Female Head Athletic Trainers in NCAA Division I (IA Football) Athletics: How They Made it to the Top

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FEMALE HEAD ATHLETIC TRAINERS IN NCAA
DIVISION I (IA FOOTBALL) ATHLETICS:
HOW THEY MADE IT TO THE TOP

by

JoAnne Gorant

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Advisor: Andrea Beach, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2012
The profession of athletic training has opened its doors to women, who now slightly outnumber men in the profession (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997, 2005). Unfortunately, this representation does not carry over into positions of high rank. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of female head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I (IA football) institutions to focus on the issues of barriers to advancement and their ability to overcome them.

Using Hakim’s “preference theory” as a lens, this interpretive qualitative investigation utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews to learn how participants advanced in the field of athletic training to the position of head athletic trainer. The study identified family division of labor and the discrimination from the “old boy’s club” found in other studies. However, it also showed low aspiration as equally strong a barrier to advancement and demonstrated how low aspiration then affects the intentionality of one’s career path. The participants identified three reasons for their low aspiration: First, an aversion to working in football, a traditional role for many head athletic trainers; second, an overall dislike of the duties of head athletic trainer; and, third, a stated reluctance to be in a leadership position.
Unique to this study was the identification of personal attributes which balanced the barriers and aided the women in the advancement. All expressed a strong work ethic; they received and internalized encouragement from others; and, finally, they saw a challenge and an opportunity for personal and professional growth in the head athletic trainer position. In most cases, they began to see the position as something other than traditional, and one they could change and improve. This re-visioning of the position played an integral part in their willingness to advance. Missing from the support these athletic training leaders identified was active professional mentoring. They did not benefit from formal or informal career advancement advice from supervisors or peers.

With low aspirations, low intentionality, and no career mentoring, these female head athletic trainers highlight the strong need for active preparation for advancement in the profession for both men and women.
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JoAnne Gorant
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, women have made remarkable strides in entering the profession of athletic training. Although the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) was founded in 1950, the first woman did not join until 1966 and, between 1966 and 1972, eight certified females became members of the organization (Shingles, 2001; Women in Athletic Training Committee (WATC, 1997, 2005). Following the passage of Title IX in 1973, and the resulting growth of women’s athletics, the door was opened for women athletic trainers to meet the increased demands of caring for female athletes. By the mid 1990s, women represented 50% of the NATA membership, but there remains a noticeable absence of women in the higher-ranking leadership positions of the NATA and the glamorous (and high-paying) employment options in professional sports and NCAA Division I (1A football) head athletic trainer positions.

Working as a female in the profession of athletic training over the last 20 years, I have seen significant changes in the profession. As I began my work as a student, I was clearly discriminated against because of my sex; however, as the number of women applying to the program continued to increase, the necessity of women to begin working in the male programs also began to increase. Over the last 20 years, I feel that discrimination towards women has declined, and yet there is still an absence of female leadership in the profession of athletic training.

The lack of women in leadership positions is a common phenomenon found within almost all professions. Early works identified the phenomenon (American Council

and today researchers are trying to make sense of this phenomenon (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fels, 2004). A significant amount of research has been conducted to examine what barriers women face as they enter the job market, as well as the barriers to promotion. This research has identified gender/role stereotyping, socialization “old boy’s club,” dual careers (family division of labor), lack of mobility, hiring and recruitment practices, and communication as barriers to advancement (Gupta, 1983, as cited in Booth, 2000; Kramarae 2001; Shakshaft, 1989; Sharratt & Derrington, 1993; Wilson, 1991, as cited in Booth, 2000). Missing from the literature is whether women head athletic trainers encounter the same barriers identified in other professions, and, if so, how were they able to overcome them?

In the field of athletic training, four researchers have examined barriers to women’s advancement: Anderson (1991), Booth (2000), Dieringer (2007), and Shingles (2001). The research identified the same barriers to advancement found in other male dominated professions. Anderson (1991) revealed that, in the early years, women had to fight for the right to gain entrance into the profession. It was not uncommon for women to be denied entrance into the educational programs based entirely on their sex. Although this is not the case today, women are still impeded in their opportunity to advance into the high-ranking and leadership positions of the profession, regardless of experience and qualifications. Currently, only 17.5% of all Division I institutions employ women in the role of head athletic trainer (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).
Because of the limited research into the lack of women in high rank in intercollegiate athletic training, I examined the phenomenon through the review of literature in fields similar to athletic training: academic and athletic administration. The literature review in these two fields identified the “old boy’s club,” family division of labor, and low personal aspirations as the most common barriers faced by women seeking advancement. The “old boy’s club” acts as a barrier based on discrimination and exclusion. Because women are identified as “different” by males in a male-dominated profession, they are often overlooked and not taken seriously. This perception of “difference” or “difference” distinction results in exclusion from vital experiences, information, and connections that are necessary for advancement (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Shingles, 2001; Whisenant, Miller, & Pederson, 2005). This then manifests itself into lost opportunities for advantageous mentoring as well as exclusion from the most beneficial networks.

New research has suggested that the most effective way to help women aspire to high rank may be by presenting them with effective role models (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Stubbe, 2008; White, 2005). In higher education (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Stubbe, 2008; White, 2005), strategically planned mentoring and networking opportunities for women have helped them to advance, but in athletic training (Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001), mentoring and networking opportunities have met with mixed results. This emphasizes the importance of examining how women in high rank in the field of athletic training reflect on their mentors and networking experiences and how these experiences have influenced their participation in mentoring and networking today. Family division of
labor affects women in that their time is often divided by two competing sets of responsibilities.

Even when both spouses work, women frequently bear the brunt of the domestic responsibilities. Because overtime work, extra projects or training, and lack of absenteeism are so important to advancement, women often find themselves at a disadvantage when they cannot stay late or take on additional assignments, or when they miss work because of family responsibilities, such as family illnesses (Carmeli, Shalom, & Weisberg, 2007; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonski, 1992; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). What is frequently overlooked, however, is that women may enjoy this dual role and are self-selecting themselves out of high rank in order to maintain balance, which may play into the next barrier of low aspiration (Gleeson & Knights, 2008; Hakim, 2000; Ruderman & Ohlott, 2004).

When asked, female presidents of higher education institutions have commented that they never wanted to be president (Eddy & Cox, 2008). This may seem trivial, but if women do not aspire to high rank, then they will never find equity in high-ranking positions simply because they do not apply themselves to this purpose. The consequences of low aspiration to high rank have yet to be thoroughly examined; however, one explanation may be job satisfaction. It is well documented that women find more job satisfaction at low rank than their male counterparts (Barron, 2003; Compton, 2005; Jackson, Gardner, & Sullivan, 1992; Major & Konar, 1984; Martin, 1989). Males tend to be more driven by power and acclamation, whereas women may seek a more balanced life and acceptance (Tannen, 1990). Again, the question remains whether women are self-limiting and if personal psychosocial belief systems actually hold women back from
advancement. The concern then is that a woman’s own perceptions of self may be the primary stumbling block for most women in the field of athletic training. Could it be that women do not aspire for high rank, or is it possible that women do aspire, but do not advocate well for their own personal advancement?

The explanations for why women are sparse in high rank have primarily focused on gendered communication and feminist theories (Blackmore, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Kolb, 1992; Ridgeway, 2001, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Tannen, 1990, 1994; Williams, 1975) where women are constrained purely based on their gender. As discrimination appears to be on the decline, theorists have begun to move away from discrimination to examine the differences between men and women and how we place ourselves and others in the society. Preference theory, presented by Catherine Hakim (2000), suggests that women may self-select a lifestyle preference, and this will predict a woman’s likelihood of advancement. Hakim suggests that even though there are more women than men entering college and seeking advanced degrees, it is likely that women will never outnumber men in high rank due to lifestyle preference.

Hakim (2000) believes that women can be grouped into three primary lifestyle preferences. The first lifestyle preference is labeled “family-centered,” and makes up about 20% of all women investigated. Women in this group value family or personal experiences more than they value work. Because of this value preference, these women are likely to quit working when they marry or have children if they are financially able to do so. This pathway is chosen regardless of profession and education. The second group occupies the other end of the spectrum and is labeled by Hakim as the “work-centered” preference. These women fit most closely with the male model and value work over
family and personal activities. This group tends not to marry or have children and is the most likely to be found in high rank. Hakim named the final group the “adaptives,” which is made up of women who try to do both. These women enjoy both work and family in varying degrees, but tend to be married and have children. Because of a constant pull of the two lifestyle choices, these women tend to dismiss the thought of promotion, knowing that the demands of the high-ranking position will interfere with time with family.

Balance is essential for the adaptive woman.

Although preference theory has yet to be used as the theoretical framework for other investigations on women in academia and athletics, the findings of investigations in these two areas seem to support Hakim’s research findings. First, in the academy, women who advance to full professor or pursue administrative leadership positions tend to be single or childless, with their focus on career (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Harper, Baldwin, Gansneder, & Chronister, 2001; Mason & Goulden, 2002). This phenomenon also exists in athletics, where women athletes are choosing not to pursue a career in coaching. Women no longer hold the majority of head coaching positions in women’s sports and are a significant minority in the position of Athletic Director (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; Drago, Hennighausen, Rogers, Vescio, & Stauffer, 2005; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Welch & Sigelman, 2007; Wilson, 2006).

I used preference theory as the theoretical lens for this investigation, and it served as the starting point in choosing the sample of high-ranking women for this investigation. Hakim’s theory predicts that the majority of the women head athletic trainers would fit into the “work-centered” grouping. Based on preference theory, I assumed that these women at some point in their careers aspired to high rank, were free of some of the
constraints presented in the family division of labor, and subsequently overcame the obstacles related to the “old boy’s club.” By selecting this focused sample, it was possible to more clearly identify certain personal attributes shared by these women, to identify commonalities in career paths and barriers, and to reveal the strategies they were able to incorporate to overcome these barriers.

The Problem

In the field of athletic training, less than 17.5% of the head athletic trainers in all Division I institutions are women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012), while over 50% of athletic trainers are women (Dieringer, 2007). Like so many other professions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; ACE, 2006; Chen, 2005), women are not equally represented in the high-ranking positions and dominate in lower-ranking jobs. It is clear that women face different challenges in their quest for advancement in the field of athletic training than their male counterparts. Previous research (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001) suggested that the barriers were primarily discriminatory in nature, but more recent research (Dieringer, 2007) shows that as discrimination appears to be declining, women are not stepping into the leadership positions. The previous authors have identified barriers to advancement; however, no research has investigated the lived experiences of women who have ascended into high rank in athletic training as head athletic trainers, or identified successful strategies to overcome these barriers.

The Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of eight female head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I (IA football) institutions that ascended into high-ranking leadership roles. This study was guided by the lens of
preference theory (Hakim, 2000). In preference theory, Hakim introduced the idea that women make career and lifestyle choices, and these preferences are the primary influence as to whether women actively pursue advancement. In other words, some women may be limited not only by external barriers, but also by low aspiration to high rank, making self-advocating for high rank a null issue. Hakim recognized a group of women (approximately 20%) who are “work centered” and found that this group tended to achieve high rank; however, it is not clear when they aspired to these positions, and if or how these women may have advocated for their advancement.

I anticipated that through conversations, the women interviewed would be able to express successful strategies for advancement among those who do aspire to high-ranking positions. While studies have been conducted on the topic of barriers to advancement in the field of athletic training (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001), few have offered insight on what strategies women utilize to overcome these barriers (Booth, 2000; Shingles, 2001).

**The Rationale/Significance**

Examination of the literature demonstrates that women are disadvantaged in their quest to become head athletic trainers (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Shingles, 2001). Barriers to advancement have been identified in almost all professions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; ACE, 2006). What I have yet to understand is how women in the field of athletic training can overcome these barriers to high rank and what strategies are most successful to this end. The rationale for this study was to enter the minds of the women who have successfully ascended to high rank in the field of athletic training and draw upon their common experiences to develop a better understanding of what it takes to
achieve this career goal. The study was able to identify commonalities in career path, and successful strategies or personal characteristics that enabled these women to persevere in the field of athletic training. Through the experiences of others, young women in the profession can then learn and grow.

**The Research Questions**

1. What are the commonalities in career path for women head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I (IA) universities, and how do they link their experiences to the positions that they currently hold?
2. What barriers to advancement (if any) have women working as head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I (IA) institutions encountered (both professional and personal) and how did they overcome these barriers?
3. How has mentoring and networking played a role in the advancement of these women head athletic trainers?
   a. How would they now explain their role as a mentor and how do they use those networks today?
   b. How large are their networks and how are they represented in gender?
4. What role did preference play in the advancement of the female athletic trainers in this investigation and were these women truly “work-centered” individuals?

**Methodology Overview**

I designed an interpretive qualitative investigation that used semi-structured, open-ended narrative interviews that walked these women through their lives and asked them to describe their career path and pinpoint experiences that led to their advancement,
identify and discuss barriers, and discuss the role of mentoring and networking in their journey. Through analytical induction, I then sought to identify the common themes and place them as they relate to other themes based on barriers discussed in the past. Creswell (1998) noted that the qualitative researcher seeks to understand patterns of experiences in order to better grasp the meanings of the lived experiences. It is through this process that the researcher and his or her audience understand what it is to truly experience this role.

This investigation was made up of a purposeful, criterion-based population of participants. In qualitative research, this is often the most appropriate type of sample to study because it is necessary to determine, prior to the interview, that the participants have indeed lived the experience being investigated and fit the criteria for study. The participants were all female head athletic trainers working in the intercollegiate athletics department of NCAA Division I (IA) institutions that sponsor football.

Initially, I set out on an exploratory investigation to examine career path and advancement and the role that common barriers found in other careers played in the lives of women head athletic trainers, to better prepare me for a study looking at the role that self-advocacy plays in women’s advancement. I believed that by picking such a specific group of women (based on preference theory by Catherine Hakim) I would be limiting the effects found by the psychosocial barriers of family division of labor and low aspiration. This way it would be possible to focus more on the career obstacles (personal or professional) that face women who tended to be “work-centered.” What I found, however, caused me to step back and look again at the strength and magnitude of the traditional barriers discussed and presented a shift in the focus of my future work.
Limitations and Delimitations

Creswell (2003) described delimitations as the factors that purposefully shape the scope of a study. In this case, the delimitations included the criterion-based participant population of only female head athletic trainers in the field of athletic training at one specific type of institution. This is a well-defined population, and choosing this group of women allowed for the examination of shared experiences.

The construction of a “composite” biography of the participants was a limitation found in this study. Unlike other research investigations, where individual biographies of each participant are presented to give the reader a clear sense that the author was intimately connected to the participants and understands their stories. Here, I chose to create a composite of all seven participants together. I felt that with such a small pool of potential candidates available, the individual stories of these women could have made them easily identifiable. I understand that this is a limiting factor, but a necessary step in protecting the confidentiality of the participants.

Definition of Terms

*Athletic training:* An allied health care profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association and is responsible for the prevention, recognition, management, and rehabilitation of injuries occurring to the physically active (Arnheim & Prentice, 2004; NATA, 1999, as cited by Shingles, 2001).

*Athletic trainer (AT):* An individual who is certified by the NATA Board of Certification and who specializes in the domains of athletic injury management (NATA, 1999, as cited by Shingles, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, an AT or ATC will also be referred to as an athletic trainer.
**Head athletic trainer:** The highest ranking position to which an AT can ascend in the intercollegiate athletic training setting.

**Summary**

Athletic trainers from the United States organized in 1950 to form the NATA, and at its inception, only males were present. As women athletic trainers have moved into the 21st century, the profession has blossomed and women now slightly outnumber men in the organization’s membership (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997, 2005). Unfortunately, this representation does not carry over into positions of high rank. Like in academic and athletic administration, women dominate the low-ranking positions and are underrepresented in high rank (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; ACE, 2007). Although much research has examined the barriers that women face in their quest for advancement in athletic training (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001), to date no research has been conducted in athletic training to better understand how some women are able to ascend to high ranks.

I studied the women who are serving in the highest ranking position for athletic training in intercollegiate athletics. Their stories helped me to better understand the career path to the position of head athletic trainer, barriers to advancement in the field of athletic training, and the role that mentoring and networking played. By comparing the lived experiences of these women, this study provides a better understanding of what it takes to achieve this position and what it is like for women to serve in this position.
For women in athletic training, a glass ceiling allows only a few to advance into high-ranking administrative positions in athletics. Although this phenomenon has been documented in many professions, the nature of this investigation is driven by the limited research that has been conducted in athletic training (Anderson, 1991; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001) and the relatively different barriers found among women in closely related areas of academic and athletic administration. While previous studies identified inequities in the field as well as external barriers to advancement, they were unable to identify how women may be able to advance to the positions of high rank. Did successful female athletic trainers encounter barriers common in other fields, and did the use of common strategies help them to overcome these barriers? If recognized, these strategies could be shared with other women in the profession of athletic training.

The purpose of this review is to allow the reader to explore the current research as it relates to the lack of women serving in high rank in the field of athletic training as well as related topics that are relevant to this investigation. Because of the dearth of research on this topic specific to athletic training, the related fields of intercollegiate athletics and academic administration will be used to draw relevant comparisons. As mentioned in Chapter I, preference theory will serve as the theoretical lens of this investigation and will be thoroughly examined in this chapter as well. To this end, the review is broken down into the following sections: (a) the history of the NATA from a woman’s perspective; (b) gender research to date regarding women in the field of athletic training;
(c) the current state of women in athletic training leadership roles; (d) the current state of women in intercollegiate athletics and academia; (e) career path and promotion; (f) commonly identified barriers to advancement for women; (g) theoretical framework (preference theory); (h) nurturing the pipeline, the role of mentoring, and networking in athletic training.

The History of the NATA From a Woman’s Perspective

Although the roots of athletic training can be traced to ancient Greece, the profession gained a foothold in the United States in the late 19th century with the rising interest in intercollegiate athletics. The profession was formally established in the United States in 1950 with the formation of the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA). “The primary purpose was to establish professional standards for the athletic trainer” (Arnheim & Prentice, 2004, p. 3). In 1966, the organization adopted the credential of Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) and required that each athletic trainer pass an exam before becoming certified. Today, an athletic trainer is recognized by the American Medical Association as an allied health professional, and students must graduate from a Commission of Accreditation for Athletic Training Education (CAATE) accredited educational program.

To say that athletic training has been a male-dominated profession is an understatement. At its formal inception in 1950, there were no women present. It was not until 1966 that the first woman joined the profession, and between 1966 and 1972 there were only eight women recorded as members. The first woman to join was Dorothy “Dot” Cohen (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997).
The tables began to turn in 1972 with the passage of the Title IX Amendment, which created the need for more women to join the profession to care for female athletes. O’Shea (1980), in *The History of the National Athletic Trainer Association*, noted a concern for the lack of females being admitted into athletic training education programs. This was a legitimate concern, since the majority of accredited curricula in athletic training barred women (Anderson, 1991). The justification was that women would have to work within the men’s locker room. It is interesting to note that the above concern was the only mention of women in the field of athletic training in O’Shea’s text. This may demonstrate that women working in the field of athletic training up until this time were practically invisible to the dominant male group, or at least to O’Shea. It is also clear that even in 1980 the thought of women working with male athletes was not a consideration.

The first attempt to address the concerns of women in the field came in 1974. The NATA Board of Directors (NATABOD) established an ad hoc committee of eight women charged with the responsibility of identifying the needs of women working in the field of athletic training and presenting to the NATABOD a list of recommendations to aid in the advancement of women in this field. The committee met in June of 1974 for one day and created their list of recommendations to the board. The next year, the committee disbanded because they felt that the objectives had been met (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997, 2002).

The number of women in athletic training continued to grow throughout the 1980s, but there is very little recorded history of this time period (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997, 2002). With the disbanding of the ad hoc committee in 1975, there was a status quo that settled over the organization and women remained invisible and were left
without a voice until 1995 (Shingles, 2001; WATC, 1997, 2002). In fact, when an administrative assistant to the NATA was asked in 1985 for demographic information regarding women in the profession, none was available (Shingles, 2001). This does not mean that no progress was made for women of this generation. Janice Daniels was the first woman elected to the NATABOD in 1984 (WATC, 2002).

In 1995, the Women in Athletic Training Task Force was established by the NATABOD to again address the issues of women in the organization. The impetus for this committee may have been the ever-growing presence of women in the profession (WATC, 2002). In 1996, the NATA found that the percentage of its membership who were women had grown to 44%. The task force was conceptualized by Dr. Katie Grove of Indiana University and presented to the NATABOD in February of 1995. The mission of the task force was to research and prioritize issues of women in the NATA and to then engage the entire NATA membership in problem-solving of the identified issues (WATC, 2005). The goals included the promotion of women in leadership, employment, and education, as well as the development of a support network.

The first order of business was the development of a survey to identify the concerns and issues of the female membership. The survey was distributed to 1,000 members of the organization and found that the primary concerns of the female membership included family/personal life, the perception of a “good ol’ boys” network, and salary. Although only 37% reported sexual harassment, a follow-up survey of the male members in 1997 showed that 41% believed that women trainers had suffered from sexual harassment (Shingles, 2001). With this knowledge, the task force developed a brochure to address the topic (WATC, 2005). The task force, as a result of this survey,
became a standing committee of the NATABOD in 1996 and was renamed the Women in Athletic Training Committee (WATC, 2005).

With regard to women in leadership, the survey confirmed the lack of female representation in leadership positions within the governing bodies of the NATA. Most of those who did participate held office or belonged to a committee at the state level. The women surveyed felt that there were fewer opportunities for women to serve (Shingles, 2001). This problem has persisted. Ward (2006) found that only 10% of the NATABOD representing each of the 10 districts were women. In 2011, the board has only one female representative, Marjorie J. Albohm, MS, ATC, the president.

In 2005, female membership in the NATA exceeded that of their male counterparts. A demographic study of the state of women in athletics (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006) found that only 27% of all head athletic trainers are female, and although 97.5% of all NCAA institutions employ athletic trainers, only 33.3% had a female head athletic trainer. This brings up an interesting point; in spite of the fact that Title IX improved participation for women in sport, it had the reverse effect on positions of leadership. Many women who once served as athletic director and head athletic trainer of women’s athletics programs lost their leadership positions as the two departments merged (Acosta & Carpenter, 1992; Carpenter & Acosta, 2006; Costa & Gutherie, 1994; Dieringer, 2007). This phenomenon is further explored in forthcoming sections.

**Research in Athletic Training as It Pertains to Gender Issues**

In the field of athletic training, four researchers have examined the phenomenon of the lack of women in high rank and leadership roles: Anderson (1991), Booth (2000), Shingles (2001), and Dieringer (2007). The research identified the same barriers to
advancement found in other male-dominated professions. Anderson (1991) revealed that, in the early years, women had to fight for the right to gain entrance into the profession. It was not uncommon for women to be denied entrance into athletic training educational programs based entirely on their gender. Although this is not the case today, women are still impeded in their ability to advance into the high ranking and leadership positions of the profession, regardless of their experience and qualifications. Today, fewer than 18% of the positions of head athletic trainer in NCAA Division I institutions are held by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).

The first person to examine the plight of women in the field of athletic training was Anderson (1991, 1992). Her qualitative investigation studied the experiences of 13 pioneer women in the field of athletic training. It was Anderson’s hope to note progress, document the perspectives of the female athletic trainers, and discuss the current status of women in the field. Anderson found that only three of the women were able to articulate barriers when directly asked, but all clearly described gender-based barriers to advancement in conversation. In her work, Anderson labeled barriers to advancement as contradictions and she found seven that emerged from her study:

1. Equal education as compared to males
2. Equal clinical experience while students
3. Involvement in high-risk sports (football)
4. Women’s athletic training budgets compared to men’s
5. Heavier workloads
6. NATA’s lack of compassion and commitment to women

7. Labeling women as lesbians

Anderson (1991) also discussed the lack of women serving in leadership positions of committees within the NATA organization itself at the national level. This is important because it means that women were excluded from the important decision-making processes of the organization. Although women were asked and encouraged to fill traditional roles at the lower levels, such as administrative assistant in the national organization, very few were encouraged to pursue leadership positions. As revealed in Dieringer’s (2007) recent work, this problem persists in the profession today.

Anderson’s (1991) work clearly demonstrates the marginalization of women in the field of athletic training and clearly establishes the presence of barriers to advancement in the early years of the profession’s development. Her work was followed by that of Booth (2000), who also acknowledged the barriers faced by women but also examined how the work setting influenced these barriers. Booth’s research relied on a survey of 300 male and 300 female athletic trainers, distributed evenly between three possible working settings: clinic, high school, and college/university. Of the original 600 participants, 283 responded, of which 53% were female and 47% were male. Although the participants were identified by work setting and gender, they were not identified by title or position. The study was based in the theoretical frame of Gilligan, which focused on the differences between the way males and females communicate.

Booth’s (2000) investigation found that women experienced more barriers than their male counterparts, but these barriers were not influenced by work setting (secondary schools, college/university, and clinical/hospital). The barriers appeared to be universal
and included “socialization, career aspiration, advancement opportunities, dual careers, role conflict, administrative capabilities, mobility, experience, age, recruitment practice, hiring practices and communication” (p. 67). While Booth concluded that work site was not a significant variable in gender-related barriers for women, another study investigated the variable of race as a barrier.

Shingles (2001) added to her predecessors’ work by investigating the effect of race and sexual orientation on a woman’s ability to advance in the field of athletic training. Shingles’ study used a mixed-methods approach, beginning with a survey and progressing to a set of qualitative phenomenological interviews. Her theoretical base came from symbolic interaction theory, anchored in the contributions of Padavic (1991). The theory is based on the interaction of men and women and the meanings that are attached to the interactions. Shingles (2001) employed the theory to better understand how women are perceived in the male-dominated role of athletic trainer and how this influences her inquiry. The results of the study found a significant difference in the women-of-color’s perceptions of the use of the lesbian label, interactions with colleagues and educators, and issues of structural power; however, most of her participants agreed that race was not a factor in the quality of their educational experience. Like the previous investigation (Anderson, 1992), these women denied the existence of sexual harassment and discrimination unless it resulted in abuse or an uncomfortable work setting.

In the most recent investigation in this area, Dieringer (2007) redistributed a survey that was originally distributed by the Women in Athletic Training Committee (WATC) in 1996. To remain consistent with the original work, Dieringer surveyed 15% of the active membership, which resulted in a sample size of 3,000 NATA members
(1,500 males and 1,500 females). The survey examined their perceptions of the opportunities and issues of women in regard to leadership, awards, employment opportunities, and family conflict. Dieringer’s purpose was to evaluate the change that had taken place as a result of the efforts of the NATA and the WATC in this 10-year period of time. Dieringer’s study provided a rich history of the theories dedicated to gender differences, but never made a clear statement as to which theory she used as a frame for this investigation. In the study, she found that although most perceptions had improved, the actual frequency of women attaining high-ranking positions of employment and positions in the highest levels of leadership in the NATA had shown only marginal improvement and certainly did not represent the membership ratio of women currently working in the profession. Other results of Dieringer’s work will be used throughout this chapter to examine the state of women in athletic training today.

Although the work of Anderson (1991, 1992), Booth (2000), Shingles (2001), and Dieringer (2007) clearly establishes barriers to advancement in the field of athletic training, none of these investigations studied the women who have broken through the glass ceiling and are the high-ranking leaders in the field of intercollegiate athletics.

The Current State of Women in Leadership in Athletic Training

According to Acosta and Carpenter (2008), the profession of athletic training has shown steady growth over the last 10 years. In 2008, 97.7% of all NCAA institutions reported having a full-time athletic trainer on staff, which is up from 92.3% in 1998. The profession has also shown steady growth since the 1970s, and the percentage of women in the profession exceeded that of men in 2005 (Ward, 2006). In 2006, undergraduate and graduate athletic training programs reported that 60% of their student members were
female. With the growth in the number of women in the profession, it is reasonable to expect the same growth in leadership roles. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

In 1992, Acosta and Carpenter began reporting the employment statistic of female athletic trainers in NCAA athletics. In the 1992 report, they found that 28.6% of all head athletic trainers in the NCAA were women. Since this time, the percentage of women in the role has reached a low of 25.5% in 2000 to the highest percentage found in the 2012 report of 30.7% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). The demographics across divisions have remained relatively consistent, with NCAA Division III schools hiring the largest percent at 40.5%, Division II at 31.2%, and, finally, Division I schools hiring the lowest percentage at 17.5% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Since the duties of head athletic trainer appear to be gender-neutral, this discrepancy is of great concern (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Possible reasons for this will be discussed later in more detail.

Another concern in the profession is the lack of female leadership in state, district, and national athletic training organizations. Dieringer (2007) reported that in the last 10 years women have made modest strides in professional leadership. Two women have now been elected as president of the NATA. The number of women participating on leadership boards at the state, local, and national levels has shown a modest increase over the last 10 years and the number of women who are now chairing committees and boards has risen slightly. Even with the rise, there is still a significant disparity between the number of males and females in these positions based on the overall demographics of the profession.

Because the plight of women in athletic training has been documented so scarcely, to truly understand the breadth of this phenomenon, one must look to work in
other fields. Business, education, and the medical sciences have all researched the lack of women in positions of power, but to narrow the scope, comparisons will be drawn from the work completed in the fields of collegiate athletics and academics. These two areas were chosen because of the similarity in environment and time commitment to collegiate athletic training.

**The Current State of Women in Intercollegiate Athletics and Academia**

The more male-dominated the profession, the harder it is for women to ascend up the ladder to positions of high rank (Harper et al., 2001; Whisenant, 2008). Like athletic training, collegiate athletics and higher education are professions of male dominance. In order to understand the scope of the problem, one may examine the current state of women in positions of high rank in the fields of athletic training (head athletic trainer), athletics (athletic director), and academic administration (president). One characteristic shared by the latter two fields is that women seem to be derailed from the pipeline at the initial stage of employment or participation. This is a circumstance that has yet to be investigated in the field of athletic training.

This section will also consider the changes in women’s athletics since the enactment of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Valentin, 1997). Title IX has been extremely positive for women’s participation in athletics, with a three-fold increase since the enactment of the legislation in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). In 2008, women’s participation in athletics reached a high of three million participants in high school, club, and community teams, which has carried over into increased participation in intercollegiate athletics. In 1968, colleges reported 16,000 female athletes; in 2008, colleges and universities reported 9,101 women’s athletic teams. The
number of women’s varsity teams offered at each institution has continued to increase. In 1970, colleges averaged 2.5 women’s teams; today the number has risen to 8.7 teams per institution (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Although the effects of Title IX have been extremely positive for women with regard to participation, its effect on leadership and administrative positions has been detrimental.

In 1972, 90% of women’s teams were coached by women, and 90% of women’s athletic programs were led by female athletic directors. Over the last 38 years, the number of women coaching women’s sports has steadily declined, and the number of women administrators has sharply declined as the men’s and women’s athletic departments have merged and the women’s AD positions have been eliminated or relegated to a subordinate title (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Although no demographics are available to document this phenomenon in athletic training, in my personal observations, this has been the experience of female head athletic trainers as well. The result is that women now have very little say in the leadership decisions of sport, and control has been relinquished to males.

**Women in Intercollegiate Athletics**

**Coaches.** The career path to the position of athletic director generally first passes through the position of head coach of a major sport. With women’s sports growing in popularity, one may assume that the path to AD is now open to women; however, women are no longer the majority gender in the coaching of major women’s sports. Since the passage of Title IX (when 90% of women’s teams were coached by women), the percentage of women coaching women’s sports has been on a decline until 2008, when it leveled off at 42% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). The initial decline was attributed to the
large increase in the number of women’s teams and the lack of qualified women to coach them. Acosta and Carpenter (2008) showed that from 1972 to 1978, collegiate sports programs rose from an average of 2.5 female offerings to 5.61 teams per school; but as time has progressed, one would have expected the percentage of women’s coaches to have leveled from the flow of these new female athletes into the profession of coaching. So even though there has been massive growth in female sports participation, there is a significant decrease in women’s representation as coaches of women’s sports and no increase in the percentage of women coaching men’s sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008).

Acosta and Carpenter (2008) suggested that the lack of female athletic directors is related to the shortage of women being hired as coaches and that the increasing prestige and budget of women’s sports has attracted males to a once female-dominated profession. Interestingly, this does not appear to be the case. Welch and Sigelman (2007) contradicted Acosta and Carpenter’s conclusion with their finding that women head coaches still dominate in the most prestigious of NCAA Division I (IA) institutions with the largest budgets. This finding could lead one to believe that women are highly valued as coaches of women’s sports, but that there is a dearth of women who can fill these positions. Welch and Sigelman turned to the disparity in the family division of labor as a reason why women are not entering the field at the same rate as men. Drago et al. (2005), Everhart and Chelladurai (1998), and Wilson (2006) have suggested that the family-unfriendly nature of coaching deters women from entering the profession. Women opting out at entry level may be one contributing factor to the lack of women in athletic administrative positions.
**Athletic directors.** Acosta and Carpenter (2008) also investigated the progress of women as chief administrator of athletics or athletic director. They found that although the majority of women lost their administrative positions due to the merging of the men’s and women’s athletic departments, women have shown a modest increase in the percentage who have served as AD over the last 8 years. In 2008, there were 224 women who served as athletic director in all divisions of the NCAA, which represents 21.3% of the total population of ADs. Other hopeful signs include the increased number of women who now serve as administrators in athletics. Females now represent 48.6% of the athletics administrative staff, and the percentage of programs that lack any female representation has continually dropped since 1984. As of 2008, only 11.6% of programs lacked female representation.

Whisenant (2003, 2006) has demonstrated that although the number of females participating in high school athletics continues to grow, the plight of women in this setting persists, as 85% of all high school athletic directors are male. Lovett and Lowry (1994) and Whisenant (2003) have all been able to demonstrate that gender inequality in high school athletics administration exists in Iowa, Texas, and Florida (as cited in Whisenant, 2003).

The most prominent explanation for the absence of women in intercollegiate administrative positions has been the existence of the “old boy’s club.” Several books have been written on this phenomenon, and Salter (1996) examined it directly when studying the rise and fall of women in administrative positions in sport. Exclusion from this club presents itself as a barrier in that this system restricts a woman’s ability to amass political power by reducing a woman’s ability to build alliances, meaningful mentoring
relationships, and opportunities to demonstrate autonomy in leadership roles. This ultimately results in a lack of positional and personal power.

**Women in the Academy**

**Faculty, tenure, and promotion.** Like women in the athletic setting, the very first career choice made by women may be the choice that holds them back in the career pipeline. A person’s chosen field of study may be the first barrier to advancement to high rank. The American Council on Education (ACE) presidential report (2007) showed that the majority of presidents rise from the hard sciences, business, and theology. The ACE (2006) report on gender equity emphasized that these fields are still dominated by males.

According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005), men comprised 42% of total enrollment at the graduate level in 2003-2004, but the gender balance varied tremendously by degree program and field of study. Men are still the majority in theology (77%), MBA programs (59%), non-education doctorates (55%), law (54%), and master of science programs (52%). Women hold the largest majorities in education programs (80% at the master’s level and 64% at the doctoral level), but have also made strides in traditionally male fields. Women now have a slight majority in enrollment in medicine (51%) and other health science professional programs (53%).

Whether by choice or mandate, once women have attained their doctoral degrees, they are less likely than their male counterparts to arrive at a full-time tenure track position. The annual report from the American Association of University Professors on the economic status of the profession in 2004-2005 showed that when looking at the professorate as a whole, or all full-time faculty positions, the number of women in the
profession has risen steadily and is approaching equity; however, these numbers are quite misleading (Curtis, 2005). Curtis asserts that as one separates the full-time positions into tenure track and non-tenure track positions, one would see that men disproportionately outnumber women in the tenure track positions and the reverse is true in the non-tenure track positions. This may be attributed to the fact that female faculty tend to work in lower tier institutions. Among the full-time faculty, women tend to work at 2-year institutions, while men are more likely than women to work at research universities (Curtis, 2005; NCES, 2004).

Women in tenure track positions are less likely to receive tenure and to be promoted to full professor than their male colleagues. In 1974, it was first noted that gender inequity did exist in appointing women faculty members to lower ranks (non-tenure track or associate college positions) and appointing or promoting few females to the rank of full professor (Harper et al., 2001). Unfortunately, this trend has not changed. From 1975 to 1985, the number of women on tenure track rose from 18.3% to 20.7%, and then from 1985 to 2004, this number increased only to 33% (Curtis, 2005) even though the number of women receiving terminal degrees is now equivalent to men. Thus, the proportion of women at doctoral-granting universities rose from one-fourth that of men to a ratio of one-half, meaning the men still outnumber women on the full-time faculty by two to one (Curtis, 2005). This is in sharp contrast to the women in associate degree colleges, who now slightly outnumber their male counterparts (Curtis, 2005). The trend seems to be continuing; the general report of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2004) showed that by examining rank, women dominate in instructor
(53%) and lecturer (54%) ranks, but only make up 47% of the assistant professor, 40% of the associate professor, and a dismal 26% of the full professor ranks.

Of note is the fact that when women are applying for tenure, they are being denied significantly more often than their male counterparts. In 1993, of all full-time faculty eligible for tenure, only 58% of the women received tenure in contrast to the 75% of the males who applied (Harper et al., 2001). One explanation for this is that women tend to be placed into positions that require a high teaching load in lower level classes with less time allocated to research (Harper et al., 2001). It should be noted that this does not happen in all disciplines; education and the social sciences are just as likely to promote women, but it has been asserted that the hard sciences discriminate against women. Allen (1998, as cited in Harper et al., 2001) found in the fields of nursing, teacher education, foreign languages, English, and general education that the majority of the full-time professors with tenure are women. This is in sharp contrast to the hard sciences, where in the early 1990s, as few as 4% of the full professors were women (Harper et al., 2001).

A groundbreaking report published in 1999 by the Committee on Women Faculty at MIT demonstrated that women in Research I institutions had been marked by a series of disadvantages. The report was analytically based and found that women faculty members received an inequitable share of space; procured lower salaries paid from research grants; were included in fewer important committees; and received fewer research assignments, awards, and distinctions.

When considering the career path to the college presidency, most research seems focused on the number of women who progress through the pipeline of faculty to administration to high rank, when a closer monitoring of faculty promotion may be
necessary. Evidence indicates that if women are denied tenure, or after attaining tenure are not encouraged to advance in the professorate, colleges may be losing a significant number of qualified candidates for president before any even reach the administrative positions of department chair and dean. When examining the statistics on women in these positions, one sees that this is indeed the case (ACE, 2007).

**Department chairs, deans, provosts, and presidents.** The 2007 ACE report shows that 45% of all senior administration positions are held by women, and 38% of provosts or chief academic officers are women. These are significant strides, but again, these percentages do not hold across all types of institutions. In 2004, Niemeier and Gonzales reported that men chair 80% of science and engineering academic departments in colleges and universities, and the majority of chairs (73%) are full professors (Niemeier & Gonzales, 2004; Ransdell et al., 2008). The areas of highest success for women correspond to those that are most likely to grant women tenure and promotion. “Of the 20% of women who do act as department chairs, 80% come from the arts, humanities, and social sciences—not physical sciences, business, or engineering” (Ransdell et al., 2008). One interesting fact is that women who accept department chair positions are younger and more likely to be assistant or associate professors (Niemeier & Gonzales, 2004; Ransdell et al., 2008; Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000). This allows them to skip one step in promotion, which is the only advantage women seem to have over men (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000). The fact remains that women are more likely to take department chair positions at lower tier institutions, and these are the same institutions that they are most likely to lead (Niemeier & Gonzales, 2004; Ransdell et al., 2008).
As women progress up the career ladder, the statistics show that women’s positions continue to erode. Only 36% of deans are women and half of them come from nursing; only 25% served as associate dean before advancing, but 91% had served as a department chair, coordinator, or director (Ransdell et al., 2008). In one study (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000), only 23% of the women deans surveyed intended to seek higher rank. The majority reported that they would return to a faculty position or retire when they vacate the position of dean. This is a very concerning finding, and the article does not expand on what keeps the women deans from aspiring to higher rank.

The office of provost or academic vice president is no different. The position is currently occupied by women 38% of the time, but again, women dominate in the lower tier institutions (ACE, 2007). The position of provost carries with it the same barriers to women in higher tier institutions as the other positions in that they are primarily elevated from the position of dean, and academic segregation persists since most come from the position of dean of arts and sciences.

The ACE (2007) report indicates that the office of president has shown growth in the hiring of women over the last 20 years; however, the same pattern exists in that 2-year institutions hold the greatest percentage of female presidents (29%), and the percentage continues to decline as one moves up the ladder of prestige. Women make up 20% of college presidents at 4-year institutions. The number of women at doctorate-granting institutions rose from 4% in 1986 to 13% in 1998 but has not changed significantly since that time (ACE, 2007).

Female college presidents possess many of the same characteristics as their male counterparts. They are white (86%), their average age is 60, they are promoted from
within nearly 30% of the time, and 70% have faculty experience (ACE, 2007). Although these statistics may seem somewhat comforting, they may in fact be part of the problem. Until academic institutions are able to break some of the traditional characteristics of the office of president, women and minorities will continue to struggle to achieve the same academic success as white males.

As demonstrated in the above review, the plight of women in academia and athletics has confirmed that the dearth of women leaders is not limited to athletic training. Why women are derailed in athletic training at the entry level is a question that warrants future investigation.

The theoretical base for the research on women’s career paths in athletics seems to have originated in hegemonic masculinity and then has progressed into homologous reproduction. Hegemonic institutions are those that accept the superiority of one group over others. The key is that the subordinate group accepts its plight (Whisenant et al., 2005). Homologous reproduction theories are based on the concept that groups in power continuously attempt to reproduce themselves (Whisenant et al., 2005). Research by Acosta and Carpenter (2008) has supported this theory by demonstrating that male ADs are more likely to hire male coaches to coach female sports, and, of course, very few have made the leap to hire a woman to coach male sports. Acosta and Carpenter (2008) were able to support this finding in that “in Division I programs with no female administrator at any level, 30.6% of the coaches of women’s teams are females compared to 43.9% in programs with a male AD but also [have] at least one female serving as an assistant or associate AD” (p. 10).
When looking for a theoretical framework that might illuminate the research on this phenomenon in education, it was a surprise that very few actual theories were presented. The articles were based on previous findings, mostly based in the family division of labor. No theory seems to have bloomed from the work in academia, and the education-based academics seem to be reluctant to reach to other schools of thought to explain the concept of the division of family responsibilities.

**Career Path and Promotion**

A search of the literature did not reveal any documented career path or strategies for promotion to head athletic trainer. Although an article on expert athletic trainers in Division I athletics (Malasarn, Bloom, & Crumpton, 2002) did not identify a clear path to the position of head athletic trainer, it noted that these expert athletic trainers (all males) each had an athletic background, entered the profession for different reasons, and all took on additional responsibilities at their institutions and within the NATA. The study noted the personal attributes of loyalty (to the athlete, institution, and profession) and a strong work ethic to be important. Among the articles reviewed, none discussed strategies for promotion in the field of athletic training, but numerous articles discussed promotion in the general employment sector.

When asked “What are the considerations for promotion?” managers report that they consider an employee’s tenure, education, career prospects, overtime work, and job performance; however, research shows that job performance tends to be the primary motivator to promote an employee (Carmeli et al., 2007). An examination of the backgrounds of those who were actually promoted also shows that absenteeism and
lateness play a significant role in the decision process of the supervisors (Carmeli et al., 2007).

With job performance as the primary factor in promotion, it is important to determine if women and men are judged differently in performance rating scales. When looking at the difference between the genders in promotion, women tend to receive lower job performance ratings in their prior position than their male co-workers (Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Swim, Borgida, Maruyama, & Myers, 1989). When working in positions where the leadership model was more masculine, women’s leadership abilities were significantly less valued than those of their male counterparts (Eagly et al., 1992; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Lyness and Heilman also found that those women who were promoted had significantly higher job performance ratings than the males who were promoted. This suggests that women had to work harder than their male counterparts to receive promotion. It should be noted that this disadvantage does not carry into the highest levels of an organization. Yap and Konrad (2009) found that women are most disadvantaged in promotions at the beginning or in the lowest rungs of the organizations; mid-management still causes some problems for women, but women in the highest organizational levels are just as likely to be promoted as their male counterparts. Once again, this line of research emphasizes the importance of the initial step in a woman’s career, which places her at a disadvantage in the future for promotion.

It is also interesting to note that research on promotions in the business professions has shown that over a specific period of time men and women are promoted an equal number of times, but for women, the promotions are more likely to be in name only and not accompanied by increases in pay, prestige, or leadership responsibilities.
(Cox & Harquail, 1991; Lemon, 2003). It will be interesting to see if this happens in athletic training because there is such a short ladder to the top rung.

Motherhood appears to have a significant effect on a woman’s ability to be promoted. Windsor and Auyeung (2006) found that women with children were far less likely to be promoted than men with children, even in countries where women were given governmental support for childcare and governmental laws extend maternity leave (for either spouse). The authors found that women with children were still disproportionately more responsible for the care of the children and home than their male counterparts, which makes working long hours difficult. In the accounting firms examined, the promotions appeared to be based primarily on job performance (fees collected) and the ability to work 50 to 70 hours per week. It was also noted that the exclusion of women from male networks contributes to the lack of women in the accounting fields, even though this is difficult to measure (Windsor & Auyeung, 2006).

**Commonly Identified Barriers to Advancement for Women**

There are many barriers to advancement for both genders, but common gender-related themes repeated throughout the literature for women are based in three broad categories. The first barrier results from the family division of labor (ACE, 2007; Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Drago et al., 2005; Eddy & Cox, 2008). Responsibility for the rearing of children, in most societies, has remained with the mother. The decision to have children initiates a domino effect, which may result in the loss of advancement opportunities to the female candidate choosing different career sequencing from her male counterparts. It should also be noted that women will often delay their own professional advancement to help advance the other members of their family.
The second barrier discussed in most articles is the phenomenon of the “old boy’s club” (Anderson, 1991; Eddy, & Cox, 2008; Shingles, 2001; Whisenant et al., 2005). The male model of leadership predominates in athletic training, higher education, and athletics, like most other careers. Women who enter male-dominated professions often feel out of touch and leave these professions because of this discomfort. They also perceive that there is no room for women to advance, or, in other words, to break through the “glass ceiling.”

The last barrier to advancement is a woman’s lack of aspiration for high rank. Although not the main focus of the reviewed research, this barrier is noted in almost all articles. The qualitative research by Eddy and Cox (2008) stated that the majority of the women presidents interviewed indicated that they never had any intention of becoming a president. Is this lack of aspiration a byproduct of the other two barriers mentioned, or is it a conscious decision based on a need for work/life balance? Women may not be hard-wired to commit to their work in a way that men are at the expense of a personal life.

**Family Division of Labor**

The major characteristic that separates male presidents from female presidents in academic administration is that men are more likely to be married and have children than their female counterparts (ACE, 2007). This phenomenon is shared in the realm of athletic training and athletic administration (Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Drago et al., 2005). Where it is seen as an advantage to men to be married and certainly not a disadvantage to have children, the unpredictable and demanding nature of the jobs of head athletic trainer, president, or athletic director makes child rearing a disadvantage to the female leader (Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Drago et al., 2005). In academics,
studies have shown that women who have children early in their professional careers but
after achieving their terminal degrees are less likely to obtain tenure than their male
counterparts or women who remain childless during this same period (Harper et al., 2001;
Mason & Goulden, 2002).

There is a consistent and large gap in achieving tenure between women who have
early babies and men who have babies later in their careers, and this gap is surprisingly
uniform across the disciplines and across varying types of institutions. It should be noted
that women who have babies later in their careers and women without children
demonstrate about the same rate of achieving tenure as their male counterparts (Mason &
Goulden, 2002, ¶17). Men who begin families early seem to benefit, unless they ask for
paternal leave, in which case they, too, are less likely to receive tenure (Williams, 2004).

When women do decide to have children, they are then susceptible to
stereotyping, which can wreak havoc on a career. A few examples of the effects of
stereotyping, according to Mason and Goulden (2002), include assertive women who are
mothers are perceived as “uncollegial”; women are also perceived to be less competent
once they have a child; and when a female faculty member is absent from her office, it is
assumed that she went home to care for children, not to do research or other job-related
functions. The most damaging stereotypes are the benevolent ones that deny women
speaking engagements, travel to conferences, committee assignments, and summer
research funding because their colleagues assume that mothers do not want the added
responsibilities that would result in time away from their families. Unfortunately, all of
these added responsibilities are necessary for tenure and promotion.
For the women who do achieve tenure, the decision to advance to higher rank is often influenced by family sequencing. Solid examples of this were given in Eddy and Cox’s (2008) qualitative study where women acknowledged making career decisions based on perceived family needs. In this study, several women waited for their husbands to retire before actively seeking a presidency, and one president admitted resigning a post as assistant dean when her child was a toddler because of work-family life conflicts. She did not resume another administrative job until her son was in high school. Others waited to take on administrative duties until their children went off to college. The outcome of women delaying higher-level administrative positions early in careers is often fewer high-ranking career opportunities.

In the realm of athletic training, Booth (2000) found that women struggle more than their male counterparts in work-family conflict. The women reported significantly more perceived barriers in dual careers, mobility, and role conflict than their male counterparts. Dieringer (2007) reported that the females in her investigation overwhelmingly felt that women experience greater conflict between professional and family responsibilities than their male counterparts. Many report that the conflict is too great and anticipate leaving the field when they begin a family. Both males and females in this study believed that women have a more difficult time re-entering the field when they leave it to have a family. The conflict for both males and females were attributed largely to the long work hours required of an athletic trainer. The pioneer women in Anderson’s (1991) study spoke to the fact that, in intercollegiate athletics, women were often asked to work more than their male counterparts. These women often found
themselves working multiple sports and taking on additional responsibilities (teaching, supervision, and administrative roles) compared to their male counterparts.

Like women in academics and athletic training, women who coach or become athletic administrators tend to be childless. Drago et al. (2005) found that only 30% of woman coaches are married and only 18% have children. Again, authors (Drago et al., 2005; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Wilson, 2006) have suggested that the family-unfriendly nature of the job deters women from entering the profession. Like women in athletic training, women in coaching and athletic administration find the same conflict with the balance of time between work and family commitments.

**Gender Stereotyping: The “Old Boy’s Club”**

Even with all the advancements Western culture has made, this society cannot seem to get past basic gender stereotypes that have been carried on for centuries. Traditional male networks continue to alienate and reject women (Anderson, 1991; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Shingles, 2001; Whisenant et al., 2005). Male networks exclude or discourage female participation or include activities unfamiliar and uncomfortable to women. In the academic research, two studies comment on the need to play golf (Eddy & Call, 2008; Randall et al., 2008) as a characteristic necessary of a leader.

Anderson (1991) defines the “old boy’s network” as an existing network of men in positions of power that openly attempt to take care of one another by controlling the dissemination of information, promotions and job opportunities to their male colleagues. Women are effectively excluded from this network, placing them at a great disadvantage when seeking new job opportunities or upward mobility within an organization (pp. 152).
These pioneering women in Anderson’s study explained that this fraternal network may have the primary limitation on hiring, promotion, and advancement in professional organizations; however, the exclusion from power had far-reaching effects and carried over into budget and work load, and, most significantly, renders women invisible in their professional endeavors.

Women in all of the studies (Booth, 2000; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001) recognized the “old boy’s club” to some degree, and Dieringer reports that, even though the effects of this phenomenon are diminishing, 70% of the women still “strongly agree or agree” that males are given preference in hiring to the position of head athletic trainer. In contrast, only 41% of the male respondents felt the same way. It should also be noted that although a couple of women have cracked the glass ceiling of major league professional sports, the “old boy’s club” remains almost completely intact in this setting and women remain excluded.

Like athletic training, athletics continues to fight the gender stereotyping and limitations of the “old boy’s club.” Whisenant et al. (2005) demonstrated that a simple job description may be a form of discrimination. In 17% of the job descriptions analyzed in their study for the position of AD in Texas high schools, the position required the AD to have served as head football coach. Since there are no women known to coach football in the state of Texas, this requirement effectively eliminated any woman as a candidate for the position. In some instances, the mere mention of football experience would also have the same effect. Women do not fit the traditional male view of what a leader should be, so men create, whether subconsciously or consciously, these barriers to advancement.
In academia, Eddy’s (2008) interviews were able to demonstrate the situations in which gendering plays a role. One president was told that she should wear glasses so that she would be taken more seriously, while another was told that she should not wear such bright colors. These are examples of women encouraged not to be too feminine in a male-gendered role. One president felt that in order to be perceived as most effective, she had to take sole credit for the work done by a group she participated in and led. In contrast, some of the presidents have found ways to make their female characteristics valued. For example, one president spoke to her experience of pinching pennies on a single income as an experience that carries over into the budget process in her position as president (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

What is interesting is that all of the barriers discussed to this point still do not explain the lack of women in high rank when considering the number of women entering once male-dominated fields. Statisticians Hargens and Long (2002) argued that it statistically would not be possible for women to replace men across all professions and gain equity before the year 2015. With 2015 just around the corner, the growth rate of women entering the field has slowed in the last 5 years instead of accelerating (Dieringer, 2007). The next section examines the role that low aspiration to high rank may play in these sluggish statistics.

Low Aspirations: Could It Be a Preference of Balance?

In athletic training, Anderson’s (1991) women reported that they had little interest in the position of head athletic trainer; however, these pioneer women may well have never had the opportunity. Even after Title IX was passed, women were still barred from working in men’s athletic programs. Female students were not allowed to work football
at most Division I institutions until the mid to late 1980s, and the women’s and men’s programs were completely separate until this time as well.

Since the 1990s, Booth (2000) and Shingles (2001) did not find a self-imposed barrier to women considering high rank, but Dieringer (2007) noted that women have made significant progress in the field of athletic training and now may be increasingly choosing not to pursue high rank. She notes that in the 1996 survey, 29% of the men and 23% of women believed that women were absent from leadership roles because they chose not to pursue them. By 2006, the percentages had increased to 45% of men and 38% of women. If the discriminatory factors are declining, then it is important to consider why women chose not to advance to high rank in the field of athletic training. To date, there has been no research as to why women are opting out of leadership positions in the field of athletic training.

Research on women in athletic administration offers very little support for the hypothesis that women do not aspire to leadership positions. As discussed above, research in these professions was grounded in hegemonic masculinity theories, which tend to focus on discrimination as an explanatory variable. What is missing from this literature are qualitative investigations of women who are in the pipeline or who have ascended to athletic director positions. It was from these conversations with women in education and athletic training that low aspiration seemed to be a choice.

In Eddy and Cox’s (2008) study of women presidents, the majority of the women reported that they had no aspirations early in their career to be president; however, each was able to describe a point when they realized that this was a job that they could do and
wanted to do. Many of the women indicated that it was a job that they could finally connect with or felt that it now aligned with a new set of priorities.

Low aspiration has been documented in two of the fields thus far examined, but the reason for not aspiring to high rank is a hotly debated topic. Feminists would argue that it is just another example of hegemonic masculinity, where the subordinate group accepts the condition dictated by the male-dominate group and, according to Bandura (1997), self-selects out of the leadership track. Catherine Hakim (2000, 2004, 2006) presented another alternative to feminist theory, contending that women make a conscious choice not to advance based on lifestyle preference. Hakim (2000, 2004) acknowledged that high rank is tied to disengagement with most other opportunities in life. Successful career men and women associate exclusively with their positions and are willing to sacrifice all other roles. Career-oriented individuals focus on work “24/7.” Even when they are not at work, they are thinking about work. It is this dedication that is linked to success in most organizations.

It is that sheer determination and focus that estranges many women from positions of high rank. Hakim (2000) argues that women are more likely to place family responsibilities and lifestyle preference before work, not because they are forced to or because society has dictated this, but because they choose to do so. The majority of the women connect with these roles and identify themselves according to them. Family or self-actualization are more important than work, which may be why women report being happier and more satisfied in low rank than their male counterparts (Barron, 2003; Compton, 2005; Jackson et al., 1992; Major & Konar, 1984; Martin, 1989). Hakim
postulates that less responsibility and structured hours allow women to plan and to lead the life that they prefer outside of the nine-to-five work day.

Several authors in higher education speak to this phenomenon but call it by different names. Gleeson and Knights (2008) referred to women as “reluctant leaders” and described how the masculine definitions of leadership convince women early in their careers that leadership is not worth the trade in how they wish to live their lives. Ruderman and Ohlott (2004) supported the idea of preference in the field of higher education; however, they labeled it “authenticity.” They have found that women often struggle to find authenticity in their high-ranking roles. The authors described authenticity in a job when the job aligns with the employee’s personal and professional goals and values. They found that some women are never able to disconnect from their roles of teacher, researcher, or the responsibility of public service. Often women leave administration to return to teaching, not just because of time, but also because they miss the personal and social connections they had in their previous roles (Barron, 2003; Compton, 2005; Jackson et al., 1992; Major & Konar, 1984; Martin, 1989). They prefer their role as faculty.

In light of the gaps identified in the literature review, preference theory (Hakim, 2000) was used as the theoretical frame for this research. Preference theory accepts the existence of the family division of labor and the “old boy’s club,” but assumes that the primary caregiver role is not just a role that women accept, as in the hegemonic masculinity frame, but rather is a lifestyle preference that women choose. Within the preference theory frame, it is possible to accept that not all women in athletic training would aspire to the position of head athletic trainer. This then supports the need for a
study focusing on the few women who have ascended to head athletic trainer in NCAA Division I (IA football). It is important to understand what motivated these women to take on the position of head athletic trainer. This information is valuable for women who wish to move up the career ladder in the athletic training profession and may even motivate others who did not aspire to the position to now consider it.

**Theoretical Framework: Preference Theory**

Hakim (2006) believes that the inequality in women in high rank is not based on discrimination, but that “these differences are linked to broader differences in life goals, the relative importance of competitiveness versus consensus-seeking values, and the relative importance of family life and careers” (p. 280). When work preference is considered, Hakim (2000, 2004, 2006) believes that it is unrealistic to ever expect a 50/50 split in the “top jobs,” when some women prefer to link themselves more closely to their role as mother or wife than president or CEO of any major organization.

Hakim (2000, 2004, 2006) argued that some high-ranking occupations cannot be condensed into a 40-hour work week, nor should they be. She contended that many full-time positions require an employee’s attention 24 hours a day and often take priority over not only family life but social life as well. She believes that this is necessary in order for the employee to build up the knowledge and experience needed in positions of high rank. Women who value their roles in family or their personal life in general would then not be interested in positions of high rank.

Based on research by Hakim, preference theory predicts that women make work-style decisions based on their lifestyle preferences. This means that women who are career-focused are more likely not to marry and have children than women who are
family-centered. Hakim’s research in 2000 and 2006 shows that women who are given genuine choices in career will choose based on three different lifestyle choices: “home-centered,” “work-centered,” or “adaptive.” What is most amazing is that these preferences are independent of social class and education. In general, the divergence of women entering the job market is evident in that 20% of women are work-centered, 60% are adaptive, and 20% are home-centered (Hakim, 2000, 2006).

The “work-centered” women are totally devoted to work. They tend to be childless and their work takes precedence over all other lifestyle choices. They are the most likely to pursue high rank and are willing to pursue additional qualifications and training in order to advance. They are competitive, achievement-oriented, and individualistic. The work-centered women are in the minority.

The “home-centered” women prioritize family and children. They prefer not to work and feel their utmost satisfaction through the establishment of a secure family unit. They tend to be caring, non-competitive, and communal. The “home-centered” group is also a minority. These women most likely leave the work force when they marry or when they have children.

The “adaptives” are the women who try to do both. This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, as well as those who must. Hakim also includes drifters and women with unplanned careers in this group. The “adaptives” work but are not totally devoted to work and are often personally at odds between the two other preferences. This group makes up the majority of women who work. Most of these women work through their entire careers, but never aspire to high rank. Women in this category seek a work/life balance; they want to have fixed,
dependable hours, and, in fact, are more likely to ask for shorter, more flexible hours than higher pay or promotion. In 2004, Hakim noted that the best predictor of full-time employment of these women was the need to supplement the family income for home ownership.

Hakim is not without her critics. For example, Crompton and Harris (1998), McRae (2002), and Procter and Padfield (1999) were all unable to identify the three lifestyle preference groups presented by Hakim in her findings. Hakim (2004) contended that the researchers had not developed questions sensitive enough to identify the lifestyle preferences, or the populations were inappropriate because they were looking only into one or two preference groups and excluding the rest. She also noted that in other studies women who cohabitate were identified as single and placed into work-centered groups, even though Hakim has found that they more closely align with adaptive or “home-centered” groups. Hakim (2004) went on to say that her theory does not single out three clear preference groups, but rather argued for a continuum with two strong ends.

A search was conducted to find other direct criticism to preference theory, but none was identified. However, it could easily be argued that women do not truly have a preference but over the generations have succumbed to the pressures of society itself. As indicated earlier, hegemonic masculinity posits that a subordinate group accepts the status quo as well as the power that the other group has over it. Whatever the reason, preference or sociological encoding, perhaps it is time to accept that a percentage of women do feel most connected to the primary caregiver role.

In support of her theory, Hakim (2000) pointed out that the societal change that is focused on laws to promote women staying and progressing in the work force does not
work. Preference theory holds true even in countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, where significant legislation has made day care and extended time off available. Hakim even found a backlash in Sweden, where the privileges were offered only to females (this did not happen in the Netherlands where the legislation was gender-neutral). In this investigation, it was interesting to see how many of these head athletic trainers were wives and mothers, and how they were able to handle the conflict of work and family.

What is most striking about Hakim’s work is that it suggests that women who are “home-centered” and “adaptive” in today’s society tend to seek prestigious careers in medicine (pharmacist) and law at nearly the same rate as “work-centered” women. Within the same society, the rate of drop out remains the same over all careers, independent of the prestige of the career (Hakim, 2006). If this is generally true across the population, then could the women who enter the work force who are career-oriented be at a disadvantage, because the expectation of their superiors may be that they are not truly interested in advancement? If this perception is prevalent among superiors, women who do not self-advocate for promotion may be overlooked.

Finally, if preference is indeed a choice, then maybe today’s administrators should focus on the mentoring of all women in a different way. If the career-minded women are not identified and groomed in the early years of their careers, then there is a strong possibility that we may lose a number of them as well. It is clearly demonstrated in the literature on career advancement that promotion aids a company’s retention of its employees (Cox & Harquail, 1991; Lemon, 2003). Knowing how women who have succeeded and advanced to the role of head athletic trainer did so is important in
mentoring the next generation of women athletic trainers, but first we must understand how women connect their values and belief systems to a desire to achieve a high rank. Attempts have been made in athletic training to encourage the advancement of women to high rank (Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001), but many of these attempts have resulted in mixed outcomes. The next section examines in more detail the attempts to nurture a pipeline to advancement for women in athletic training and academics and the role of mentoring in that nurturing process.

Nurturing the Pipeline

In athletic training, the Women in Athletic Training Committee (WATC) has made attempts to positively impact women in the profession. Since the 1996/1997 survey, the WATC has provided programs and information on leadership, mentoring, affirmative action, Title IX, life balancing, and communication (Dieringer, 2007). Most recently, WATC has attempted to initiate an E-mentoring program that connects young female professionals with female mentors, because mentors are not always available within the institution where they work (Dieringer, 2007). Unfortunately, Dieringer’s 2007 study found that most women did not participate in any of these programs and were unaware that the programs existed. In education, efforts to support women’s growth in male-dominated professions have been met with mixed results as well (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Stubbe, 2008; White, 2005).

The American Council on Education (ACE) and other organizations associated with higher education have taken actions to help bolster the number of women entering the pipeline to president. They have developed committees, held leadership conferences, and enacted policies to promote the hiring of women in high-ranking administrative
positions. Although some attempts have succeeded, others have been met with skepticism (White, 2005).

In the early part of this decade, ACE tried to address the lack of women in full professorships. With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan foundation, ACE launched “Creating Options: Models for Flexible Faculty Career Pathways.” The purpose of this commission was to create a new vision of the career path for young faculty. It was not to make the path less stringent, but to give faculty with young children (or other personal barriers) more time to complete the expectations of tenure. Many colleges now do allow faculty to defer tenure, but male faculty who defer tenure for family reasons, in particular, have suggested a backlash where they are then viewed as less serious and less worthy than those who are able to complete tenure on time.

When female college presidents were asked what factors enabled them to attain their positions as presidents, in almost all instances, they related that mentoring and same gender support networks played an important role (Eddy & Cox, 2008). The inception of women-only organizations in higher education appears to be an extremely positive one. These organizations provide the opportunity for mentoring, networking, and leadership training. Gender-neutral organizations provide the same opportunities, but being able to have contact with other women who have succeeded is an invaluable experience (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Stubbe, 2008; White, 2005). The most effective way to help women aspire to high rank may be by presenting them with effective role models.

**Mentoring and Networking in Athletic Training**

Kram (1985) wrote a seminal piece on mentoring, which identified the importance of mentoring young executives in the business environment. In his work, he identified
two primary functions of mentors as career development and psychosocial integration. Career development focuses on the advancement of the protégé up the career ladder; here, the mentor coaches the protégé through a successful strategy of knowledge acquisition through recommendations in career advancement for both lateral and upward moves. In this role, the mentor also is able to protect his protégé from risky and difficult situations, while at the same time encouraging the protégé to advance by funneling appropriately challenging assignments his or her way.

In the psychosocial realm, the mentor is able to map the cultural landscape, and in doing so, help the protégé to build confidence. According to Kram (1985), in this function, the mentor is able to provide the protégé with a positive role model, confirmation, counseling, and friendship. It is often the mentor who recommends the protégé for promotion and advancement.

The benefits of mentoring for the protégé have been well documented: greater job satisfaction (Goshalk & Sosik, 2003, as cited in Anderson, 2005; Scandura 1997, as cited in Anderson, 2005); higher wages (Chao, 1997, as cited in Anderson, 2005; Drehaer & Ash, 1990, as cited in Anderson, 2005); and career mobility and advancement (Catalyst, 1996, as cited in Anderson, 2005; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003, as cited in Anderson, 2005). Specific to athletic training, the importance of mentorship has been reported in four investigations: Furcsik (2005); Malasarn, Bloom, and Crumpton (2002); Pitney (2006); and Pitney, Ilsley, and Rintala (2002).

Although not directly studying mentorship, Malasarn et al.’s (2002) qualitative investigation into the career path of Division I NCAA male athletic trainers demonstrated the importance of mentors in these men’s lives. The expert head athletic trainers
interviewed in this investigation all commented on mentors as important to their ways of learning and teaching. They related that most of their knowledge pertinent to the profession was gained through mentoring relationships during education or early career experiences. Unique to this study was the finding that head athletic trainers’ mentors were not limited to other ATs, but included coaches and educators.

Pitney et al. (2002) also found that mentorship was key to the professional socialization of young members of the NATA. In addition, the study by Pitney (2006) demonstrated that mentors continued to play a significant role in helping young athletic trainers navigate the bureaucratic and political environment of intercollegiate athletics. Pitney (2006) also suggested that there may be a benefit to seeking out role models at each new level of advancement.

Furcsik’s (2005) thesis was the only direct investigation of mentoring in the realm of athletic training. Adapting Scandura’s (1992, 1997) “Mentoring Function Questionnaire,” Furcsik found that the functions of the mentor in athletic training were the same as those found in other professions (career advancement, role modeling, and psychosocial support), and that the most influential mentoring experiences happen at the undergraduate level. She also noted that the knowledge base for the professional development domain for athletic training (Board of Certification for athletic training has identified domains of professional practice that the certification exam is based upon) was most influenced by the mentorship of others.

Two studies on women in athletic training (Anderson, 1991; Shingles, 2001) mention mentorship as important. Further examination of the history of women in athletic training shows that the establishment of mentorship opportunities has always been in the
programming mix. In 1996, the WATC offered a workshop in mentoring, and then in 2006, the committee initiated the E-mentoring program, which attempted to connect young female ATs with appropriate female role models and mentors (Dieringer, 2007). The impact of these programs, however, has been minimal. Dieringer (2007) found that only 8 and 9% of those surveyed had participated in the mentoring workshop and the E-mentoring program, respectively. Most respondents indicated that they were not even aware that the programs existed.

Although the importance of mentorship is well documented, what is clearly missing from the reviewed research is the role that mentorship plays in the advancement of women in the field of athletic training. This investigation questioned and then listened to the experiences of women to see what role, if any, mentorship has played in their advancement to the position of head athletic trainer.

**Networking**

A social and professional network has also been shown to be an effective way to progress and grow professionally through the attainment of social capital. Forret and Dougherty (2004) define networks as “individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career” (p. 420). Kram (1985) indicated that relationships are built on their potential, noting that actual assistance may never be utilized. Although both mentoring and networking strive to build or develop relationships, network relationships differ from mentoring relationships in that the mentor–protégé relationship is more intimate and network relationships are less personal and often single-dimensional (career development) in role (Kram, 1985).
Like mentoring, networking has proven to be positively related to salary, salary growth rate (promotion), and career satisfaction. de Janasz and Forret (2008) and Wolff and Moser (2009) support the old adage, *It’s not what you know, but who you know*, when they suggested that 70–80% of all professional jobs are attained through networking rather than job postings and traditional applications. The advantage of networks to the employee is the investment that the network makes in developing one’s social capital. It has been shown that the quality and uniqueness of one’s network not only benefit personal career growth, but offer a valuable resource for one’s employer that cannot be duplicated by others. Employers often benefit from the new connections an employee brings with them from past experiences.

Successful networks that improve one’s social capital have been shown to be influenced positively by the following characteristics (a) size of the network, (b) strength of the relationships in the network, (c) disconnection of members in the network, and (d) high-status members (de Janasz & Forret (2008)).

The size of the internal network is nurtured through joining task forces or projects, participating in social gatherings, and becoming involved in corporate events. External networks are nurtured through participation in professional organizations, attending regional and national meetings, maintaining contacts through email and cards with others as they move, and taking part in community events.

Like all relationships, networks must be nurtured and maintained, but surprisingly, these relationship networks are most successful when they emphasize acquaintances. The reason for this is that one’s closest friends generally share the same close personal relationships, which tend not to add to one’s professional network. This is
explained by de Janasz and Forret (2008), who focus on Burt’s (1992) “structural holes” theory. “Structural holes” are evident when members of a network are not familiar with other members within this network. A network with “structural holes” offers an advantage because this widens one’s social and knowledge base. What has been noted, however, is the important role that networking can play in acquiring mentors as one progresses in a career. Acquaintances at one point in a career may become mentors at another point in a career.

Finally, having high status members in one’s network can positively affect one’s professional life by influencing promotions, job acquisition, information, and social support. Often the value of networking up the career ladder is lost to a young professional.

Although the benefits of networks for men have been established, the questions as to the benefit of networking for women remain. Past research has shown that women do not benefit from networking as their male counterparts do (Brass, 1984, 1985; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Perriton, 2006). Forret and Dougherty (2004) found that internal visibility showed no benefit for women in promotion or compensation. One reason for this may be that women tend to network with other women. This may lead to networks that are less influential because women hold less influential positions and this limits a woman’s access to powerful individuals and coalitions (Brass, 1984, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1993). These networks do not have the influential base that male networks or cross-gender networks may possess. Ng and Hau-siu Chow (2009) supported this when they found that women who network in cross-gender groups benefit by being promoted more often than women who network only with other women.
Research on the importance of networking in athletic training appears to be nonexistent and is scant in athletics and academic administration as well. Anderson (1991) recognized the exclusion of women from male networks and the limited number of female social and professional networks as clear barriers to women’s advancement in the profession of athletic training. Through her work, Anderson ignited the development of such networks for women in the NATA. To date, however, these programs, such as the ones mentioned previously, appear to have had marginal success. When looking at the work of Acosta and Carpenter (2008) as well as Dieringer (2007), one can see that women have made only marginal progress into the high-ranking positions of athletic training. In fact, according to Dieringer’s work, women have also made minimal progress into the leadership positions of the NATA (national) and district or state professional organizations. Women who do serve tend to serve at the state level.

As stated above, it is possible the strength of a “women only” network hinders the effectiveness of the network, but through this investigation it was important to examine how high-ranking women utilize specific networks or are able to identify networks that are most meaningful and effective. Were high-ranking women able to gain acceptance in the traditional “old boy’s” organizations?

**Summary**

Although women have made great strides in athletic training as well as the other professions discussed in the review, women are still significantly absent from positions of prestige and high rank. Also absent is a breadth of research focusing on this issue. The research available examines trends and statistics or presents theories as to why women are not promoted to high rank, but offers very little quantitative or qualititative work
looking at women, specifically in higher rank, in athletic training or other academic professions. The absence of women in high rank may be the reason for this dearth of information due to the lack of a significant population pool to pull from, especially for quantitative investigation. The study of this topic can only be accomplished at this time through qualitative investigation.

When looking at the problems through the eyes of preference theory (Hakim, 2000), one may question the need to study this material at all, arguing that if women do not aspire, why pursue it? However, it is important to remember that in preference theory, 20% of women do place their job above family and lifestyle preferences and 60% of women value both. If this carries over to the athletic training profession, one could expect that the contributions of competent individuals are being lost to the profession and a significant percentage may aspire if given proper mentoring and networking opportunities. By studying successful women’s shared experiences and career paths, solutions may emerge to engage women in positions of power and prestige in the athletic training workplace.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Strauss and Corbin (1998) described qualitative research as “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (pp. 10-11). Strauss and Corbin explained that in qualitative research, although it may take on the primary characteristics of many well defined traditions (e.g., phenomenology, grounded theory) any one study may not fit into one specific tradition. This study is one that does not neatly fit into any one specific tradition, but is purely a qualitative study by nature. In this chapter, an explanation for the use of this approach is provided. This chapter also includes a description of the data collection methods, the sampling procedures, and the data analysis processes and procedures.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Although qualitative research may have had roots in the research of psychologists and sociologists in the 1920s to 1940s, by the early 1940s researchers shunned qualitative investigations in favor of more quantitative experimental approaches or the “hard sciences” (Flick, 2006). A renaissance of qualitative research began first in the United States (in the mid to late 1960s) and, as discussed by Flick, has progressed through six different stages since that time.

The first stage lasted from the 1920s until World War II. The most notable research was conducted by Malinowski in ethnography and the Chicago School in sociology. The focus of the investigations during this phase was not on whole societies, but on the more unusual parts of specific societies.
The Renaissance or the Modernist phase (Flick, 2006) lasted from WWII to the 1970s (although most work appeared following the 1960s), primarily in the Americas. Here researchers formalized qualitative research and published the first textbooks. The aim of qualitative research was to give more justice to the participants than was allowed in quantitative research.

The next phase took aim at blurred genres, and this stage became prominent in the 1970s to the mid-1980s, which, in the United States was followed by a “crisis of representation” in the mid-1980s to 1990s. Flick commented on two other shifts occurring since the 1990s: The “Fifth Moment” focused on the shift from using narration to create theory, to the narration of previously created theories; the “Sixth Moment” was characterized by a more focused narrative on specific issues. The current investigation is clearly a narrative focused on a specific issue.

**Commonalities Across Traditions**

Creswell (2003), Marshall and Rossman (2006), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) all recognized at least four common traditions across all qualitative research:

1. All qualitative research occurs in the participants’ natural setting or world.
   
   Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, does not take place in tightly controlled laboratory settings.

2. Data collection methods are varied but are always interactive and humanistic.

   One of the most common data collection methods is the interview. Within qualitative research, the participants often interact with the researcher and a rapport with the researcher is often encouraged rather than discouraged.
3. Qualitative research is emergent and not tightly prefigured like quantitative research. Because the research questions and the focus of the study may change following the initial coding, the research often takes surprising shifts as new themes begin to emerge.

4. Finally, qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. The researcher uses both inductive and deductive reasoning in the interpretation of the data, and the researcher’s history and belief system play an integral part of this process.

**Commonalities of Qualitative Researchers**

Qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) seem to share a commonality of four characteristics. First, they are critical thinkers who are able to step back and view phenomena holistically. Second, they appear to be continually sensitive to the role the researcher plays in the investigation, as well as the role of their own personal history and bias. Next, qualitative researchers use complex reasoning skills and relish the process, becoming absorbed in the work. Finally, the researchers show sensitivity to the participants and value their perceptions of the material being investigated.

**Research Design**

I began this research project as an exploratory investigation to understand the lived experiences of women as they ascended in rank to the position of head athletic trainer. I hoped to find common themes based on these lived experiences, which would shed light on how the women were able to identify an appropriate career path and overcome common barriers, and the role of mentoring and networking in their ascent. A phenomenological approach seemed best suited to meet this end. Phenomenology is an
interpretive research methodology that links a shared phenomenon to the individual experiences of its participants. The intention is that, through inductive reasoning, common themes will emerge from the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998, 2003) of the participants. These themes may then provide a better understanding of the nature or essence of the human experience (Creswell, 1998).

The interview protocol, data collection, and data analysis procedures followed Creswell’s recommendations, as part of the phenomenological tradition. Following data collection and analysis, it became clear that the individual biographies would lead to easy identification of each participant. To give the subjects some degree of confidentiality, the results present a composite biography, rather than individual biographies, of the participants. The inclusion of this composite biography conflicts with the tradition of phenomenology. This being the case, the research design is considered as a more general interpretive qualitative investigation. The quotations by Strauss and Corbin (1998) presented at the beginning of this chapter support the importance of all qualitative research, even that which does not fit neatly into any one tradition.

Participants

This investigation used purposeful criterion-based sampling. In qualitative research, this is often the most appropriate type of recruitment method because it is necessary to determine, prior to the interview, that the participants have indeed lived the experience being investigated. The participants were all female head athletic trainers working in the specialty of athletic training and in the department of intercollegiate athletics of Division I (IA) institutions that sponsored football.
For this investigation, I considered a population of eight potential candidates, identified through the 2007-2008 National Directory of College Athletics, in which they were listed as the Head Athletic Trainer for their institution. Initially, I contacted the participants via email and then directly by phone. During this conversation, I described the study, outlined the time commitment, and assured participants of the confidentiality of their data (although this was difficult with such a small pool to choose from). Seven of the eight women felt that they met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate. The eighth candidate declined because, through our conversation, it was mutually determined that she did not meet the criteria. This means that 100% of the identified population that met the criteria agreed to take part in this investigation.

**Data Collection Methods**

The data collection methods used in this study included semi-structured open-ended interviews, which were audio recorded and then transcribed. Two interviews were conducted at the National Athletic Trainers Convention held in June 2008 in St. Louis, Missouri. This convention is extremely well attended and I anticipated that most of the candidates would attend. The fact that so few of the candidates for this study attended the convention took me by surprise and raised a question as to whether this might not be yet another difference between male and female head athletic trainers.

The recording procedures followed the recommendations of Creswell (1998). The use of an interview protocol ensured consistency among participants, but also allowed me to jot down notes regarding the responses to the interview questions. The interview consisted of six questions based entirely on the four research questions listed previously. The interview also included an opening statement and a short list of demographic
questions, and then concluded with a statement to ensure confidentiality and thank the participant. Since I conducted the interviews for this investigation, I found it necessary to first bracket my own experiences and then identify my preconceived thoughts and beliefs as they related to this study. These preconceived thoughts and beliefs are presented in the sections dedicated to the researcher and the epoch.

The face-to-face interviews took place in a hotel near the convention center. I requested a non-smoking suite and conducted the interviews in the living area, without interruption, which provided a comfortable environment. I procured a reservation in advance and confirmed the type of room.

Prior to beginning the interviews and turning on the audiotape, I discussed the consent form, reviewed the purpose of the study, the time needed to complete the interview, and the plans for the results. I then asked the participants if they had any further questions and asked them to sign the consent form.

For the interviews conducted by telephone, I contacted the participants prior to the interview, by telephone and email. The purpose of this call was to confirm the content of the consent form. I then asked the participants to sign the form and fax a copy to me. They were to retain the original.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours and consisted of six questions. I selected a conversational style to create an open environment that furthered the depth of the inquiry, and asked additional questions to confirm the meaning of the answers given. I had asked the participants to bring a copy of their vita or resume that they could use as a point of reference when discussing their career journey. With the use
of this style, I was careful not to offer advice or personal anecdotes that might lead the interviewee. I also made every attempt to be courteous, attentive, and respectful.

At the conclusion of the interview, I coded and secured the data, placing the list of codes in a secure cabinet in my home office. Voice-generated writing software facilitated transcription of the coded tapes. At the conclusion of the study, the chair of this dissertation committee secured copies of the material, and after a 3-year waiting period, all data will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis Processes and Procedures**

The data analysis procedures followed the examples given by Creswell (1998, 2003) and began with organization of the material.

Once the transcriptions were completed, I began reading each individually, making notes that reflected the experiences of being a female Head Athletic Trainer and using this time to familiarize myself with the material. Creswell (2003) recommended using this first reading to “obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning” (p. 191).

The second step of the detailed analysis began by initiating the coding process. Looking at each document individually and using the research questions as a guide, I identified topics or statements that were similar, grouped the statements into clusters, and then formed “meaning units.” I then coded the groups using the participant’s language or my own descriptive wording based on the purpose of the study.

Following the coding process, I returned to the transcripts collectively and separated the descriptions of what was experienced from the descriptions of how it was experienced. Through this process the themes began to emerge. Connecting these themes
together and building relationships among these themes helped described the essence of the phenomenon.

The final step (Creswell 1998, 2003) in the process was to present a narration of the “essence of the experience.” The narrative conveyed the findings and discussed the themes, their relationship to the topics and each other, and their meanings. Chapter IV presents the essence of the findings through the written narrative and by the use of tables. The narrative is reflective, to help to capture lessons learned and describe the true meaning and essence of the lived experiences.

Within the narrative, I present a composite biography rather than individual biographies of each participant. Although this is a nontraditional format, I believe that with such an identifiable small group of women, individual biographies erased any chance of confidentiality. Also in the text, some comments are not attributed to a specific pseudonym, so that individuals’ thoughts cannot be identified elsewhere in the text. To create the composite, I counted and grouped data together in the sections on demographics and career path to aid in preserving confidentiality. The remaining sections of the composite focused on the emergent themes and at times were not directly connected to any one specific participant. This reporting style is presented as a limitation in the introduction.

**The Researcher**

Bracketing played an important role in the validity of this study. This research topic is one that I have reviewed from many differing perspectives. Because of this, I entered the work with several preconceived notions as to what the findings would be. I also entered the study having lived a similar experience. I did not see this as prejudicial
on the work because my experiences were primarily in a different work setting. What was most interesting for me to bracket out were my expectations of the participants, influenced by my current job as an educator and mentor. I did not anticipate interviewing any of my old students; however, I was interested to see whether the educational programs influenced the participants’ aspirations.

The Epoch

As a female working in the field of athletic training over the last 20+ years, I have developed many deep-seated beliefs. I believe they stem from my unwillingness to accept that I do not have control of my destiny, not that I would be excluded based entirely on my sex. To this end, I have lived my professional life ignoring the naysayers, instead, working as I choose. That said, I must also disclose that I have never attempted to work in Division I athletics following graduate school. Therefore, the barriers (or lack thereof) that I experienced are likely not the same barriers other women face in this setting.

Over the last 20 years, I have observed a significant change in the profession, where women dot the sidelines of all male Division I televised events, and in the last five years broke the barrier into athletic training in male professional sports. I now believe that any of my female students could attain the highest ranks of this field regardless of sex. What I have personally observed is that women are unwilling to break through their own personal boundaries of what it means to be a female athletic trainer and lead. For those who tend not to be work-oriented, the choices are clear, but I have witnessed a group of women in athletic training and physical therapy who aspired to positions of leadership but were unwilling to self-advocate. In these women’s minds, promotion was a reward based on time of employment and work habits within the confines of their job
description. Promotion was not something that one should have to self-promote or advocate for. Most interesting to me was that they were unwilling to place their names into consideration and were not aware that their male counterparts were advocating. As I have witnessed, this same scenario played itself out over and over again. Most recently, a conversation with the provost revealed that the number of women applying for promotion were far less than the number of men with the same qualifications. Also, when a Division II head athletic training position opened at a regional institution and I asked a committee member how many women had submitted a resume, he indicated that no women had applied.

**Summary**

I designed this investigation as a phenomenological study, but to protect the identity of the participants, the study changed to a more universal interpretive qualitative investigation. I used semi-structured, open-ended narrative interviews to learn of the ways in which the seven participants advanced in the field of athletic training to the position of head athletic trainer. I chose a purposeful, criterion-based sample. The participants were all female head athletic trainers working in the intercollegiate athletics department of NCAA Division I (IA) institutions that sponsor football. Through analytical induction, I then identified the common themes and placed them as they related to other themes based on career advancement and barriers to advancement as discussed in the literature and grounded in the research questions.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this qualitative investigation, the dearth of women’s leadership in athletic training is examined through the eyes of women who are now in leadership positions. The seven women were able to describe their personal paths to this position and through this discussion described what led them to progress to the position of head athletic trainer in NCAA Division I (IA) institutions. They also related their experiences and understanding of the barriers they encountered in their advancement to this position, but also the barriers they have faced once achieving the title of head athletic trainer. Finally, the query examined the utilization of mentors and networks in their personal career growth. All seven potential candidates accepted the invitation to take part in semi-structured open-ended interviews based on the three primary research questions presented in Chapter I.

The composite leads this chapter and provides the reader with an understanding of not only the participants’ career path and backgrounds, but also the demands of the job of head athletic trainer. Finally, the composite looks at the common personal traits identified among the women in this investigation.

Within the main body of this chapter, I will examine the findings associated with career path and barriers to advancement. I organized the chapter by identifying and presenting the salient themes observed within each question. Unique to this investigation were the emergent themes related to the patterns of resolutions to the barriers. Finally, the chapter presents commonalities in the role played by mentors and professional networks
in the advancement of the female head athletic trainers, as well as the themes regarding the value of these voices in their careers today. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings.

**Who Are These Female AT Leaders: Composite Biography**

The female participants in this investigation were all Caucasian and, through conversation, described a middle class upbringing. They ranged in age from low-to-mid thirties to the oldest reporting to be over the age of 65. They attended college immediately following high school. Only one reported being an intercollegiate athlete. This is not uncommon, because some programs restrict athletic training students from being athletes due to the conflict in time commitment. They all possess a master’s degree and all have spent time working as an assistant athletic trainer before assuming the head athletic trainer position. In this investigation, four of the women reported being married, and only one marriage had resulted in a divorce with no child. The three women who are married all reported having at least one child.

**Head Athletic Trainer’s Job Responsibilities**

To really understand who these women are, one must first understand the responsibilities of the position. When asked to describe her job to someone else, Jill stated:

> It is the highest multitasking thing one could ever think of. You will use any skill any leader should have. Your communication skills and patience has to be optimal, as well as, foresight and planning.

All of the women managed staffs averaging seven full-time athletic trainers and six graduate assistants. But their responsibilities did not end there, as Laura related: “So you
are constantly juggling your own staff [athletic training staff] but you are also concerned and know that you have to take care of 20 athletic teams and their coaching staff. So I think it is just a huge challenge.” Besides managing their staff, handling the administrative duties, and overseeing the care of all athletes and the coaches, all but one of the women has maintained the responsibility of primary caregiver to at least one sport. Additionally, the head athletic trainer is considered to be a part of the athletic administration. They generally report to the director of athletics or one of the assistant athletic directors. Some of the women have also taken on the responsibility of supervising graduate and undergraduate athletic training students, and two reported teaching in the athletic training education programs as part of their job responsibilities. Although the job seems diverse and overwhelming to many, it may be the diversity of the job that has attracted these women to it, as Amy explained:

I think if I am talking specifically to my position, it is a very good balance. I still have a clinical component to what I do, I have an administrative component, and then . . . I teach classes. For me it's a nice balance of getting to do a little bit of everything . . . If that is something you enjoy doing then it’s great. It has a lot of opportunities and a lot of benefits because I don’t get bored or stagnant.

All of the women reported working a minimum of 9 hours per day, 5 to 7 days each week, with one participant reporting more than 14 hours in a normal day, and only one reporting that she worked a set schedule with no travel. Jill was also able to provide the best description of an average day, which is very similar to the descriptions of the other women.
Three mornings a week, I will have an administrative meeting in the morning with . . . , coaches, or the assistant athletic directors. That usually starts about 7:30. Then into the training room and go through e-mails, and return voice mails. Next, I check my appointment book to see what student athletes will be coming in, who has appointments that day that need to get done before practice or anything that was scheduled before practice. Usually, our practices begin at about noon until two o’clock for most practices. So that means anywhere between 11:00am and 1:00 pm you are in your pre-practice mode working with student athletes. Then we do leave the athletic training facility, to cover your assigned sport (if they are in season), we do cover sports on site. I know that is the same for most places, but our facilities are such that if I stand in the gym, I am not at my desk so that takes me away from paperwork for three to four hours a day. Then back to appointments or post practice stuff, usually I will have doc nights three times a week, where the physicians come out and I easily spend time talking with them. I leave anywhere between 6:30 pm and 7:00 pm.

All but one of the women have retained a primary sport coverage, which requires them to travel with their team a minimum of 3½ to 4 months out of the year, and during this time many of the women reported working a minimum of 6 days per week, with some acknowledging 7-day work weeks during the season. Only one of the women stated that her primary sport coverage was football, and the significance of this will be discussed later. These women are all dedicated to their jobs and their profession, and as one would expect, they have reported common personality characteristics.
Common Personality Characteristics

The strongest shared personal traits described or modeled by the seven women head athletic trainers were a strong work ethic and self-confidence. Other characteristics mentioned by at least two of the participants were a passion for the profession, organization and time management skills, as well as seeing themselves as good communicators and relationship builders. One participant mentioned the necessity of a good sense of humor. The outcomes were derived from quotes taken not only from their descriptions of themselves, but also from what they perceived to be important to look for in others who may aspire to this position.

Work ethic. “Work ethic” was one of the strongest themes found among common personal traits. All of the participants mentioned the importance of a strong work ethic. As Karen puts it, “I think the number one thing that you need to have in this position and in this profession to be successful is a really strong work ethic and a desire to be there.”

The 45+ hour work weeks in the profession and the willingness to do more seemed to be a common characteristic of all head athletic trainers. Again, all but one of the participants reported working on average 10 to 12-hour days a minimum of 5 to 6 days a week during the academic year while in season with their assigned sport, and the other reported a consistent 9-hour day. Chris explained how her administrative work results in an extension of the time that she puts in (during the normal day):

I do everybody else’s job, and then at night or after hours is when I do my job, because I’m always answering questions or guiding or, “hey you’ve got a problem with this coach, let’s try to intervene” or “let’s try and counsel the staff on how to manage it” or ”we’ve got a problem over here.” And once it gets down to “OK,
everybody’s home for the day,” I can sit down and start to work on some budget stuff, and some inventory, and this, so it’s just a very broad-scoping position that you really have to have your wits about you on a daily basis.

The importance of a strong work ethic may have been put best in this investigation by Brandy, who stated:

You know, I said it, and I’ll still do it, and I’ll always do it. I come in when I need to and I’ll leave when the work’s done. I don’t watch the clock. There are many times when I’ve spent an all-nighter in here. But that’s part of it, and you’ve got to be willing to do that as an athletic trainer.

And again later in the conversation, Brandy continued with this when describing what she looks for in others:

A work ethic is, I’m sorry but I think that’s what carries it all. What I preach to my students and assistants and GAs and everyone is . . . you know the most important thing I look for is work ethic. And that’s what’s going to go further than anything else.

Work ethic was not a characteristic that these women acquired after taking the position of head athletic trainer. Most acknowledged that they were willing to take on extra burdens along the way. One example was given by Chris, who related the following when discussing her career path, regarding her time as an assistant in her first job immediately following graduate school:

I continued to kind of have more awareness, and just sort of volunteer and take over administrative things from the head athletic trainer. I took over summer camps stuff from him; I took over all the inventory checking and supplies, that
type of thing. It just seemed to work in the summertime because I was doing a lot of summer coverage when all those supplies get sent in . . . So he was very willing, but it was a little bit of a passing thing, and in some ways the other people I worked with at (the school) were more reticent to take on additional things. I had the time, and again, I was still young and single, and kind of wanting to expand things. It’s kind of funny because when I think about it, I don’t think I consciously thought about, “I need to get this experience because this is where I’m headed.”

Beth spoke about how her hard work in her younger and single life not only helped prepare her for this position, but also paid benefits after she started raising her own family.

But it was back . . . when I started in graduate school the point that I became the head that I was always putting in the time. I had always been the one who did the extra, and I had always been the one that my boss could rely on. “Can I help you? Let me make a phone call.” Then I started having kids and it was like okay I gave you help, now you help me.

And they did. She was the only head athletic trainer not to have any sport coverage directly, but she managed all the administrative tasks and was available to all sports, working with athletes on their post injury rehabilitation programs.

**Self-confidence.** An equally strong trait to work ethic was a strong sense of self-confidence. This was acknowledged by three of the women in comments about what they look for in others. When commenting on all successful athletic trainers, and put it this way:
I think they have to have a strong sense of their own abilities and inner sort of quiet confidence that definitely comes along the way. They may not have this right when I’m passing through their world, but you can see the potential for that. This confidence in oneself seemed to appear early in these women’s lives. Beth related a story about applying to enter the athletic training education program:

I met with the head trainer at the time at (school’s name) and that was the in-state school--it was four hours from home--and I sat in his office. I was a great student in high school. I graduated with a GPA up there; you know 4.0 or whatever I don’t remember anymore. And he said basically that I wasn’t going to make it because I had the book smarts but I needed to apply it to the athletic training portion of it and (the application process) was not going to be based on grades . . . , but it was. So at that time, . . . no one had ever told me that I cannot do something. It was my father who said we will see you in the fall. So that started it with already being challenged and saying all right, I will prove it to you I can do this. I was either the number one or number two person in because I had a 4.0. It was from there that they handed me my uniform and said go. . . . I remember just the whole time doing jumping jacks down the hallway because I was so excited.

Another participant reflected on her disappointment when, upon graduation from her master’s program, an assistant professor presented her with a job opportunity she felt that she was overqualified for. Listen to the experience in her words and imagine the self-confidence that it took to continue the job search in her primary area of interest:

When I went looking for jobs, you know, I’m coming off of great years in grad school, I had a lot of confidence on board . . . and the curriculum director at the
time, was like “hey, you might be interested in this job.” And it was up at some rinky-dink school . . . , and it was going to be a half-time athletic trainer, half-time life skills coach, or something like that, and I think that he thought that I really wanted to continue with the aerobics thing. You know, that was just a frou-frou thing on the side. I had to make more money. But I was kind of disappointed that he thought that that’s where I was headed, especially with my Division I competition experience. You know, I competed as a college athlete. I really connected with that environment, so I was pretty picky about the jobs I applied to coming out of grad school. Looking around at my peers, I started to see, “whoa, so-and-so got a job at a clinic making . . . ,” at the time $35,000 , which was a ton of money right out of grad school. I’m like, “wow, really? Gosh, maybe I should start to get nervous.” And I really didn’t. I didn’t seem to get nervous. There was a job open at (school’s name) that many of us actually applied for. One of my closest friends got the job, and I remember feeling a little bit of resentment. . . . But then this job opened at (school’s name), and it’s like the stars all lined up. . . . In the conversation above, Chris expressed her own self-confidence in what she was capable of and her willingness to persist. Later in conversation she went on to explain that in this position one must be willing to demonstrate that confidence directly to others, especially in situations that involve conflict.

. . . and I think it’s a big factor that is confidence, and that ability to manage a conflict situation, to manage a situation with an angry coach, an angry parent or an angry student athlete. Not being afraid to, I mean, I’ve kicked people out of the training room for being jerks. . . . So I had a confidence in me that, I was willing
to go toe-to-toe with anybody. Now, I wouldn’t characterize myself as being argumentative or anything. And the times that I’ve really jumped . . . it’s been I think for a very justified reason . . . a real sincere injustice that I think needs to be managed.

The ability to have the confidence to put oneself in a position to succeed, to apply for positions even when discouraged, and to stand “toe to toe” with some pretty intimidating co-workers and colleagues was a trait that all the women shared. In the upcoming section on barriers, many more stories reflect on the self-confidence that these women have used to carry them through. It appears that these women possess the confidence and thus are willing to accept the ultimate responsibility for their programs. Brandy stated: “Sure I can still fall back on my assistants and ask them questions, but ultimately it’s always going to be my decision now. I’m always going to have the final say.”

**Career Paths and Common Experiences**

All the women began their careers by attending graduate school, and all but one received a graduate assistantship. Six of the seven participants attended graduate school immediately following graduation from their undergraduate institution. The seventh participant spent time working in a high school before pursuing her master’s degree. Graduate school is a common path for all athletic trainers working both within intercollegiate athletics and in other job settings. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), almost 70% of all athletic trainers hold a master’s degree. The article points out that a master’s is a requirement to be eligible for some positions, especially those in colleges and universities, and to increase advancement opportunities.
Besides the requirement of a master’s to work in the intercollegiate setting, the wide availability of graduate assistantships in athletic training make the decision easier and provide the novice AT with a sound first work experience. None of the women had completed a terminal degree, which would be common among most head athletic trainers.

All of the women, following graduate school, were employed within the profession; four continued on in intercollegiate athletics, becoming assistant athletic trainers, and three worked in physical therapy clinics where they were contracted out to area high schools. Two of the women first accepted part-time positions before being promoted to full-time assistants. Most of the women in the outpatient physical therapy setting spent a very short time in this environment before realizing that they preferred intercollegiate athletics.

All the participants served as assistant athletic trainers and, it is important to note, attended or worked as an assistant or head women’s athletic trainer within the organizations they now lead. Most commonly, the women worked in one or two assistant positions before assuming the position of head athletic trainer. Six were elevated from within the institution and only one was brought in from another institution, but had a prior association with the institution. This study demonstrates that the path to head athletic trainer most certainly travels through graduate education and at least one position title of assistant athletic trainer in intercollegiate NCAA Division I (IA) athletics. No one was brought in from the private sector outpatient setting to assume the position. Two of the women had held the position of head women’s athletic trainer, and then when the men’s and women’s athletic departments were merged, took over the head athletic trainer role. The phenomenon where women’s athletic directors lost the lead administrative roles
when men’s and women’s departments combine most likely is the same scenario in athletic training. The importance of the loss of an administrative position dedicated to a woman was not lost on one of the participants:

I always told the head athletic trainer at the time, what it [the head women’s position] does is keeps a position that is a certain salary higher than your other staff, so that your female student athletes when they are looking at their athletic training staff don’t see all women that are in their twenties. They see somebody the age of typically the head athletic trainer [at least 35 or older, most times at least or 40]. Age is experience and usually power in most positions. So I thought it was super important that they held that title and kept it so that it attracted, if it wasn’t me, somebody with at least five years’ experience post graduate work.

In the literature review, it was suggested that one disadvantage for women is their inability or desire to leave an employer. It is also not clear whether women are more or less likely than male counterparts to hold positions at different institutions. In this investigation, one woman remained at one collegiate institution for the entirety of her career. All of the others had worked in at least one other collegiate institution, but only one had worked in more than two.

The women in this study showed a very similar career path to the position of head athletic trainer. All but one of the women in the study has worked in more than one university and some spent a short amount of time in the private sector. The most interesting finding was that the women did indeed have a previous connection to the institution that they now lead, and all but one of the women were promoted from within.
Job Change and Advancement

As the women in this study discussed their career paths, they noted experiences that caused or drew them to make a career change. Although all the women were confident in their abilities as athletic trainers, all but one of the women expressed the support or encouragement of another to justify or encourage the move into the leadership position. This, coupled with a desire for a new challenge, were the two strongest themes that emerged from the interviews. The results on the topics of encouragement from others and the challenge of a new position are presented in depth in the section on overcoming barriers.

As I looked more closely at the move up the career ladder, I saw that the women were motivated by other common circumstances found in other professions: change in life status (from single to married or from married to divorced), being unhappy in a current job, and, in one case, the realization that she could do the job better.

Personal life changes prompted a move by two of the participants. As Beth put it, “... and that was when the personal life came in and swept me off my feet and took me away.” Beth moved to a new city and was able to find a job as an assistant AT. One participant was a head athletic trainer in two institutions; the first was in a mid-major university. For this position, she was taking a small step down in institutional status, but was motivated to move by a personal life change and the challenge of the new job. She stated:

Then I went through some life changes, I decided that you know this is a small town I needed a new challenge so I am going to move. I don’t know anyone there and just see what it’s like to live in (city name). So I found an opportunity there
and it was a job at a place where the whole structure of it was in transition. . . . I went there because I could see all the potential for me. That was the draw: it was a really great challenging opportunity to work at restructuring the clinic.

In this investigation, I found that only one participant described a moment of enlightenment. This was the example given by Chris, and it came following the situation discussed above where she was confident enough to stand up to her supervisor. “I blew up. It wasn’t my grievance, but I was standing up for what I perceived to be a dramatic injustice. It ended up being kind of the impetus, for me to say ‘I can do this better.’”

Missing from the transcripts is the mention of a calculated plan. None of the women expressed that any of the career moves up the ladder were calculated. Two participants attributed their career path to luck. Brandy expressed that she was “at the right place at the right time,” and Chris stated that “the stars lined up. That’s why in some ways, I kind of look at my career and think ‘oh my God, I’m just the luckiest person in the world. . . .’”

**Barriers to Advancement**

To examine barriers, I focus on the emergent, salient themes related to the women’s insight into the barriers they encountered or experienced in the career path to head athletic trainer. The women were also sensitive to barriers that they have seen in others, yet had not experienced themselves in their own path. Surprisingly, the purposeful sample did not produce themes that were unique to this population, but what emerged with the most relevance were the same themes discussed in the literature review. Because this is the case, in this section, the themes are organized by the three barriers found in other careers: low aspiration, family division of labor, and gender stereotyping. Quotes
are used to support the relevance of the salient themes. The order of the themes has changed, based on the strength of the themes. Low aspiration and family division of labor shared the highest percentage of women who addressed these issues; gender stereotyping was weaker but still considered to be salient and is discussed last.

**Low Aspiration**

Following the literature review, it became apparent that low aspiration plays a role in the dearth of women who achieve leadership positions. Completely unexpected was the high percentage of these women who are now head athletic trainers that never aspired to be head athletic trainers. Four of the women interviewed directly stated that they never wanted to be or thought of themselves as a head athletic trainer. In the first interview, I was stunned when Amy made the following comment: “I never really wanted to be a head athletic trainer so maybe that’s the secret, you don’t want to do it and it will happen.”

Another participant reported a different position as her ultimate career goal (head of football) but never directly stated whether she did or did not want to be head athletic trainer. One participant never commented on her feelings of aspiration regarding the position, but felt compelled to “throw her hat in the ring” when her supervisor left. Only one other stated that she planned to be a head athletic trainer in Division I as her ultimate career goal early in her career, but then reported feeling not ready for the position when her supervisor encouraged her to apply for the position at other institutions.

Early in the work, it appeared that these women, even though highly qualified, did not see themselves in this role. A comment from Jill alluded to this point:
I think it’s probably a function of society or my own... I’m not sure it’s all my own, about not setting high enough goals for myself. But I never intended to be a head athletic trainer; I never went through school saying I want to. I just knew how I wanted to do my job.

The quality of their work, their dedication to the profession, and their natural ability to lead seems to be what led to the promotion of each woman. Chris spoke of how the extra hours and different leadership positions were what piloted her to this place, even though she reported early never aspiring to be a head athletic trainer. Chris said:

It’s kind of funny because when I think about it, I don’t think I consciously thought about “I need to get this experience, because this is where I’m headed.” I never had a concept of someday I want to be a head athletic trainer. I knew I had some leadership skills that were developing I knew I had an ability to connect with people, and you know, motivate GAs, and to guide people and that kind of thing. And I had a desire to do that. I was getting a lot of that good warm feeling, personal satisfaction. But never saw myself in the role of a head athletic trainer.

It is clear from the excerpts above that the majority of women in this study did not aspire to the position of head athletic trainer. Again, they did not initially see this as a barrier; however, when I brought it to their attention, the women were able to come up with insights as to why they did not aspire or why other women may not aspire and never overcome this barrier.

Three salient themes emerged as to why these and other women may not aspire to high rank. The weakest was the responsibility and duties of working with the football team. Even though this one theme would fit within the category of responsibilities of the
job, football was mentioned so often that it needs to be examined independently. Next, I present the aversion to the administrative role coupled with the duties of the head athletic trainer taking time away from patient care. The last salient theme I found to emerge was a woman’s tendency to devalue her abilities and experiences. The participants’ comments suggested that this then leads to the intentional decision not to step into the leadership role where the function of ultimate decision maker is owned.

**Football and the head athletic trainer.** Traditionally, the head athletic trainer also serves as the head trainer to the football program. The demands of both responsibilities at one time can be overwhelming to anyone and are often perceived as unappealing to many athletic trainers (male or female), especially those who are trying to balance work with family.

For Laura, the thought of working football was enough of a deterrent not to seek the position of head athletic trainer. For Karen, football was used as a deterrent to the head athletic trainer’s role. Karen spoke of the experience with her previous boss as one that happened as a coincidence of her stepping in when life presented “some health issues” for her supervisor. His support, however, was not enough to persuade the athletic director to hire her, and Karen felt that the AD even made several attempts to deter her from applying for the permanent position.

So I was told that if you get this position you will have to work football. And I look back and I think that meant they were maybe trying to deter me a bit. But obviously, I felt like if I didn’t apply for it, I would obviously not get the chance to make a move and I felt like that was the time to make the move . . . I honestly
think he felt I wouldn’t even apply for it because I wouldn’t want to give up my 10 month basketball position and I had a great thing going.

Of the seven women in this investigation, only two have worked football as their primary sport while serving as head athletic trainer, and only one continued to work football at the time of the interviews. Recently, most colleges and universities have recognized that the head athletic trainer’s position has grown into such an administratively demanding job, that to serve as the head athletic trainer for an entire athletic program and work football is not prudent, and all sports suffer. Because of this, many institutions are hiring a full-time position completely dedicated to managing the football programs.

When the men’s and women’s departments merged, for two of the institutions, it was first made clear that football would be a separate entity and that the role was going to be far more administrative, completely without the responsibility of football. Chris provided this explanation:

. . . the head men’s athletic trainer had actually resigned before the merger. . . .

The head assistant with football also resigned, so at that time, and this is the spring before the merger, the men’s athletic director, and the associate A.D., asked me to be part of the hiring of the head football assistant athletic trainer position. It was very interesting because I was interested to know if they were going to be hiring for head men’s, but they made it extraordinarily clear to all of the candidates that this is not a head men’s athletic trainer position. This is a head football position.
Five of the women in this study knew that football would not be part of their direct responsibilities when they accepted the position of head athletic trainer. Anecdotally speaking, most NCAA Division I institutions have taken the responsibilities of football away from the head athletic trainers.

This trend would seem to open doors for women to now fill the head athletic trainer position. With the separation of football from the head athletic trainer’s duties, the question remains: Why haven’t women stepped in? The next strongest theme that emerged was the perception of a significant amount of time lost from the work of caring for the athletes and being replaced with undesirable administrative tasks. The administrative side of the profession was clearly the least favorite part of the job for the women in the study. When asked what they would like to change about the job that they currently have, 100% stated the reduction of some administrative task.

**Responsibilities of the job.** All of the participants spoke about the enjoyment they experience when working with the athletes and how much they look forward to the break from their administrative duties to do just that. All of the women also commented that the administrative tasks, which are a growing part of the job, are the least desirable part of the position of head athletic trainer. When Amy was asked, she clearly stated that the administrative role was her least favorite and went on to communicate just how administrative the role of head athletic trainer has become.

I think any more a lot of head athletic trainers are . . . probably 70% are 65% administration and a little bit of something else along the way. You do get kind of bogged down at it and I think the more you want to be involved with the entire department and, yah know, kind of want to know what’s going on. But then again
that takes you away from what it is you are really passionate about doing (treating
the athlete).

This attachment to the role of caregiver seems to be one that women are reluctant
to relinquish, and for one participant in this investigation, it continues to be an aversion to
climb the career ladder. Karen spoke to the intentional decision on her part not to
continue up the administrative ladder in the athletic department by likening it to a
position in athletic training that would be completely administrative.

I don’t think that I would like just a 100% administrative position. In where you
are just doing insurance and sitting in the training room writing reports and going
to meetings. Because I enjoy being able to go out to practice at three o’clock or
3:30 and get out. I don’t see myself aspiring to even an assistant athletic director
position because I think part of the job that I like the best is interacting with the
kids and getting to know them and helping them.

For Karen, even with her success as head athletic trainer, she cannot see herself
moving up the career ladder. This is not uncommon; remember that in the literature
review women serving as deans of colleges and universities reported that they were more
likely to go back to teaching than they were to progress up the administrative ladder.

**Reluctance to lead.** When I questioned why they believed that other women are
not stepping into the role, the participants felt that women were reluctant or were
consciously choosing not to take on the problems they saw associated with leadership
positions. Whether this is tied to a lack of confidence in their decisions or the
unwillingness to accept the ultimate responsibility for the programs is unclear. Amy
commented on this phenomenon: “I think they see what the job actually is as they go
through the program and that all the problems tend to come to that person’s door.” Amy did not make a statement as to whether this was the reason she did not initially want the job of head trainer, but this sentiment is a worthy one. Two of women commented that the most difficult transition from assistant to head was the responsibility of the final decision-making process. Even for the women who accepted the position, the transition from peer or subordinate to leader was a difficult one. This is acknowledged by Brandy in the following comment:

The biggest thing that changed was it was a lot easier to go say “go ask XXX,” and all of a sudden it was “go ask Brandy.” I felt like I had a pretty firm grasp as far as the field of athletic training, but being in charge the first year or two was a little difficult because you had to start making a lot more decisions.

In Karen’s case, it appears that she experienced the same feelings and also acknowledged that women do not envision themselves in this decision-making function because they do not acknowledge their own abilities. Like Brandy, she even expressed what a difficult transition this was for her:

. . . I don’t think we give ourselves enough credit. It was a huge change for me, because now you go “Hey, the buck stops with you.” You are suddenly adding staff, since I’ve been in this position we have added two full-time positions and an intern position so that’s more people to hire, more people to supervise. I think that that was just huge, because suddenly people were coming to me and asking me things that I never had to make those decisions before. And for the first six months it was very overwhelming; but I also think that we are hard on ourselves and don’t give ourselves enough credit sometimes.
Later in the interview, Karen contrasted a woman’s lack of confidence to man’s sense of confidence, even when not worthy:

I also think that we are hard on ourselves and don’t give ourselves enough credit sometimes. In most cases, I think men handle things a little bit differently they might not know what to do but they never let on to that.

Also remember that, in an earlier quote, Jill commented on the fact that she did not give herself enough credit and considered this a common female trait. Even Brandy, who wanted to pursue a position as a head athletic trainer, was surprised by the timeline. She felt it would take more time and experience for her to be ready:

I guess my hardest thing with this whole thing is I don’t really look at it as me being a female. I look at it as . . . you know it’s been hard work and I’ve done what I need to do to accomplish my goals. Being the head, it was one of my goals when I first got into athletic training, and I guess after the first couple of years, I knew I wanted to work at the collegiate level. And once I got an assistant position, after a couple of years, it was certainly a goal to become a head athletic trainer. And I never thought it would happen this quickly, but again, to me that was, being at the right place at the right time, but I think the biggest asset is hard work.

**Family Division of Labor/Work-Life Balance**

As introduced in the literature review, the family division of labor may be the most prevalent barrier to women’s advancement to high rank. The responsibilities of home and family fall disproportionately to the women in a family. Although the majority of the women in this study (4 of 7) are single today and childless, it is surprising that
three of the women are married with children. This gives this investigation a very interesting insight into both worlds: the perceived barriers of family from the perspective of female head athletic trainer when they do not have a family, and then the other side of the barrier as discussed by the women who tackle both leadership and family.

The emergent themes suggest that the family division of labor is such a strong barrier that even the women who did choose career over family saw this barrier as one that still affects them today. Of the four women who are childless, three of them made comments that they believe they would not be in the position that they are today if they had married and had children. They perceived the barrier of family as an insurmountable one and made a decision early in their careers to do one or the other. As Jill commented, there were statements made to her early in her career that have stuck with her. The first came from a male AT that she was working under as a student; it pertained to her personality—that she may not be cut out for larger schools. The second comment spoke to her inability to be hired because women leave the profession to have a family or because of family:

And the other one said to me, you know you have to be ready because you are going to have trouble because it’s hard to hire women. Because we can’t count on you to move around once you get married. And I said well what if I don’t get married?

I find it interesting that later in the conversation Jill commented that she may have ended up in this type of institution as a way of proving the man’s comments to be wrong, but in contrast, she never commented on proving that a woman could have family
responsibilities and still work as an intercollegiate athletic trainer, even in a lower rank. It appears that she believed that this lifestyle choice is one or the other.

It is this lack of vision found among the women in the study without children in dealing with the problem within their own programs that seems the most concerning. The perceived stereotype of the role of a head athletic trainer is so strong that even these women have a difficult time imagining a situation where family and job responsibilities can coexist. Karen provided the best example of this in the following comments:

So for me . . . if I was married and I had kids I don’t really think I could do this job. It is really sad to say and I wish there were ways that we can make that better. Because I think there are a lot of females that we lose because of that . . . I think the biggest reason we see it is just you know with child care and running a home. I think that most often that falls to the female rather than the male and unless you have a husband who is a stay-at-home father, I think it would be almost impossible.

It appears that the women who lead see the conflict of family to be so great that the only way it could work would be for the woman athletic trainer to be the primary bread winner and to, so to speak, have a wife. For the women who did remain single, it was the most commented on perceived barrier for women; most of them could not see having children and doing this job. Karen even related a story in which she had a female athletic trainer who wanted to continue on, but she was unable to provide a solution that was agreeable and met the needs of both. Karen stated:

I am not married I do not have a family; we have lost some really good professionals because of the requirements of the job. I had a woman who worked
with our men’s basketball program and did a great job and worked with them for about four years and then was married. She decided to then start a family and in our situation here we don’t have any staff that does not travel with the sport . . . .

So I think for me that is a frustration that we have some really good female professionals that we are losing because of the hours and the demands of the job.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the position of head athletic trainer is an extremely time-consuming one, and it is understandable that these women would find it hard to believe that it would be possible for a woman to do both; but three women in this study have managed to carve a niche for themselves as head athletic trainer, wife, and mother. How they were able to do this is examined in the upcoming section on overcoming barriers related to the family division of labor.

Another barrier to women presented in the literature review, related to the family division of labor, was the phenomenon in which women are more likely to support their husband’s career and quit their jobs in order for their husbands to advance. At first, Beth followed the path of other women, and when she met her husband, she left her job in favor of moving to the location that best suited his career. (Although this was a mutual decision, I believe that they felt it would be easier for her to find a job than vice versa, though this was not clearly stated.) She did say, “Then I got to (university name), and was there for three years and that was when the personal life came in and swept me off my feet and took me away.” Beth was able to find a job as an assistant at another Division I (IA) institution. In Beth’s case, the move was lateral and did not postpone her career advancement. Unfortunately, other women have not been so lucky, and some have even chosen to opt out of their careers at this point.
Old Boy’s Club

When asked, most of the women denied direct discrimination in advancement and they considered themselves to be lucky, but it is clear through their conversations that some discriminatory behavior still does persist. The most notable discrimination and exclusion sometimes occurred after they were promoted to the head athletic training position. As presented earlier, Karen felt that she was discouraged from applying for the head training position and the responsibilities of football were used as a deterrent. Laura related that she was indeed told not to apply by an athletic director because she was a female. The other women denied any other clear discrimination based on gender. However, Jill did feel that male athletic directors were just more comfortable hiring men.

Most ADs are men and most people in the higher ranking positions and athletic departments are men, and people like familiarity. Men communicate with men in a more comfortable level; it’s still not a place that women are truly equal at the table.

For the most part, these women felt directly untouched by the discrimination of the “old boy’s club,” but Amy was quick to note that she never really put herself into a situation where she might not be successful or might experience discrimination purely based on her sex. Amy said:

I think I never saw myself as one of those “I’m really driven to an NBA head athletic trainer position” so I never felt like I tried to do something that wouldn’t work out. I made my decisions based on trying to get variety in my position and my professional life and that I have skills that I can take from each job and take into a new positions or situations and not be content to find a situation that is
comfortable, wanting to be a little bit more uncomfortable. I guess confidence-wise it was more. I never really tried. I never desired to be in a professional sports setting or somewhere where maybe I would’ve felt a little out of my element.

The women in this study did not really feel that they had to work harder than their male counterparts to get promoted, and only one participant commented that she felt that women do have to work harder. Four women did, however, make comments about having to prove themselves as the head athletic trainer once they assumed the position. Amy noted that people were surprised to hear what she did. Brandy commented that it takes time to gain the trust of new physicians, which may partially be because she is a woman. Jill pointed out that as women work women’s sports, the roadblocks are not related to gender. It is when women begin working on the men’s side of the athletic department that old stereotypes are hard to overcome.

I didn’t notice any real roadblocks when I was moving through graduate school and my first job, when I worked with three women’s sports. But as soon as you step over into taking care of football and men’s basketball things change . . . You really do have to be ready for questions or ready for them to look over your shoulder and say “Well when is the head athletic trainer coming in? Doesn’t the head guy do football? Isn’t the football guy the head guy?” . . . And the misconception follows that to work a male sport you need to be male, “What if you have to go in the locker room?”

Once two of the women were promoted and they felt that they had the support of their administrations, this support did not follow them professionally with the other head athletic trainers in their athletic conferences. Two of the women told stories regarding
their first trips to the conference meetings as the head athletic trainer. This was truly an instance of breaking into the “old boys’ club,” and these two women were met with resistance. First, one participant told of how uncomfortable these meetings were for her in those first few years.

When I became the head trainer in this conference, the other men didn’t even speak to me. We had at least two meetings a year and it was very uncomfortable because we would go in and the head trainers would have their meeting and the staff would have in-services and that kind of thing. . . It was probably four years before I ever felt comfortable.

Another related the same kind of experience, since she had served as the head women’s athletic trainer. She had always gone to the women’s and assistants meeting. Once she moved into the head trainer position, she was not warmly welcomed or respected.

The first conference meeting when I got promoted to the head position, . . . I wound up in a group talking to three of the other head athletic trainers in the conference, or something like that. And (name) . . . classic (name) said, “well don’t think (you know, they’re congratulating me, but they’re saying) well don’t think this means that you can come to our meeting at the conference office.” And I said, “Bull shit, (name).” And trainer 2 said, “It’s alright, you can sit next to me, kid.” “Kid” you know?

The women in the investigation have shown progress, but evidence of the “old boys’ club” still persists. Although outright discrimination based on gender was presented only by Laura, Karen and Amy expressed that women were not always welcome to apply
for positions of leadership. More importantly, the women were able to discuss how once promoted to the position of head athletic trainer, the discriminatory behaviors of others had a profound effect. What is important is that all of the women persevered.

**Overcoming Barriers**

I asked the women in this investigation to describe the barriers that they encountered in their careers. From this discussion, themes began to emerge related not only to the barriers the women experienced, but also how they were able to overcome them. In this section, I will present the salient themes pertaining to their experiences in overcoming these barriers. I found the strongest theme in barriers to advancement to be low aspiration. I begin focusing on how these women were able to overcome the barriers related to low aspiration by dividing the section into themes identified as reasons for low aspiration. Next, I focus on how the women with children were able to overcome the family division of labor, and how it affected even the women who chose to remain childless. Finally, I present how all the women were able to conquer the “old boy’s club” and fit in.

**Low Aspiration**

When examining low aspiration as a barrier in the last section, themes emerged that I considered to be the embedded causes or reasons why women may not aspire to high rank. First presented was the lack of confidence or a sense that they were not yet prepared fully for the position, which resulted in a reluctance to lead. The other was tied to the responsibilities of the job being unattractive or the cost of moving on too great. Although strong intrinsic factors helped these women overcome the barrier of low
aspiration, I found that the final push to consider this position occurred when they received the encouragement and confirmation from others.

Support and encouragement of others (confirmation). I can easily spot personality traits in these participants that helped them to overcome the barriers in their paths, but first I identified an extrinsic factor that was common among these women. The majority of the participants (six out of seven) were approached by someone and encouraged to pursue the position of head athletic trainer. Some were actively recruited and would not have applied for this position if it had not been made available to them. For others, the impetus was less direct, but still effective. What is clear is that this external force was important to each of these women and may have been the most significant factor in the promotion of the women who did not initially aspire to the role of head athletic trainer.

The strongest theme I found in regarding overcoming low aspiration was that all but one woman was approached directly about taking the head job before actually applying. Only one of the women completely pursued the position independent of some encouragement from another. For Amy, it was being actively recruited; one cannot ask for more support than that. Two participants faced a similar experience when they were asked to give up their head women’s job and take over the head athletic training position as the universities merged their men’s and women’s athletic programs.

Although the others reported applying for the position, three of the four had the support of their immediate supervisors to replace them, and one of the three also had the support of the staff working with her. The first, Brandy, was directly approached by the
head athletic trainer to replace him, and he was even a mentor in how she should approach the situation. Brandy describes the experience:

So I never dreamed of being the head trainer here. In fact, 2-3 years after I had taken the assistant job down here, the head athletic trainer was finding me jobs because I wasn’t making any money. . . . then he [the head athletic trainer] got recruited away. At first, he was trying to help fill the position, and it turned out he got a lot of money and I got my head athletic training position. So again, it was being at the right place at the right time.

Next, Beth related that when the head athletic trainer announced his retirement, it was a group decision between Beth and the other athletic training staff for her to take on the role of interim head athletic trainer. Here Beth talks about the transition into power and the decision process:

Because I succeeded someone else and I was their peer, it really went over smoothly. I was kind of like the obvious choice when things happened and things were going down they (the administration) were not making a decision what to do. It’s like we (the athletic training staff) all sat in the office and they said “You need to apply for this position and we need you.”

I should make it clear that Beth also believed that she was the best suited or the obvious choice, but had another staff member wanted to step into the position, would she have still put her hat into the ring?

Finally, the most interesting of all the experiences that led to the application for the position of head athletic trainer came from Laura. When the position for the head athletic trainer opened at her institution, she was still reluctant to apply because the job
description at the time listed football as a primary responsibility. Then a walk across campus changed everything.

Well, you know what, when I applied for it, it was interesting because one of the professors I knew, not in athletic training at all, said “oh are you going to apply for the head training position” and I said “you know I’m really not because I don’t want to do football and I don’t want to do . . .” And he said “you know what, it has nothing to do with that, you apply for the job and then you make it the way you want it. You don’t have to do football.” So I did. When I went in for the interview, I had this whole scheme of who would do football and why and the fact that the head trainer really shouldn’t because they have too many other responsibilities. And they all just thought it was wonderful and I think that people don’t realize, I mean I didn’t realize it until his guy said well that’s not even relevant. Go in and make it what you want. You have nothing to lose.

Reluctant to lead. When I asked the women in this study why they thought women (including themselves) did not aspire to high rank, the comments seemed to suggest that they felt women devalue their experiences and abilities, leading them to feel that they were not ready to take on the responsibility of the department or were just unwilling to. Some participants’ statements suggested that women did not feel comfortable with the responsibility for the final decisions. Here are examples where confidence may be lacking. Recall the women in this study at one point demonstrated behaviors that built confidence. I referred to this as a quiet confidence in the section pertaining to common personality characteristics. Although they did not always see themselves in this role, they were always somewhat aware of their strengths and able to
acknowledge that these were traits that made them good leaders. Amy commented on her ability to communicate well with a wide variety of people and “the ability to have strong relationships with lots of different people.” Chris spoke about her ability to stand up for what was right. Here is another example of the role that confidence in her judgment played, even with a person whom she deeply admired:

I didn’t cower to him, and he was such an impressive figure in my life but he had his opinion, and I had mine. There were times in my life that I stood up to authority when I thought it was the right thing to do. . . . I’m not sure how I developed it, but I remember instances when I was very young, of standing up to authority.

In Chris’s case, it is important to note that she was standing up for others. When studying women in negotiation, it was interesting to read that women are comfortable negotiating when it benefits others, and often out negotiate men, but when it comes to negotiating for themselves, they are often out negotiated by men (Bowles, Babcock & McGinn, 2005; Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002). What is sometimes difficult for women is learning that it is okay to stand up for yourself.

In this study, Beth realized that there are times when she needs to do what is best, not only for the people around her and her organization, but also what is best for her. Beth learned this the hard way, from an experience in graduate school:

I think that a second roadblock which was more professional was in Graduate school, the second year, they knew how much I wanted football. . . . I wanted to be the primary GA for that sport, but a female had never been the primary GA. They were concerned about it because that person usually stays with them (the
football team) in the dorms and the hotel during camp. . . . They were like do you want this position, because they were toying with it, they hadn’t made the decision. They were asking would you want this position. Instead of saying yes, I said I want to do what is best for the program. I was trying to be selfless and I knew either way I was going to get a good experience. . . . So I don’t know if I had made a definitive decision at that point in time whether it would have made a difference, I regret it.

What is important is not this example, but what Beth learned from this experience and then took with her.

But I learned from that decision, when the position came open for me I should take it. When my athletic director came in and said “can you handle this job.” I looked him in the eyes. I said “for the past eight months I have been going through pretty much an interview and I have been running this place. The reason why you haven’t worried about the athletic trainer is because of me.” I knew at this point in time, it wasn’t time for me to say I want to do what is best for the institution or the program. I wanted to do what was best, what I thought was best, for the program and best for me.

It was her confidence in her skills, learning from a past experience, and the acknowledgment of abilities that allowed her to confront her supervisor when he later questioned her ability to perform the duties of head athletic trainer.

Chris and Beth were both able to show this confidence, and these are just the best examples of those provided by the women in this study. What I found in these two cases was that they were able to build up their confidence as they progressed. Amy, Beth, and
Chris were all able to describe many exact instances in which their confidence in their abilities was strengthened by experiences that they had.

With self-confidence as a base, the next trait found to be common was a willingness and excitement about accepting new challenges. Although initially some of the women may have seemed complacent about staying in their previous position, all of the women were ready and, like Karen, willing to “throw their hat in the ring.” This is one of the keys to the next barrier of low aspiration—overcoming the aversion to the responsibilities.

**Aversion to the responsibilities.** In the barriers section, all the women indicated the administrative side of their position as head athletic trainer remained the least desirable part of their job. They also commented on the fact that women see this part of the job as undesirable and therefore prefer to stay at the assistant athletic trainer positions. Not only were women trying to avoid the administrative duties, but they also seemed to prefer spending more time with the athletes. So what was it then that motivated them to take the next step? It appears to be twofold. First, most of the women expressed a desire to accept new challenges and, second, most came to the realization that they could change the job and some of its responsibilities to suit their own needs.

When I asked about their career path, most of the women in the study related that the desire for a new challenge motivated them to accept the position of head athletic trainer. Amy described how this search for a new challenge was always a part of her impetus to move on to the next position:
For me, I really like to be challenged in my job. If I’m in a situation where you can see from the beginning, three years or four years and I got a little, like well I’ve done that now so I look for a new challenge but never a specific title.

As she continued to speak about each step in her career, the challenge of the new position was always a primary draw for her. The move back to the institution where she now serves was initiated by the university. Amy had served as an assistant at this university in the past and was the only woman to be actively recruited to leave one institution to move back to another. She reported being very happy in her previous position, but the familiarity of the old institution and the challenge of the new title again was enough to draw her back:

But then someone called me from (college name) to tell me that the head athletic trainer had retired and they asked me if I would consider coming back. I said no I’m really happy here. But then they flew me out for an interview and it just felt, like you know, my family is here and I kind of felt like the right thing to do because it did have so much variety and so much challenge.

The challenge and the variety of the new position was a big draw for Amy, but she was not the only participant to be motivated by a new challenge.

In Jill’s case, it was a little different; she would have been happy to stay in the position of head women’s athletic trainer, but in the end, it was the challenge of the new position that motivated her to finally commit to the new position. Before reading Jill’s experience, one must understand that the role of head women’s athletic trainer was her dream job. For Jill, this was the one job to which, if it opened, she always would apply. This was a position that she actively pursued:
. . . I always wanted to come back to that position. They created it about three years before and two people had it before I took it. It had always been a huge goal of mine to get as good as I could about the needs of the female and not just female athletes.

So when the departments merged and the position of head athletic trainer was offered to her, Jill was reluctant at first to accept the position. Jill knew that accepting the position would mean that an important position would go away. It appears for Jill, like Amy, it was again the challenge of the job that convinced her to make the move:

When I stepped out of that role [head women’s athletic trainer], it was to take over the interim head athletic training role. At the time, when I was talking to my immediate supervisor I said I would rather stay in my position with my title and have you hire a head athletic trainer and I don’t care what gender does but there would then be two of us with experience. And they said we really want you to do it . . . I never wanted to be the head athletic trainer, I like this job. I get to work with student athletes; I have a little bit to say in policy and you know it was good. But the supervisor asked two- three times and finally I decided that that was a good challenge for me. I was reluctant because I know when I stepped out of that role that title would go away . . . It was also a time, I could challenge myself with some administrative duties that actually when I thought about it, I was really excited about. I think it’s probably a function of society or my own, I’m not sure it’s all my own, about not setting high enough goals for myself.

The challenge of the new position appeared to be a major contributor to the change in job title for these first two women. Karen related a similar experience;
remember that the athletic director tried to use football as a deterrent for Karen, but in the end, she chose to persist and it was seeing the challenge of the new position that motivated her. Karen related:

I think it was the challenge. I think it was let’s throw my hat in the ring and see what happens. I think I would’ve probably regretted it if I didn’t do it, you know, and someone else came in. I felt like if I applied and there are better candidates then so be it. But I think I would’ve felt a little disappointed in myself if I hadn’t applied for it. Because I would’ve always had that question I didn’t know, I just never would’ve known.

Karen did persist and initially she did accept the head athletic trainer position, which included the responsibility of the football team. It was some time later that Karen realized that working football was not prudent when she was also responsible for all of the other administrative duties. Like so many of the other participants, Karen understood that the traditional role of head athletic trainer needed to change, so she changed it at her institution. In doing so, she designed the job to better meet the needs of the school and also herself.

The next theme to emerge regarding what helped these women overcome low aspiration was the realization that they could change the job. Whether it was working football, the dislike for the administrative duties, or the lack of personal contact with the athletes, each of these women had a reason at one time or another as to why she would not want to assume the position of head athletic trainer. What these women were able to realize was that the job really had no set boundaries, and it could be what they made it. A person accepts a new title and a set of responsibilities, but how they distribute those
responsibilities is completely their own making. As we learned earlier, Laura did have an “ah ha” moment on that walk across campus when the professor said, “get the job and then make it whatever you want it to be.” For her, this meant not working with football. But what is most impressive about this is that she did not dismiss this advice. She was able to take it to heart and she went into the interview with a well thought-out plan and won everyone over.

Laura was able to overcome two very important hurdles in this scenario; first, once prompted, she was willing to take action, and second, she was able to come up with a clear vision of a position in which she knew she would be successful. Then, she was able to communicate this vision to others. As noted in the section on football as a deterrent to aspiration for women, it is now a common practice that the head athletic trainer does not work football; but, when Laura proposed this idea, it would have been a very novel idea to everyone. Not only was she able to paint a picture of a new idea of what a head athletic trainer should be, but she was able to convince a group of people that she (a woman) could fulfill the position. But first she had to believe it herself.

Beth also took an active role in designing the position that was compatible with her values and responsibilities in her personal life. Beth was able to envision a job with a unique responsibility set once she had children. She knew that she did not want to stop working, but she also knew that working and traveling with a sport was not going to work with her new responsibilities at home. She went to her supervisors and developed an assistant’s position that allowed her not to travel and have more stable work hours. It was this position that then almost propelled her into the head athletic trainer’s position.
Because, once again, the responsibilities of the job did not have to conflict with Beth’s values and responsibilities at home, Beth said:

So when the position to move up came about as long as I could move in that position into the head athletic training position and not have to travel. That was the only way I would take the head position.

Upon reflecting on her career path, Beth, later in the interview, gave other women this advice:

. . . I had already talked to my boss about it, but it was like because I knew what I was only willing to do. Because I knew that I could not compromise my family. So, I think that the best thing to tell women when they are going into this is that they have to make a decision and stick with the decision as far is what they are capable of doing. Once they do that and they have the support of the people around them, they need to approach and propose different ideas to their administration. That’s pretty much what I did from the first time that I got pregnant.

Beth has been very successful in her attempts to create the position that works for her, but she and Laura are not the only women to do this in this study. In fact, all of the women have made requests or set limitations prior to assuming the role of head athletic trainer, or they have altered the role since assuming the position to better fit their lifestyle and preference.

The entire group of participants spoke about other barriers that they were able to overcome. These barriers included life experiences like family emergencies, health issues, and death of loved ones that may have derailed their careers; but with the strong
base that they had formed above, they were able to persist in their careers. For three women, this persistence continued even in the face of the most recognized hurdle for women today, the family division of labor.

**Family Division of Labor**

I am almost ashamed to admit this, but when I started this investigation I did not expect any of these women to have children, or perhaps even a spouse. Even I could not imagine a woman working as a head athletic trainer and also raising a family. Like so many others, I was stuck in the old stereotype of what the position of head athletic trainers looks like. I hope that this investigation can now begin to break this image so that other women may begin to envision themselves in this position. Though women in this story have shown that one can do both, all of these women have acknowledged that the timing of their family has played an important role in their success, and/or the presence of a mentor helped them to see the possibilities. Ironically, the timing tailored to fit each individual and discussed as so important to the success of these women was different for each.

Chris and Laura both spoke to the importance of the timing of the position and when they had their children. One of the participants did, in some ways, follow the more traditional path described by Eddy and Cox (2008), with the exception that not only did she delay advancement until after raising her children, but she did not even pursue the field of athletic training until after raising her family. Here Laura describes her path to the head position:
I came back and taught . . . and looked at athletic training. I took a couple of the classes that I needed and I put in my 1500 hrs and at the same time did get my master’s . . . as well.

Laura perceived that entering the field at a more mature age was an advantage for her in being promoted to the position of head athletic trainer. Coming into the field as a mature adult, she stated:

I think part of what helped me was the fact that I got into athletic training later in my career and I don’t know, I think my family was more settled and being just a little bit older. I think people were much more comfortable with hiring me and having me as the director. For once, I think maybe age actually did help.

Laura took the more traditional route among women professionals and postponed work to raise her family before pursuing her career. Laura also described that she saw her age as an advantage, not only for her family but for her position as well.

Chris, on the other hand, decided to put career first over relationships early in her career and did not marry and have children until after she had assumed the role of head athletic trainer. In her mind, this career sequence was pivotal in her ability to advance.

After . . . [after becoming head athletic trainer], I met my future husband. We dated a couple years, then, married and had a child. Everything sort of unfolded at the time that it could have. It would have been a very different career path for me had I met someone earlier that I wanted to settle down with. . . . I feel like any of the relationships that I had before were a little bit doomed because I wasn’t in a frame of mind to be able to say, “this is what I can do now.” I turned down a lot
of ongoing relationships because “I’m going to take this job,” or “I’m going here,” or “I like my career better than you.” That type of thing.

Chris felt that it was vital that she first became the head athletic trainer and then met her husband and started a family once she had overcome the initial obstacles of the position: “So anyway, it’s been quite a journey, and you know, at this stage in my life, it’s like my life has just unfolded in a very fortunate way.”

Beth, on the other hand, made sacrifices early in her career common to those made by other women, but then was able to come up with a new definition of what an assistant position would look like for a woman with small children. When the opportunity presented itself, she went on to completely redefine the position of the head athletic trainer. Because Beth had had a positive experience with a female mentor in graduate school who continued to work Division I (IA) football, Beth always believed that with some creative time management and some adjustment to job responsibilities, she would be able to work as an athletic trainer and be a wife and mother as well. She never considered leaving the field of athletic training after having children, although she did sacrifice her original goal of being the head football trainer.

Beth described how over time and with many changes she and the university were able to come up with a position that suited both her needs and those of the college:

I had already talked to my boss about it . . . because I knew what I was willing to do; because I knew that I could not compromise my family. So I think that the best thing to tell women when they are going into this is that they have to make a decision and stick with the decision as far as what they are capable of doing. Once they do that, and they have the support of the people around them, they need to
approach and propose different ideas to their administration. That’s pretty much what I did from the first time that I got pregnant.

Beth and her boss were able to throw around scenarios until they landed on one that worked for the both of them, so that she was able to retain a position of assistant athletic trainer. Beth stressed that one must first set priorities, get a mutual agreement with your partner, and then go to the boss with a clear picture of what it is that one is capable of doing. But in doing this, it still may mean that career or family sacrifices are necessary. Beth explained:

My goal at that point in time was to be an assistant with a major football program. Just like my mentor. Then when the position actually became available for me to become the head in football at my institution (after having a child), I knew they weren’t in the situation where they could handle what I needed to be able to do in order to juggle both.

The goal of football may have been put aside, but Beth was prepared to take the head athletic training position when it became available, because she knew that the challenge would be right for her and also what was best for the institution. The job as it is now is very unconventional.

One point that was consistent among the three women with husbands and family is that they all made decisions about what the boundaries would be for their jobs and what they were capable of giving with their partners. The husbands all appear to be supportive and collaborative with these women in the responsibilities of family. Each seems to have carved out a niche that works for her. Chris gave this example:
... my regular days now tend to be (well I’ll just take a day in the middle of the year, because summers are a little bit more administratively oriented ... ) arrive in the office between 9:00/9:30am unless I have earlier meetings. Earlier meetings might start as early as 7:00am. But this stage in my life, I have a three-year-old-son and so I’m just trying to balance family, so ... [Interviewer: 9 to 5?] That’s right; well I don’t go home at 5:00, that’s the thing. But because I work late, I don’t worry about coming in later. That’s just the arrangement that my husband and I have.

The difficulty of having a family and being the head athletic trainer was not lost on the other women in the study. The surprising thing was that the women without children often could not work out ways to overcome the obstacle for their female staff members. Amy displayed an understanding of the dilemma and at least believes that her institution offers both her male and female staff that have two-career families a little support:

I don’t think I could’ve moved ... and started a new adventure; maybe I could of, it depends on your style obviously that collaborative nests is probably the biggest one finding a relationship or a situation where both people are able to kind of balance their career goals. I do think in any profession you have that whole two career family is going to be a challenge no matter what the career is. I think that athletic training is just a little harder, because people don’t always understand our hours and our demands and that sort of thing. We are lucky here because they will let us bring our kids here when we need to; it is an environment that is family-friendly. I know that is not true everywhere else.
Amy showed empathy to the situation, and her institution is making efforts to make the career more family-friendly. As presented in the barriers section, this problem of retaining women with families is one that will not go away soon. With the example given above and more innovative thinking, the problem is not impossible to overcome.

**The “Old Boy’s Club”**

The women in this study primarily advanced through the women’s athletic programs. Most of them did not feel that they faced any strong discrimination in their career path. Not working male sports did not affect these women’s ability to be promoted to head athletic trainer, and this may be the anomaly that is the constant for this group of women. Amy was able to recognize that she was not a woman who felt compelled to buck the establishment and attempt to pursue positions that may have resulted in more discriminatory behavior:

So I kind of always try to pick environments that I thought I could be successful in. I wouldn’t put myself in that situation but maybe there was some bias there. That’s how I sort of dealt with it but that I want to go somewhere where I know I will be challenged but in the right ways. I started and stayed out of those situations where there may have been more discrimination or more forces working down against me.

I found the most common clash with the “old boy’s club” occurred as the women were promoted and then attempted to join the networking organization with their athletic conferences. The conference meetings in the past had included only males because there were never female head athletic trainers, so they naturally excluded women. Two of the participants described uncomfortable situations when attempting to attend the meetings of
the head athletic trainers within their respective conferences. How did they get past this? First, they both attended, no matter the discomfort that they felt. One participant was able to articulate that she came to the realization that what these men thought of her really didn’t matter.

"It came down to; I liked my job so I will put up with you guys. Because I like what I do and I go home and I have a different identity it’s not like it’s my whole life. My whole life does not revolve around whether you like me or not."

Although it took some time, both of these women were able to overcome the discrimination and now report a good working relationship with most of the male head athletic trainers within their league.

In conclusion, all of the women in this study were able to overcome low aspirations primarily by focusing on personal strengths, listening to the advice and encouragement of others, and being willing to make the job their own. Coincidentally, they all followed an appropriate career path and often saw their advancement as opportunistic, but all were willing to step up to the challenge when it was presented to them.

The family division of labor and the responsibilities of being a mother seem to be a concern even to those who did not marry or have children, and these responsibilities are something that they reported struggling with. The women in this investigation with a family are able to show us that it is possible to pair this career with family. Interestingly, this was done in no one particular sequence, which is different from the experiences of female junior college presidents discussed in the literature review. The women in this
study serve as positive role models to other women who can now see that this indeed can be accomplished.

**The Role of Mentoring**

This section focuses on the emergent themes surrounding the role of mentors in the lives of the participants. The section highlights the influence of the women’s mentors on their careers and then looks at how they perceive themselves as mentors. In order to add structure to this section, I used the lens provided by Kram (1985) to organize the role of mentors by function. First, however, let’s look at the more quantitative make-up of the mentors as described by these women.

The seven women described a total of 31 different mentors, which averaged between 4 and 5 mentors per participant. The largest collection of mentors acknowledged by any one participant was 10, with the smallest number of mentors acknowledged being 2 (by two different participants). The gender profile of the mentors also varied. None of the women reported having only female mentors, but one woman recognized only male mentors. When broken down by gender, 56% of the mentors were male and 44% were female.

This investigation supports the findings of previous researchers (Furcsik, 2005; Scandura, 1992) that the majority of the participants’ mentors were influential early in the women’s careers and primarily within the educational and novice segment of their careers, as shown in Table 1. What is really interesting is a small increase in mentors later in their careers, closer to when they became head athletic trainers. It is unclear if this can be representative of the final boost to advancement. Only one of the women clearly stated
that she had the counsel of an early mentor in her final advancement to head athletic trainer, and what is most interesting is that she did not take his advice:

Now I take some things he says with a grain of salt, because you know when the head position came up, they were going to offer me the interim instead of the head and he said “just take what they can give you. Keep being loyal.” Then they wanted to lowball me because I knew what my boss was making and what it came to after doing the job all summer long while really for almost 6 months. I felt like I was kicked in the teeth and he (the old mentor) was telling me to be loyal, be loyal, be loyal. The other part of me was like, I don’t know if I can take your advice this time and so I told my supervisor this is what the salary is going to be and it’s not going to be for the interim. . . . So that’s when I had the athletic director come in my office the next day and offer me the head permanent position. But I knew he (the old mentor) meant well and I knew that he knew from his experience being a male and being loyal is what worked for him; but I think at
this point, I had to make a different decision. I understand why he said what he said, but I felt I was being taken advantage of. But you know it was because of him and some of the things he did along the way in my career that gave me the strength to do what I needed to do. So he has probably had the biggest influence on me.

All of the women discussed having mentors, though not all of the mentors were athletic trainers. As presented in Table 2, other professions included physicians, athletic administrators, and educators (AT, but in an academic role). Please note that the educators were also athletic trainers, but those on the educational side fill very different roles from the athletic trainers that work directly with the athletes. Of the athletic trainers mentioned in the interviews, the vast majority of the mentors did not come from the academic portion of the program. The mentors were primarily athletic trainers who may have crossed into the academic side, but their primary responsibilities were with athletics. They often served as clinical instructors in undergraduate school or supervisors in graduate school.

Table 2

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<td>Athletic trainer</td>
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<td>Physician</td>
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<td>University administrator</td>
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To review, the women were all able to describe a mentor. All but one of the participants acknowledged both female and male mentors, with male mentors making up 56% of those described by the population. Most mentoring relationships occurred early in their careers and were primarily their athletic training clinical instructors and supervisors. Some mentors from other fields did have an influence on most participants.

**The Role of Mentors**

As discussed earlier, Kram (1985) defines two primary purposes of mentors as serving career development functions and psychosocial functions. What is interesting, in this investigation, is that the emergent themes found in the transcripts when the participants spoke directly about their mentors were heavily weighted towards the psychosocial function of mentoring, with role modeling being the most prevalent, followed by confirmation. Regarding the question pertaining to mentors, what is interesting is the lack of response concerning any emergent themes related to career development outside of the acquisition of basic tasks (which include the expansion of a patient care knowledge base).

Within the context of career path and advancement in this inquiry, the women did discuss career advancement mentoring functions, and they were able to give examples of career development functions by supervisors or colleagues as they discussed their career paths. Why these mentoring functions were not recognized when the women were asked about mentorship is not clear. It should be noted that most of these supervisors were represented in the discussion of mentors, but some individuals whose actions of mentorship paired with those described by Kram (1985) were not always recognized as being mentors later in the discussion. Chris provided an example of this. In her discussion
on career path, she noted how important it was that she took over more tasks from her head athletic trainer when she was a young assistant, but she did not mention him as a mentor. This could be due to the fact that she did give the impression that she lobbied for these tasks, or at least offered to do them, and was not selected directly by her supervisor.

First, I will look for individual examples of career developmental functions of mentors found in this investigation and also note exactly where in the women’s discussions they were found.

**Career advancement.** One example of an allocation of challenging assignments came from Chris, but again, this story was told during the conversation on career path and motivation forces for advancement. This particular AT was recognized as a mentor by Chris in the context of a mentor, but in this section she told how he was a source of confirmation of ability and a confidence builder.

So XXX asked me to work with the star running back on the football team to do his rehab, and it was such an honor to be asked . . . It was such a vote of confidence, obviously for me to be branching out into football of all things. At the time, Chris was working with the track team. Although Chris recognized this as a form of confirmation, it could be argued that this also fulfilled the functions related to career advancement since this was not only a challenging assignment, but one that would have increased Chris’s exposure and visibility to supervisors and professionals of significant influence in the athletic department. This could have very well played a role in her advancement at this institution had she stayed.

Brandy was able to describe instances in which her mentor was clearly fulfilling the functions on the career development side. In this quote, it is evident that the
sponsorship began early in her partnership with this mentor: “In fact, two-three years after I had taken the assistant job down here, XXX was finding me jobs. You know, because I wasn’t making any money.” Brandy made this statement in the description of her career path and what motivated her to make the next step. Recall that Brandy also was hand-picked by this supervisor to replace him, but in addition, he then mentored her in how to successfully handle the political climate to attain the position—“... because when all this started he told me I needed to go talk to the football coach and the men’s basketball coach.” Politically, the head athletic trainer knew that if she applied for the job with the approval of the two most influential coaches, she would get the job.

Jill was also able to give an example of how her mentor (head athletic trainer during her graduate assistant experience) was able to challenge her in a way that at the time may have made her uncomfortable, but somehow he knew that she was ready for the challenge.

I always admired him. He was strong enough and organized enough to let us go try things. He knew the outskirts of where we could go before we knew that. He was so organized that he would say okay you are assigned to this team go cover their practice and come back and let me know what you find out. He was organized enough that he could just kind of cast us out there and he knew how to catch us before it was too late.

Jill was one of the few women who discussed the ability to challenge as a talent that she was able to recognize as one of a mentor.

The concept of coaching is also not easy to identify if one eliminates the acquisition of knowledge of the tasks associated with being an athletic trainer in the
realm of patient care. In this role, the women in this study often recognized the staff athletic trainers who were acting as clinical instructors or supervisors to them early in their careers. This theme was one of the strongest in the study, with four of the women commenting on the role that their mentors played in knowledge gained. Although this knowledge plays a role in advancement, it is not the same as that discussed by Kram (1985) as the coaching appropriate entirely for career advancement.

Examples of coaching for advancement do exist. Brandy had a mentor who not only sponsored appropriately, but he seemed to also play the role of the coach in helping her to navigate the cultural aspects of the athletic program. She said this when talking about the head as a mentor. “Certainly XXX, who was the head athletic trainer here . . . taught me so much as far as just how to handle all the things with the administration and the different coaches.”

Another good example of coaching through a not-so-supportive cultural landscape for women came from Beth when she described how her head athletic trainer (when she was an undergraduate student) described how the culture often perceived females in the profession of athletic training. He was able to coach her in an appropriate, although maybe slanted, way. She began by saying at each step she felt she had a mentor and then went on to explain:

. . . the first mentor was XXX because he challenged me and then looked at me as a female and in a cultural climate where women were often stereotyped as not being able to handle it, still wanted me to present myself as a female. He is the one that had the talk, you know, do go to the convention dressed like a female and act like a female, but be professional.
Direct examples of mentors working for these women as protectors appear to be missing, although there are hints of both in the examples given above.

**Psychological support.** Five of the women in the study were able to give very clear examples of mentors acting as role models. Often this is the only example given by the participants of a mentor’s direct influence. Chapter II discussed the importance of female role models and how the low number of female role models in leadership positions may be one of the reasons for the shortage of women who wish to pursue this as a career option. In Beth’s comments on career path, her female mentor made a leadership position seem possible rather than impossible. Beth went on in the mentorship section to expand on this relationship by saying:

XXX at (name of institution), it wasn’t as much of what she said, it was how she did her job and how she carried herself. It was not like she ever sat me down and said you are great; you can handle this, nothing like that. But I know that there was a mutual respect between us and like I said, the way that she carried herself as a female helped.

Like Beth, four other women mentioned women as good role models. The fact that they were women doing the job that they wanted to do seemed to be the most consistent theme. Other factors that the participants felt were important in the female mentors included the role of providing education, as well as providing that sense of what a female leader could be. Chris shared her admiration for and the influence of one of her most powerful role models:

XXX was huge in terms of a female that was in a very powerful position. . . . But to see her in that position and to know what kind of scope of influence she has on
people . . . she’s just a very good person to know. What I’ve come to find out she
doesn’t have to know it all . . . she’s a problem-solver, and she demonstrates that
on a regular basis.

Jill was also able to relate the importance of seeing women as leaders, and she was one of
the few women who described someone she is currently working with as a role model.

For Jill, it continues to be important to see women in leadership roles, and she spoke of
the assistant athletic director as one of her current mentors: “the . . . that oversees me in
this role is the first mentor I have had in an administrative role. . . . She is a really good
mentor for a young administrator.” Jill went on to explain how this administrator was
willing to take the time to understand the needs of Jill’s department, even though she had
never been the supervisor to athletic training in the past.

Within the realm of role models, the next most common theme among these
mentors was the positive characteristics that these women chose to emulate. Jill was able
to reflect nicely on examples of this that she valued in her mentors. Her examples
included comments like these:

- His simplicity in rehab and his ability to connect with the person was amazing. He
could gain trust . . . and he followed through on the commitments that he made to
them.

Jill provided the next example as well:

- XXX is an assistant athletic trainer there still and she has probably the best sense
of policy and how it would extend to a group. She is very black and white the
kind of person who knows herself and her philosophy so well that if you said
“XXX, I have a problem. Can I run it by you?” You would get all the way
through your story and she would say “okay this is what I do . . .” It doesn’t matter what it is, she knows herself so well, she knows what place you put things in, what order of decision-making, and priorities are necessary. I have never met anyone like this she is simply amazing.

As an interesting aside, one participant introduced the idea of a bad role model actually serving as a mentor of what she doesn’t want to do. Amy said:

And I had a couple of mentors who I like very much as people, but they were terrible managers and terrible. . . . In terms of their management style, if you take a problem to them they would tell you later in an evaluation, that you didn’t really handle that well because you came to me. So, I think that they were mentors but in a more “I don’t want to go there” kind of way.

The importance of mentors in the role of confirmation and confidence-building was also demonstrated in this population. The women articulated how they connected the idea of a mentor to this theme. Chris gave another example in the mentoring section about how the same AT that allocated the football athlete to her often gave her the sense of confirmation in staff meetings as well by even just a look of acknowledgment that she noticed the other staff members were not always getting. Amy related the experience she had with physicians as mentors. In this relationship, the physicians were not only able to confirm her ability as an AT, but were also able to confirm the role of the athletic trainer as a profession.

Early on I worked with a couple of physicians who are really good mentors and really supportive of athletic trainers. And I think they made me feel that what we
did was really valued within the medical team environment and that was helpful coming out of grad school because I really was not sure where we fit in per se.

**The Role of Networking**

I asked the participants to describe their professional networks and how they have been able to use them. Here, I examined the common themes found among the participants relating to the role that networking played in their advancement, as well as the role that it plays in their professional life now.

The strongest networks recognized came from within the organization in which the women currently work and within the conference to which the institutions belong. Once prompted, all seven women were able to give examples of networks that they have formed within their institutions. The network always reached into the athletic administration, but many spread outside of the athletic department to other useful departments on campus. Chris could directly connect a network of very influential women on campus to her rise to head athletic trainer. What was interesting, though, was that the most important feature of the networks within for these women was not the support of the network in their advancement, but the support of the networking to the advancement of the field of athletic training, incorporating a broader positive reaction to the athletic department as a whole. Karen gave an example of this in the following comment:

I have served on different hospital boards and a couple of boards and different committees at the University itself outside of athletics. I think this really helps because it makes people a little bit more knowledgeable about what you do and
they have maybe a higher opinion of athletics after they to get to know you and serve with you.

The next most popular network for the women in this study was the network that they found within their athletic conference. Six of the seven participants spoke of the importance of their colleagues at the other like institutions with whom they come into contact with on regular bases. Amy explained, “We do have a conference or meetings and even just going to conference championships is a good opportunity to network as well.”

These networks have a natural built-in structure to the commitments that the women have every day. The conference meetings also seem to be a form of networking that is financially supported by their institutions. When they are working with their sports, they are visited by or travel to most of the opponents within the conference, but also come into contact with other athletic trainers outside of the conference. Within the conference, this allows for annual nurturing of these relationships. The benefit of this was expressed by Laura:

Certainly in our . . . conference, I think we have a pretty tight knit group and we don’t hesitate to call each other. If somebody has a situation or something comes up then we are on the phone quite a bit. It is kind of a nice support network.

Laura did discuss the closeness of the group, but it does still appear to be more a group of close acquaintances.

Some of the conferences have gone through major changes recently, adding and losing teams, which has had the effect of growing the networks of these women. Although this may have acted to expand Brandy’s network, it appears that the geographic structure of the new conference may limit some of the natural interaction that is
experienced by the other participants. This is how she commented on the changes in this conference:

You know, I do have a lot of connections and a lot of that is I don’t travel as much. I only travel with football now. And I’m still trying to get to know some of the other head athletic trainers in the conference just because I only see them once a year. And then there are times when I won’t see them for three years. So it’s still . . . we’re trying to network a little bit better within the conference, because they made a major change when we all came in and a lot of schools left. And so that conference changed a ton, and it’s just, we’re so spread out and the only time they allow us to meet as athletic trainers is at the national convention. Well it’s just too hard then.

One drawback to this network is that the people within the conference network know all of the same people. There are the outliers, though, that occur, especially if a peer entered this conference from another.

Other networking activities mentioned were service in athletic training professional organizations, attending continuing education conferences or product-sponsored symposia, and, finally, keeping in contact with graduates. Each of these themes carried the weight of only two participants.

What I found to be most interesting is that there appears to be a theme of declining networks as they have progressed instead of expanding networks. Beth explained it like this: “I actually think it has gotten a little smaller and I think it is because I have gotten a little less involved. And I think it’s because what is going on personally in
my life.” Beth hinted that her family and the balance of work and family may have the greatest influence on networking. Chris supported this constraint with this comment:

It’s always one of these sorts of things that I wrestle with, like, “gee, I know I have a fairly prominent position, especially for a woman. Should I get involved in these groups, like women’s athletic training, college athletic trainers’ society, that sort of thing . . . ?” I don’t have time. And now that I’ve got a family, to me it’s balancing that.

Although Jill is single, she related that her network is small and she attributed this to her own personality:

Well I think I am pretty much an introvert so I don’t meet a lot of people but I really hang on to the three or five people that I have known since I was a student trainer. I’ve known who they are and why they make the decisions that they make. So I trust their end product. I trust that they can tell me where to go or how to better something.

Jill’s comment also questions how she uses her network.

Most of the women commented on using their network as a support structure more so than one of exposure, which is how the networks helped them to advance professionally. Chris, Jill, and Brandy were all able to tell stories of how professional networks helped them to land jobs in their career path, but they also now describe their networks as diminishing in number, quality, or both. The primary use of their networks now is to find other people jobs, and Beth feels that she is at a point where the “six degrees” theory would allow her to make any important contacts that she may need.
The final theme found in this population is that none of these women seem to take part in women-only networking groups within the NATA. Chris acknowledged that she has a pretty unique position for a woman and knows that she should participate in some form of gender-oriented group, but has yet to prioritize this over her other commitments. Earlier, she also spoke about the one female-only network within her organization where she did find support and counsel when she first moved. As discussed, with only seven women head athletic trainers, it would be difficult to find enough women to form an effective network.

Summary

I began this chapter with a brief description of the participants in the investigation. They were very similar demographically, with the only major difference being their age. They all followed a similar career path to head athletic trainer, and all had previous connections to the university that they now lead. All but one was promoted from within.

Somewhat surprisingly, the women, when asked, described the same barriers to advancement found in other professions. The barriers included low aspiration, the family division of labor, and breaking into the “old boy’s club.” Although low aspiration is discussed in other professions, the strength of the barrier among such a high-achieving group of women is concerning. The women were able to demonstrate, through their actions, how they were able to overcome these hurdles.

I concluded with the presentation on mentors and networking. These two components are considered to be vital in the advancement of most professional workers. The finding here may lead one to believe that this may be a weak link in the advancement
of women in the profession of athletic training. Comparisons of the above results to those found in other studies are examined in the next chapter as well as the implications of this work.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

I designed this qualitative investigation to examine the shared experiences of female athletic trainers who have assumed the leadership role of head athletic trainer in some of the largest and most prestigious institutions of higher learning. The original purpose was to look for common themes that would indicate how “aspiring” women overcame common barriers to advancement. Based on the work by Hakim (2000, 2006), I selected the population with the assumption that the women would be “work-centered” and therefore aspire to high rank. What I discovered was that only four of the seven women fit into Hakim’s “work-centered” preference group, and among this group, only one of the women reported that she aspired to the position before the opportunity presented itself.

I begin this chapter by discussing the major findings within each of the research questions. Next, I compare and contrast the salient themes with the research presented in the literature review to strengthen and help to clarify the findings. The discussion begins by examining career path and common personality traits. The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to the research question regarding the barriers to advancement with the shared characteristics or experiences that helped the participants to overcome the barriers. With the discussion on low aspiration, I introduce the common resultant experience of coincidental preparedness and the “unintentional” career path. Their common personal traits seem to be the key to the success of these women and the impetus to overcome their barriers.
Next, I examine the role of mentorship and networking, which is followed by a comparison of the results of this study to the theoretical frame presented by Hakim (2000, 2006). I conclude with the implications and recommendations for future career advancement strategies that women and employers may be able to initiate in the pursuit of promoting women, and, finally, propose considerations for future research. A summary of the findings with a comparison to previous research is presented in Table 3.

**Summary and Discussion of Research Findings**

The women in this investigation were all similar in ethnicity, education, and experience. All participants were Caucasian, had earned a master’s degree, and had worked their way through the ranks of intercollegiate athletics. This is similar to Malasarn et al. (2002), who found the same traits among the male expert athletic trainers. The women in this study varied in age, with the youngest reporting to be between the ages of 30–35 and the oldest reporting to be over the age of 65.

Four of the women were married, and one marriage had resulted in a divorce. The three women who were married all reported having at least one child. I expected the majority of the women to be “work-centered” individuals who would have chosen career over family, when, in fact, this population contained three women who would more naturally fit into the “adaptive” category described by Hakim (2000, 2006). This alone may be one of the most important findings in the investigation. In Hakim’s work, the “work-centered” women who have chosen not to have children and possibly not even marry were the most likely to advance. Even though I would categorize the majority of the women in this study as “work-centered,” it certainly was not an overwhelming majority.
### Table 3

**Comparison Summary: Findings of Gorant (2012) and Previous Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composite Biography</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Female head athletic trainers vary in age, but are similar in ethnicity, education and experience.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Four of the women were married and three women had children.</td>
<td>Disputes: Hakim (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- All possess and value a strong work ethic and display self-confidence.</td>
<td>Adds to: Malasarn, Bloom, &amp; Crumpton (2002)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Career Path</th>
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<tr>
<td>- The women in this study showed a very similar career path to the position of head athletic trainer.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adds to: Booth (2000)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Research on mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All but one of the women in the study has worked in more than one university.</td>
<td>Adds to: Booth (2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Research on mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All women had a previous connection to the institution that they now lead, and all but one of the women was promoted from within.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- The career path to promotion was opportunistic with no calculated advancement up the ranks.</td>
<td>Supports: Doherty &amp; Manfredi (2006) and Eddy (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Findings of the same opportunistic career path in female educators and presidents of junior colleges.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Barriers to Advancement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Three barriers to advancement emerged from this study: Low aspiration, the family division of labor, and the “old boy’s club.”</td>
<td>Supports: ACE (2007), Booth (2000), Dieringer (2007), Drago et al. (2005), and Eddy (2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Low aspiration</td>
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Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Aspiration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Low aspiration was the strongest barrier to advancement for the women in this study.</td>
<td>Supports: Fels (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Found lack of ambition to be a strong barrier to women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanations for low aspiration:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The responsibility of working football</td>
<td>Supports: Hakim (2000)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Women making a lifestyle preference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The increased administrative responsibilities coupled with the decreased contact with athletes and student athletic trainers</td>
<td>Supports: Hakim (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women making a lifestyle preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A lack of confidence in leadership skills, most predominantly decision making</td>
<td>Disputes: Hakim (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finding independent of family/lifestyle preference, and unrelated to job preference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• found women tend to devalue their contributions, making them less likely to “put themselves forward”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• decreased confidence then leads to low ambition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Division of Labor</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The women without children saw the family division of labor as one of the most imposing barriers to women and they have also found it difficult to retain women on their staffs.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that the sequencing of children plays a significant role in advancement.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adds to: Eddy (2008), Mason &amp; Goulden (2002), and Eddy &amp; Cox (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For faculty, children are postponed until degree completion or tenure; for women presidents, advancement was postponed until families were raised or partners had retired</td>
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### Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Old Boy’s Club”</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Most women reported that they did not experience discrimination based on their gender, although most were able to give instances of sexism.</td>
<td>Supports: Booth (2000), Dieringer (2007), Shingles (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the finding that women tend to under report or deny discrimination, but recognize exclusion from male networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Most reported instances of exclusion occurred after the women were elevated to head athletic trainer when they tried to enter conference administrative meetings.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The also had the sense that they had to prove themselves.</td>
<td>Supports: Eagly &amp; Carli (2007), Tarr-Whelan (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overcoming Barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Coincidentally preparing themselves for the position, through their strong work ethic.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Seeking and enjoying new challenges.</td>
<td>Original to Gorant (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Emphasizes the need for more flexible work designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women do not seek out recognition so encouragement from others is vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support here often found within mentoring roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The women reported the primary role of their mentors to be one of psychological support and knowledge acquisition. Few described mentors which would fill a career advancement role.</td>
<td>Supports: Furesik’s (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentoring lack career advancement strategies and support</td>
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</table>
As disclosed in the results section, before this study I was certain that I would find a group of women who might be married but not women who were also mothers. I asked myself why I felt so strongly about this, and then I realized that I truly did believe or accept what I had been told by my peers, that a woman could not take on this kind of responsibility and be a mother. I know that I am not alone, as the four other women in this study also believed that they could not do both. As a professional working with young athletic training students, I now strive to not mentor my female students away from advancement and instead continue to show them what is now possible.

**Career Path and Common Experiences**

The career path to the head athletic training position seemed to be very consistent among the participants. Whether there is a difference between male athletic trainers and female athletic trainers in the number of positions held prior to reaching the head position or the amount of time required to reach the position of head athletic trainer is not known, since there are no contributing studies to use as comparison. In Malasarn et al. (2002), the expert male athletic trainers had been practicing in the field for an average of 29 years. The study presented a variety of different work settings for the expert male athletic trainer, but it did not give a direct line of advancement or the time line for this advancement. I found that the women head athletic trainers in the current study had held an average of 3.3 different positions (including title changes within the same institution). Some researchers (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000; Yap & Konrad, 2009) have suggested that women may be promoted more quickly than their male counterparts, but again, with the lack of information regarding the males in this field, it cannot be determined. Clearly, all the women spent the majority of their time in intercollegiate athletics and all served as
an assistant before taking on the responsibilities of head athletic trainer. None of the women came from outside of intercollegiate athletics to assume the head job. These experiences are similar to those of the men in Malasarn et al.’s study.

Booth (2000) suggested in her work that a woman’s lack of mobility or the inability to control one’s mobility for professional gain was a barrier to advancement. I found that only one participant had spent her entire career at one institution. The other participants had spent time at a minimum of two institutions. Again, I found it impossible to determine if this was common or uncommon in the field of athletic training. What was interesting was that six of the women were promoted from within when assuming the head athletic trainer position, and the seventh was recruited back to an institution where she had previously worked. Again, how this relates to male head athletic trainers cannot be determined, but it would suggest that women are more likely to advance when they have a level of familiarity with the work setting.

What I found to be missing from the participants’ discussion on career path was the existence of a career plan. None of the women expressed that any of the career moves up the ladder were part of a predetermined plan to ascend to the position of head athletic trainer. The women appeared to make career moves based on personal preferences and opportunities, more than timed and planned career changes. The moves were far more opportunistic than calculated. I would argue that this was most likely due to low aspiration for promotion. This lack of intention then appears to be a barrier itself to the advancement of women in the field of athletic training. This secondary effect of low aspiration for the head athletic training position may further complicate this already imposing hurdle.
Lack of Intentionality to Career Path

The career path to promotion was one that appears to be more opportunistic than calculated and mimics that found in female educators (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006). The women in this study did not pursue the position. They did not see their advancement up career ranks as a stepping stone to further promotion. Although they all excelled in their assistant positions, they did not see the extra hours and increasing responsibility as a necessary step to ascend to their current position. For the most part, the women in this investigation felt very lucky to have been promoted. This sense of luck is not unique to the women mentioned in the academy or the study of women leaders in general. Fels (2004) found the same phenomenon in highly successful women of all professions. She attributes this to not only a woman’s unwillingness to receive recognition, but a woman’s willingness to relinquish it to others.

The participants in this investigation are not unlike those in the educational leadership research by Eddy (2008). Eddy coined the term lack of intentionality to describe the opportunistic way women in her study acquired their position as president of a community college. In a similar study looking at the advancement of middle managers to senior level positions in English universities, Doherty and Manfredi (2006) found the “opportunistic nature” of the way the women advanced in their positions to be very disturbing. They found it even more disturbing that these women continued to have no aspiration to advance, but were planning to stay in their positions until retirement. This was in sharp contrast to the men who were planning to progress to higher levels. This is all independent of the fact that the women were equally qualified, advanced in the same time frame as their male counterparts (if not more quickly), and indeed were younger.
In this investigation, the women did appear to follow a similar and appropriate path of advancement to the position of head athletic trainer. What was apparent was that the path was not intentionally planned. Two of the women spoke about aspiring to a different position, but only one related that she did intend to one day become a head athletic trainer. None of the women in this study mentioned any intention of advancing in their administrative role within the athletic department. (It should also be noted that the women were not asked what their future intentions are, but one participant commented that she did not aspire to athletic administration.) This study supports the work by Doherty and Manfredi (2006), Eddy and Cox (2008), and Fels (2004).

The findings here suggest that the unintentional career path taken by these women is another barrier to their advancement. If this is the case, it is then important to examine the transcripts for themes to help understand how the participants were able to overcome this barrier. Recall from the section on personal traits that all participants showed leadership skills and had prepared themselves, even though this was not a conscious intention (coincidental preparedness). What seemed to propel them up the career ladder were their common personality traits of a strong work ethic, a quiet confidence, and, finally, the willingness to accept a new challenge.

A strong work ethic was a common trait found among all head athletic trainers, both male (Malasarn et al.’s, 2002) and female. The women here demonstrated how they dedicated themselves to their positions and described how they valued this trait in others. The common theme was often defined as a willingness to put in the necessary time and not watch the clock. I found that it was this relationship with time that bridges any gaps between male and female athletic trainers. Work ethic was a common theme found in
Malasarn et al.’s (2002) study of the expert male collegiate head athletic trainer. Malasarn stated, “The work ethic and philosophies of the participants have resulted in the development of a great passion for their work” (p. 59). It is interesting to see how closely Brandy’s and Beth’s earlier comments were mirrored by a participant in Malasarn’s study (ATC 2) when he said:

For the last 15 years, I haven’t worn a watch. The job has never been about how much time I spend at work. I go to work, do my job, and go home when everything is done. If you start looking at the clock and worrying about the fact that you’re putting in 14 to 15 hours a day you won’t last very long. (p. 59)

A strong work ethic is clearly a characteristic valued by all athletic trainers. The participants were willing to accept additional responsibilities within their professional life, which contributed to their preparation. According to Fels (2004), this preparation and increased knowledge base then contributes to a woman’s willingness to pursue promotion. Their ability to acknowledge this in themselves helped them to accept the challenge once it was presented to them, but only after it was recognized by others.

To summarize, the women in this investigation reported that they did not aspire to the position of head athletic trainer, yet, almost unconsciously, they were able to navigate through barriers, many of which they did not even perceive. Strong personal traits helped them to be natural leaders even though they did not aspire to promotion. If an unintentional career path can be attributed to low aspiration, I suggest that the strongest theme regarding the barriers to advancement may indeed be low aspiration and, in some instances, a complete lack of aspiration for advancement.
Barriers to Advancement

Low aspiration, the family division of labor, and the “old boy’s club” persisted as the most common barriers to the advancement of women in this investigation. These barriers were identified in the literature review as the most common across all disciplines. This finding was somewhat surprising; I felt that with such a high achieving population this would not be the case. I found low aspiration was the strongest barrier to the advancement of the participants. This was followed by the family division of labor and, finally, the “old boy’s club.” Within this section, I discuss each of these barriers independently, how the barriers are placed in the literature, as well as how these women were able to overcome the barriers.

Barrier I: Low aspiration. The strongest theme that emerged from this investigation on barriers was not one that the women were able to self-identify, but one that emerged from all but one of the transcripts. Six of the seven women, at one time or another in the interview, directly stated or strongly implied that they never wanted to be the head athletic trainer. From the literature review, I knew that the lack of aspiration to high rank is not restricted to the field of athletic training. In Eddy’s (2008) and Eddy and Cox’s (2008) study, the women presidents reported that they too did not aspire to high rank. Eddy and Cox referred to this as a “lack of intentionality.” Wolverton and Gonzales’ (2000) article reported that only 23% of female deans intended to seek higher rank. Doherty and Manfredi (2006) found the same low aspiration in female professors’ ascent into senior university positions. This was in sharp contrast to the men in Doherty and Manfredi’s study, who continued to plan their future advancement.
Another interesting theme was that the women who chose a more “work-centered” lifestyle also did not seem to be any more likely to aspire to high rank than their more “adaptive” counterparts. Five participants never sought to pursue similar positions and did not consider such a position until this position was presented to them. Most women reported that they were content in their role as assistant athletic trainer or head women’s athletic trainer. The question remains, why would women who bypassed family obligations for career not aspire to promotion?

To answer this question, it was important to examine the transcripts for clues as to why women may not aspire. There were some probing questions, mostly regarding why young females do not appear to aspire to their position, but some of the responses came directly from their own experiences describing why they themselves did not aspire to head athletic trainer.

Emergent themes that seem to deter women from pursuing advancement in the field of athletic training and influence low aspiration are the responsibility of working football; the increased administrative responsibilities coupled with the decreased contact with athletes and student athletic trainers; and, finally, a lack of confidence in leadership skills, most predominantly decision making. Since the responsibilities of football were described clearly in the results section and so few of the women in this study were working football, this section focuses on the latter two influences.

*Responsibilities of the job and loss of contact with students.* This investigation showed that the position of head athletic trainer was not a position that these women felt was unattainable because of their gender, but it now appears that the position was one that they did not wish to pursue. The women unanimously felt that their administrative
paperwork and the role of the administrator was their least favorite part of their job. The most enjoyable part of their day was the time spent working directly with their sports and the athletes involved in those sports. This sentiment is very similar to the one expressed by the women who had ascended to the position of Dean in Wolverton and Gonzales’ (2000) study: not only did they not intend to pursue any advancement, but many felt that they would return to teaching full-time prior to retirement rather than pursue promotion. This was attributed to the fact that the women missed the connection to the students and their primary research interests.

This type of attachment to part or all of a job may leave women with a lack of aspiration for advancement. Ruderman and Ohlott (2004) explained that women strive to find “authenticity” in their lives and work. To do this, women seek alignment between what they value personally and professionally in their work roles. If women value the relationships that they form working with students and athletes, they are less likely to pursue promotions that would take them away from these experiences and, worse yet, into more responsibilities that they value the least. Tannen (1994) suggested that women are less motivated by title and salary than their male counterparts. Modern literature in women’s leadership shows that this assumption persists. Eagly and Carli (2007) found that women and men are now similar in job aspirations once considered to be masculine. Women now closely aspire to increased earnings, leadership, promotions, and autonomy, but the remaining difference between the sexes is a woman’s desire for more flexible hours and the ability to work with and help others. Women are still willing to forfeit their career aspirations for the latter. The detachment from these positive work roles may well be enough for women to choose to not pursue advancement.
A similar phenomenon was also reported in the academy by Gleeson and Knights (2008). They found that female professors were reluctant to pursue leadership positions because they preferred to stay in touch with their subject of interest, their students, and their own pedagogic values and identities. The female head athletic trainers all appeared to be connected personally to the roles that they had prior to the head position, and all seemed happy and satisfied. This makes promotion a less valued alternative. These findings are consistent with Hakim’s (2000), who argued that women are making choices both in their profession as well as in their lifestyle preference outside of work. However, none of the women in this investigation related that they felt their low aspiration was due to lifestyle outside of work, as all appeared to be “work-centered”; rather, they were choosing a work preference.

Reluctance to lead. The next strongest theme that appeared showed that the women in this investigation may have been reluctant to take on the leadership role of a head athletic trainer. They seemed to be most averse to the thought that all the problems come to the leader’s door, and that when taking the position, they would have the final decision on tough issues. At first, I did not get the sense that they were uncomfortable with making the decision, but were more uncomfortable with the decision-making process. The women seemed to want to be able to confer and lead in a more transformational manner before making a decision. It appears that they were judging their style of leadership by the traditional hierarchical model of leadership, in which decisions are handed down from the top. Here, the women did not appreciate how effective the transformational model of leadership can be and seemed to abandon it for the more traditional model. Eagly and Carli (2007) described this same phenomenon and found it
to be most prevalent in male-dominated professions where women tend to lead in isolation, absent from female role models and mentors.

This move to a new leadership style seemed to be one of the most difficult barriers to overcome once the women attained the position of head athletic trainer. The participants were under the assumption that this was how leadership at this position had to be. This is not uncommon; when women choose to lead in a more transformational manner, it is often mistaken as a lack of confidence in their own decision-making ability. Eagly and Carli (2007) explained that when women assume leadership roles in male dominated environments, they tend to adopt the same leadership style as their predecessor and counterparts. The quotations presented earlier suggest this. What I cannot determine is whether this indeed leads to feelings of lower self-confidence that prevent women from wanting to apply for promotion.

The transition of leadership style may not be the only precursor to the lack of self-confidence. Three women in the study clearly stated that women tend not to give themselves enough credit. First, it is important to understand that this is a different phenomenon than not being able to envision themselves fitting into this role. Again, when the values of the job do not align with personal values, the job becomes unattractive. This does not mean that a woman considers herself unable to perform the task. The disengagement with the position aligns with the decision to not take on football as a responsibility or not wanting to give up contact with the student athlete. It makes the decision not to advance one of preference.

This phenomenon of devaluing their abilities leads women to feel, in some way, unprepared or inadequate. The root then of this may indeed be more cultural. Fels (2004)
found that professional ambition was tied to two factors: first, the acquisition of a skill set and, second, the ability to accept recognition for these skills. Fels feels that women are raised to shun recognition and even allow others to take the recognition for their accomplishments. This then leads women to devalue their own preparedness for promotion, leaving them unwilling to pursue advancement. I found the women in this study perceived that they were not quite prepared for the task of head athletic trainer. Two recognized that they and other women tend not to give themselves enough credit. One participant even disclosed that she was surprised that the advancement happened so quickly; she felt she had not prepared enough.

What keeps women from aspiring is the most important question yet to be considered. Although these women spoke about not envisioning themselves in this position, some of the reasons for lack of aspiration did start to emerge. The literature review pointed to the lack of role models and gendered social traits as the root of low aspiration. The results of this investigation lead me to believe that, even though the roots may be gender-based, the manifestations of this may, in fact, be caused by a devaluing of one’s accomplishments or the perceived responsibilities being unappealing to women. If young female athletic trainers are able to reverse this perception, with the help of the women in this investigation, then maybe women will be encouraged to consider leadership as a viable option.

**Overcoming low aspiration: Aspiring to new challenges.** As discussed in the results section, the women in this investigation were innately hard workers and self-confident. These two characteristics were vital in the progression of these women through the career path. First, these traits made them attractive candidates when applying for
positions, but it appears that they also were important in making the jobs with greater responsibilities more attractive to these women.

When the positions were presented to the women, most commented that the job no longer seemed unattractive, but one that was positively filled with new challenges. Two of the three women who had served as women’s head athletic trainers, seemed to be continuously in search of a new challenge. Some reported being bored or felt they had accomplished this and now it was time to move on. In the Eddy and Cox (2008) article, the authors found that the women presidents were willing to accept the new challenges, because they possessed a “desire to be in a position where the ultimate decisions were made” (p. 75).

When asked why women did not pursue high rank, the head athletic trainers felt that most women were reluctant to take on the responsibility of the final decision. These women learned to embrace the role of leader and decision maker. Eddy and Cox (2008) found that the women in their study, like the women in this study, had the confidence in themselves that allowed them to envision themselves in the typically male role. Eddy and Cox attributed this to the women having a clear understanding of their own strengths and the hierarchy within which they worked. Each study demonstrates an “internal desire to move up in responsibility based on her awareness of her ability to do the job” (p. 75). In Eddy (2008), one female president insinuated that when one feels that she can do the job better than her supervisor, it is time to move on.

**Designer job.** A completely unique contribution to the work on women aspiring to leadership is the idea that the women came to the realization that the position was not set in stone, but could be altered to provide more work/life balance. All of the women
have made changes to the position that they now hold. When examining the literature, this concept appears to be missing. In Eddy and Cox (2008), the women postponed their advancement until their children were older or until their husbands retired. This means that the women adapted to the role as it was presented; there is no mention of any alterations to the role of president in order to improve work/life balance. As I expanded my search into women’s leadership, this concept of the altering of responsibilities was considered only as to how it relates to the family division of labor and less to work/lifestyle preference. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested that as men become more involved in the upbringing of the children, they are more willing to propose and accept changes to job responsibilities to improve time spent with family. The key may be that these changes are gender-neutral, so that males can benefit as well as females.

In this study, two women made significant changes to the role of head athletic trainer in order for the position to become more attractive. Two participants were able to negotiate a change in job description before assuming the position. Here the women had the foresight to initiate change, but this was not always the case.

For some of the women, their institutions first initiated the role change. This was done by removing football from the responsibilities or merging two separate departments into one. Once hired, most women also altered their position. In some instances this called for the hiring of additional staff to improve both their position and the quality of care of the athlete. This is an important point. The change to the position may not have been initiated by these women to improve their own lot, but may have been initiated to improve the care of the athletes. At this time it is difficult to distinguish which was the primary motivator. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested that when women change job
descriptions to improve their own lot it appears selfish, but if it is tied to the benefit of others, it appears giving and considerate.

All but one of the women found that they did not have to copy the job description of their predecessor, but all seven women made adjustments in their job responsibilities so they had more time to attend to administrative duties, allow for more work/life balance, and, in some instances, spend more time with family. Most chose to work sports with less demanding seasons and travel schedules, but all continued to prioritize the time that they did spend with their teams and their athletes. Most appeared able to balance the job with their outside interests and have developed some boundaries to their schedules and have delegated some of the administrative tasks.

These women were able to make the position whatever they needed it to be. It can be more or less administrative. It does not have to include football, and it can change depending on one’s circumstances. There are tasks that all head athletic trainers must do, such as supervising staff and handling some of the administrative side of the job, but the rest can be altered to fit the needs of the head trainer, the institution, and his or her personal life. Similar findings in the literature review were absent.

Encouragement from others. Thus far in this chapter, I have discussed the intrinsic qualities of the women that helped to prepare them for the title that they now hold, but equally as important was the extrinsic factor that was common among these women. As discussed in Chapter IV, for the majority of these women, someone approached and encouraged them to pursue the position. Some were actively recruited and would not have applied for this position if it had not been made available to them. For others, the impetus was less direct, but still effective. This external force was
important to each of these women and may have been the most significant factor in the promotion of the women who did not initially aspire to the role of head athletic trainer.

Eddy (2008) found this to be a motivator as well. In her article, she focused more on the support of others, mostly in mentoring roles, or being directly recruited for the position of president. Eddy did not provide instances like those found in this study where the women were encouraged to apply by others not related to the search committees. In Eddy’s article, the importance of appropriate mentoring was vital in the climb of the women presidents, but in this study, it appears that a single comment at the right time can make all the difference in the world.

Researchers in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fels, 2004; Wilson, 2006) have found that since women are reluctant to ask for recognition for their accomplishments, acknowledgment from others is vital. Wilson clarifies this point: “Everyone knows at least one woman who should be urged to follow her dream, a woman who is utterly capable of being more than she is if only she were given encouragement” (Wilson, 2006, p. 86). The encouragement to apply was not an acknowledgment for talents that they did not see in themselves, but more a confirmation that others saw the same strengths that they had acknowledged in themselves. Wilson further explained that encouragement is not enough for most women. Once recognized, ambition must be nurtured by mentors and through the distribution of knowledge and tools they need to lead. The importance of mentors is discussed in a following section.

**Barrier II: Family division of labor/work-life balance.** This investigation reveals that the family division of labor is a significant contributor to the low number of women serving in the position of head athletic trainer. All of the participants reported that
this was a barrier to a woman’s advancement in the field of athletic training. It is very hard to lose the image of the head athletic trainer spending endless hours in the athletic training facility and working directly with a sport with which they travel. This stereotype comes into direct conflict with the stereotype of a wife and/or mother. It is difficult to picture a scenario in which a woman can do both.

Of concern was the finding that female head athletic trainers still struggle with retaining women on their staffs after the women start families. Two women reported trying to work with women on their staffs to retain them after marrying or having children, but were not able to find a mutually satisfying alternative. It appears it was difficult to break the old molds and consider alternatives for their women assistants.

Others have tried to offer support to both their male and female staff members in an attempt to retain quality personnel. Until enough good examples exist of women stepping out of traditional roles and filling more leadership roles while children are young, this will be a difficult problem to overcome. On a positive note, this study does provide three examples of women who were able to do both.

Like the studies on women presidents (Eddy, 2008; Eddy & Cox, 2008), sequencing seems to play a role, but the timing for each of the three women was quite different. The women presidents described postponing their advancement in college administration while they raised their families or even waited for their husbands to retire. This is the most traditional pattern of sequencing found in the literature review, which, for many women, makes advancement to the higher ranks impossible because there is so little time before retirement. The next most common sequencing found in the literature was to postpone family until certain professional goals were met. This was common
among the young professorate who postponed children until after they had achieved their terminal degree or even tenure (Mason & Goulden, 2002). The three women in this study each followed a different path to the position of head athletic trainer and mother.

One participant followed the more traditional path of postponing career and advancement until she felt that her children would not be affected. This follows the model of the female junior college presidents (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Chris’s model for sequencing work and family is closer to the female faculty members who postpone children and marriage until they have completed a career goal, like tenure (Mason & Goulden, 2002). The final participant’s example of completely changing the format of a position after having her first child is unique and was not found in any other investigation.

This question of sequencing of work and family is unique to the field of athletic training. Unlike other professions, no clear sequence appeared to benefit the women in this study. The women here were able to demonstrate that work and children can coexist in the profession of athletic training at any stage. Women should not be forced to choose one or the other. Three women in this study were able to overcome the barrier of the family division of labor by adapting the job, or by timing their advancement to fit their family’s needs.

The conflict of work and family balance is one that continues to stifle the profession of athletic training. In order to try to ease this conflict, the profession has moved away from the one or two certified athletic trainers who cover all sports. Today, programs with larger staffs offer some relief in the time commitment. Part of this is due
to a push from the NATA to decrease the high attrition rate of both male and female athletic trainers. This also results in superior care for the athletes.

As athletic training grows as a profession and more families are two-career families, athletic trainers must realize that women are now viable candidates for promotion and may be the primary wage earner. All athletic trainers must eliminate the stereotype that a wife and mother cannot be a leader. Many women may choose not to progress within their profession, this is not always the case.

**Barrier III: “Old boy’s club.”** The women in this investigation reported no incidences of discrimination or sexual harassment. I found this to be similar to the participants in Shingles’ (2001) study, who reported only physical abuse as sexual harassment and tended to overlook other less direct verbal harassment. One woman made an interesting observation that she had never really stretched her boundaries and realized that she never pursued a position that might have led to more discrimination. In this study, none of the women attempted to break into male professional sports. Some of the women reported crossing over and helping with male sports, most notably football, but this was never their primary responsibility before taking the head position. The lack of experience with male sports did not disqualify the women athletic trainers from advancing to the head position. Unlike the role of athletic director, the lack of football experience was not a limiting factor in advancement.

Although few descriptions of discriminatory behavior were given through the career path, three women did described instances of gender-linked behavior following the acceptance of the position. Most acknowledged a lack of respect from their peers and a period of proving themselves to their coaches and physicians that they felt would not
have been necessary if they were male. The lack of inclusion demonstrated by their head athletic trainer peers was not a unique experience. Female college presidents reported similar instances (Eddy & Cox, 2008). What is encouraging is that all the women reported that they no longer experience these problems. They were able to overcome this barrier through persistence and determination. They did not accept or allow the “old boy’s club” to exclude them.

The women in this study were promoted due to a strong work ethic and a natural leadership mentality. The unintentional career path did not adversely impact their advancement. All but one participant did not aspire to the position of head athletic trainer. The women in this study all faced challenges with work/life balance, even those without the responsibilities of family. Interestingly, the head athletic trainers without the conflict of marriage and children found it difficult to retain women on their staffs. All of the women reported only minimal negative experiences resulting from discrimination, but most described a career path primarily within woman’s athletics or sports lower in prestige.

The Role of Mentoring

The women in this study were able to clearly describe their mentors. Six participants described mentors from both genders. Like their male counterparts, women reported mentors from other professions, like physicians and educators. The most striking difference to the literature on mentoring is that the role of the mentor was far more psychological in nature. The role was one in which the mentors offered support and helped to build confidence in the basic skills of the athletic trainer. This style of mentoring was also found in Furesik’s (2005) study on mentoring in athletic training.
There were very few examples in the text of the mentors filling career development roles. This could be a major contributor to the lack of women who advance in the field of athletic training.

The women athletic trainers did see themselves as mentors, but they were not able to communicate any mentoring strategies other than leading by example. This could be a clear vision of how these women were mentored themselves. As discussed, this is not an uncommon response and is also a valuable technique of mentoring. The importance of their position should not be lost, as they now serve as role models to others. The lack of female role models was presented by other authors (Anderson, 1991; Dieringer, 2007; Shingles, 2001) as a predominant hurdle to a woman’s advancement in athletic training. I believe that this study supports this work and reinforces a lack of knowledge in the profession on proper mentoring.

Tarr-Whelan (2009) and Wilson (2006) have emphasized the importance of mentoring to the advancement of women. They encourage everyone at every level to seek mentors and to realize that mentors do not have to be superiors but can come from any level and any area. They also emphasize the importance of recognizing yourself as a mentor. Rather than waiting for someone to ask for your advice, it is sometimes necessary to go and find young professionals who show ambition or possess exceptional promise. This is especially important to women who may be devaluing their skills. The NATA has made several attempts to connect successful women to young female professionals but have found only limited success. A better plan may be to add mentoring training into the graduate curricula of athletic training. Wilson has shown that proper training in mentorship and leadership can successfully promote future leaders.
If nothing else, those in leadership positions should make every attempt not to mentor women away from leadership positions. The women in this study repeatedly heard, and some even said, that one cannot be a wife and mother and still lead an athletic training program. Three examples in this study show that this is not true.

**The Role of Networking**

From this study, I have come to understand that networking may not play as big a role in career advancement for women as it does for their male counterparts. The women in this study were primarily hired within the organization for which they worked or had worked in the past. Networking was a valuable tool for these women when they were pursuing their assistant athletic training positions. The women all reported having larger networks early in their careers and that their networks have declined in number and scope as they have persisted in the fields.

Most studies on networking occur within middle management of some type of corporate institution. The lack of research in the field of athletic training makes close comparison difficult and the complexity and uniqueness of the field of athletic training makes comparisons sketchy at best. Athletic trainers in general are a relatively close-knit group of people. As the number of athletic trainers continues to grow, however, the need for better organizational networking discussions may be important. I found it a bit surprising that none of these women are connected with professional networks outside of their conference. Perhaps membership in these groups occurs earlier in one’s career or will be picked up again later. This study does suggest that networking may be the area that women neglect in order to balance their other work/personal life responsibilities.
Preference Theory

Preference theory in this investigation was initially used to identify a group of women who could shine a light on roadblocks encountered by work-centered women. Hakim (2000, 2006) contended that “work-centered” women are the most likely to advance to high rank. Research has demonstrated that, for women, the family division of labor and discrimination are the most likely hurdles for working women to overcome. Hakim found that work-centered women were the least likely to have a family, eliminating this barrier from the population.

I found that the women in this study did not fit neatly into any category. First, three of the seven women were married and had children. This was very surprising considering the demands of the job. When placing them into Hakim’s (2000, 2006) “adaptive” group, the range of work orientation seems to be too broad. After reading the transcripts, I see that all of the married women in this study are indeed work-oriented. This does not mean that they value their families less than other women, but they do appear to dedicate many hours a day to the profession, and they do so because they have chosen to do so. In the “adaptive” group, Hakim included women who prioritize family over work in the same category; these women work only because they have to, primarily for financial reasons.

The range of women in the “adaptive” category then is very broad. This category spans from work-oriented women who arrange their family responsibilities equally around their work responsibilities, to women who are family-oriented and seek employment responsibilities that fit their priority of family. Some women in this category would opt for a family-exclusive orientation if the financial obligation was eliminated.
I also found it interesting that the women who fit into the “work-centered” category could not completely escape the barriers related to the family division of labor. The “work-centered” women in the study reported barriers related to having to care for, or help, members of their immediate families. As a result, some chose positions related to proximity to family to handle caretaker responsibilities. Another discussed how the time and responsibilities of helping a family member can take away time from the position. This investigation supports Hakim’s (2000, 2006) theory that women make career choices based on family orientation, but the spectrum on which some women are categorized may be too broad to present a clear picture of a woman’s choices.

In preference theory, Hakim (2000, 2006) relates that women in the “work-centered” category are more likely to aspire to high rank. This investigation calls this into question. I found that the women who were “work-centered” appeared to be only slightly more likely to aspire to high rank than the “adaptive” participants. Only one woman aspired to be head athletic trainer, and she fit into the “work-centered” group and chose to bypass family.

Finally, I believe that Hakim (2000, 2006) may have disregarded an important point when considering a woman’s decision to pursue employment. Hakim contended that women choose to seek employment based purely on preference. My results suggest that a woman’s level of self-confidence may influence her willingness to pursue promotion. Some participants in this investigation offered the opinion that women may devalue their contributions and talents, leading them to feel unprepared to initiate the next step. The fact that the participants all related that the encouragement of others played a role in their advancement supports this theory. This scenario that self-assessment may
prohibit the willingness to seek advancement by women is absent from Hakim’s work.

Hakim maintained that women make advancement decisions based simply on work/life balance or preference.

**Connecting the Themes**

As I examined the themes that emerged from this study, I was struck by the importance of the low aspiration. I suggest that low aspiration is the most imposing hurdle for women in the field of athletic training. I believe this is the case because of the influence that it then renders on the other themes (see Figure 1). When a woman does not aspire to high rank, not only would she not place her name into consideration for advancement, but she may even communicate to her supervisors that she does not want to advance.

![Figure 1](image-url)

*Figure 1.* Cycle model of the consequences of low aspiration. When one does not aspire for advancement one does not advocate for promotion. One may even express a desire to stay in their current position. This then affects the mentoring style of the mentor, so that career advancement strategies are not utilized. Because of the lack of mentoring for advancement, women continue to feel unprepared which feeds back to continued low aspiration.
This could then have negative effects on how this person is mentored. I suggest that a possible mentoring relationship is derailed. This helps to explain why the women in this study received so little career advancement mentoring. Why mentor someone who has no aspiration to advance? Once the mentoring relationship breaks down, the women, unless highly motivated, would not ask for or be given additional responsibilities that would prepare them for advancement. This then leads to a coincidental career path without proper knowledge acquisition. Fels (2004) demonstrated that ambition first requires the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of skills. With these absent, women continue to feel unprepared for advancement, which results in continued low aspiration. This is a devastating cycle that may trap many women.

The women in this investigation were able to escape the cycle through their strong work ethic. They volunteered and accepted additional responsibilities, which led to their preparedness. Because they had developed the necessary skill set, they began to envision themselves in this position, or they were at least able to see themselves in this position once it was presented to them. It is important to recognize that each woman still needed the encouragement from another before placing her name into consideration or accepting the position of head athletic trainer. The women’s actions also support Fels (2004) in that the women required the recognition or confirmation of their skill set before aspiring.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study and the discussion above, I present the following implications and recommendations for action. The first implication in the future advancement of women in the field of athletic training is the suggestion that female athletic trainers, most notably those early in their careers, do not aspire to the
position of head athletic trainer. Thus, low aspiration is a major barrier to the advancement of women in athletic training to high rank. Thus, the National Athletic Trainers Association must begin work to combat this.

One suggestion for action is to initiate a culture where the majority of women do not feel the need to opt out. This can be accomplished by rewarding creativity in job description and job responsibilities. Another suggestion is to provide supervisors with a new skill set in the management of female assistant athletic trainers. This new skill set must include seemingly small changes like pointing out employees’ strengths, encouraging advancement, and offering increased responsibility. Finally, I recommend that institutions consider lengthening maternity leaves, allowing women (and men) to return to work after one academic year. Interim positions would allow continuity of care for the athletes, allow female (and male) athletic trainers to avoid the complications of travel during that first year, and provide young female or male trainers with a year of paid experience.

The next implication is that novice female athletic trainers do not have a clear sense of the traditional career path, nor do they receive the proper mentoring to navigate it. Therefore, it is imperative that the professional preparation of athletic training students include career path instruction. In addition, athletic training faculty, preceptors, and/or advisors should be trained in proper mentoring, specifically, on career development. For example, topics on mentoring should be offered as part of regularly required preceptor training sessions or incorporated into master’s-level educational programs.

My final implication is that female athletic trainers do not possess innate confidence in their leadership skills, or they feel unprepared to take the leadership roles.
Thus, it is important that athletic training educators begin to incorporate leadership training into the graduate athletic training programs. As 70% of all athletic trainers possess a master’s degree, this may serve to help young female athletic trainers begin to envision themselves in these leadership positions. The women will also benefit from the introduction to transformational leadership, a style that they should feel more comfortable implementing.

**Future Studies**

Using this study as a foundation, I make four recommendations for future research. First, future research should examine the magnitude of low aspiration in women pursuing a career in athletic training and truly understand how this differs from men. Second, future research should examine, from an organizational perspective, how male and female athletic trainers differ in their understanding of career path and determine if women advance at a different rate than their male counterparts. Next, researchers should apply Hakim’s preference theory to other women leaders (or those just below top leadership) in higher education and other professions to look at the breadth of the low aspiration issue. Finally, studies should examine more closely how the mentoring of women and men may differ, looking specifically at whether males in athletic training receive mentoring in career development skills, which were found to be lacking in this investigation. It must also be determined if women are actually mentored away from advancement in athletic training because of the perceived conflicts with family and the demands of the profession.
Conclusion

The original purpose of this investigation was to examine the lived experiences of eight female head athletic trainers in NCAA Division I (IA football) institutions who have ascended into high-ranking leadership roles; that purpose has been met. The women’s discussion of their experiences lead to the identification of strong important themes to further consider. First, the women in this study did not fit into the work preference models presented by Hakim (2000, 2006). The most significant contrast was that the women did not aspire to advancement as Hakim alluded to in the “work-centered” model. It would be difficult to argue that the women in this investigation were not “work-centered,” but they lacked the aspiration for advancement that was presented as an attribute of the group by Hakim.

In this investigation, three significant barriers to advancement were identified: low aspiration, the family division of labor, and the discrimination of the “old boy’s club.” What I found to be unique to this investigation was that low aspiration appeared to be an equally strong barrier as family division of labor and discrimination, which were typically highlighted in other studies. I am left with the sense that other studies did not appreciate the magnitude of this barrier. Importantly, the study demonstrated how low aspiration then affects the intentionality (or “unintentionally”) of one’s career path.

The study also demonstrated that women in the field of athletic training may not suffer from just low aspiration for advancement, but also from a complete lack of aspiration to advance. Here the study identified three possible reasons, not related to discrimination, why women may not want to proceed. First was an aversion to working football; next, an aversion to the job responsibilities of head athletic trainer; and, finally,
a reluctance to lead. The first two reasons support Hakim’s preference theory, but the final reason for low aspiration is not based on preference.

Unique to this study was the identification of personal attributes that aided the women in their ability to advance. Their strong personal traits made them successful and supported their growth as leaders. They then received encouragement and advice from others, which they internalized, and began to look at the position of head athletic trainer in a new light. Instead of seeing the position as unattractive, these women now saw a challenge and an opportunity for growth. In most cases, they began to see the position as something other than traditional, and one they could change and improve.

When examining mentoring, I felt that the women in this study were not mentored in a manner that would promote advancement. They all could easily describe mentoring relationships that enhanced their abilities to treat the athletes, but only a few were able to give examples of career development mentorship strategies. This is a very troublesome finding, especially when combined with the declining professional networks the women described as they advanced.

This study describes a clear portrait of the women who have advanced to the position of head athletic trainer, the barriers that they have faced, and how they were able to overcome them. The dearth of women in this position makes the insights of these seven women invaluable. Examining these findings helps to provide suggestions for athletic training leaders and educators regarding the training and mentoring of young female athletic trainers. Lastly, this investigation contributes to the work of Anderson (1991), Booth (2000), Dieringer (2007), and Shingles (2001) in documenting the history of women in the profession of athletic training and the role that women play in it.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Email Recruitment Letter to Head Athletic Trainers
Hello,

My name is JoAnne Gorant MS ATC and I am requesting your participation in a research investigation entitled, Profiles of High Ranking Women in Athletic Training: Their Career Path and Experiences. It is the purpose of this phenomenological investigation to examine the career path and experiences that led to your being hired as a NCAA Division I (1A) Head Athletic Trainer. As a Program Director and Western Michigan University doctoral student, I see female students enter with lofty aspirations but with no realistic idea of how to make their aspirations a reality or how to overcome the barriers they will encounter in order to attain their goals. It is my hope that through these conversations we can better prepare women to ascend into high rank in this profession.

I am inviting you to take part in a semi-structured open-ended in-depth interview that is approximately 45 to 90 minutes in length. I would like to arrange for the interview to take place at the Renaissance Suites Hotel (827 Washington Avenue) in St. Louis, MO at the NATA National Convention. If you are not attending the national convention a telephone interview can be arranged.

You were chosen for this investigation by your listing in the 2007-2008 National Directory of College Athletics and the criterion of this investigation is that you are now serving as Head Athletic Trainer at your institution. Although the data will be confidential, because of the small purposeful sample and the criterion set for this investigation, it may be easy to identify the women who are taking part in the study. You will be given a pseudonym and every attempt will be made to remove identifying dialog from the future write-ups so your comments should not identify you directly. You will also be given the opportunity to view the transcripts and confirm and clarify any information obtained. The transcripts will be emailed to you within 30 days following the interview.

Please take the time to consider taking part in this investigation. I will be following up this email with a telephone call to arrange a time to explain more about the study if you are interested. If there is a time of day which is best for me to contact you please reply to this email with the details. If you choose not to participate perhaps you can recommend someone else who would be interested in participating. I can also answer any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you, for your time and consideration,

JoAnne Gorant MS ATC

Student Investigator

Western Michigan University
Appendix B

Follow-up Telephone Script
Telephone Script

Hello, _____________________ this is JoAnne Gorant and I am following up on an email that I sent to you last week. I am a doctoral student working on a research project entitled: Profiles of High Ranking Women in Athletic Training: Their Career Path and Experiences. You were invited to take part in this investigation because of your current position of Head Athletic Trainer at a NCAA Division 1(1A) institution.

Were you able to read this email?

If no: read the email to her.

If yes: Fantastic, as the email stated it is my hope that you will take part in this investigation to help clarify the career path to young female athletic trainers as well as identify important experiences that you have encountered to better prepare them for their journey. As you know the investigation will be confidential but because of the criterion set for the investigation it may be easy for others to tell that you may have taken part in this investigation. I want you to know that all identifying information will be removed from your comments and your name will not be used in this study. Do you have any questions?

Would you be willing to learn more about this investigation?

If yes: Are you able to meet with me at the national convention in St Louis? I will be arriving on June 16th and plan to stay until June 21st.

Schedule interview

Schedule phone interview.

Fax Number for Informed Consent

If no: Do you know anyone else who is serving or has served in your position that would not be listed in the NCAA directory as a Head Athletic Trainer in a D1 institution with football?

Write any contact information down

Closing 1 affirmative

Thank you so much for your willingness to take part in this investigation. I will send you a map and directions to the hotel and I look forward to meeting you on ____________.

Closing 2 decline

Thank you so much for talking to me today and I hope you have a good summer.
Appendix C

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: May 28, 2008

To: Andrea Beach, Principal Investigator  
    JoAnne Gorant, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-05-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Profiles of High Ranking Women in Athletic Training: Their Career Path and Experiences” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 28, 2009
Appendix D

Coding Sheet
Coden Sheet

JoAnne Gorant

Western Michigan University
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
College of Education

Profiles of High Ranking Women in Athletic Training:
Their Career Path and Experiences

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Appendix E

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol
Project: Profiles of High Ranking Women in Athletic Training:
Their Career Path and Experiences

Time of the interview:
Date:
Location:
Setting:

Interviewee (code):
Age:

Brief description of the project: It is the intention of this study to better understand how young women can ascend to high ranking position by learning from the experience of their predecessors. This project is part of the requirements for my doctoral program.

Questions:
1. What is it like being the head athletic trainer working in intercollegiate athletics? How would you describe the experience to another female considering your position?

2. Using your resume as a guide, could you review with me your career path to the position that you hold now.

   A. Can you tell a story at each level about an experience that you can link to your move up the career ladder?

   B. What roadblocks did you encounter on this journey (from others and from yourself) and what strategies did you use to overcome them?
3. How do you see the perfect position and how does it differ from the position you are in now?

A. What needs to be done to get there?

4. As you watch your female students grow through the educational programs at your institutions, what characteristics do you look for in them that would cause you to highly recommend them to a position like your own?

5. Again, using your resume as a guide, could you list and describe for me the people who have acted as a mentor for you and tell a story about how they were able to do this?

6. Describe for me your professional network, how it has grown over the years and how have you utilized it to promote your own professional growth?

A. What activities have you found to be the most beneficial in developing this network?

Thank you & assure her of confidentiality