (2012) posited that the above inequalities that women leaders have encountered within collegiate sports have only just diminished since the enactment of Title IX in 1972.

When reflecting on the assistance that the participants received in breaking through gendered barriers, eight of the nine participants referred to mentors and educational colleagues. The majority of participants' responses provided for this section mirror those regarding *trusted advisors* discussed in the interpretation section for the first research question. This finding on mentor assistance in breaking through gendered barriers somewhat supported what Mazerolle et al. (2015) found concerning how supportive others helped their participants to overcome gender biases in U.S. collegiate sport settings. Walker and Bopp (2011) identified the lack of female leaders to mentor female basketball coaches as a crucial issue for women who desired to coach U.S.

collegiate men's basketball teams.

It is impossible to know how many female head athletic trainers at all collegiate levels have benefitted from the guidance and support of mentors as just two studies have attended to the topic: Mazerolle et al. (2015) and this study. While the athletic trainer participants in Mazerolle et al.'s study did not report engaging with mentors, the authors indicated that mentorship was crucial for career advancement. From the coaching literature, Walker and Bopp (2011) conducted the only study that emphasized the importance of mentorship. Bower and Hums (2013), who examined the impact of Title IX on the careers of men and women mentioned mentors in response frequencies. Burton et al. (2009), who explored the perceived competency of female athletic directors mentioned mentors in an interview guide. I discovered that the participants in this study benefitted from mentorship and thus, were better prepared to navigate barriers to achieving career goals, including U.S. collegiate leadership positions. This finding extends and supports Burton et al. (2012) and Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) conclusions about how supportive others can help female athletic trainers navigate gender barriers while in pursuit of leadership in U.S. collegiate sport programs.

Other participants in this study noted the importance networking of and communicating with female and male athletic training colleagues within and outside of their affiliated conferences. Some participants networked with colleagues at high schools, junior colleges, or with family members. Research has found that networking, as a positive factor for career advancement, could positively increase the numbers of women in U.S. collegiate sport programs (Adriaanse & Scofield, 2013; Burton et al., 2009;

Hoffman, 2011; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). Still, these studies emphasized that male-dominated sport networks in higher education institutional sport programs excluded women. Also, there appeared to be a weakness in female's sport networking that was of little benefit. Participants in my study reported networking as significant throughout their careers while the empirical literature has most often described networking as more of a barrier than a benefit to women's career success (Burton et al., 2012; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Schull et al., 2013; Sibson, 2010; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

Finally, two participants in this study reported that intuitions of higher education did not assist them in overcoming career barriers. One participant indicated that postsecondary athletic training education programs did not address the real world. Some of these real-world issues included informing women of what to expect in the athletic training profession such as potential hostile environments and matters of rape. Also, she noted higher education's unwillingness to allow female athletic trainers to earn a living by working with male sports. This finding underscored the conclusions of Burton et al. (2012), Walker and Bopp (2011), and Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013). Another participant reported that U.S. institutions of higher education played no role in assisting women to overcome career barriers. From her perspective, if women acquire hands-on and clinical experiences and apply such experiences, then U.S. higher educational institutions have no bearing on preparing women to overcome career barriers to achieving U.S. collegiate athletic training leadership roles.

Research Question 3: Proposing Higher Educational Curricular Reform

The themes that emerged in relationship to the third research question also confirmed existing research and theory. Thematically, mentors and role models, experiential learning and interactions, networking opportunities, and gender and leadership permeate the socialization processes that enable student athletic trainers to learn their roles via formal and informal educational praxis. These thematic threads encompass all didactic and clinical education experiences that filter through U.S. higher education's classrooms, training rooms, fields, and courts. Also, education experiences are found in sports medicine clinics, colleges and universities, professional sport organizations, hospitals, and high schools.

In the context of potential U.S. higher education curricular reforms, I found that the participants in this study perceived mentoring as a cornerstone for career development and advancement. The participants reported that mentorship was invaluable for female head athletic trainers teaching the curriculum and also for students examining multifarious roles, responsibilities, and theories of athletic training. Over half of the participants spoke about their mentor's guidance that helped them to navigate bureaucratic sport matters in collegiate settings and maintain professionalism during difficult times. Consistent with what Mazerolle et al. (2015) found regarding the importance of supportive supervisors, three participants in my study identified role modeling as an essential feature of the mentor-mentee relationship. As reported by the participants, the mentor-mentee relationship would enable student athletic trainers to establish expectations and gain awareness of tasks and responsibilities associated with

athletic training. Most of the participants noted that observing female head athletic trainers managing duties in professional ways could significantly assist students in understanding how to grow professionally and gain the courage to make appropriate decisions regarding patient care. These data complemented Walker and Bopp's (2011) conclusion about women's desire to coach collegiate men's basketball teams and the importance of mentorship. The authors also noted that men are not born from their mother's womb knowing or understanding how to coach. Men have to be educated and mentored and offered coaching opportunities. Walker and Bopp concluded that women also need that same education, mentorship, and opportunity.

Consistent with Burton et al. (2012) and Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) assertions, a majority of participants in this study described experiences akin to educable moments via which student athletic trainers observe real-world events. These real-world events (e.g., experiential) fostered learning and fortified expected professional behaviors and perspectives. Repeatedly, the participants expressed that athletic training education programs in U.S. higher education institutions needed to offer more experiential learning. The participants strongly recommended more experiential learning as such learning was paramount for student athletic trainers who often seek hands-on educational experiences to advance learning. When educable moments involve fostering professional conduct and perspectives, modeling and mentoring could help open dialogues and assist in the socialization and professional development of female athletic trainers at all levels of their career. The findings concerning the participants' reference about developing communication skills via open dialogues somewhat supported Mazerolle et al.'s (2015)

conclusion about how communication helped their athletic trainer participants with overcoming workplace barriers. To reiterate, Mazerolle et al. did not focus on how educational programs contributed to career goals but rather, how mentorship, communication, and leadership skills helped to navigate barriers with male coaches of male sport teams.

Four participants in my study mentioned their obligation to mentor and serve as strong role models for current and future female athletic trainers. These participants emphasized the significance of candid communication with their student athletic trainers, athletic training staff, clinical practitioners, university administrators, and the community. All the participants in this study spoke about the importance of educating everyone about the athletic training profession and what is expected of athletic trainers. Establishing expectations for student athletic trainers in clinical education practicums and career endeavors as athletic trainers could, according to the participants, help develop cogent communication aptitude. Establishing expectations could also enrich professional dialogues between healthcare practitioners, sports medicine team members, and the community. One participant highlighted open communication several times for its potential to help the student athletic trainer to feel welcomed to voice concerns and questions about modeling professional behaviors. When considering the participants' most valued advice for curricular reforms and student athletic trainers, communication skills were second only to mentorship. This finding supported Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) emphasis on both mentorship and communication, and Walker and Bopp's (2011) observation about the importance of mentors for young women who desire a career

coaching collegiate men's basketball.

Just over half of the participants in this study felt that implementing networks into the curriculum could enhance athletic training education programs in U.S. institutions of higher education. As mentioned in the second research question section, the participants perceived professional networks at conferences and with both men and female athletic trainers as imperative. The participants spoke with enthusiasm about communicating with professional colleagues within and outside of the athletic training profession, which from their perspectives, could help students by providing fresh perspectives on the experiences they encounter daily. One participant strongly felt that the curriculum inform student athletic trainers about the available resources and professional support, which could help them deal with similar challenges that other allied health professionals might also experience. Meeting with and learning from leaders in the profession was another suggestion that would encourage students to take the initiative to learn about athletic training and perhaps, help them formulate career goals and a strategic plan. There is an immense power in networking that should not be understated. The participants' suggestions about networking could potentially invert the male-dominated networks that have created barriers and sustained gendered ideological beliefs about women's leadership as described by Burton et al. (2012), Claringbould and Knoppers (2012), Mazerolle et al. (2015), Schull, Shaw, and Kihl (2013), Sibson (2010), and Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013).

Thus far, I have introduced the participants' reported suggestions about curricular reforms that include mentors and role models, experiences and interactions, and

communication, which form the marrow of socialization processes in athletic training roles. Other participants suggested including leadership courses in the curriculum that reached beyond the typical managerial or standard administrative leadership competency course in U.S. higher education's professional and post-professional athletic training education programs. Leadership skills that integrate sociocultural interactions, as the participants recommended, are not independent of mentoring and role modeling, experiences and interactions, and communicating. In other words, some participants emphatically believed that student athletic trainers needed to learn about leadership that deals with gender, the gender roles and biases that women, but not all women, will most likely face. As Ridgeway (2009) noted, the effect of gender status upon a member's (e.g., athletic department personnel) behavior can fluctuate across contexts. These data confirmed Mazerolle et al.'s (2015) suggestion of "educating athletic trainers at all levels of the profession about the impact of stereotypes on women's advancement in the field of training is of critical importance" (p. 79). The authors also recommended placing greater emphasis on leadership preparation in both U.S. undergraduate and graduate level athletic training education programs.

I concluded the interview by asking the participants to provide advice for present and future generations of women who desire to lead athletic training programs at U.S. collegiate schools or any level of sports. The participants expressed several overlapping themes that have provided an interwoven thread throughout this analysis. This thematic thread evolved into the concept of interpersonal connections. For example, one participant enthusiastically indicated that connecting with a mentor was the most

important career decision a female athletic trainer could make. She encouraged

continuing one's education via different learning venues such as conferences, committee

work, and volunteer services. She also underscored the importance of sharing education

and research to remain professional involved in the athletic training field. Along this

same vein, another participant suggested that female athletic trainers embrace all learning

opportunities that emerge and to help others by volunteering when they were able to do

so. Concerning networking, she added that female athletic trainers should interact with

every professional in a positive and memorable way.

Another participant emphasized the importance of female athletic trainers

building career networks early in their careers. She also pointed out the significance of

learning all levels of staffing such as the roles of assistants, graduate assistants, and

associate athletic trainers to understand better their responsibilities. This understanding

could help female athletic training leaders to become more compassionate and

understanding of the responsibilities that each staff members have. Concerning support,

female leaders or athletic administrators need to welcome female athletic trainers in

leadership roles, which implies that men are not solely responsible for restricting

women's professional advancement in U.S. collegiate athletic training. Also, because

female athletic trainers have to prove themselves as exceptional in every facet of athletic

training, they need to be noticed as excelling in their craft. The participant described

excelling in one's craft as women working together versus relying on work ethic alone.

One participant recognized that female athletic trainers would most likely face

obstacles when working with male coaches or athletes. She advised female athletic

trainers to persevere and become empathic and confident leaders by pursuing their

dreams, and making a positive difference in the lives they touch. Another participant

encouraged female athletic trainers to embrace their journey, wherever that journey leads.

She also advised female athletic trainers to remain mindful that difficult situations such

as others making inappropriate comments or exhibiting inappropriate behaviors would

likely surface. If difficult situations arise, she encouraged female athletic trainers to

remember that such situations are not necessarily directed at them but rather, at the

thought of something new (e.g., young women in sport leadership positions). The

participant also emphasized the importance of female athletic trainers getting involved in

professionally via networks and community service and foremost, connecting with a

mentor who will listen and guide them through thick and thin situations. She concluded

by suggesting that whatever female athletic trainers learn, they should enthusiastically

share information with others who ask questions.

When considering professionalism and leaving people with a memorable

impression, one participant encouraged female athletic trainers to strive towards

becoming remarkable professionals in all endeavors. She suggested that female athletic

trainers allow their competence and work ethic to set the standard of excellence via which

others will recognize them for the effective treatment and care they provide. In

conclusion, the participant advised women to be the athletic trainers that everyone seeks

to hire. For another participant, professionalism was about consistently acting in ways

that exhibit a personal commitment to be a great leader. Two other participants suggested

that female athletic trainers find a position or location that best suits their career and life

goals, and to keep their emotions under control.

Limitations of the Study

The trustworthiness of qualitative phenomenological research necessitates self-reflection of existing researcher biases to avoid presumptions about the participants' experiences that might have influenced the findings of this study. An examination of the empirical literature in tandem with personal life experiences of the phenomenon under investigation was requisite to achieving a grounded and authentic research study. I noted in previous chapters that trustworthiness of data collection and analysis was bound to credibility, which included the empirical literature, conceptual framework, and paradigmatic lens used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I also pointed out that credibility could be compromised by both researcher reactivity and biases regarding the participants' experiences and data. When considering potential reactivity or personal sway in this research, I employed Maxwell (2013) and Moustakas's (1994) bracketing technique to the greatest degree possible. During this study, credibility was achieved via prolonged communication (e.g., email, telephone, interview, and member checks) such that rich, thick descriptions developed, establishing greater insight into the phenomenon.

Inherently, the generalizability in qualitative research is limited to any population beyond the selected sample of the study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). For this study, I interviewed a finite sample of nine female head athletic trainers who had worked or were working at NAIA and NCAA Division II and III schools, representing just 5 out of 10 National Athletic Trainers' Association districts across the

United States. The findings in this study are limited to female head athletic trainers'

experiences represented herein. I cannot generalize the study findings to all NAIA and

NCAA Division II and III schools. It is plausible that female head athletic trainers at

other NAIA and NCAA Division II and III institutions have different perspectives on

educational and career experiences. I also cannot generalize the findings of this study to

female head athletic trainers beyond the collegiate setting such as high schools,

community colleges, sports medicine clinics, semiprofessional and professional leagues.

The selection of one group of female athletic trainers restricts the scope of the study

relative to transferability; however, selection of a homogeneous group could generate

new hypotheses and findings that might transfer to a population of similar characteristics

or goals.

     The timing of data collection approached final examination weeks for many of the

participants, which posed a limitation for some, but not all, participants. To avoid

infringing on participants' valuable time by scheduling interviewing during times when

they might have been distracted, I scheduled interviews (e.g., initial and follow-up)

during a weekend or at a time most convenient for them. This interview scheduling

strategy allowed the participant to be a part of the decision-making process and to

allocate time to provide deep reflection in response to the questions.

     Recognizing limitations of objectivity or privileging one epistemology over

another helped to avert potential conflicts regarding researcher bias. As the sole

researcher of this study, I disclosed personal experiences as a collegiate athlete, student

athletic trainer, head coach, director of intramural sports, and adjunct faculty in the

domain of exercise and sports science. I also employed a self-reflexive approach to curb identified partialities while gathering and analyzing data as well as developing conceptualizations.

<center>**Recommendations**</center>

The findings of this study laid a foundation for future research in three areas on female head athletic trainers' experiences regarding the part higher education plays in supporting the achievement of leadership roles within U.S. collegiate sport programs: educational preparation and support, overcoming barriers, and curricular reforms. From the experiences of nine former or current NAIA or NCAA Division II and III female head athletic trainers, the following recommendations are presented.

How we socialize students in the classroom and through clinical settings carries over into professional roles that inscribe lessons learned. If those lessons are biased, exclusive, and stereotyped according to gender, then educational change faces resistance. If those lessons are unbiased and inclusive to derail stereotypes, then educational change is plausible. The first task is guiding students to respect the contributions of all student athletic trainers. As evidenced by this research, guidance can be done in several ways, from respectful teaching, syllabus construction that includes such examples, and supportive supervisors for female athletic trainers in their clinical internships. More research is needed to examine how educational programs contribute to female athletic trainers' career preparation and leadership pursuits at all U.S. collegiate levels. In particular research could focus on ascertaining whether or not sex-segregation in athletic training majors parallels sex-segregation in occupations (Charles & Bradley, 2009;

Ridgeway, 2011).

The educational preparation of student athletic trainers needs to attend to sociocultural issues including gender, racism, sexism, age, and sexual orientation. For instance, a topic might cover the influence of gender on healthcare service systems and the access to athletic training medical services. Also, the educational preparation of student athletic trainers needs to address sexual harassment in didactical and clinical education settings. This topic could include hostile environments created by male coaches of male sport teams, administrative responsibilities to eradicate hostile environments, and fostering positive social relations between all students, educators, and athletic departmental personnel. Future research could incorporate a more ethnographic approach to examine the power that male coaches of male teams are afforded to control the lives and professional careers of female athletic trainers. Also, research could investigate the power structures that allocate such authority to male coaches of U.S. collegiate football at all levels.

Leaders in various sports organizations, including higher education institutions, need to assess their structural setting to ascertain if barriers to professional advancement for female athletic trainers exist. This study supported the literature, which identified gendered barriers in multiple sport settings. These gendered barriers were empirically confirmed to be institutional (Burton et al., 2012; Hoffman, 2011; Schull et al., 2013), organizational (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Sibson, 2010; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012), or interpersonal (Burton et al., 2011; Walker & Bopp, 2011) constraints that thwarted the participants' sport leadership opportunities. It is incumbent upon higher

education institutions, and sports organizational leaders to both identify and eradicate gendered barriers where they exist. Employment data from U.S. higher educational institutions and sports organizations need examination concerning the proportion of women to men who hold top U.S. collegiate leadership or administrative positions. Future research could follow Yiamouyiannis and Osborne's (2012) study and examine how federally funded U.S. higher education institutions are allowed to exclude student female athletic trainers from applying their educational skills in male sport programs (i.e., men's basketball and football) that are housed in the higher education institutions.

Administrators and employees in U.S. higher education need continuing education on cultural stereotypes, sexist ideological beliefs, and gender inequalities associated with barriers that restrict female athletic trainers' opportunities for career advancement into U.S. collegiate leadership positions. Such education needs to occur at all employment levels and within all organizations that prepare female athletic trainers for professional careers. This education could start with the creation of diversified committees, independent of the NCAA, in both professional organizations and employment domains. These committees could research issues about gender inequality, women's access to employment opportunities, and avenues to break the cycle of barriers that marginalize women in sport leadership.

U.S. higher education institution administrators and sport governance leaders in athletic associations could amplify efforts to recruit and hire female athletic trainers for powerful decision-making leadership positions. Such recruitment and hiring efforts need to be aggressive to the extent of addressing female athletic trainer's retention and

promotion within the hierarchical ranks of U.S. collegiate leadership structures. Deliberate efforts to countervail prevalent gender-based inequalities within enacted policies (e.g., Title IX, NCAA gender equity policy, and NATA anti-discrimination statement) need to be actionable and not merely symbolic. Finally, leaders need to address issues of inclusiveness about decision-making sport governance bodies and prime committee appointments (e.g., NCAA Leadership Council). Leadership workshops and training on sex equality in U.S. sport leadership could help to support such social and cultural change efforts.

The educational preparation of student athletic trainers should also include negotiating power relationships via conflict resolution and problem solving. This preparation would help to socialize student athletic trainers and empower them to develop relationships with coaches, athletes, and medical professionals, fostering transition into their professional roles once they are certified athletic trainers. This recommendation needs to be extended to all students, employees, and leaders who work in U.S. institutions of higher education, secondary education, sports and non-sports organizations, corporations, and governments. To grasp the potential for positive change in this recommendation, I will direct attention to theory.

Knowledge of social and psychological influences are vital to addressing the abstract ways via which gender is framed to sex-categorize or segregate people into occupational divisions of labor (Ridgeway, 2006). Thus, the ways in which an individual's employment positions or career opportunities are constructed include the context (e.g., classrooms and workplaces), hierarchical level (e.g., staff and director),

task-oriented competence (e.g., aggressive and nurturing), prior work experiences (e.g., volunteer and job type), and personal attributes (e.g., agentic and communal; Ridgeway, 2006). Standing at the crossroads of the aforesaid reasons and in the realm of paid labor, people may find, "we frame and are framed by gender literally before we know it" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 148). The patterns of persistence and change in sex-segregated U.S. collegiate majors contribute to and thus, parallel the patterns in sex-segregated occupations (Charles & Bradley, 2009; Ridgeway, 2011).

A U.S. postsecondary athletic training curriculum is needed that assist students in understanding just how to negotiate and to promote themselves in the world of work. Drawing on the findings of this study, connecting students with mentors or implementing mentorship programs into the curriculum would foster success for students, for the student when they become professionals, and for the U.S. higher educational institution. Leadership training needs to be incorporated into U.S. higher education's intuitional athletic training curriculum via courses, apprenticeships, or volunteer community services. This leadership training could help students to gain knowledge and experience to make informed decisions about their lives and career paths. Also, U.S. postsecondary curricula need to include open dialogues about gender and how it impacts both men and women in their education, career, and daily lives. Openly discussing gender issues could help develop communication skills and diminish stereotypes about U.S. women as second-class citizens. Learning to negotiate power relations and self-promote in the world of work needs to begin with discussing gender and understanding how it divides people in U.S. society and at U.S workplaces. Future research could investigate the specific

strategies that female head athletic trainers used to navigate barriers, negotiate power relations, and self-promote to achieve a leadership position.

Implications for Social Change

The study explored the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part higher education institutions played in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also included exploring the participants' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. The results of this study indicated that the participants' perceived U.S. higher education institutional program preparation and support was limited in both achieving U.S. collegiate leadership positions and overcoming barriers to professional advancement. Also, the participants suggested ways to improve athletic training education programs within U.S. institutions of higher education that included a plethora of issues.

As per the findings of this study, the U.S higher education institutional preparation of student athletic trainers needs to include information on and discussions of Title IX of the Amendments Act of 1972, which was enacted to ensure equal opportunities in all activities, programs, and employment in federally funded U.S. intuitions of education. It is imperative that students and employees learn what opportunities are educationally available or denied to them. U.S higher education institutional athletic training faculty, staff, and clinical instructors need to refrain from stereotyping students, as stereotyping constrains their social and cultural realities across all levels of U.S. sports organizations and U.S. collegiate institutions. Moreover in

support, U.S. academic and athletic administrators need to take responsibility for considering gender as an organizational issue and for reflecting on societal processes within their specified domains.

U.S. athletic directors and head athletic trainers need to acknowledge the power afforded to male coaches of U.S. male sport teams and ascertain how this power sustains stereotypes, especially concerning who is allowed perform the responsibilities of an athletic trainer. Also, U.S. athletic directors need to acknowledge stereotypes perpetuated against female athletic trainers and work with athletic staff, male coaches, and head athletic trainers to identify and dispel such stereotypes. Because a majority of U.S. collegiate NAIA and NCAA athletic directors and head athletic trainers are men, they set the policy and agenda for the athletic department and training staff. With this in mind, these athletic directors are responsible for the safety and well being of all athletic trainers, students, and employees under their supervision. Eight of the nine participants in this study reported hostility in U.S. institutions of higher education athletic training settings, stemming from male coaches of U.S. male teams. Perhaps incorporating information about gendered stereotypes in U.S. intuitions of higher education and athletic settings could open dialogues between students, faculty, athletes, coaches, and athletic trainers that would encourage collaboration and promote healthy social relations in the realm of U.S. collegiate sports.

Should this study be replicated, including U.S. collegiate male head athletic trainers could also identify the extent to which their perceptions might differ on the basis of gender. Conclusions of such a study might lead to additional suggestions for positive

social change in the U.S. athletic training field. Both U.S. sports organizations and higher educational institutions could sponsor new research and perform in-depth analyses regarding ways to eradicate gendered practices and stereotypes.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

A theoretical implication of this study is the necessity for an intricate understanding of gender as a fundamental frame for organizing behavior in athletic training and how it contributes to the underrepresentation of women in U.S. collegiate sport leadership roles. I applied Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) status construction theory, which included the expectations states theory (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998), as a supportive framework for the literature review and analysis of results. All the participants in this study were cognizant of gender biases, with over half of them specifically identifying gender biases as social beliefs or preconceived notions about a female athletic trainer's competence. I also examined a particular institution to see how gender assignments are reinforced and sometimes broken through. The female head athletic trainers, by virtue of their presence in this study, confirmed that gender stereotypes persisted and foremost, stereotypes can be resisted.

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that a central aim of both the expectation states (Berger et al., 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998) and status construction (1991, 2006) theories attended to social relations with a specific focus on the resiliency of gender as a frame for sex-segregated occupations. This aim touches every facet of an individual's daily interactions. The findings in this study confirmed that some participants were excluded from working with U.S. collegiate or professional male football teams at some point in

their careers. The U.S. female head athletic trainers participating in this study were also objectified based on physical appearance, declared professionally incompetent based solely on gender, denigrated by male coaches of male sport teams, ignored by faculty or university administrators, or denied opportunities to apply for jobs. In essence, the participants' experiences confirmed Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) conclusion that gender, as a background identity, touched upon every facet of their daily lives.

Previous qualitative research has focused on female head athletic trainers' preference for adaptive or balanced lifestyles (Mazerolle et al., 2015). Burton et al. (2012) interviewed assistant athletic trainers and found that male coaches both applied gender stereotypes to challenge the women's competency and bolster authority over their lives. From a macro-level theoretical perspective, Burton et al. concluded that the U.S. athletic training programs at the NCAA Division I level functioned as gendered organizations. Ridgeway's (2006) micro-level focus on cognition and socio-psychological influences was imperative to addressing abstract ways via which gender was used as a cultural tool to sex-categorize or segregate the participants in this study into occupational divisions of labor. While macro-level analyses are crucial to understanding the phenomena associated with gender, the micro-level analyses are equally vital to the extent that women's voices and experiences remain central. The contextually flexible theoretical framework supported this phenomenological study by addressing the dynamics of practicing gender in U.S. higher education institutional athletic training programs and sports organizations (Ridgeway, 2011). This study advanced Ridgeway's (1991, 2006) theoretical approach that gendered social practices

can be understood in light of social-relational features such as cultural beliefs and individual expectations that impact on their sanction.

Conclusion

I explored the perceived experiences of U.S. female athletic trainers regarding the role higher education institutions played in supporting and preparing their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership positions. I also explored the participants' perspective on gendered barriers and their propositions for curricula changes in current U.S higher education athletic training programs. The empirical literature showed the complexity of gender for female head athletic trainers and how it can be used as stereotypical "rules of gender" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 29) to systematically inscribe inequalities into both U.S. higher education and workplace settings. The literature review also demonstrated the significance of inclusive and engaging athletic training education programs that foster learning via mentorships, open communication skills, and experiential learning (Burton et al., 2012; Mazerolle, et al., 2015; Walker & Bopp, 2011). The findings of this study revealed that the female head athletic trainers perceived their U.S. higher educational program preparation and support as limited in helping female athletic trainers to both achieving collegiate sport leadership and overcoming barriers to career advancement. The participants recommended ways to augment U.S. athletic training education programs that included mentorships and role models, experiential learning, interactions with coaches and athletes, networking opportunities, and courses on sociocultural leadership, and gender roles and biases. The participants identified stereotypes or gender as the source of career barriers in U.S. professional athletic training education programs housed

with the sex segregated framework of U.S. institutions of higher educational sport programs. Stereotypes that led to career barriers were perceived to stem from U.S. higher education administrators and faculty, sport associations such as the NAIA and NCAA, the National Athletic Trainers' Association, male and female athletic directors, male and female head athletic trainers, male coaches, and male athletes.

Although it has already been said, it bears repeating; the processes that construct and replicate inequality in U.S. athletics are complicated and lie obscured within U.S. higher education's institutional framework of segregated intercollegiate sports programs (Brake, 2001; Heckman, 2011). Evidence to support the above statement derives directly from the reported experiences of the nine female head athletic trainers who participated in this study. The resolution for diminishing gendered stereotypes and gender-typed work roles that the participants in this study mentioned needs to start in U.S. higher educational institutions. I concur with the participants' recommendations above, as such recommendations are interpersonally interactional. That is, learning to work with others in a positive and supportive way.

The female head athletic trainers in this study expressed the honor in their athletic training profession. All of the participants exemplified strong leadership and professionalism through their creation of educational athletic training programs, academic achievements, scholarly publications, volunteer work, committee work, or their pursuit in achieving more. The participants' endeavor to achieve more began when they sacrificed their valuable time to participate in this research. With that in mind, the results of this study may enhance a U.S. higher education institutional professional athletic

training program framework that implements sociocultural issues into its athletic training education programs. Such sociocultural educational reform could effectuate social change by heightening recognition of underlying gender biases thereby promoting women to top-level sport leadership roles.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Informant for Participation and Potential Recruit List

Hello [insert name]:

As an esteemed professional in the field of athletic training, I would like to first invite you to participate in a study of female head athletic trainers at NAIA or NCAA schools. Secondly, if you know of other potential participants and are willing to share their information with me, it would be greatly appreciated. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting women's achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. The purpose also includes exploring female athletic trainers' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricula changes in current U.S. higher education athletic training programs. Gaining insight into the experiences of female head athletic trainers might lead policy makers and administrators to improve women's career advancement opportunities. Women who satisfy the criteria listed below are welcomed to take part in this research:

- Former or current full-time female head athletic trainers at either a 4-year NAIA or NCAA schools.
- Must have held the collegiate head athletic training position for at least one year.
- Must hold a current certified athletic trainer status.

If you would like to participate in this study, you will be invited to:

- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for one interview session of 60 to 90 minutes, which will be recorded via audiotape.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.

Just as you may choose to voluntarily elect to take part in this study now, you can choose to withdraw at any given time. No compensation will be offered in exchange for participation.

All information you share will remain confidential. Beyond this study, I will not reveal your information for any reason, which includes data that could distinguish you in the final report (e.g., name and university). Prior to the interview, you will receive an informed consent document in which your signature will be required. After the interview,

I will ask you to offer names of other potential participants; however, you may choose to decline to offer such information.

Please ask questions that you have at this time or at any time during this study. I can be contacted by email or phone at: ███████████ or ███████████

Kind regards,

Bekki Turner

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate from Informant Recruit List

Hello [insert name]:

As per [insert name] recommendation, I would like to invite you to participate in a study of female head athletic trainers at NAIA or NCAA schools. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. This purpose also includes exploring female athletic trainers' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricular changes in U.S. higher education athletic training program. Gaining insight into the experiences of women who lead or have led college athletic training programs might lead policy makers and administrators to improve women's career advancement opportunities. Women who satisfy the criteria listed below are welcomed to partake in this research:

- Former or current full-time female head athletic trainers at either a 4-year NAIA or NCAA schools.
- Must have held the collegiate head athletic training position for at least one year.
- Must hold a current certified athletic trainer status.

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be invited to:

- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for one interview session of 60 to 90 minutes, which will be recorded via audiotape.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.

Just as you may choose to voluntarily elect to take part in this study now, you can choose to withdraw at any given time. No financial compensation will be offered in exchange for participation.

All information you share will remain confidential. Beyond this study, I will not reveal your information for any reason, which includes any information that could distinguish you within the final report (e.g., name and university). Prior to collecting any personal information, you will receive an informed consent document in which your signature will be required. After the interview, I will ask you to offer names of potential participants,

however, you may choose to decline to offer such information.

Please pose questions that you have at this time or at any time during this study. I can be contacted by email or phone at: ████████ or ████████.

Kind regards,

Bekki Turner

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate from NAIA List

Hello [insert name]:

I located your name on the NAIA's public list of athletic trainers and would like to invite you to participate in a study of female head athletic trainers at NAIA or NCAA schools. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. This purpose also includes exploring female athletic trainers' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricular changes in U.S. higher education athletic training program. Gaining insight into the experiences of women who lead or have led college athletic training programs might lead policy makers and administrators to improve women's career advancement opportunities. Women who satisfy the criteria listed below are welcomed to partake in this research:

- Former or current full-time female head athletic trainers at either a 4-year NAIA or NCAA schools.
- Must have held the collegiate head athletic training position for at least one year.
- Must hold a current certified athletic trainer status.

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be invited to:

- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for one interview session of 60 to 90 minutes, which will be recorded via audiotape.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.

Just as you may choose to voluntarily elect to take part in this study now, you can choose to withdraw at any given time. No financial compensation will be offered in exchange for participation.

All information you share will remain confidential. Beyond this study, I will not reveal your information for any reason, which includes any information that could distinguish you within the final report (e.g., name and university). Prior to collecting any personal information, you will receive an informed consent document in which your signature will be required. After the interview, I will ask you to offer names of additional possible

recruits; however, you may choose to decline to offer such information.

Please pose questions that you have at this time or at any time during this study. I can be contacted by email or phone at: ███████████ or ███████████

Kind regards,

Bekki Turner

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate from NCAA List

Hello [insert name]:

I located your name on the NCAA's public list of athletic trainers and would like to invite you to participate in a study of female head athletic trainers at NAIA or NCAA schools. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. This purpose also includes exploring female athletic trainers' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricular changes in U.S. higher education athletic training program. Gaining insight into the experiences of women who lead or have led college athletic training programs might lead policy makers and administrators to improve women's career advancement opportunities. Women who satisfy the criteria listed below are welcomed to partake in this research:

- Former or current full-time female head athletic trainers at either a 4-year NAIA or NCAA schools.
- Must have held the collegiate head athletic training position for at least one year.
- Must hold a current certified athletic trainer status.

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be invited to:

- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for one interview session of 60 to 90 minutes, which will be recorded via audiotape.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.

Just as you may choose to voluntarily elect to take part in this study now, you can choose to withdraw at any given time. No financial compensation will be offered in exchange for participation.

All information you share will remain confidential. Beyond this study, I will not reveal your information for any reason, which includes any information that could distinguish you within the final report (e.g., name and university). Prior to collecting any personal information, you will receive an informed consent document in which your signature will be required. After the interview, I will ask you to offer names of additional possible

recruits; however, you may choose to decline to offer such information.

Please pose questions that you have at this time or at any time during this study. I can be contacted by email or phone at: ████████ or ████████.

Kind regards,

Bekki Turner

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Bekki Turner, PhD candidate in Higher Education at Walden University is administering a research project.

You have been chosen as a potential participant in this research project because you are a:

- Former or current fulltime woman head athletic trainer who has worked or is working at either a 4-year NAIA or NCAA school.
- Woman who has held a collegiate head athletic training position for a minimum of one year.
- Woman who holds a current certified athletic trainer status.

Your decision to participate in this research project is voluntary.

Why is this research project being conducted?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived experiences of female athletic trainers in the United States regarding the part institutions of higher education play in preparing and supporting their achievement of U.S. collegiate leadership. This purpose also includes exploring female athletic trainers' perspectives on potential career barriers and their suggestions for curricular changes in U.S. higher education athletic training program.

What can I expect if I partake in this research project?

If you choose to voluntarily participate, the research will request that you engage in the following:

- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for one interview session of 60 to 90 minutes, which will be recorded via audiotape.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- Talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- A pseudonym will be used that will distinguish your explanations during all phases of this research such that no personal or traceable data will link you to this study.

- Interviews that will be conducted in person, by telephone and/or Skype.

How long can I expect to be involved in the research project?
You can expect to be involved in one interview 60 to 90 minute interview and two 15 to 30 minute member-checking (e.g., transcripts and summary of findings) interviews (e.g., in person, telephone, and/or Skype) within a 3-week period of time. For the 15 to 30 minute member checking interviews, you will have the option of replying via email.

What can I expect relative to possible risks or uneasiness from this research?
- Conversation about discriminatory events or potential unfavorable experiences in retrospection.
- Considering the purpose of this study about experiences and matters that might be personal, some of the interview questions about experiences with leading others, reflecting on what your experiences mean, interacting with your educational institutions, and feelings regarding your leadership ability could be sensitive. At any time, you may choose not to respond to questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still participate in this study.

What can I expect relative to possible benefits?

- You will not receive compensation from participating in the research project.
- The findings of the study might influence the future of female athletic trainers in pursuit of collegiate sport leadership roles by sharing experiences and ideas that could improve their educational programs and career opportunities.

What alternative choices are there if I elect to be a participant?

In association with this research project, all acquired data, inclusive of information that could distinguish you, will continue to be confidential. At no time will your personal information be revealed without your permission.

- Confidentiality will be preserved via institutional and personal pseudonyms. The researcher's home office is where all data will be stored and secured within a locked file cabinet: data stored on a home computer will be encrypted and password-protected.
- Other than the researcher, only the committee supervising this research will be able to access interview data. Pseudonyms will be used to sustain confidentiality throughout the entire research project.
- Data analysis strategies (e.g., codes and categories) will be reported as thematic thus, avoiding disclosure of personal information.

What can I expect relative to accuracy of my interview information?

- Approximately 3 to 5 days after your interview, you will receive a verbatim, typed transcript via email for your review. This transcript will allow you to check and validate the accuracy of your experiences.
- You will be able to talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that your typed transcript represents your experiences and the tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.
- You will receive excerpts of the findings relevant to your interview. This excerpt of the findings will allow you to check and validate the accuracy of your experiences.
- You will be able to talk in person, via telephone and/or Skype with the researcher for 15 to 30 minutes to ensure that excerpts from the interview represent your experiences and tenor you ascribe to these experiences. You'll have the option of replying via email.

What rights do I have as a participant in this research project?

- Just as you may choose to voluntarily participate, you can also choose to retract your permission and terminate participation at any given time throughout the study.
- If you choose to decline or discontinue participation in this study, please know that such a decision will not negatively impact your relationship with the researcher in any capacity.
- Whether you decide to participate or not, there will be no forfeiture of entitled benefits or any ensuing penalty.
- Throughout the course of this research project, you can decline to respond to any question at any time and still be a participant in the study.

Potential conflicts of interest:

There are no conflicts of interest pertaining to this study. As the researcher, I am not in any teaching, business, leadership, and supervisory or professional role with any athletic trainer or potential participant in this study.

Who do I get in touch with if I have further questions regarding this research?

- Should you have questions, concerns, and comments pertaining to this study, please notify ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Dr. Cheryl Keen is my faculty advisor who will address any questions you might have and can be reached at: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. If you desire to speak privately regarding your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact Dr. Leilani Endicott, Walden University's representative, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number for this study is 04-13-15-

0072243 and will expire on April 12, 2016.

You will receive a copy of this document to retain in your files. In addition, you are encouraged to maintain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information and feel that I understand the research study well enough to make an informed decision concerning my involvement. By replying to this email with the words 'I consent', I am agreeing to participate.

Appendix F: Interview Guide Questions

Initial Interview

Preparation and Support for Female head Athletic Trainers in Collegiate Sport

Phase 1 Questions—Contextual Foundation

(Relevance to Career Path and Role of Education)

Interview Question 1: Describe for me how you initially became interested in achieving an athletic training leadership role in collegiate sports.

> **Probe Question 1a:** How did the type of college or university (e.g., single-sex, mixed-sex, and denominational) influence the path of your career?

> **Probe Question 1b:** How did your undergraduate degree program (e.g., physical education or athletic training) contribute to developing your career goals? Graduate program?

Interview Question 2: How did faculty or mentor interactions influence your decision to pursue an athletic training career?

> **Probe Question 2a:** How did academic advisor interactions influence your decision to pursue an athletic training career? Athletic department staff?

> **Probe Question 2b:** How did graduate assistantships or clinical internships influence your decision to pursue an athletic training career?

Interview Question 3: Describe for me the career route you took to achieve your athletic training leadership position.

> **Probe Question 3a:** Describe how Title IX influenced your decision to pursue an athletic training career.

> **Probe Question 3b:** How did you obtain your first athletic training position in collegiate sport leadership?

> **Probe Question 3c:** Have you had to obtain additional credentials or certifications in order to qualify for an athletic training leadership role? If yes, explain why extra credentials and/or certifications are necessary.

Phase 2 Questions—Details and Remembrance

(Relevance to Leadership Preparation and Barriers)

Interview Question 4: Describe for me any challenges you might have experienced while pursuing a collegiate head athletic trainer position (e.g., professional organization, institutional or employment responsibilities, and gender)?

> **Probe Question 4a:** If yes, for what reasons do you believe you have experienced challenges to your professional advancement opportunities? If no, explain how you were able to advance professionally or describe, in detail, the events that led to becoming a head athletic trainer.

> **Probe Question 4b:** If yes, who or what assisted you with overcoming these challenges (for challenges, use words of participant).

> **Probe Question 4c:** What role, if any, did higher education play in training you to overcome challenges to your athletic training leadership success (e.g., leadership courses, working with male sport teams, and opportunities to apply and interview for leadership positions)?

> **Probe Question 4d:** As a woman, do you think your higher education program(s) sufficiently prepared you to contend and qualify for an athletic training leadership position in college sports? If so, how? If not, explain?

Phase 3 Questions—Reflection and Experiential Meanings

(Relevance to Educational Reform)

Interview Question 5: How can higher education curricula and credentialing be reorganized to enhance female athletic trainers' leadership proficiencies and opportunities?

Interview Question 6: How can higher education prepare female athletic trainers to handle various personal and institutional barriers to achieving career success?

Interview Question 7: Consider what you have been able to reconstruct from early career aspirations to present leadership experiences: how would you describe the role of education in your personal life and career?

> **Probe Question 7a:** How would you describe the role that gender plays in your career?

> **Probe Question 7b:** Considering your leadership role now, what role, if any, does faculty, mentors, and career networks play in your career?

Interview Question 8: How does your current continuing education credits and/or head athletic training experiences influence your leadership of both men and women?

> **Probe Question 8a:** The statements or words of participants will provide probe examples.

Interview Question 9: What suggestions or advice do you have for present and future generations of women who desire to become athletic training leaders at the collegiate or any level of sport?

Interview Question 10: Would you like to contribute additional information that you believe is relevant to this study?

Appendix G: Permission to Use Interview Guide Questionnaire

From: Regina Epps
To: B Turner
Date: Tue, Mar 10, 2015 at 6:53 PM
Subject: RE: Permission to use your 2012 interview questionnaire

Dear Bekki,

Thank you for contacting me for permission to use my interview questions from my Dissertation on the *Relevance of Higher Education in Preparing Women for Leadership Positions in Collegiate Sports.* My dissertation focused on understanding the experiences of females in athletic administration leadership positions from a general perspective. Since your dissertation is examining the experiences of individuals specific to athletic training leadership, I am giving you permission to use my interview questions and modify them according to your participant's professional field.

Let me know if I can be of further service to you.

Regina Avery Epps, Ph.D.
North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University
Department of Human Performance & Leisure Studies
Email: xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx
xxx-xxx-xxxx
xxx-xxx-xxxx

NOTICE: This e-mail correspondence is subject to Public Records Law and may be disclosed to third parties.

Kind regards,

Bekki Turner