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**Perspectives of Female Leaders in Athletic Training**

**By**

**Kyle M. Momsen**

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
the Educational Doctorate Degree  
in Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato**

**Mankato, Minnesota**

**May 2014**

June 9, 2014

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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### **Abstract**

Previous research has found that women face barriers in athletic training and it appears that they are not represented in leadership positions in numbers equal to the demographics of athletic training. The purpose of this research was to explore the leadership experiences and perspectives of female athletic trainers who have earned a leadership position at the highest levels in athletic training. This qualitative investigation utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 12 women that held national leadership positions in athletic training.

The data from this investigation suggests that many of the barriers that previously faced women in athletic training have decreased or disappeared. The participants highlighted the NATA and state associations as having an increased number of female leaders. While this study found this positive trend the data also revealed continued challenges for women in the athletic world, particularly professional and NCAA Division I sports, and work life balance, particularly for mothers. The data in this study also suggested that, contrary to previous research, women are motivated to become leaders in the field. The participants reported that their motivation to become a leader was influenced by a passion for the field, involvement in the field, relationships, and the opportunity to effect change in the profession.

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Kyle Momsen

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Problem**

Very few articles and research studies have been published about women's leadership in the field of athletic training. Those that have, along with a few dissertations on the topic, indicate that women who are athletic trainers face barriers. Women first had difficulty joining the field of athletic training because academic programs often would not accept women. Once they were able to enter the field they often were not able to gain experience in high-risk sports, such as football, which hindered their professional development (Anderson, 1992). The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE, 2012) has taken steps to eliminate these barriers by incorporating a non-discrimination clause in the professional standards for athletic training education. These standards state "clinical education assignments cannot discriminate based on sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation" (p. 7). It is not clear that these barriers to education have been eliminated even with this standard for education. During a CAATE roundtable at the 2013 National Athletic Trainers' Association Athletic Training Education Conference (ATEC) several educators argued against this standard. These educators believed they had good clinical educational sites even though those sites would not allow female athletic trainers. For example, often men's professional sports teams will not allow females to participate in clinical experiences (Anonymous, personal communication, January 12, 2013).

Authors have also found barriers for women including discrimination, patriarchy, and socialization, or behaviors commonly referred to as *the old boys club*. Shingles (2001) and Walk (1999) both found that many female athletic trainers experienced sexual harassment in the classroom, their clinical educations, or their job. These incidents included both verbal and physical harassment. Female head athletic trainers in Gorant's (2012) study reported a variety of situations where they faced these types of barriers. Their experiences ranged from being told not to apply for a job because they were female, needing to prove themselves more than males, to being told they were not welcome at the conference head athletic trainers meeting. An excellent example of the male patriarchy that exists in some sports was documented by O'Connor, Grappendorf, Burton, Harmon, Henderson, and Peel (2010). Male football players reported that they felt that *football athletic trainer* and *female* were incongruent.

Work life balance or family obligations are often cited as a barrier for women in athletic training, although as the review of literature will document it is unclear if this is true or a perception. Gorant (2012) found that four of the seven female head athletic trainers she interviewed were single and childless, and three of those women indicated they would not be in their current position if they had a family. Booth (2000) and Dieringer (2007) also reported that women felt greater conflict in their job due to family obligations than men. During their study of female athletic trainers working with a National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I football program Goodman, Mensch, Jay, French, Mitchell, and Fritz (2010) found that the primary reason for leaving their job was work life balance.

Women also perceive fewer opportunities for advancement and receive less financial compensation than men in similar positions. Booth (2000) found that male athletic trainers were more likely to be paid more and have more experience than women even though they had similar education and practice settings. Dieringer (2007) also found that female athletic trainers were paid less than male athletic trainers. Dieringer found that 41.6% of males and 70.5% of females surveyed believed that preference was given to males for head athletic trainer positions.

Even fewer studies have offered insight for women who are or plan to be leaders in athletic training (Booth, 2000; Gorant, 2012; Shingles, 2001). Booth (2000) found women perceived barriers to leadership in athletic training and offered several recommendations. She suggested leaders of organizations should identify and eliminate barriers to advancement for women and minorities, committees in the employment arena and professional associations should be established to address issues of gender equity, and administrators should intensify efforts to recruit and hire women and minorities. Shingles (2001) reported that women varied on their perception of societal power issues. Some women felt they were disrespected and disadvantaged as female athletic trainers, especially when working with male coaches. Due to the male hegemony in sports some of these men believe they are supervisory to female athletic trainers. Gorant (2012) offered a composite description of a female head athletic trainer at the NCAA Division I level. This description offered readers some idea of the challenges facing women and what current female leaders attribute their success to. Her research indicated that common themes for female leaders are having a strong work ethic, self-confidence,

having experience as an assistant athletic trainer (generally at the same institution they later led), and having a strong mentor.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) was founded in 1950 and offers the most comprehensive information about demographics in athletic training. In 1950 there were about 200 male athletic trainers in the association and it was not until 1966 that the first female athletic trainer joined the association (Shingles, 2001). The numbers of women in the field have been growing ever since. Appendix 1 shows a chart of years that membership statistics by gender are available. In 2006, for the first time ever, the association (and therefore theoretically the profession) had more female members than male. There have been several women in key leadership roles in the field; however, there have always been more male than female leaders.

The passage of the Title IX Amendment in 1972 created an excellent opportunity for more women to enter the field of athletic training because it forced athletic training programs to end discrimination against women. Before this time women were often denied admittance to athletic training education programs because classes were often taught in the men's locker room (Anderson, 1992). It would seem that more women would have leadership positions since there would be more female athletes to participate in sports and more women in the field. However, it appears that Title IX had the opposite effect in terms of leadership positions in college athletics. Many women who were head athletic trainers in a women's athletic department lost their leadership position when the men's and women's athletic departments merged (Acosta & Carpenter, 1992; Dieringer,

2007). Currently only 17.5% of all Division I institutions employ a woman as the head athletic trainer (Gorant, 2012).

### **Problem Statement**

There appears to be fewer women in leadership positions in the leadership structure of the athletic training profession than current demographics for the entire field would suggest. Literature over time indicates that there has been a reduction in discrimination towards women in athletic training but no research has investigated the lived experiences of women who hold key leadership positions in the field of athletic training, particularly with a focus on what these women attribute their success to.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research was to explore the leadership experiences and perspectives of female athletic trainers during gender demographic shifts in the field of athletic training. How have the women who have earned a place at the highest levels of leadership in the field of athletic training experienced barriers to their roles and what strategies have they employed to overcome these barriers?

### **Research Questions**

1. How do female athletic trainers in leadership roles describe any barriers they have experienced?
2. What are the commonalities in strategies women have used to overcome barriers to leadership positions?



3. How do female athletic trainers in leadership roles describe the changes in leadership opportunities as the demographics of athletic training have included more women?
4. How do female athletic trainers in leadership roles describe the motivational and influential factors that influenced their leadership development?

### **Significance of the Research**

While the research has indicated that women face barriers to achieving leadership roles there is little guidance for aspiring female leaders in athletic training (Anderson, 1992, Booth, 2000, Gorant, 2012, Shingles, 2001). This study was designed to gather information from women who have been successful leaders in the profession and share any common strategies they have for overcoming barriers with future leaders in the field. The findings for this study are beneficial for current and future athletic trainers regardless of their gender by providing insight into the career path towards leadership. These insights can help athletic trainers determine what actions they can take to strengthen their leadership journey.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The delimitations of this study include the specific selection criteria for the participants. This study intentionally focused on women who have served, or are serving, in leadership positions in the field of athletic training, such as NATA Board of Director, Board of Certification (BOC) Director, Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) (or its predecessors), presidents, and state or district association presidents. This intentional sample was important because of the small

numbers of female leaders in the field and it allowed for a deeper examination of their experiences.

While the small sample size allowed for richer data it was also a limitation because it is possible that I missed valuable experiences that other female leaders could share. It will be helpful for future research to expand to a larger sample population. The need to protect confidentiality of the participants is another limitation. Due to the small pool of female leaders I am not able to share complete stories of any one participant to ensure their anonymity.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Athletic training.** An allied health care profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association and encompassing the prevention, diagnosis, and intervention of emergency, acute, and chronic medical conditions involving impairment, functional limitations and disabilities.

**Athletic trainer (AT).** Healthcare professionals who collaborate with physicians to optimize activity and participation of patients and clients. ATs can be found anywhere there are active people. Traditionally, ATs are thought to work in professional sports, colleges and high schools, but as the profession grows so have the practice settings. Those practice settings include the performing arts, military, physician extender, industrial (manufacturing settings) or public safety (police and fire fighters) and more.

**Athletic training leadership position.** This term will be used to include leadership positions such as president of the NATA, board of directors for the NATA or

BOC, president of the CAATE, and president of district or state athletic training associations.

**Board of Certification (BOC).** The Board of Certification, Inc. is the only accredited certification program for athletic trainers in the United States. The BOC establishes and regularly reviews both the standards for the practice of athletic training and the continuing education requirements for BOC Certified ATs.

**Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE).** The mission of the CAATE is to provide comprehensive accreditation services to institutions that offer Athletic Training degree programs and verify that all CAATE-accredited programs meet the acceptable educational standards for athletic training education.

### **Summary**

Athletic training began as a field with only male practitioners, but as the field has developed women have entered the profession. Women now outnumber men in the field, but men still hold more of the leadership positions than women. There is a small amount of research documenting some barriers women face in the field and obtaining leadership positions in the field, and even less research that helps explain how the women who have obtained leadership positions were able to overcome the barriers they faced.

This study interviewed women who have served, or are serving, as leaders within the athletic training profession. Their perspectives will help others in the profession better understand the career path to a leadership position and how they might be able to achieve that level of leadership in their career.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

While there are some women who have risen to the top leadership positions in athletic training it clearly is not the norm. This study was driven by current research that indicates women face barriers to leadership, and even persistence, in the field of athletic training. At this time, it is not known how these female leaders have achieved their leadership positions so this research attempted to give insight into their success. This review of literature will introduce the reader to a history of women in athletic training, research in athletic training with a focus on gender, specific barriers to practicing athletic training and research focused on leadership in athletic training.

### **Women in Athletic Training**

The field of athletic training has vastly changed and developed over time, as one would expect from a young profession. In terms of the way that women experience the profession there has been much progress but there is work that remains to be done. This section of the literature review will document the growth of women in athletic training from no women to over 50% of the professional association membership. In addition to describing the growth of women in the field this section will also document the perceptions women have had about the field over its history.

### **History from 1950-2005**

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) is the professional association that represents athletic trainers in the United States and offers the best source of data about the history of athletic training. It was founded in 1950 and was comprised

solely of male athletic trainers. It was not until 1966 that the first female athletic trainer joined the association and the first large growth was from 1972-1974 (about 100 women), possibly due to the passage of Title IX (Wilson, 1974a). One example of the scarcity of women in the field is a report by Linda Treadway. While covering the U.S. Women's Track and Field Olympic Trials in 1972 she was told there had been considerable trouble finding a woman qualified to cover the event (Wilson, 1974b).

The profession was partially difficult for women to join because not all educational programs admitted women. In 1973 there were 15 undergraduate athletic training programs and only five schools accepted women into their program (Wilson, 1973a). Progress was made in 1974 as 15 of the 23 schools with a NATA approved undergraduate program and both NATA approved graduate programs accepted women (Wilson, 1974b).

January 1974 marked the formation of an Ad Hoc committee on women in athletic training by the NATA Board of Directors and they were given four months to make recommendations to the Board (Wilson, 1974c). Anderson (1992) suggested this was due to the influx of women after Title IX was passed. This committee recommended that the NATA disseminate information on women as athletic trainers to colleges and universities, information on athletic training as a career to junior and high school students, that female athletic trainers be available at all girl's and women's competitions, and women representatives be appointed to standing NATA committees (Wilson, 1974d). These requests were mainly met, but the committee was disbanded the following year and it is not clear how successful the educational portions of their recommendations were met

(Anderson, 1992). In 1995 a new effort to address the concerns of women began as the NATA Board of Directors established the Women in Athletic Training Task Force. At this time more than 40% of the NATA membership were women and in 2006 there were more female than male members of the NATA, which is a trend that has continued ever since.

### **Current Status**

In 2006 *The NCAA News* published a commentary by Hosick (2006) titled “Athletic Training as a Career is No Longer a Man’s Domain” that included comments from several prominent female athletic trainers. The women’s comments indicated that Title IX had created many more opportunities for women to get an education in athletic training. Since initially men did not want to provide care for female athletes there was a large increase of both athletic training and women in athletic training. They also noted a change in the culture that made it more acceptable for women to be athletes or be associated with sports as professionals. While the women quoted in the column felt the profession was not as much of a good old boys club anymore, they acknowledged that women should be aware they would probably face “gender challenges, crude remarks, or even physical obstacles” (p. A3) despite the improvements in the field. They even stated that a female has to be better than a male in the field to succeed because it was still a man’s world. Another barrier they suggested was the grueling schedule of a collegiate setting making it close to impossible to raise a family. However, they all agreed that it was vital that women continue to grow in the profession and provide an important facet of diversity for the field.

The year 2006 also saw the publication of a dissertation by Dieringer that compared the perception of athletic trainers from responses to a 1996 and follow-up 2006 survey about women in athletic training. This study will be discussed in greater detail throughout the literature review, but clearly it indicated that perceptions about women have changed since 1996. Dieringer reported a 30% increase in the perception by women that they had equal opportunity to participate on committees, while men had a 26% increase in their perception. Between the two surveys there was also approximately a 20% decrease for both genders in the numbers of respondents who felt that men had greater opportunities to advance in the field than women. Dieringer also reported a decrease in the number of respondents who thought preference was given to male candidates over female candidates for head athletic trainer positions, 70% to 42% for males and 84% to 70% for females. One interesting finding that bears future study was that both men and women felt more leadership roles were available in 2006 for women, but that more women were choosing not to pursue leadership roles.

There were two areas where there was not improvement in the working situation for women. The first was the perception of whether or not females experienced greater conflict between family and professional responsibilities. Both men and women believed that women have greater conflict in this realm in 2006 than they did in 1996. The second area, which is a very troubling finding, was that in 1996 37% of the women who responded to the survey indicated that they had been sexually harassed and in 2006 that percentage stayed essentially the same at 36.4% (Dieringer, 2006).

Acosta and Carpenter (2014) have been collecting data on women in intercollegiate sport since 1977, but have only collected data on women and athletic training since 1998. During this time the percentage of schools with a full time athletic trainer rose from 92.3% to 99.5%. Acosta and Carpenter show little improvement for women in the role of head athletic trainer at NCAA institutions during this time. In 1998 28.6% of all head athletic trainers were female and in 2014 that number was at 32.4%. However, it should be noted that there is a marked difference in this percentage if the institutions are broken down by the NCAA Division they belong to. There is a female head athletic trainer at only 19.5% of NCAA Division I institutions while 42.4% of NCAA Division III institutions have one. The authors commented

the duties and skills of an athletic trainer seem to be independent of the gender of the athletic trainer or the division within which the athletic trainer works. Thus the stark variation in representation across divisions and the overall low representation of females leaves open the question of the presence of non-skill based selection processes. (p. 44)

Their data also indicated that in 2014 there was the highest ever number of females employed and participating in intercollegiate athletics.

### **Barriers for Women in Athletic Training**

Several authors have looked at barriers women face to practice in the field of athletic training. It is clear that women often face barriers to practicing in the athletic training field, but it is also clear there is not yet a complete picture of their experience due to the variety of situations women are in. This portion of the literature review will be



dedicated to describing the studies that have investigated the various barriers women experience.

**Historical barriers.** Anderson (1992) published one of the first studies directed towards women in athletic training and gave insight into the early years of athletic training for women. She found that women practicing athletic training during the 1960's-1970 had faced significant barriers to becoming an athletic trainer. Nearly all women in her study perceived that access to academic programs in athletic training, supervision, exposure to high risk sports, equipment, and facilities was not at the same level offered to male athletic training students. For example she reported barriers to education such as classes being held in the men's locker room so women were not allowed in class. Female students were also not being allowed to gain experience in "high risk" sports, such as football, and therefore missing vital clinical educational opportunities. They also faced significant barriers while they were practicing as an athletic trainer. Once practicing in the field female athletic trainers reported they had to work harder because they had fewer resources for women's sports than the men's sports had. They also faced a difficult work environment because they were often labeled as lesbians. This created a negative working environment for many women.

**Discrimination.** Since Anderson's (1992) publication several authors have investigated the barriers that women face in athletic training. Walk (1999) reported that female athletic training students faced discrimination due to their gender in several different realms. In this survey of 9 female athletic training majors at a large Midwestern university, drawn from a larger study done at the same university, results showed that the

women faced disempowerment and sexualization. Female students were routinely assigned sports that ranked lower on the hierarchy in the athletic department and were never assigned to men's ice hockey, which that institution considered its top sport. With certain sports the roles and responsibilities the females were given were less than what their male peers were given, such as not being allowed to be at men's basketball practice or post-practice briefings due to the obscene language that was used. Coaches stated that they believed this language might offend the female athletic training students. When women were assigned to work with male sports Walk reported that the male athletes often assigned the female students the traditionally feminine roles of "mom", "sister" or "lady" (p. 268) as a way for the athletes to compromise with the perceived challenge of having a female around. The female students in Walk's study also reported feeling that sexualization of women occurred, particularly from coaches. Female students also reported that they experienced sexual harassment, both during their work with teams and outside of the work environment.

Alhadeff (2006) also found participants in his study had been labeled with feminine roles, such as daughter, so the men could act as protectors for them. This study utilized a qualitative research method to reveal the perspectives of seven women athletic training students that were interning at a West Coast University with NCAA Division I athletics. Each woman had worked with at least one men's athletic team, so they had experience working in a male sports subculture. When the researcher questioned the students about their experiences they indicated they believed they were equal with the experiences of male students. One of the main areas they saw their experiences to be

different was in their clinical assignments. The women were rarely assigned to work as a lead student with a male team, and they attributed this to increased cost while traveling since the female student would need their own room. However, during analysis of the interviews it became apparent to Alhadeff that the women had accepted the naturalization of gender in their workplace and accepted inequalities instead of being concerned about inequality. For example the women allowed distasteful behavior to occur so that the work atmosphere was agreeable to the male athletes because they felt bad if athletes felt obligated to change their behavior around the women. One important difference between this study and the Walk (1999) study is that the women in Alhadeff's study did not report any sexual harassment, so it is important to note that not all male athletes and coaches sexualize female athletic trainers.

**Male hierarchy.** Burton, Borland, and Mazerolle (2012) reported that the 14 young female participants in their study noted that many male coaches believed women should not work with men's sports and male dominated hierarchies would continue to enforce this belief. Burton et al. reported that participants felt that their decisions were questioned more than their male colleagues, and gave specific examples of where coaches would ask a male athletic trainer the same question the female athletic trainer was trying to respond to. The women in this study also indicated that male coaches often stereotyped them as being too mothering and wanted the women to be more of a "bitch" (p. 311) to the athletes. In addition to these challenges the women in this study also reported that coaches had made it clear that they feared the women would be a distraction to the male athletes or that they were just there to become sexually involved with the

athletes. These gender stereotypes continue to make the work environment uncomfortable for some female athletic trainers. Alhadeff (2006) also reported the cultural attitude that women should not work with male sports. Participants in her study indicated that it would cost the teams more to have someone of the other gender travel with the team so while they did not like it, they understood why women could not work with certain sports.

In their study to investigate the comfort level of male and female athletes with care provided by same-sex and opposite-sex athletic trainers O'Connor, Grappendorf, Burton, Harmon, Henderson, and Peel (2010) reported findings that indicated women faced barriers to practicing. Respondents in their survey of 140 male football players demonstrated they felt that *football athletic trainer* and *female* were incongruent. This was often because women were viewed as supportive, nurturing, and caring when the athletes wanted someone to be assertive in their role as football athletic trainer. When viewed from a leadership perspective this also prevented women from being hired as head athletic trainers since football is generally the responsibility of the head athletic trainer.

Using a grounded theory approach Goodman, Mensch, Jay, French, Mitchell, and Fritz (2010) investigated the reasons that female athletic trainers gave that informed their decision to either stay or leave their position with a Division I (DI) football program. The female athletic trainers' primary reason for leaving DI football was life balance issues. The women reported struggles balancing family demands and job demands. Similar to what women have reported in other professions, Goodman et al. found that

female athletic trainers also bore a greater burden than men for child rising and household management.

**Work life balance.** One of the most discussed barriers is the work-family conflict that can arise for women, particularly in the college athletics setting (Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Gorant, 2012). Results from research on work life balance are conflicting in terms of whether or not women experience this barrier. Both perspectives will be presented in this section.

Nussbaum and Rogers (1999) completed an informal survey that was focused on the perceptions of 33 female athletic trainers without children and 35 female athletic trainers who had children. Their findings indicated that mothers reported significant challenges in being both a mother and an athletic trainer at the Division I level. The women in this study expressed the opinion that they were more responsible for childcare and therefore they could not work as many hours as their peers. In addition to societal pressures they also faced increased stress from negative reactions they received from co-workers. The authors recommended that in order to fully engage women, particularly those with children, in the profession the issues of flex time, job sharing, day care, and travel responsibilities need to be addressed.

One of the first studies to present the case that work-family (or role conflict as she called it) conflict existed for women in athletic training was Booth in her 2000 dissertation. Booth studied the perceptions of gender equity and barriers to advancement held by male and female athletic trainers. The following issues related to role conflict were included in her survey:

1. If they have young children, lack of adequate day-care facilities is more of a problem for women than men pursuing a position as a head athletic trainer
2. Women athletic trainers are unable to do justice to their professional duties when these are combined with the management of a home
3. Male athletic trainers are more likely to assist males rather than females in developing competencies needed to be a head athletic trainer
4. Female athletic trainers do not relate as well with the female athletic trainers as they do with male athletic trainers. (Booth, 2000, p. 84)

The findings in her study were not reported by question, but as larger categories so it is impossible to pull out data specific to the first two questions, which more appropriately address the type of role or work-family conflict more recent studies have investigated. Booth reported that there was a significant difference in female athletic trainers' perceptions of greater barriers than perceived by male athletic trainers. These findings matched the findings of authors in her literature review.

In her 2007 dissertation Dieringer (2007) investigated the work-family conflict that might have existed in 2006 and compared that data to a survey completed in 1996. When asked whether women had greater work-family

conflict than men (as opposed to the same or less amount of conflict) females responded in the affirmative at a higher rate than men (i.e., 90% of female respondents, as compared to men, 65% of male respondents). The female respondents also felt that women had greater difficulty reentering the profession after taking time off for child rearing (i.e., 78% of women versus 50% of men). She also found that since 1996 these perceptions of work family conflict had increased for women.

Contrary to the findings from Booth (2000) and Dieringer (2007) the next study Mazerolle, Bruening, and Casa (2008) found that work-family conflict was not dependent on sex. In an effort to identify roots and factors leading to quality-of-life issues for athletic trainers working in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I-A setting the researchers surveyed 324 men and 263 women. Their data indicated that travel and long work hours directly contributed to work-family conflict while sex had no significant impact on the measure. Questions in their study included items such as “the demands of my work interfere with my home and family life” and “I often have to miss important family activities because of my job” (Mazerolle et al., 2008, p. 507). The authors had hypothesized both that married participants would experience more work-family conflict than single participants, and the same for female versus male participants. Their theory for this result, which they developed after this study was completed, was that work-family conflict led women to leave the Division I-A setting if it was going to be a challenge for them.

Goodman, Mensch, Jay, French, Mitchell, and Fritz (2010) followed up to examine the reasons that female athletic trainers leave NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision schools. They interviewed 23 women, 12 of whom were currently full-time and 11 of whom were formerly in the Southeastern Conference, to ascertain why they chose to stay or leave their position. The four themes that developed for persisting in the setting were “(1) increased autonomy, (2) increased social support, (3) enjoyment of the job/fitting the NCAA D-I AT mold, and (4) kinship responsibility” (p. 290). In this article kinship responsibility was defined “as the degree or existence of obligations toward family who live within the local community (p. 292). The three themes that emerged from their data for why female athletic trainers leaving were “(1) life balance issues, (2) role conflict and role overload, and (3) kinship responsibility” (p. 292). While at first glance this gives the impression that the data supports the theory that married female athletic trainers have more work life balance conflict the authors actually found that both single and married female athletic trainers had this conflict.

Kahanov, Loeb sack, Masucci, and Roberts (2010) investigated the perspectives of female athletic trainers in the secondary school and collegiate setting towards parenthood. Their research demonstrated the complexity of studying this issue and provided mixed results. The study had 405 respondents, 61% of whom did not have children. The authors reported that the majority, 41%, of the women worked in the secondary school setting as opposed to the collegiate setting, which had 26%. This type of data led the authors to believe that the challenges women face balancing work-family conflict led



them to practice more often in non-college settings. While the quantitative data Kahanov et al. collected from the women did not show a significant difference between parents and non-parents for choice of job setting, follow-up qualitative data (from a smaller sample) gave the perception that motherhood presented more challenges or struggles in the work and family settings and therefore led the women to believe the collegiate setting would be much harder to work in. A further complication to researching this topic was addressed by Kahanov et al. as well. They indicated that 77% of non-parents in their survey had less than 5 years of experience as athletic trainers and their results mirrored data from the NATA that many women leave the field after the age of 30. They hypothesized that one reason women leave the field is due to the challenge of balancing work-family conflict.

Pitney, Mazerolle, and Pagnotta (2011) also studied work-family conflict in secondary school athletic trainers. Their data indicated that athletic trainers in the secondary school setting experienced moderate levels of work-family conflict, regardless of sex, family situation, or number of children. This did not match the data from other professions that their literature review discussed. The authors hypothesized this was partially due to the studies in their literature review being conducted in the 1990's and since then family workload has begun to equal out more between the genders. Pitney et al. suggested that work-family conflict could best be mediated by organizational support from employers and colleagues and personal strategies such as the athletic trainer taking time for their self.

In an effort to help female athletic trainers with children be successful Mazerolle and Goodman (2011) offered suggestions based on current literature and their

conversations with three female athletic trainers in the NCAA Division I setting. They suggested three important realms to consider, (1) support networks, (2) job sharing-teamwork, and (3) integration. Good support networks at home and in the workplace included support from colleagues and administration to help the mother balance work and family responsibilities. They suggested this could be done by fostering the culture that everyone should have a life outside of work, whether that is hobbies or family or by maintaining a flexible schedule at work. The family support was not specifically identified but the participants all indicated that family support was important. To address job sharing the authors suggested that staff help care for each other's athletes or develop a rotation of who travels with teams. They also reported one institution hired a graduate assistant athletic trainer who could share responsibilities with a staff member and that allowed the staff member a schedule with time to care for their child. The last strategy was integration, or "viewing work and life as having overlapping responsibilities" (p. 11). Examples of this might be bringing children to work or answering phone calls while making dinner at home and then doing administrative work from home after children have gone to bed.

As can be seen the research is conflicted about whether work-family conflict is a particular problem for women or if it equally affects men and women, both married and single. It is quite clear that for many athletic trainers they face a significant challenge to balance the demands of their job with the desire to have a personal life. It will be important to continue to investigate ways that athletic trainers can overcome this particular barrier to fully engaging in the profession.

## **Leadership in Athletic Training**

Research on leadership in athletic training is limited. While several different areas have been investigated, each topic is limited in its scope. As Kutz and Scialli argued in their 2008 report, leadership is important in any professional field. Kutz also agreed with the Pew Health Professions Commission that all healthcare professionals need to practice leadership (Kutz, 2008). Unfortunately leadership is a poorly understood phenomenon and difficult to research. There is no single agreed-upon definition of leadership, so it is nearly impossible to compare and contrast studies to one another when leadership is the focus. This section of the review of literature will cover the literature in athletic training on leadership development, educational leadership, and leadership styles.

### **Leadership Behaviors**

Several authors have investigated leadership behaviors within athletic training, but again most of the research is published only in dissertation form and not in peer-reviewed journals. It is clear that more research needs to be completed and published on this topic.

The oldest article included in this review of literature demonstrates that athletic training has long been focused on a contemporary definition of leadership and how difficult it is to research leadership. Nellis (1994) noted that leadership and management were topics of interest at that time, yet between then and now few research articles have been published. Nellis chose the definition of leadership posited by Rost, “leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (as cited in Nellis, 1994, p. 328). Nellis also noted that

while it was an influence relationship management was an authority relationship and that an athletic trainer proficient in both would maintain a “highly motivated and efficient athletic training room” (p. 328). Nellis offered the following suggestions to be a proficient leader. Begin leadership by knowing oneself to allow for self-confidence in strengths and a realization of what biases or irritants might cloud judgment. Next the leader should lead by example as this is often contagious and those around the leader will demonstrate the same values and actions, such as commitment or enthusiasm. Two other suggestions he offered are for leaders to know their profession and to know their people. He said that it is important for athletic training leaders to continue to develop professionally, or know their profession, so they can provide the best health care possible. Knowledge of staff and patients will allow athletic trainers to adjust to their needs and help the leaders know how the people will react in certain situations. The last three realms of proficient leadership are the skills of enacting loyalty, encouragement, and reprimand. Nellis recommended that leaders must be loyal to their staff in order to obtain the loyalty from staff needed for an organization to thrive. Finally he encourages following the dictum “praise in public and reprimand in private” (p. 329). He suggested that following these concepts would allow the leader to have a more efficient management process and garner support from colleagues.

Since there is no one agreed upon definition of leadership Kutz (2008) proposed in his commentary that healthcare professionals might define leadership as “the ability to ethically influence others, regardless of title or role, toward the accomplishment of goals and objectives” (p. 15). Because leadership can produce positive change, increased

motivation, consensus and morale Kutz argued that athletic training needs leaders “who are creative and innovative, who will foster change and growth, and who can further advance athletic training as a respected profession within the healthcare community” (p. 16).

Another important point Kutz (2008) made about leadership is that it transcends context and management is restricted to context, such as a job setting. Leadership can transcend the organizational boundaries of a job. As such Kutz argued that there are six leadership factors that are important to healthcare professionals, and specifically athletic trainers. The first is personality characteristics or innate characteristics, such as ethical behavior, willingness to delegate, and ambition. The second is contextual intelligence, or the “ability to quickly recognize contextual variables that are inherent in a given situation and make intentional adjustment of behavior to exert influence in that context” (p. 17). Multicultural awareness is an example of this leadership factor. The third and fourth are people skills and communication skills, such as the ability to collaborate with others and clearly articulate thoughts and ideas. The fifth factor is initiative, particularly towards the application of knowledge and recognition of a crisis situation and an appropriate rapid response. The sixth factor is strategic thinking, or “decision making and efforts to influence others that are directed toward realization of a desired future state” (p. 18). This is different than strategic planning and examples might include expressing concern for the organization’s future and efforts to share the organization’s mission with others.

Laurent and Bradney (2007) evaluated the leadership behaviors of athletic trainers, as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory, originally developed by Kouzes and

Posner in 1987. Laurent and Bradney then compared their findings to those in other fields. They had program directors and head athletic trainers take the assessment tool because they “perform leadership tasks when they influence people as part of their job responsibilities” (p. 122). Laurent and Bradney received 238 responses from their sample. They then compared those results to the work of Kouzes and Posner’s mean from a sample of 1255 participants. There was a statistical significance on the  $\chi^2$  test at the .05 level for the Model, Inspire, Challenge, and Enable categories, and no statistical significance in the Encourage category. Athletic trainers self-reported higher on modeling and enabling and lower on the inspiring and challenging categories of the LPI than the normative data so the authors concluded that athletic training leaders were similar to leaders in other fields.

Two other findings of the study were interesting. The first was that “program directors reported using inspiring, challenging, enabling, and encouraging leadership behaviors more often than the head athletic trainers did” (p. 122). The authors suggested this is because of the different job responsibilities and work environments of the two positions. For example, the program director is required by the accreditation process to have a mission and assessment plan, whereas the head athletic trainer may be more focused on daily health care services and not able to focus on changes for the future as much. One other interesting finding that requires more research was that they found that women reported engaging more often in modeling, challenging, and encouraging behaviors than men in this study. The study did not have a sample that allowed the authors to come to any conclusion on this result though so future research is needed.

### **Leadership Development in Athletic Training**

Similar to the amount of research present in athletic training regarding women in the field, there are few papers published on the subject of developing leadership for athletic trainers. The two primary areas that authors have attempted to address are professional socialization or mentoring and incorporating leadership in the educational area of athletic training. All of these articles have attempted to capture the influences on leadership retrospectively rather than through prospective studies. There have not been any formal studies reported on interventions to increase leadership ability within the athletic training literature. While the NATA does have a leadership development program, called StarTRACKS, the efficacy of the program has not been evaluated and shared via a research publication.

**Professional socialization.** Through a qualitative study of seven male NCAA Division I certified athletic trainers Malasarn, Bloom, and Crumpton (2002) attempted to identify the major influences in the development of expert male athletic trainers. The data created three categories, one of which was labeled mentoring. The participants in the study attributed a great deal of their learning to athletic trainers, teachers, and coaches they interacted with. The examples cited by the authors indicated that athletic trainers in this study appreciated mentors that encouraged learning, demonstrated their passion for their profession, and allowed mistakes to occur but then guiding the athletic trainers so learning could also occur. Pitney, Ilsey, and Rintala (2002) also examined the professional socialization of athletic trainers in the NCAA Division I setting and found that athletic trainers often felt they were not fully prepared in their formal education for

their position in a NCAA Division I setting so they often went to previous mentors for assistance. The authors found that this mentoring and development was not structured, rather it was an informal socialization process that athletic trainers utilized to grow in the profession.

In an attempt to gain further insight into the mentoring process of athletic training students Pitney and Ehlers (2004) interviewed 16 athletic training students and three of their mentors. In every interview the students identified their clinical supervisor as their mentor and the authors found that in each instance the mentoring relationship was founded on interpersonal connections and focused on the educational needs of the student. Three subcategories of interpersonal foundations emerged from the data in this study. The authors found that congruent values, trust, and personal relationships were all interwoven and important to a good mentoring relationship. The students were drawn to mentors that exhibited similar values, not just knowledge of the profession.

Within the educational dimension the Pitney and Ehlers (2004) reported three subcategories as well. The two primary categories were facilitating knowledge and skill development and individualized learning. When those two categories were fulfilled in a positive mentoring relationship students also appreciated the opportunity to have a mentor that encouraged professional perspectives. In addition to those two founding categories the authors also suggested there are three categories of mentoring prerequisites necessary for a successful mentoring relationship to occur. These categories are an accessible mentor, an approachable mentor, and a mentee with initiative. Based on their findings the authors suggested that mentoring is an important portion of athletic training



education and that future researchers should explore models and best practices in order to offer the best educational experience for students.

In her dissertation Gorant (2012) also found mentoring to be an important theme in the development of leaders in athletic training. She interviewed the few women who have been able to become head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I institutions and all of them attributed some portion of their ability to overcome barriers to mentors. These athletic trainers indicated that the gender of the mentor was not important, and that the mentor did not also have to be a clinical athletic trainer. The mentors filled various roles for the women in this study and no one role could be identified as the most important role of a mentor. The women felt it was important that their mentors confirmed their abilities and skills in the field. For instance, when selection for the head athletic trainer position occurred the women felt that important coaches at the institution had to be confident in their skills, and that often came from mentors confirming their abilities. The women also appreciated the role their mentors played when they allowed them to face challenges, but were there to assist if the mentee was going to fail in a task.

When discussing mentors and their gender one theme that became apparent is that the women in this study noted that it was very helpful to have a female role model that demonstrated the ability to be a leader, so that they had seen a woman be a leader. This allowed them to think that it was possible for them to also become leaders. The next theme that was common for the women in this study was that the role models they chose modeled positive characteristics. The women then chose to emulate those positive characteristics in their own careers.

Eberman, Kahanov, Kahanov, and Yoder (2011) advocated that it is important for junior faculty to be mentored so that they are successful and in order to increase retention. In their commentary they advocate for utilizing the “WISE” principles to create a culture that allows for effective mentorship. This mnemonic stands for winning trust, inviting acceptance, supporting without rescuing, and embracing growth. The mentor must first establish trust by demonstrating the relationship is a safe environment, and that the protégé is not being judged. If there is a foundation of integrity, with credibility, openness, and honesty the two faculty can create a personal and professional connection. In addition to gaining the trust of the protégé the mentor must also create a relationship that is not based on chain of command or power. This allows for both of the faculty members to feel their views and opinions are valued and neither is forced to agree with the other. The third category, supporting without rescuing, ensures that the mentoring relationship is not one in which the more experienced faculty acts as a parent or protects the protégé from all mistakes. Instead the mentor should offer suggestions but allow the protégé to fail and then learn from their mistakes. The final component of the relationship is to embrace growth. In particular, the mentor should fully expect that eventually the protégé will no longer need the relationship and that independence is a desired outcome of the mentoring process.

**Athletic training education.** The majority of research dedicated to leadership development in athletic training is based in the educational setting. Authors have evaluated the importance of leadership content in athletic training education, leadership styles of athletic training educators, and the leadership role clinical instructors play. One

explanation for this is that the educational standards for athletic trainers include leadership competencies, but specific guidelines for implementing those competencies are lacking. In addition, as Eberman et al. (2011) argued, faculty in athletic training have a greater expectation of conducting research as part of their job requirements. Therefore, it follows that they would conduct a large amount of that research within their sphere of influence.

The most comprehensive study on leadership content that is important in athletic training education was published by Kutz and Scialli in 2008. They completed an exploratory and comparative research study using a Delphi Technique followed by a national survey. During the Delphi portion of the study athletic training and leadership experts identified 35 content areas, ranging from issues and trends in professional development, to behavioral ethics, to various leadership theories. During the second portion of the study the authors used a national survey to evaluate how important athletic trainers thought it was to include each of those content areas in athletic training education. The three highest rated content items were risk management of legal issues, evidence-based medicine, and team leadership. The three lowest rated content areas were McGregor's X and Y motivational theory, transactional leadership, and budgeting, reimbursement, and revenue generation strategies. While some content was ranked lower, every item was rated at least of moderate importance and 22 of the 35 items were ranked very or extremely important. Based on their findings the authors recommended that athletic training programs increase the emphasis they place on delivering and assessing leadership content, both in the curriculum and clinical education.

Three authors evaluated the leadership behaviors of program directors in athletic training education programs as their doctoral dissertations (Meyer, 2012; Odai, 2012; White, 2005). White began by looking at whether or not program directors were utilizing participative leadership, and if any variables could be identified that would predict the amount of participation by others in decision-making. The only significant predictor White found was whether or not there was also a clinical education coordinator. The programs with a clinical education coordinator demonstrated greater use of participative decision-making techniques. White suggested that future researchers also evaluate the leadership style of the program director's supervisor, if leadership could be taught at the master's degree level, and benefits and downfalls of program directors that are on the tenure track.

Odai (2012) examined the results of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire with 27 program directors to determine outcomes based on their leadership style. In this study program directors reported using transformational leadership most often while utilizing passive avoidant leadership the least often. While evaluating the difference between program directors with master's versus doctoral degrees Odai found that participants with a doctoral degree scored significantly better on the effectiveness component of leadership even though program directors showed no difference in overall leadership outcome based on their highest degree earned. Due to the fact that participants who had completed leadership coursework scored better on leadership outcomes, Odai recommended increasing the amount of leadership coursework required for a program director.

In an attempt to determine if the type of leadership style of athletic training educators influenced the success of athletic training students on the Board of Certification (BOC) exam Meyer (2012) surveyed a limited sample of athletic trainers to obtain their success rate on the exam, the leadership style of their program director, and other demographic information. The results of this survey indicated that leadership style was not a significant predictor of the success rate for students on the BOC exam. Instead the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) score and age of the student were found to be significant predictors of success.

Platt (2000) investigated five leadership variables (professional attitudes, characteristics of effective leaders, communication skills, teaching abilities and attitudes, and personal attributes) to determine if they could be used to predict teacher effectiveness. While she did not find that a composite score of all five leadership variables could predict teaching effectiveness, she did find that when evaluated separately professional attitudes, characteristics of effective leaders, and communication skills were the strongest predictors of teacher effectiveness. Platt also reported that leadership courses taken by clinical instructors influenced their professional attitudes. While this study indicated that leadership skills of clinical instructors are important more research is needed, as a limitation of this study was that they only surveyed students and instructors affiliated with one institution.

### **Summary**

The research in the athletic training literature relevant to this topic falls into two main categories, women in athletic training and leadership development for athletic

trainers. Athletic training has changed from a profession with only men to a profession that has more women than men in it. While this change in the demographic make-up of the profession has occurred women still indicate they face barriers to practice and leadership roles, although perhaps to a lesser extent than they once did in some areas. One area where women have not obtained equal representation is in the role of head athletic trainer at NCAA Division I institutions. There is a female head athletic trainer at only 19.5% of NCAA Division I institutions while 42.4% of NCAA Division III institutions have one (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Authors have reported a variety of barriers that women in athletic training face. Originally barriers were as extreme as some educational programs prohibiting women from enrolling. While this practice does not exist anymore there are still many barriers for women. Female athletic trainers have faced discrimination in clinical education assignments and this practice might occur still despite efforts of the CAATE to prohibit this practice. Female athletic trainers that work in a sport related setting also face challenges to practice and leadership due to the male hierarchy that is often present in that realm. Women are often labeled with feminine roles, such as daughter (Alhadeff, 2006), mom, or sister (Walk, 1999). Some male athletes, such as the football players O'Connor et al. (2010) surveyed, even feel that a female athletic trainer is incongruent with their sport. The most discussed barrier to practice is work life balance. Several authors (such as Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; and Nussbaum and Rogers, 1999) reported that women experience more conflict between work and family responsibilities

than men. However, other authors (such as Mazerolle et al., 2008 and Pitney et al.) have reported that men and women experience an equal amount of work-family conflict.

While the literature in athletic training leadership is scarce there are important points to be learned from the research. Athletic trainers, like all healthcare professions, need to practice leadership. Nellis (1994) focused his comments on clinical athletic trainers and argued that the patient care would be better provided in a setting with an athletic trainer proficient in leadership. Kutz (2008) also advocated for athletic trainers to develop leadership skills because those skills can produce positive change, increased motivation, consensus, and improve morale. He categorized these skills into six categories, personality characteristics, contextual intelligence, people skills, communication skills, initiative, and strategic thinking. Although there is not a large amount of leadership research in athletic training according to Laurent and Bradney (2007) athletic training leaders do model leadership behaviors similar to other leaders when measured with the Leadership Practices Inventory.

One of the primary ways athletic trainers develop their leadership skills is through a relationship with a mentor. Malasarn et al. (2002) found that expert male athletic trainers attributed a great deal of their learning to their mentors. According to Gorant (2012), this is also true for female head athletic trainers. The women she interviewed all indicated that their mentors helped them overcome barriers and gave them confidence through confirmation of their abilities. Pitney et al. (2002) found a similar result when many of the participants in their study indicated they went to mentors for assistance when they became athletic trainers in the NCAA Division I setting. Pitney and Ehlers (2004)

found that students identify their clinical supervisor as their mentor and this relationship is founded on interpersonal connections and focused on the educational needs of the student. Eberman et al. (2011) suggested that having a mentor is important for faculty as well as for clinical athletic trainers.

There is a small body of research focused on leadership development in athletic training academic programs. Kutz and Scialli (2008) examined what leadership content, if any, should be taught in athletic training education. They found that the three highest rated content areas were risk management of legal issues, evidence-based medicine, and team leadership and that athletic trainers thought the majority of content areas were very or extremely important. White (2005) found that program directors in programs with a clinical education coordinator demonstrated greater use of participative decision-making techniques. Odai (2012) found that program directors reported using transformational leadership behaviors most frequently when compared with other leadership behaviors in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. More research is needed to obtain a larger population, but Platt's (2000) research supports the benefits of leadership education. She found that leadership skills, particularly professional attitudes, characteristics of effective leaders, and communication skills, were predictors of teacher effectiveness.



## **Chapter III**

### **Research Design**

This research was designed to be an exploratory qualitative investigation to help me understand the experience of women who had ascended to leadership positions within the male dominated athletic training field. The literature suggests that they would have faced significant barriers so I was curious if they intentionally worked to become leaders and what their experiences were. This research searched for common themes that might help female leaders overcome barriers they face to their leadership positions.

Additionally I asked for their perspectives on any changes for women that may have occurred in the field and leadership positions as the demographics in athletic training have changed.

My research methods followed the recommendations of Creswell (2009). After soliciting participants for the study data was collected and then analyzed for themes. To protect the participants from being identified I present a combined description of their experiences unless specific examples are needed and they can be provided without identifying markers. This combined description is the reason to use a general qualitative research tradition instead of a specific type of qualitative research like phenomenology.

#### **Participants**

I used intentional criterion-based sampling for this study. This was necessary so I could determine that the women have in fact become leaders in the field and share insight into the research questions. According to Creswell (2009) “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher

understand the problem and the research question” (p. 178). I was able to recruit 12 participants, ages 40-70 for this study. All participants are female athletic trainers who have served in a leadership position in one of the important athletic training organizations or associations. Some examples of these leadership positions include being president or on the board of directors of the National Athletic Trainers’ Association, director of the Board of Certification (BOC), a leader of the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) (or its predecessors), and district association president. The potential participants were contacted via e-mail or phone and asked if they would consider being a participant in the study. If they were willing to consider participating I explained the project in greater detail and they were given an informed consent form before I proceeded with data collection. This consent form was returned in hardcopy or electronic form before the interviews occurred. Each woman was assigned a pseudonym (which used the first 12 letters of the alphabet as the first initials in participant names) to ensure confidentiality. The names chosen have no particular meaning: Angela, Brittany, Candace, Danielle, Ellie, Fran, Gabrielle, Heather, Iris, Janelle, Katy, and Laura.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Interviews.** This study collected data through a semi-structured open-ended interview that lasted between 30 minutes and one hour in length (see Appendix A for the interview script). Guiding questions were asked of each participant, with follow-up questions asked to seek more information if a participant provided vague, partial, or unclear responses. During the interview if I believed the participant was providing data that was not related to the purpose of the study, I guided them back to the questions at

hand. This rarely happened so I was able to respectfully affirm their experience and perspectives while staying focused on the research questions at hand. The interviews were conducted over the phone since participants are from throughout the United States. These interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed at a later date. I never used the participants names during the interview and if the participant stated their name it was not transcribed. I used this type of interview procedure so that I could focus my efforts on my research questions while also demonstrating that I valued my interviewees' experiences. They could report what was important to them to avoid my bias in the study.

Prior to the start of the interview I reviewed the consent form (see Appendix B) and gave the participants another opportunity to withdraw if they so chose or ask any further questions they might have had about the study. When they were ready and had agreed they still wanted to participate I began by asking my first question. When the interview was finished the data was coded and secured in my office. I will destroy all data after the completion of the study.

**Assurance of trustworthiness.** To ensure trustworthiness in the data collection process I followed recommendations from Creswell (2009). I checked the transcripts to make sure they did not contain any obvious mistakes from the transcription process. I wrote memos about the codes I used and defined them so I could ensure there was not a drift in coding. I also used member checking to give the participants the opportunity to review the interpretations I developed from their interviews. I e-mailed my interpretations to the participants for their review and utilized e-mail and phone calls to discuss their responses. The final method I utilized to ensure trustworthiness was peer

debriefing. By having my dissertation committee review my work I was better able to make sure my account of the data resonates with people other than myself.

**Role of the researcher.** I have been an athletic trainer for 12 years, primarily a clinician for three years and then primarily an educator for the following nine. During this time I held leadership positions both within the profession and in non-profit organizations. I also completed the NATA StarTRACKS program in 2014, which is a leadership development program. Over my years as an athletic training student and professional I have noticed the shift in gender demographics in our profession. However, at the start of this research effort I noticed that only one member of the NATA Board of Directors was a woman. This caused me to be curious to learn how women have become leaders in the field of athletic training.

I am a white male so it is likely my experience in the field has been different than for the women who will be participating in my study. Because I do not claim to know what these women have experienced or what has led them to become leaders in the field I hoped to interact in a way that allowed me to ask questions and then be open to the experiences these women have. I made an effort to step-back while I was coding data and view the data without relying on my experiences as a white male.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was guided by the methods described by Creswell (2009) once raw data was obtained. The recorded interviews were transcribed to ensure accuracy and to allow for the coding process to occur. Once the transcriptions were finished I read through all the data in order to obtain a general sense of what the participants had said.

During that reading I focused on what the underlying meaning of the statements of the interviewee were. I then imported the transcripts into NVivo 10 for Mac Beta (Version 10.0.1). In NVivo I began to create nodes or topics from the interview questions and the initial reading of the transcripts. With that list of nodes I could go back and read the transcriptions again and assign more refined codes or create new ones if I saw I had missed a code I should be using. After that reading I started evaluating for relationships in the categories.

Nvivo allows using the transcripts to highlight statements from the participants and file them under the nodes. I then began a final coding to organize the material so that I could bring meaning to it and create a rich description of the people I interviewed and their experiences. Whenever possible I used the participants own language and significant statements to create categories, or meaning units. During the coding process I continually reflected about the data and wrote memos so I could be consistent and analytic about the data.

Based on the coding process I was able to identify themes in the data (Table 1). These themes guided the description of my findings as well as assisted me in interpreting the meaning of the data and will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV. Due to the use of open-ended interview questions I was able to develop my analysis from the information supplied by the participants rather than interjecting my own experiences. The final step in the data analysis was to make an interpretation of the meaning of the data and share the knowledge and experiences the participants in this study had.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Interpretation**

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of female leaders in the field of athletic training. Specific inquiries focused in six core areas and this chapter is an interpretation of the findings. The first area was whether the participants intentionally worked to become a leader and what their motivation to become a leader was. The second area revolved around barriers to leadership they might have experienced and how they overcame any barriers they faced. The third area examined whether they perceived any changes in leadership opportunities in the field as gender demographics have changed. The fourth area was how the participants developed their leadership skills. The fifth area was what challenges the participants saw for women and/or the field of athletic training. The final area asked them to share advice for future leaders in athletic training.

The themes that developed from the data collected during this research can be found in Table 1. One to four themes emerged from the data for each core area and this chapter will describe those themes in greater detail. The data is organized under headings that match the six core areas of Motivation to become a leader, Barriers for women in athletic training, Change in leadership opportunities, Leadership development, Challenges in athletic training, and Advice for others.

Twelve women agreed to participate in this investigation into the leadership experiences of female athletic trainers. Eleven of the women identified themselves as leaders within the field. When I asked them to explain why they saw themselves as leaders, they all gave examples of the type of leadership positions for which I had

selected them as part of the rationale for their belief. This validated my criteria for defining leaders within athletic training. Laura was the only participant that didn't see herself as a leader. She responded by saying "I think I'm a participant. I've been fortunate to be around a lot of people who are doing some good things." When she was asked why other people might identify her as a leader in the field, she guessed it was because she has chaired "a few committees" and there "might be few women in our organization."

These women have held a wide variety of leadership positions and represent each facet within the professional structure of athletic training. At least one, if not several of the women, have held positions of the highest level of leadership in our field, including district director or president of the NATA, chair of a national NCAA committee, president of the NATA Research and Education Foundation (REF), state representative to the NATA REF, Board of Certification board of directors, and chair of the NATA Executive Committee for Education. All of the women described occupying leadership positions at lower levels as well, and most experienced some form of leadership outside of athletic training.

### **Leadership Intention and Motivation**

While Gorant (2013) found that low aspiration was a barrier to advancement for female head athletic trainers, this study found an even split between participants who claimed that they intentionally worked to become a leader and those who claimed that they did not: six women indicated their intent to become a leader, and the other six indicated that they did not intentionally work to become a leader. However, when asked

if they could describe anything that motivated them to become leaders in the field, all twelve women offered clear examples of their motivation. Based on these contrary results, it is not possible to conclude that women have low aspiration to become leaders in the field of athletic training.

**Passion for the field.** In this study, the strongest theme that arose as motivation to assume a leadership role was a passion for the field of athletic training. Seven women indicated that their primary motivation to become a leader was due to a desire to advance the profession or to become more involved in the profession. Fran, for instance, gave a clear message regarding advancing the profession when she responded to the question asking her to describe anything that motivated her to become a leader in the field with the following:

I was more based on seeing things that I wanted to—or that I thought should—change in the big picture of our practice that would contribute to the big picture as opposed to little things, and then realizing that the only way to get some of those changes was to be in charge.

Laura echoed this sentiment when she stated the following:

I think it was a message that came from, maybe from [anonymous], and that message was if you didn't like what was happening, you need to get involved, try to then understand it and then make some changes.

**Involvement in the field.** Four of these women indicated that their initial motivation was simply to become involved with the field, and then that involvement later grew into a greater desire for leadership. For example, Gabrielle shared, “I wanted to get



back to my profession and that just started things,” and Brittany said, “my initial motivation was just to get involved in my profession.” Iris not only felt the desire to be involved with the profession, she also emphasized that she felt an inner drive to give back. When asked to describe her motivation to become a leader, she responded, “this inner drive to give back.” She followed her response by saying, “I am—and I hope this comes out of this interview—if I want anything to be connected with me, I feel like I live a purpose-driven life.” This passion for the field is very likely necessary because occupying a leadership role often generates extra work for the leader.

**Effect change.** Candace and Janelle combined the passion for the field and the desire to assume leadership in the field in their responses and gave a clear example of how the two categories of response fit together. Candace said,

Well, I think—what I believe drives every leader, at least what drives me—is passion and the belief in a certain initiative or passion for where the profession can go. Vision as to what I think and always thought athletic training can and should be, and...that passion and...my love for the profession and belief in the initiatives that we were pursuing and are pursuing, always gave me the energy to be a leader and to do the kind of work that is needed in a leadership position.

Janelle echoed this sentiment,

I think the opportunity to move the profession forward. You know, I’ve always had great passion for athletic training and chose that as my career, and I’ve seen that we’ve come a long ways, but we have a lot further to go as, as a profession... in order to gain the respect that we deserve as a profession in the healthcare arena.

The two responses provide an example of the sixth factor of leadership, or strategic thinking, advocated by Kutz (2008). Throughout the interviews, all of the women demonstrated that they were engaged in “decision making and efforts to influence others that are directed toward realization of a desired future state” (p. 18). The field of athletic training has advanced tremendously since its beginning in the 1940s, so it comes as no great surprise that its leaders have been focused on strategic thinking.

**Relationships.** Another strong theme that developed in the responses to questions about the participants’ leadership status concerned relationships. The women spoke of how others encouraged them, demonstrated good leadership, and made being a leader in the field fun; they also spoke of wanting to be a role model for others. This finding is to be expected. One need only talk to a few athletic trainers to learn how important relationships, often gained via networking are in the field. In addition, studies have demonstrated that mentoring plays an important role (Malasarn et al., 2002; Pitney et al., 2002). Katy echoed this research, responding to a question about her motivation to become a leader in the field with the following:

I got kind of mentored into [a] service role, and then if you feel like you would like to lead, then to move forward in those areas. And then in my current position, I got lucky again, and I have a fantastic leader in [anonymous], so I’ve just seemingly been placed in areas where I—not that it is a bad thing—can’t get away from leaders in our profession.

Ellie shared a similar sentiment, stating:

I think I had when I moved ... a couple of the folks that I met became good friends, and they were motivators to try and get me to do things and give me the confidence that I could do more things.

Fran's words, echoed by many participants, attributed the opportunities she had to assume a leadership role to her desire to effect change but also to the fun she had interacting with her colleagues:

Some of it just happened without any intention, and it happened because it's fun. It's interesting to be on the national level. You get to meet lots of people, and I think when you meet people and interact with people, you realize it's a good thing and you kind of want to do it more because you learn a lot in doing it. So one of the things that I just like is, I like the people that I meet and always, it seems like they're always with good, smart people who are not always agreeable, which is not what I'm looking for, but certainly always interesting and that, I think that's one reason why some of these opportunities have happened.

The impetus cited by participants for their leadership roles indicates that future leaders, both male and female, need to have doors opened for them, likely by a mentor, and also need to be watchful for and ready to take advantage of leadership opportunities. When Angela was asked what motivated her to become a leader in the field she gave an excellent description of how other people, such as mentors, can create opportunities for someone but then, beyond that, an aspiring leader then also needs to want to serve and be involved in the profession.

I mean, the support of other people giving me opportunities. No doubt that [anonymous] gave me a wonderful opportunity ... in the 1980s [and] '90s. [Anonymous] giving me the opportunity to serve on the foundation board, and that just was something that really skyrocketed my career. It took it a totally different direction on a national level. So I think the opportunities and the timing. If you read the book *Outliers*... It talks about the timing of things in your life, and I think I've just been blessed with good timing. And then also being blessed with the wisdom to take advantage of those opportunities at that time. Although it may have overloaded me at the time, I had to think of the future. What will this, where will this take me five years from now versus tomorrow? And unfortunately with today's Millennials they look at today and tomorrow. They don't look at five years from now, where your ancestors did, you know, your grandma and grandpa... Today unfortunately we're 24/7 news, click, click, click, a lot of waste, waste, waste. So I think a leader really looks at investments. You know, leaders really invest in your resources. And we invest in the time, where will that get them in the company five years from now. Will it, you know, motivate them to move up in the company? Are we going to spend this time and effort on them, or will they leave for another job but still be very productive in life? I think good leaders don't just keep people for their own use. I think good leaders prepare people for life, and the community as a whole.

Based on the responses of the participants, it is clear that they did not suffer from low aspiration, and at some point in their career, they were motivated to become leaders.

While research suggests that women may have low aspirations for some positions, this assertion cannot be supported for leadership in general (Gorant, 2012).

### **Barriers for Women in Athletic Training**

Due to the amount of literature indicating that women have faced barriers in practicing athletic training, a primary focus of this study was to determine what barriers had been faced by the female leaders interviewed. Authors have reported discrimination (Alhadeff, 2006; Walk, 1992), a male hierarchy (Burton et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2010), and work life balance (Booth, 2000; Dieringer 2007; Goodman et al., 2010; Gorant, 2012) as barriers faced by women in athletic training. After the barriers faced by the women in this study were determined, participants were asked to describe their strategies for overcoming these barriers. This information can be used to advise future leaders.

**Limited barriers.** The most surprising, and positive, finding of this study was that nine of the women stated that they did not believe they faced any barriers or challenges to their career or leadership positions because of their gender. A review of the literature suggested that most women overcome significant barriers on their way to leadership positions. Instead, responses to questions about barriers more often mirrored Angela's response, "No, I have to say no," or Gabrielle's, "You know, I'm not sure that I had that many barriers because I was a woman." The women reported that they themselves did not face any barriers, but it was clear that they were not in disagreement with the literature about the barriers that women in their field often face. They acknowledged that many of the barriers in the literature existed or that they had heard

about women who had to face them, but they themselves had not run into these barriers.

Iris responded to the question by saying:

And I think maybe I'm of the minority. But I literally have not. I have never experienced a barrier. I've never experienced a challenge from my colleagues, or I've never even experienced a challenge in the venue of athletic training.

Laura echoed Iris's point and indicated that barriers do perhaps exist but not for her, when she stated "I think the barriers that I've heard that others have had maybe prior to my time are not existent or I just make them non-existent. I haven't had any, I don't think, no." Iris and Laura offer a solid representation of the majority of women in this study who indicated that while they are aware that women can still face barriers within athletic training, the women in this sample did not face those barriers. It was outside of the scope of this project to determine why the interviewed women felt they hadn't faced any barriers. Further research is necessary to evaluate whether or not women in top leadership positions are capable of making barriers non-existent in the way suggested by Laura.

Katy offered some insight into why women may be facing fewer barriers now. First, she suggested that there are more women than men in the field now. Second, she pointed to the leadership of Eve Becker-Doyle for the NATA. Several women mentioned her, and Katy was very explicit about Becker-Doyle's role in advancing women:

It was 1994, and that was really when the door, in my opinion, swung wide open and most of our class was female. I mean, it was open prior to that, but where the flux was switching from male-dominated NATA to now where females are a

slight better than majority in the population. So, I think that I lucked into that ... leadership position because you know what they needed is they actually needed a couple women on the committee and it was [anonymous] who somebody called. [Anonymous] was leader of the committee, and he's like, "[anonymous], do you have any former students that you'd recommend?" And he gave him a couple names and, and I said yes, so I think I kind of lucked into a cycle where the NATA saw that their membership was changing and they needed to reflect that in leadership positions or the decisions that were being made would no longer be valid to the membership. I think as in any case, you know, there can be some barriers, that men may not think that women are exceptional leaders. I think the one thing that we have in our pocket as women in the NATA is Eve Becker-Doyle, and she was hired as a CEO after a very tumultuous time and ended up being just such an incredible leader, and I think she blew the socks off a couple old boys.

The women in this study indicated that barriers have broken down with the influx of women who have entered the field, as well as influx of women who have proven themselves capable practitioners and leaders.

The data yielded by this study is exciting, but it warrants further investigation and consideration because it constitutes the first study with such positive data. Questions remain about whether or not the barrier-free experience cited by the women in this study is the norm.

**No barriers but...** While the majority of the women interviewed for this study indicated that they did not feel that they faced any barriers to attaining leadership

positions, some offered examples of situations that other people might consider barriers. Such examples make it less clear that the profession has truly become as equal as the women suggest. Candace offered a particularly good example of this dilemma:

I don't think I looked at them that way. As barriers. I totally believed, and I still have that little saying on my desk. In fact, I saw it the other day, and kind of smiled from the beginning of my career that, that women had to, and maybe still have to, work harder to prove themselves in, in some settings than their male counterparts. I believe that is true in athletics. And what's true in my career. Starting out a new model, a new gender, new athlete. You know, what are you all about and, and how is this all going to affect me? And me being in the male athletics world. Now, I don't think that was a barrier. I never saw that as a barrier. I just saw that as realization that I'm going to have to work harder to be seen as a leader, to be listened to, to develop the goals and, and objectives that I want to and are best for my programs than my, than a male counterpart. Again, I, you know, if, I want to emphasize that's not a negative at all to me. That's just the facts and, and actually I think it, you know, it makes you almost better. So, not a burden, not a negative. No, I don't resent that at all. It, it's just that's the way it is.

When pushed on her view and when informed that many people might consider it a barrier that women have to work harder than men, Candace agreed and said that she thought most people would see that as a barrier but that she personally did not because "it never made me angry, you know." This study did not yield enough data to define as a



theme the ability of successful women to circumvent barriers or to possess an attitude allowing their success in the face of barriers, but comments such as Candace's encourage future research in this area.

**Work life balance.** Of the barriers mentioned by participants, the only one mentioned by more than one was family responsibilities. The comments reflected the literature in that society currently puts more pressure on women to provide care for children. Therefore, while both genders have limited time, if a woman has a family, she faces a much bigger barrier to professional involvement than a man. Ellie reported the clearest barrier, although it wasn't necessarily specifically related to athletic training or to her leadership within athletic training as defined for this study. When asked about barriers she faced, she responded:

When I came down here, I was told that if I ever thought about getting tenure promotion, which of course I had to get or I was going to lose my job, if I wanted to get tenured promotion, I better not think about ever having another child.

The way she decided to overcome this barrier was to wait until she received tenure before having another child. This may not in fact be an example of overcoming a barrier, however, but of another barrier, delaying childbirth. The other women described negotiating decisions with their husbands that allowed the women to put in the time required of a leader to overcome the work life balance barrier. Fran put it this way,

I think we just, I think women make different choices. I'm not sure that the challenge is any different. I think we just make different choices about how to spend our time. Like I'm in a situation where my husband has an extremely

flexible job. So ... it's much easier for us to, for me to leave town or to spend time doing things than it would be otherwise.

Heather is in a relationship where her husband's schedule allowed her greater flexibility, too, but she also pointed out that the need for childcare plays a role in the ability of some women to take on greater responsibilities.

But personally as a mom ... I'm lucky that my husband is super, super supportive. I didn't think that I would be able to be a district director because of the time and the travel and just the extra, you know, stuff, that luckily my husband's real supportive and ... he's able to take time off if I have to travel and things like that... So, yes, there were barriers just because, I would say as a mom, not as, not necessarily as a woman... But just the matter of childcare when they were little, you know, I had to find a childcare that luckily she had two athletes that went to my high school and so instead of, you know, I know a lot of childcare places say, you know, "We close at 5:00 and any minute after 5:00 that you're not here we charge you an extra blah, blah, blah time," you know. And I understand that it's a business, but luckily I was able to find childcare that understood what my job was, and I would say "Hey, I'll be here when the game's over. Hopefully you understand that, I'll probably drop you a call if we go into overtime, and I think it's going to be around this time but I'm not positive. I can't guarantee you in case something happens." So, I mean, I've been lucky along the way that I've had family and childcare who understood what kind of role I had.

The women who participated in this study didn't always mention work life balance in conjunction with the term "barrier," but having children was cited as a challenge and discussed in more detail in the section on challenges for the profession, discussed below. The data collected for this study, particularly the data that suggests that children constitute an obstacle that demand navigation, indicates that the work life balance continues to be a barrier, or at the very minimum an issue, for women in athletic training.

**Discrimination.** While it was not a common enough response to generate a theme, two women reported discrimination as a barrier during their career. One participant in this study pointed to many examples of discrimination obstructing her career, including being denied maternity leave (going back to work 11 days after her child was born), being denied a sabbatical request and being asked to give a male colleague her sabbatical application so he could use it, and being the only faculty member in the department without a secretary (she is at present the only female faculty in her department). In addition, both women also suffered from salary discrimination, discovered during campus-wide investigations. While the majority of the data in this study indicates positive changes for women, it is important to note that there are still areas where improvement is needed.

**Overcoming barriers.** No clear theme developed when the women who participated in this study were asked how they overcame the barriers they faced. This could be due in part to the fact that many of the women reported that they did not face barriers, or it could simply reflect the wide range of strategies people employ to

overcome challenges. Two women felt they had a support structure that enabled them to overcome barriers. When asked how she overcame barriers, Ellie shared the following:

Another method to overcome some of this like truthfully is my husband. He gets very frustrated hearing some of the stuff that happens to me but he's also, you know, we've been married for over 30 years now. So he's also someone who I can trust and know that if I'm really frustrated, I just tell him, and even if he knows that there is nothing he can do about it, he at least just sits there and listens.

Beyond relying on strong support networks, the women also mentioned strategies such as paying attention to detail, exercising, avoiding dwelling on barriers and instead working to move forward, focusing on goals, and being prepared.

### **Change in Leadership Opportunities**

When asked if they have noticed any changes in leadership opportunities as the gender dynamic of athletic training shifted to include more females, only two participants expressed frustration with the pace of change, and their comments were related particularly to the athletics setting of the field. Their sentiments line up with the data showing that few women hold the head athletic trainer position in Division I athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Gorant, 2012). While Candace acknowledged there were some areas of equity and that progress has been made for women in athletic training, she also noted her concern about some areas. While discussing the changes in the field, she stated, "I don't think enough progress has been made, in terms of women head athletic trainers, women in professional sports, etc." Ellie also noted this in her comments that this was the case particularly in some sports arenas:

You know, even in collegiate football and having head athletics trainers in collegiate Division I football, I mean, those are so, if they're female, they're so far and few between. I don't know very many of them, quite honestly. And is there a difference between how a female athletic trainer would handle an ankle sprain of a Division I football player versus a male? Probably not. Because we're trained to do it the same way.

Based on the information provided by Acosta and Carpenter (2014), the statements made by the participants in this study, and the reports that there are academic programs using clinical education sites (sports teams) that do not allow female students, it is clear that this is a topic for continued investigation. Because this study focused on leadership without using the position of head athletic trainer as an indication of leadership, it is possible that many of the participants did not consider that aspect of athletic training leadership when responding to the study's questions. This focus may have led to participants underreporting this challenge.

Fran tied the challenge of seeing more women in leadership positions to the work life balance discussed above.

I do think, though, one reason we haven't seen so many women in leadership positions is because the system isn't really set up, or the system is set up for a huge long multiple-year commitment to becoming a leader and that doesn't fit for a lot of women's lifestyles. If they have children, things like service sometimes I think has to be sacrificed because, well, and sacrifice is the wrong word. You want to focus on your kids instead of your work, and so this is one of the first

things you can get rid of if you still want to work. So, I think the time commitment required to get into some of these leadership positions is just too much. And by time requirement I mean number of years, not hours in a week.

While it appears that the challenge of committing to the long path of leadership applies to both men and women, current societal pressures for family responsibilities makes this a more difficult challenge for women.

**NATA board of directors.** Other than Candace and Fran, the rest of the participants were positive about the changes they've seen in leadership opportunities for women. Their comments focused primarily on the board of directors for the NATA, but sometimes included a broader range such as other committees and women doing research in the field. When asked if she had noticed any changes in leadership opportunities, for example, Katy responded,

Absolutely. If you look at the district directors, you know, like open up an NATA News from maybe 10 years ago, all the district directors were probably, probably men. Maybe, maybe Marje would have been one of those district directors at that point. But now you look at it and there are more women who are district directors.

Fran was a bit more specific about how recent these changes in the top level of leadership have occurred. She stated,

Well, yeah clearly there's more women in leadership positions. I also, I think that's been big. The board of directors, even just in the last few years has turned over quite a bit so there's more women now. There was a period when Marje Albohm was president when she was the only one.

These women referred to the situation in 2011 when the NATA board had a female president and ten male directors. Then in 2012, the board was comprised of a male president, seven male directors, and three female directors. In 2013, the board consisted of a male president, five male directors, and five female directors. Because this has been such a recent change in the demographic composition of the board of directors, some caution should be used when citing it as evidence of equality in leadership and using the NATA board members as a primary example.

The study's participants also pointed to the make-up of the NATA Research and Education Foundation board of directors as an example of equity. Katy highlighted the foundation when she said,

But, yeah, that's my reasoning, you look at committee structure, you look at chairs of committees and it was mostly men. And the same thing on the Foundation. Mostly men. But now we're probably 50/50 on the board. I'd have to do some internal counting in my head with that, but I would pretty much guarantee the Foundation board is 50/50 as well.

Between the executive committee and board of directors there are 13 men and 6 women. This isn't the ratio referred to by Katy, so further exploration is needed to determine if the Foundation's culture is marked by an equality that makes the ratio seem more evenly balanced than it actually is, or if Katy was mistaken about the opportunities for women in that capacity.

**Other areas of positive change.** Fortunately, the study's participants provided other examples of gender equity in leadership. Angela noticed changes at the state level,

where “more women are getting opportunities and therefore they climb up the ladder.”

Gabrielle also commented on this increased involvement of women at the local level and then moving upwards. She stated,

Just in every avenue and just, it's a much more supportive environment, it's a much more positive environment and people are getting these leadership positions because they are capable of doing them and yeah, I have seen a clear indication that ... more women are getting involved in committee work and then obviously moving up the ranks to chairs of committees and then into the district office.

Brittany and Iris tied the greater opportunities currently available to women to the awareness raised by the profession regarding women in the field. They acknowledged that the current opportunities for women are much greater than they used to be, and the barriers are limited. Brittany shared,

I honestly think that the barriers for women are not even near what they used to be, in my opinion. I think that, I mean, I look at District IV athletic training leadership, and if you look across the boards through the last, I'll even say 14 years ... the gender serving on the board has been a good mix between males and females. Committee service has included males and females on a fairly even level. I think a lot of the awareness came about and changes were made when athletic training committed committee work to issues just specifically pertaining to women. So I think our, our leaders back then who were chairing these committees and addressing these issues have really made some changes that we're living in right now, which are good.



Iris had similar thoughts about the opportunities available to women now,

Oh, absolutely. No doubt about that. And I think part of opportunities in any aspect ... comes from an awareness issue—comes from raising the level of awareness and standards. And I think our profession has done an amazing job of raising the awareness and giving more women opportunities that they really had never had.

During a few of the interviews, participants were asked a follow-up question about whether or not they felt a committee dedicated to women was currently needed within the NATA. None of the women felt that such a committee was necessary, another indicator that overall they were quite positive about the status of women in athletic training. As Janelle put it, "I think as a leader we've gotten to the point in our profession now that there's certainly equality for leadership opportunities."

### **Leadership Development**

This research also explored the topic of leadership development with these participants because there is very little research in the field of athletic training on the topic. Accordingly, participants were asked where they thought they had learned their leadership skills, and then if they had taken any steps to improve their leadership abilities.

Three main themes developed out of responses to the question of where participants learned their leadership skills. (Some of the women gave more than one source, so the total number of responses is greater than the 12 participants.) Seven of the women indicated that they learned leadership skills by watching others, such as a mentor or other leaders in their organizations. Five participants mentioned that they learned their

skills through leadership experiences and through education, books, or seminars. One participant responded that she was a born leader, and another mentioned that her skills came partly from her innate ability, and three participants indicated they had learned some of their leadership skills from their family.

**Watching others.** It was clear that many of the participants attributed their leadership skills to their mentors and to other leaders they had been able to watch. The data indicated this occurred more often in those women who didn't believe they intentionally became a leader. Four of the women who attributed their skills to other mentors or leaders indicated that they either did not intend to become or leader or that their leadership role resulted from happenstance. Janelle, for instance, thought her mentors played an important role and stated, "I think it's also the mentorship of some of the, the people that I mentioned earlier. I think I've emulated some of their leadership styles in what, what I'm currently doing." Candace explained in a little more detail her process for learning leadership skills:

I think there are people throughout a person's career that influence you and I've always believed, you know, watching people, watching their leadership style ... I think you watch people. I think you watch style. I think you become, it's kind of who you follow. You know, what are the leaders, what are those outstanding people in your life that you said, "Hey, I want to follow you because I believe in you and I believe in what you're doing and saying." And then you see that. And you see what are the parts in them that are most attractive and make them most effective. So from a variety of ways. I mean, even today when I'm at a meeting

and I see somebody presenting or leading a group, I say, “You know, so what makes that person a good leader? What are the traits and skills?”

These findings match the research from Malasarn et al. (2002), Pitney et al. (2002) and Gorant (2012). All three studies found mentoring to be an important theme in leadership development. While not all of the participants in this study specifically referred to learning leadership skills from mentors, they described watching other leaders in similar ways. This behavior also matches the theme discussed in Gorant (2012), which found that female leaders emulate positive characteristics in their own careers.

**Leadership experiences.** Alternatively, when Angela was asked where she learned her leadership skills, she responded “life experiences” and Laura responded “it might be by trial and error.” The participants whose responses fell under this theme of leadership experiences shared that they had learned through progressively greater leadership experiences. Participants revealed that they were sometimes very reflective about their experiences and that, at other times, the skills they learned from these experiences were more subtle. Candace provides a good example of the respondents who were intentional about such skill development:

You know, I can tell you as many non-success stories in my leadership as success stories. And I think those are very revealing when you sit back and you say, you know, I did not achieve the goal that I thought I would with this group. And then you step back and re-evaluate and re-calibrate, and sometimes you come out really feeling good about a leadership experience and sometimes you come out

kind of shaking your head saying, Hmmm . . . wonder what I could have done better?

This type of leadership development, the development of leadership skills and abilities by trial and error, did not appear in the literature review, but it may be loosely linked to the recommendation from Eberman et al. (2011) that mentors allow their protégés to fail and then learn from their mistakes instead of saving their protégés from making any mistakes.

**Education.** Beyond the responses of the five women indicating education as the method by which they learned their leadership skills, almost every participant mentioned completing some form of reading, seminar, or workshop to improve their skills. Eight women mentioned reading books to learn or improve their leadership skills. Candace shared,

I do a lot of reading. I think there are some tremendous leadership books that have been published, and I think from a variety of styles. Not just the political leaders, but I've done some reading with them, but some people who have studied leadership. People who say it in a way that's relevant to today. I think maybe I've read at least a dozen to fifteen books on leadership from some of the most well-known authors and studied people's success stories and oftentimes, you know, the same things are being said, but they're said in a different way that really resonate with you. And I think in some of the books I've read have been an unbelievable asset to developing my leadership skills and to really focusing on how to be a better leader. And, and there's just a whole bunch of authors out there that are great to read. And so when during my NATA [leadership], I read a

tremendous amount of leadership books and shared some of those readings with the board at our board meetings and just because, you know, it was important as they, too, are, were developing their leadership.

In response to the question about what steps she had taken to improve her leadership, another shared,

Yes, and actually a few books, and they all happen to be coaching books, actually. And I've also read Victor Gray and a few other pieces... *Confidence* by Jay Bilas and pretty much whatever, whatever book my husband brings home on coaching, it might be a Mike Krzyzewski text, but so that's generally what I've done.

Participants agreed that the particular book wasn't important, but that women should feel encouraged to read books on leadership that appeal to them. Participants in this study mentioned books ranging from coaching books to leadership books, from Covey and Blanchard to the Bible. In addition to having read a number of books, the participants also indicated that they had taken classes on leadership for their degree and attended workshops and/or seminars. Gabrielle gave a tremendous example of a meeting format that included a small workshop each time the board of directors met.

I think one of the things that has helped me is, Denise Fandel, as part of the board of directors, we have two big meetings each year. She has included leadership workshops, so, and they're geared towards leadership in nonprofit organizations because that's what the BOC is. So she would provide reading material and then, you know, we would open up every single board of directors with a small workshop. We'd talk about leadership qualities and the qualifications, the

personal characteristics of leaders, and we actually would rate ourselves and, you know, I think she was strong with that.

Another participant also mentioned a powerful leadership development experience with the BOC. More data is needed, but it appears the BOC might offer leaders a strong developmental experience. The data yielded by participant answers can potentially spur continued research on the topic.

### **Challenges in Athletic Training**

When participants in this study were asked to describe the biggest challenges to women in athletic training, they almost invariably shifted the question to challenges that were relevant to all athletic trainers. This may be related to participants' belief that they did not face gender-based barriers. For example, Iris said,

You know, I think a lot of people would answer this question in, based on the fact that they were probably discriminated against or barriers were set. But it's another hard one for me because none of that existed for me.

The themes that appeared in this data did not therefore explicitly relate to gender-based barriers in athletic training.

**Work life balance.** The only theme that appeared in the data gathered in responses to challenges in athletic training was the work life balance issue discussed in other portions of the interview. Nine women indicated that work life balance was a significant challenge, and while they felt it might also exist for some men it generally is a larger challenge for women. Katy represented many of the participants when she said,

I think the biggest challenge for all athletic trainers, honestly, but maybe slightly more women is the life balancing issue. And so I do not want to discount males of not also having this problem, because they also need to be home, but if the roles in their family are, you know, such that the woman is doing a lot more of the childcare... probably the biggest issue is life balance.

Because of societal pressure on woman to be primary caregivers for children, women generally face a difficult challenge balancing family and work. Participants in this study linked the challenge of having a family to a minor theme, an athletic model of healthcare. A few women believed the challenge was compounded by the focus on an athletics model, with its high number of hours and inflexible schedule, rather than on a medical model of care. Janelle gave a good example of the challenges athletic trainers in the athletics setting face:

I think it's largely the same as the challenge for any athletic trainer, and I think it's the work life balance—quality of life. Which includes things like salary and work hours and being on someone else's schedule and at the drop of a hat—coach calls practice at whatever time and you need to be there. So I think that's the biggest challenge for all athletic trainers and maybe more so for women because traditionally women are...the caregivers at home.

Fran tied the athletics and the health care model together, and shared the following.

I don't think these [challenges] are unique to women, actually. But I think they impact women more and that is to create jobs that are [patient centered]... not delivering care in a patient-centered environment, where you're making decisions

based on a patient and not on a team, I think really impacts your ability to do things outside of work. I don't think, and that's men or women, and it doesn't matter what your thing outside of work is, that's, so that's what I'm trying to differentiate things for women, very often it's children. When the students see that kind of necessary devotion that's required for those jobs, what they say is, "I don't want to do that." And because I want to have kids someday, so I don't want a job right off the bat where having children is a problem. You know, that's what they see, right, that's what they perceive in the job, so I think right away changing the way we deliver care to a way that takes into account the needs of the providers and the patients will be a lot better. I think we really do ourselves a disservice by saying to each other and to our students, that, "Well, this is what the job is so you better like it," instead of trying to change the job.

**Other challenges.** The remaining five challenges participants described were mentioned by two or fewer participants. Angela, who cited relevant literature, said that she finds that women were more nurturing than men. This, she argued, leads women to take on additional duties to really support their athletes, which decreases their free time. Brittany believed it is a challenge for athletic trainers to make hard or unpopular decisions without fearing for their job because the athletic department hires them. She suggested that athletic training services at universities should be moved from the athletic department to student health. Candace and Danielle both believed that professional sports are the last barrier for women and therefore a challenge (not that it is easy for men to work in that setting either, acknowledged both women, but it is much harder for



women to break into those ranks). Ellie shared that she thinks there are still some areas in the country where women have a harder time getting interviews for jobs. Gabrielle mentioned salary equity, a clear challenge based on the salary survey published by the NATA.

Based on the information collected in this study, work life balance is the primary challenge women face in athletic training today. This is especially concerning for women who desire leadership positions. If just being an athletic trainer can challenge the work life balance, then adding the extra responsibilities concomitant a leadership position would likely make that balance more difficult to achieve.

### **Advice for Others**

The final question that participants in this study were asked concerned their advice for other female athletic trainers that might help those athletic trainers reach their goals. Once again, many of the women reaffirmed that their comments applied to both male and female athletic trainers, even though the question was specifically aimed at women.

**Get involved.** Participants dispensed a wide range of advice, but most of it fell under the theme of encouraging athletic trainers to get involved. Seven women used some variance of this theme in their advice to other athletic trainers. This advice also reflects the dominant pedagogy in the classroom and at conferences. Janelle shared the advice,

I would say get involved in whatever aspect of the profession that they want to be involved in. If they want to become, you know, get into a leadership role at some

point, then they need to make themselves available and volunteer to do things and participate.

Candace gave advice for both men and women and also explained her rationale for encouraging future leaders to value involvement:

You know, that just, you don't wake up one day and have a gift of being able to speak. And the same with leadership. Try, get into it. You know, be a volunteer at the state level. Volunteer at your state meeting. Get involved and volunteer for a committee and get into it and, and develop your leadership. And that occurs at the state level. Not just for women, for men, too. So I don't know if it would be a separate what should women [as opposed to men] do to develop their leadership skills. I think it's what men and women should do, and I think that's a beautiful evolution of our profession and where our students are today—that we see them as one and not as separate.

Between the information that many participants acquired leadership skills while in a leadership position and their advice to get involved, the theme of getting involved appeared again and again throughout the interviews.

**Learn from others.** The second most common theme, learn from others, also manifested when participants were asked about their acquisition of leadership skills. Four of the women in this study advised future leaders to learn from others, and again this was often advised for both male and female athletic trainers. Ellie addressed the question, and her advice focused on women who want to become leaders:

One if they are interested in going into leadership, talk to other women who are in leadership. How'd they get there? I mean, that's a great thing. And then turn around and talk to men. How'd you get there? Because that's what I did. I asked men, "How'd you get, how'd you get that position in the NATA? Who did you have to talk to? What did you do that made you prepared for that position?"

Brittany combined the theme of getting involved with the theme of learning from others as she shared,

I would also ask them to align themselves with people in the field that have had good opportunities in leadership positions, and that might mean, you know, you see somebody at a conference and saying, "Hey, you want to get a drink? Do you want to, do you want to go get lunch?" or anything like that. I mean, anything that you can do to, to, to kind of latch on to some of those folks, because once you start talking to them and you start to realize that they put their pants on exactly the same way that you do every morning, then these young professionals start to realize that, okay, I, I can do this. This is not something I should be afraid of. And everybody's got to start somewhere.

Katy initially advised future leaders to find their passion and then added, in an echo of previously discussed themes, that leaders should also get involved and find a mentor.

There's a lot of ways to lead, you know, association, a lot of areas that need leadership, so find your passion and then find a mentor. And it doesn't always have to be a woman. So do not close your eyes to the fact that you can learn something from a man as well, and you know, from that aspect, the only way you

can learn to lead is by leading, and so take baby steps and take on small leadership roles and see how you do and see how you handle different things and then that should help develop a potential appetite for what type of leader you want to be. I mean, frankly I don't see myself being NATA President, but I see myself continuing to lead in a variety of different ways.

While not every participant offered advice about learning from others, when asked if they attributed their success to someone in the field, all but one of the participants talked about important mentors. One indicated that she started without a mentor but now has several very important mentors. This suggests that finding a mentor is an important piece of advice even though it wasn't the most common theme.

**Other advice.** The other advice offered by participants was quite varied. Angela advised future women leaders to be patient and realize that “leadership isn't gained at age 21.” She also encouraged leaders to study the personality of those with whom they worked because that would allow them to figure out how best to lead that group.

Danielle's advice tied in to the concept of barriers that people might face:

And the old cliché is, if you believe it, you can do it. Or if you dream it, you can do it. Don't let the barriers stop you. Like running water that leaks in a house, or whatever, it always finds an opening. Don't sit behind the barrier, go through it. Or go around it. But do it in a diplomatic way.

Laura's advice was to not hesitate and to,

Always attack a day as if it were a brand-new day so whatever happened yesterday is yesterday, and then take on the new day and always come to the table

with a potential solution or remedy rather than always having something to say that you don't like about what's happening. You know, what's the solution, what's the remedy, what's the compromise?

Fran and Katy suggested that future women leaders must find their passions within the field. Ellie focused her advice on future leaders and advised them to start reading books or taking courses on leadership. Heather suggested the importance of a good support base, both in personal and professional life. Iris's advice was to "be true to the profession."

Based on this data, the primary advice to enable future women leaders in athletic training to reach their goals, particularly in leadership, was to get involved.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of women that have become leaders in athletic training. The gender demographics have changed significantly in the recent history of athletic training and little is known about how women have experienced that change. A main motivation of this study was to explore the barriers that faced by women in obtaining leadership positions in the field of athletic training and how they overcame them. This research helps to complete previous research indicating that women face significant barriers to practicing athletic training as well as obtaining leadership positions even though the gender demographic of the field has shifted to include more women than men. Interviewing women who had become successful in the field offers clues to better comprehend the barriers they faced and their strategies for overcoming these barriers. With this information, future leaders might be better equipped to break down barriers, too. During the interviews the majority of the women expressed they did not face barriers to becoming leaders in the field. To accommodate this finding, the research shifted and expanded to include an exploration of the way women described changes in the field, whether they were intentional leaders or not, the factors that they recognized as motivating and helping their leadership development, the challenges they believe the field of athletic training faces, and their advice for other athletic trainers.

## **Implications**

The data yielded by this study suggests five major implications. First, the most significant implication is that study participants believe that a significant number of the barriers women once faced in athletic training have decreased or disappeared. This suggests that there will continue to be high numbers of women in the field and that there will likely be more women in leadership positions as women are in the field longer. The work the athletic training profession has done to increase equality should therefore be recognized and continued because it has been successful. The second implication and the next topic the profession should focus energy on is lessen work life balance challenges. This study indicates that this is the greatest of the remaining barriers. If women continue to have greater responsibilities than men at home and the schedule for athletic training doesn't become more manageable, the profession will continue to struggle to draw women who have or who want to have a family. This is not to say that other barriers and discrimination do not exist, however, so athletic training should continue to remain vigilant against inequality.

Third, the sample population in this study suggests that women are motivated to become leaders in the field and do not suffer from low aspiration. This indicates that athletic trainers need to continue to develop the passion young women athletic trainers have for the field and encourage their involvement. These are not the only factors that motivate leaders though, so mentors should be encouraged to discuss leadership goals with each individual and help protégés find their primary motivation.

Fourth, the study data indicates that changing demographics in athletic training have created many opportunities for women as leaders in the field. However, this is a fairly recent phenomenon and will need to be monitored to ensure continued opportunities for women. Particular attention needs to be paid to NCAA Division I athletics, as there continues to be a low number of women in positions of head athletic trainer.

The final implication is that the athletic training profession should evaluate the best way to prepare future leaders. Seven of the twelve women in this study indicated they learned their leadership skills by watching others instead of through a formal training or development process. Since the majority of participants indicated that they were greatly impacted by leadership reading and seminars or workshops, there should be continued discussion on the best way to prepare future leaders. It is beyond the scope of this project to determine if incorporating more leadership training into the professional athletic training programs, such as Kutz (2008) has suggested, is warranted or if a program like the NATA StarTRACKS program is a more appropriate route.

### **Future Studies**

Based on the data collected during this study, there are several areas for future researchers to investigate. The most important area may be further research on the barriers women may or may not face during their professional career or leadership endeavors. This is the first study in athletic training that supports significant equality for the genders, so confirmation is necessary. It is time to complete a large-scale project using The Women in Athletic Training Survey (Dieringer, 2007) to compare results



gained from 1996 and 2006, or a similar tool. Results will ideally give the profession a more complete picture of progress toward equality. As part of this research, or in a different undertaking, it would also be appropriate to investigate whether or not the women who rise to leadership positions are more adept at circumventing barriers. One possibility suggested by a participant's response in this study suggests that perhaps the women in this study are not aware of the barriers faced by other women because they are able to make such barriers non-existent.

Future research is also warranted on the leadership aspirations of women in athletic training. The findings of this study present conflicting data to Gorant's (2012) findings of low leadership aspirations in women. Further investigation of both the women who become leaders and those who do not become leaders will give a clearer picture of the phenomenon.

While it was primarily mentioned in passing during these interviews, it is also worth investigating the salary equity that appears in the 2011 NATA Salary Survey. Unequal pay could be a significant deterrent for women who might otherwise pursue leadership, particularly if they perceive that they need to work extra hours to make the same salary as a male counterpart. It is also possible that women might choose not to enter the profession if they feel the salary difference is too great.

Many researchers have examined the work life balance challenge and their results have been conflicting. Future research is needed as this continues to be a theme in the field. It is a complicated topic to study but continued efforts will be valuable. Continued

publication of strategies used by both men and women to overcome this challenge may suggest more obvious avenues into effectively researching this topic.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Ultimately the data yielded by this study both corroborates and undermines existing research, so more work needs to be done. I was surprised when the participants indicated they felt they had not faced the barriers I had read about in previous research. If these women are representative of the norm in athletic training now that is very good news. While this study found this positive trend the data also revealed continued challenges for women in the athletic world, particularly professional and NCAA Division I sports, and work life balance, particularly for mothers. I hope the field can advance in equality in these areas as well.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Script

Time of the interview:

Date:

Interviewee (code):

Brief description of the project: It is my intention that this study will help the athletic training field better understand how you got to your position and then other athletic trainers can use that information to ascend to leadership positions themselves.

Questions:

1. Do you see yourself as a leader in the athletic training field?
  - a. If yes, What makes you perceive you are a leader in the field?
  - b. If yes, Did you intentionally work to become a leader?
  - c. If no, Why do you think other people identify you as a leader?
2. What type of leadership positions both within and outside of the field have you been involved with?
3. Can you describe anything that motivated you to become a leader in the field?
4. Is there someone that you attribute your success in the field, particularly in your leadership role, to?
5. Where do you think you learned your leadership skills?
  - a. Have you taken any steps to improve your leadership abilities?
6. Did you experience any barriers or challenges to your career or leadership positions because you are a woman?
  - a. If yes, how do you think you were able to overcome these challenges and barriers?
7. Have you noticed any changes in the field as the gender dynamic of athletic training has shifted to include more females?
8. Have you noticed any changes in leadership opportunities as the gender dynamic of athletic training has shifted to include more females?



9. Do you think Title IX has played a role in changing our profession, especially in relation to gender issues?
  - a. If yes, can you provide examples or an explanation?
10. What do you think the biggest challenges to women in athletic training are?
11. What advice would you have for other female athletic trainers to help them reach their goals?

Thank you!

## Appendix B

### IRB Consent Form

**Study Title:** Perspectives of Female Leaders in Athletic Training

My name is Kyle Momsen and I'm a doctoral student conducting this research for my doctoral dissertation at Minnesota State University- Mankato in the Educational Leadership Program. You are being invited as a participant in this study because of your role as a female athletic trainer and your membership in the National Athletic Trainer's Association. Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

**Purpose of the research:** To understand the experiences of female leaders in the field of athletic training.

**Participation and withdrawal:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. You may withdraw by informing me that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship to Minnesota State University, Mankato, nor will a refusal to participate involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

**What you will do in this research:** If you decide to volunteer you will be asked to participate in one phone interview arranged at a time that is convenient for you. You will be asked several questions, with a focus on your experiences as a woman in a leadership role within the field of athletic training. With your permission, I will tape record the interview with [www.tollfreeconferencecall.com](http://www.tollfreeconferencecall.com) so I can transcribe the interview. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording and transcriptions will not include your name. While the use of tollfreeconferencecall.com is considered to be a secure online recording service that has published privacy policies, whenever working with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific risks posed by online-recorded interviews, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

**Time Required:** The interview will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes.

**Risks:** The risks in this study are no more than those experienced in every day life. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** Participation in this research provides a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences as a female leader in athletic training. The information you provide will help increase society's understanding of how women have become successful leaders in athletic training and might help other women become leaders in the field.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed or known to anyone other than me. You will be assigned a pseudonym for all publication of data. The data you give me will be used for my dissertation and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future, but you will only be identified by your pseudonym. I will destroy the recording of your interview as soon as it has been transcribed. This will be done by a professional transcriptionist who will only be provided your assigned pseudonym. The transcript, without your name, will be kept in a secure locked or encrypted location until the research is complete.

**To Contact the Researcher:** If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Kyle Momsen, 507-933-6062, [kmomsen@gustavus.edu](mailto:kmomsen@gustavus.edu). You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Julie Carlson, Department of Educational Leadership, 507-389-5441, [julie.carlson@mnsu.edu](mailto:julie.carlson@mnsu.edu). If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and Minnesota State University, Mankato, contact the IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu).

**Agreement:** My signature below confirms that the nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty. I am at least 18 years of age.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

MSU IRBNet ID# 426419-2

Please sign and return one copy of this form to me in the provided stamped, addressed envelope. You can keep the other copy for your own records. Once I receive your signed form, I'll contact you to arrange an interview time that is convenient for you.

Table 1

## Perspectives of Female Leaders in Athletic Training Themes

Node	Themes	Themes
Motivation to become a leader	Passion for field	Involvement in field
	Relationships	Effect change
Barriers for women in AT	No barriers	Work life balance
Change in leadership opportunities	NATA Board	
Leadership Development	Watching others	Leadership experiences
	Educational experiences	
Challenges in AT	Work life balance	Other challenges
Advice for others	Get involved	Learn from others