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## Retention and Attrition of Athletic Training Mothers in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II Setting

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Retention and Attrition of Athletic Training Mothers in the National Collegiate Athletic  
Association Division II Setting

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A Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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April 2021



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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my husband Matt. Without your patience and support I could not have achieved the dream of obtaining my doctoral degree. Second, to my children: Owen, Taryn, and Jacob. Thank you for your patience, your love notes, being my snack runners and helping around the house when asked. I could not have achieved this goal without your help. To my mother, Cathy. Thank you for your constant encouragement, being a shoulder to cry on, and allowing me to vent in your ear. You have dedicated your life to teaching and that personality helped see me through. Finally, to my work family. My co-workers and student-athletes. Thank you for your loyalty and support as I dove into this degree. I could not have obtained this degree without your patience, understanding and help when I needed it. I am humbled by everything you all have done to help see me through.

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### **Abstract**

More women are entering the professional field of athletic training. Despite the growth of women in the profession, many are leaving the collegiate setting by the age of 30. While this trend has been studied extensively at the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I (NCAA DI) setting, little research has been completed at the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II (NCAA DII) setting. This study aims to gain insight and understanding into the factors that affect female certified athletic trainer retention and attrition in the NCAA DII setting.

This is a qualitative phenomenological study using an advocacy lens. Participants included eleven female certified athletic trainers from ten NCAA DII institutions. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using spillover theory. Peer review and member checking were performed to establish trustworthiness.

Results of the study revealed five themes that affect female certified athletic trainer attrition and retention. These themes included role overload/conflict, support networks, women as caretakers, the culture of athletics, and gender issues. The most significant factors influencing this group of female certified athletic trainers' retention and attrition were role overload/conflict and support networks. The categories of women and caretakers, the culture of athletics, and gender issues fell to the patriarchal nature of athletics. The participants all indicated that it was an issue but did not believe that they alone could overcome the gender stereotypes in collegiate athletics.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Athletic training at the collegiate level is a demanding profession. An athletic trainer must be able to manage multiple professional roles, work long hours, commit to few days off, and be flexible to constant changes made by head coaches and athletic directors. The world of sport continues to be a male-dominated culture, despite all the advances made by women since Title IX. In 1994, David and Myra Sadker published the book *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls*. The book studied the history of shortcomings in women's education. In their book, David and Myra Sadker state:

Sport has been a part of the official school program since the mid-1800s and was originally incorporated into the curriculum to serve as an important line of defense against the potential feminization of American males by a growing female teacher profession.

Even with the progress in gender issues since the inception of Title IX, many women still face discrimination in the sport workplace (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Bruening and Dixon (2008) studied National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I head coaches that were also mothers; an interesting finding is that they believed sport culture is institutionalized at the collegiate level. "Institutionalization of this culture has established a barrier that limits employees from expressing their preferences without being asked, as they perceived a risk to their career progress by doing so" (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Praise and promotion are attributed to commitment and productivity at all costs. In the researcher's experience, taking time away from career responsibilities for parenting is seen as a barrier that limits employees' overall success.

In the researcher's university athletic department, the demographic gender makeup is 43 men and 21 women. The athletic administration is comprised of four men and one woman, and the ratio of male to female head coaches/support staff is 14:4. Of these four women, only one has a young child. Overall, in our athletic department, 19 of the 43 men have children under the age of 18, and 5 of the 21 women have children under the age of 18. This disparity is consistent with the continued male dominance of positions of power and control in the sport. It is indicative of the barrier children are to a woman in the collegiate athletic world versus men. "Employed mothers are often judged more harshly than employed fathers: Employed fathers are regarded as better parents and more professionally competent than employed mothers, and mothers must do more than fathers to be labeled a good parent" (Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004). For women, overcoming a male-dominated culture that remains in men's primary control is a significant challenge, which I will discuss in detail in the literature review in Chapter Two.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) was founded in 1950 as a professional association to support the development of professional standards and gain appropriate professional recognition of certified athletic trainers. The NATA's mission is to engage and foster athletic trainers' growth as health care providers (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 2019). The NATA membership rate is 45,000, with over 50% of that membership reporting as women (NATA, 2019). However, less than 28% of those women are employed in the collegiate setting (NATA, 2019). The deficit in female athletic trainer employment has been documented in studies by Mazerolle, Eason, Ferraro, and Goodman (2015a), at the NCAA Division I (NCAA DI) level. These studies look at work-life balance and the factors that prohibit the ability to parent effectively. "Traditionally, working women endure more challenges

balancing career demand and family responsibilities than working men, often because of their mothering philosophies and traditional gender stereotypes" (Mazerolle et al., 2015a). In 2001, Robert Everhart and Cynthia Pemberton wrote an article discussing gender bias in athletics. They noted that female governmental leaders attributed their success to their participation in athletics. They indicated that sports participation helped them gain competence, creative aggression, womanpower and learn how to savor a win while also dealing with a loss. "Sport participation is an important vehicle to practice life-skills for leadership. A vehicle too often accessed by men and boys to the exclusion of women and girls" (Everhart & Pemberton, 2001).

Research has noted several vital policies/philosophies that can support mothers in athletic training and contribute to the retention of this demographic in the collegiate athletic training setting. A study conducted by Goodman, Mensch, Jay, French, Mitchell, and Fritz, (2010) found four themes that contribute to mothers in athletic training retention in the collegiate setting: increased autonomy, increased social support, enjoyment of the job/job fit, and kinship responsibility. The purpose of this research rationale is to investigate the factors that affect the retention and attrition of mothers in athletic training in the NCAA Division II (NCAA DII) setting. One area lacking in research is the importance of women serving as certified athletic trainers, specifically at the collegiate level. This research could benefit the retention of female athletic trainers.

### **Employment Trends in Athletic Training**

Employment opportunities for women in athletic training have grown exponentially over the past six decades. The first female athletic trainers entered the workforce in 1956. In 2006, that number climbed to 48%; in 2011, that number grew to 53% (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). Kahanov and Eberman (2011) also researched employment trends of female students enrolled in

athletic training programs that showed this percentage would continue to increase as they graduate and enter the workforce. Despite an increasing trend in women employed in athletic training, few hold the position of head athletic trainer (AT). Dr. Lindsey H. Schroeder conducted an exploratory study of women in leadership roles within the Division I NCAA setting. Dr. Schroeder surveyed 350 institutions from 32 conferences and found that 286 of the institutions employed a male head of athletic trainers, 60 employed female head of athletic trainers, and four had dual representation. Dr. Schroeder looked further into the five power conferences (part of the 350 total NCAA DI institutions) within NCAA DI and found that 60 institutions employed a male head of athletic trainers, four employed a female head of athletic trainers, and one had dual representation (Schroeder, 2018).

### **Women as Caretakers**

The challenge of balancing career and family is hardly new for women. While men are taking on more of the caretaking burden, a study in 2013 by Pew Research Center indicated women are still three times more likely to face hardships in work-family conflict than men are. Despite more men being present in the caretaker role in the family model, the bulk of caregiver responsibility still falls on the mother. In my review of literature, I will discuss studies done by Fuegen et al. (2004); Sayer (2005); Kamphoff (2010); Inglis, Danylchuk, and Pastore (2000). These studies discuss the societal pressure of guilt placed on women who chose to have careers and families.

"Although work-life enrichment is increasingly recognized as a benefit of working while simultaneously engaging in a parental role, athletic training leaders are not seen to be helped by this benefit" (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). Nearly all mothers working in athletic training report conflict in balancing their personal life and work life. Work-life conflict can arise from time



spent at work, travel requirements, and inflexible schedules. "Conflict is also exacerbated by a variety of individual contributors, such as the need to parent and complete household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other domestic tasks" (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). This study shows that work-life conflict does not arise from a single factor; instead, it is a complex network of elements contributing to work climate, responsibilities, and personal values. Goodman et al., (2010) referenced three studies; one by Price (2001); Price and Mueller (1981), and the other by Balogun, Titiloye, Balogun, Oyeyemi, and Katz (2002). The Price study focused on turnover and the effect (positive or negative) of administrative support on job satisfaction, commitment, and retention. The Balogun study found that supervisor and colleague support was critical in minimizing stress in physical therapists.

Mazerolle and Pitney (2012) examined work-life balance for athletic trainers working in the clinical rehabilitation setting. In this study, 65% of participants believed the clinical rehabilitation setting was more suitable for work-life balance versus the traditional collegiate setting. The authors indicated three factors that were beneficial to work-life balance in the clinical setting. These factors were work schedules, supportive work environment, and separation of work and personal life. Work schedules in a clinical setting provided a structured and static schedule along with flexibility. Participants repeatedly mentioned that having supervisors with family first mentality was crucial to supporting work-life balance—couple that with supportive co-workers, and survey participants believe they could successfully manage a career and family life. The last factor noted was separation from work and personal life. In the clinical setting, certified athletic trainers can leave work at work. There is no expectation of being on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as there is in the collegiate setting. This

allowed the certified athletic trainers who work in a clinic to feel fully present as a parent/spouse when at home.

### **Work Demands**

Work demands can be broken down into three subcategories. These categories include working hours/travel, role conflict, and role overload. The average amount of hours spent at work by an athletic trainer (male or female) during in-season sports coverage is 70 hours per week. "In college athletics, as with other corporate settings, the concepts of work and career trajectories have become institutionalized. For instance, working excessive hours has commonly translated into a sign of commitment, productivity, and motivation for advancement" (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). The pressure to win and the financial incentive attached to success has translated into increased pressure to work excessive hours, and for many, log an obscene number of miles traveled, providing coverage to team competitions. These exact expectations are passed down to the support staff of the athletic program. For dual-career mothers in athletic training, trying to compete in the pressure of this male-dominated culture is nearly impossible. This pressure to maintain the high expectations of work in collegiate athletics results in an absence from the family role and often has negative consequences for their marriage (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

### **Support Networks**

Mothers in athletic training indicated strong support networks as the primary reason for their success in maintaining work-life balance. These support networks came in the form of their spouse/partner, their administration, and athletic training coworkers. This section will focus solely on the effect that administrative support has on mothers in athletic training.

Fulfilling work-life balance for ATs can be realized by establishing boundaries at work, seeking personal time away from their roles as ATs to rejuvenate, having a support network at home and work, and creating a separation between work and home life (Mazerolle, Goodman, & Pitney, 2015b).

The administration establishes workplace environments. They can write and promote policies that enable a family-friendly atmosphere and help employees with work-life balance. Also, organizations that make an effort to support their employees' work-life by offering programs like flexible scheduling, on-site childcare, fitness facilities/memberships, and paid time off (PTO) have a positive effect on work-life satisfaction and retention of employees (Mazerolle et al., 2015b).

Effective administrators acknowledge the importance of solid role modeling for their department. For effective role modeling in collegiate athletics, work-life balance strategies must be put into practice by the administration, head coaches, and heads of the support staff areas. "Head ATs lead by enabling and modeling for their athletic training staffs, which explains why this group used and modeled effective work-life balance strategies to help facilitate the same for their staffs" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 86). In athletic training, where autonomy is granted based on administrative support, the head AT must be modeling a balanced lifestyle and promoting the same for their staff. "A supervisor who shares the same personal and family philosophy as his or her staff has been discussed as helpful in the pursuit of work-life balance for ATs employed in the rehabilitation setting" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 86).

Communication and cooperation are critical factors in supporting a healthy work-life balance in athletic training. Many athletic trainers feel they cannot step away from their team obligations because of the intimate knowledge they have of the athletes and their sport

demands and injuries. This sense of responsibility can hinder work-life balance. Encouraging an atmosphere of cooperation can help alleviate the stress of needing to be present at all times. "The creation of a group of staff members working toward the same goals and supporting one another was viewed as a means to gain work-life balance in the collegiate setting" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 85). Encouragement of activities outside of the workplace has a positive effect on preventing burnout in mothers in athletic training. "Prioritizing personal time has been cited consistently in the literature as crucial for ATs to take care of themselves, their families, or both if necessary" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 86).

Many of the studies reviewed thus far have indicated that athletic administrators' support plays a crucial role in retaining mothers in athletic training. However, the researcher has not found any research that discusses how the athletic administrator provides this support to women in athletic training. The researcher will explore other areas of research of theme in the collegiate setting.

The researcher will conduct a qualitative phenomenology study with an advocacy lens. Specific demographic information will be sought out to select the sample for the interview. Next, participants will be asked interview questions relating to perceptions of factors that facilitate the retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers at the NCAA DII collegiate setting. This study will focus on phenomenology as the researcher seeks to determine what factors experienced by a specific group of individuals have led to female certified athletic trainer retention or attrition in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Finally, I will use an advocacy lens to improve career conditions for female certified athletic trainers. I will focus on an advocacy lens because of the lack of action being taken to

improve retention rates, despite the numerous studies that have shown what factors lead to women leaving the profession.

### **Need for the Study**

Mothers in athletic training face challenges as caretakers within the workplace. Work demands tend to be suited toward men or women without children. Successful retention for female certified athletic trainers in the collegiate athletic workplace can be achieved through supportive policies. As a certified athletic training mother, the researcher has faced many of the challenges discussed in the research. The researcher was also fortunate to have a supportive head certified athletic trainer and co-workers. The data in the studies reviewed back up the trends of retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers in collegiate athletics.

These studies contain several avenues for further research. Given that most of the current research has been conducted at the NCAA DI collegiate level, the researcher desires to explore what factors affect the retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers at the NCAA DII collegiate level. "The ability to balance personal and professional obligations has been identified as an important retention factor, especially for those working in the sports culture, as it can improve job and life satisfaction and increase professional and organizational commitment" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 83). The Mazerolle et al., (2015b) study began by using criterion sampling to select female certified athletic trainers from three categories. These categories are females with children aged 19 and over, females with children 18 and younger, and females who desire to have children, and females who chose not to have children. Once participants are selected, the researcher extended an invitation to participate in an interview process to gather information about the researched factors. Upon completing the interviews, data was analyzed into main themes and appropriate subthemes to determine which factors impact the retention and

attrition of female certified athletic trainers at the Division II level. Mazerolle et al. (2015b) stated, "many head ATs believed their athletic administration supported their work-life balance philosophies and their abilities to supervise and manage their sports medicine staffs" (p.85). This has been the case at the researcher's institution. The researcher desires to examine if this is the case across Division II athletics or if our institution is in the minority.

### **Purpose of the Study**

"Professional issues in the collegiate athletic training setting may reflect the disparity among the cultural expectation to win, ATs' quality of life, and the best practices for athlete health care" (Goodman et al., 2010). The pressure to win and rule changes made by the NCAA have increased the workload of athletic trainers. Expectations of people that do not understand athletic training put a significant strain on collegiate athletic training staff regardless of gender. For women, this burden appears to be a deal-breaker for longevity in the profession at either the Division I or Division II level. "Female ATs must not only deal with the demands and pressures in the NCAA D-I setting but also with the high demands and stereotypes associated with childbearing and cultural issues regarding the "traditional" woman's role in American culture" (Goodman et al., 2010). Kahanov and Eberman (2011) found that 45% of women in the collegiate athletic training setting plan to leave their position for more family-friendly employment once they begin to have children. The two primary factors that drew women away from the collegiate setting had regularity with working hours and flexibility within their ability to schedule their time. In the experience of the researcher, certified athletic trainers rarely have control of their schedule. They find themselves at the mercy of others' scheduling desires and are often left out of the conversation concerning scheduling options.

Mothers in athletic training face challenges as caretakers within the workplace. Work demands tend to be suited toward men or women without children. Mazerolle and Eason (2016c) researched the navigation of motherhood and athletic training in the collegiate setting. Participants specifically noted the need for support at home and from their colleagues and administrators (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). Athletic administrators and head certified athletic trainers can facilitate mothers' success in athletic training in the collegiate athletic workplace through supportive policies. This support was the critical factor in the ability to maintain a professional career without sacrificing family. The purpose of this study is to examine what factors contribute to the attrition rates of female certified athletic trainers and what factors promote retention of women in the collegiate athletic training field.

Data from the reviewed studies back up the trends of retention and attrition of mothers in athletic training in collegiate athletics. "The ability to balance personal and professional obligations has been identified as an important retention factor, especially for those working in the sports culture, as it can improve job and life satisfaction and increase professional and organizational commitment" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p. 83).

### **Research Design**

The research used in this study will be a phenomenological study with an advocacy lens. A survey was sent out to all certified athletic trainers working at NCAA DII institutions. The researcher purposefully selected female certified athletic trainers working in the NCAA DII setting. Potential participants were placed into one of four categories; those with children 19 and older, those with children 18 and younger and those who desire to have children, and those that chose not to have children. These categories have been chosen to determine how the factors being investigated in this study affect these women's family model. Selected participants that

meet the specified criteria will receive a request to participate in a series of interviews regarding athletic department policy related to work-life balance and mentality/philosophy within the department. The researcher chose a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain the most insight into mothers' perceptions of certified athletic training, their work environment, and how this affects their work-life balance.

The process is the examination of the positive or negative aspects of the NCAA DII collegiate setting with the intention of uncovering which factors most significantly affect the retention and attrition rates of female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting.

### **Research Question(s)**

Work-life balance and female certified athletic trainer attrition have been a focus of study for researchers in athletic training for the past decade. Most of the attention has been focused on the NCAA DI collegiate level and the factors that negatively affect work-life balance and increase attrition rates. This study will examine the factors within NCAA DII athletics that affect the retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers in the collegiate setting.

### **Definition of terms.**

This study will discuss several key terms. The NATA has defined the following terms in their 2018 position statement regarding work-life balance in athletic training (Mazerolle et al., 2018a).

- Work-life balance involves effectively managing one's paid occupation and those personal activities and responsibilities vital to one's wellbeing in order to reduce conflicting experiences (p. 797).



- Burnout is a syndrome characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion and facilitated by prolonged stress, overload, and intermittent feelings of being undervalued (p. 805).
- Role ambiguity occurs when the role expectations are unclear (p. 802).
- Role incongruity results when the disposition of an individual is incompatible with the expectations of a given role (p. 802).
- Role incompetence is the consequence when an individual lacks the requisite skill or knowledge to execute the demands of an occupational role (p. 802).
- Role overload occurs when the role expectation is too time-consuming (p. 802).
- Role conflict occurs when role expectations are incompatible, meaning that it is challenging to achieve one role when attending to another within the role set (p. 802).
- Face time is the need to be present in the workplace to complete the responsibilities and expectations of the role (p. 801).

The terms below are the researcher's interpretive descriptions for terminology used in the chapter four results section.

- Few equates to three similar items within the results.
- A couple equates to two similar items within the results.
- The majority in this study equates to a range of just over half to 80% of the results.
- Vast in this study equates to a range between 80-99% of the results.
- Half equates to an even point within the results.
- None indicates that no subjects indicated the result being investigated.
- All indicates that all subjects indicated the result being investigated.

### **Assumptions & Limitations**

This study's limitations include results from only NCAA DII athletic programs, the small sample size of mothers in athletic training, lack of response from female certified athletic trainers, and exaggerated responses from female certified athletic trainers. Results from only NCAA DII institutions would exclude any positive data at other collegiate competition levels (NCAA DI, NCAA DIII). Other collegiate division levels should be examined to gain as much insight into the role and type of support needed to retain mothers in athletic training.

With so few mothers in athletic training persisting in the collegiate setting, there is a high probability of a small sample size. A larger sample size would create more substantial evidence regarding the factors that support female certified athletic trainer retention. There is a possible explanation for the lack of response from mothers in athletic training. These participants may be hesitant to discuss any opposing philosophies of their athletic administration for fear of retribution despite remaining anonymous in this study. It has been the experience of the researcher that administrators have a way of finding out.

Finally, mothers in athletic training could report exaggerated experiences. These exaggerations could result from current workload, family stress, disagreements with fellow certified athletic training staff members, coaches, or administrators, or other factors that could leave the mother in athletic training temporarily overwhelmed. These factors could provide inaccurate data results.

Assumptions for this study include: all participants are on a twelve-month contract, employed by the college/university, and not outsourced to the institution from a clinic setting. All participants have a requirement to travel with a minimum of one sports team. None of the collegiate athletic training departments are fully staffed according to the Appropriate Medical

Coverage for Intercollegiate Athletics (AMCIA) recommendation ("Recommendations and Guidelines," 2010).

### **Conclusions**

In this chapter, the significant issues facing women, specifically mothers, in the collegiate athletic training setting were introduced and examined. For many women, the collegiate setting can be unforgiving and seemly meant for people who do not have families. The need for face time and the expectation of being available to coaches and students 24 hours a day, seven days a week, place a significant strain on work-life balance, regardless of family status. Mothers in athletic training indicated they needed and desired support from their administrators, specifically their athletic directors. In athletic departments where the athletic training staff is hired through the institution, it is essential to have an administration that recognizes the need for supportive philosophies and policies for their staff members. Having the support of their athletic directors in the form of personal philosophy and department policies that are family-friendly and supportive of women were noted to be the most significant factor in their ability to persist in the collegiate athletic setting. The purpose of this study is to fill in a gap of information specifically related to athletic director support and mothers in athletic training at the NCAA DII level.

Chapter Two, the Review of Literature that will provide a greater understanding of the factors that negatively influence retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers, the differences between the work-life balance in the clinic setting and the collegiate setting, gender bias in the perceptions of working men with children and working women with children. Finally, the effects of supportive administration on retention of women in the workforce. Chapter Three will describe the Research Methods, including the survey used to determine the participants and all interviews conducted with the mothers in athletic training electing to be part

of this study. Chapter Four will detail the study's results, with Chapter Five summarizing the research process, concluding statements, and recommendations for future study. The dissertation will close with a bibliography and appendix.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Athletic training at the collegiate level is a demanding profession. An athletic trainer must be able to manage multiple professional roles, work long hours, commit to few days off, and be flexible to constant changes made by head coaches. Currently, the female membership rate in the NATA is over 50%. However, less than 28% of those women are employed in the collegiate setting. This deficit in employment has been documented in multiple studies at the NCAA DI level, which effectively looks at work-life balance and parent ability. "Traditionally, working women endure more challenges balancing career demand and family responsibilities than working men, often because of their mothering philosophies and traditional gender stereotypes" (Mazerolle et al., 2015a).

Research has noted several vital policies/philosophies that can support mothers in athletic training and contribute to the retention of this demographic in the collegiate athletic training setting. Goodman et al. (2010) found four themes that contribute to mothers in athletic training retention in the collegiate setting. These themes are increased autonomy, increased social support, enjoyment of the job/job fit, and kinship responsibility. The purpose of this research is to investigate the factors that affect retention and attrition of female athletic trainers, specifically those that are mothers or planning to have a family, in the NCAA DII setting.

### **Method of Research**

To date, the majority of research has been conducted in the NCAA DI collegiate setting. Authors Mazerolle, Eason, Goodman, and Kahanov are cited numerous times in this literature review. They are the utmost authority on female certified athletic trainer attrition and retention in the collegiate setting. Recommendations from prior studies have been directed toward NCAA Division II and NCAA Division III collegiate settings. Working 22 years in the NCAA Division II collegiate setting and viewing both the prosperity and hardships experienced by my colleagues, further research needs to occur at this level to understand better the factors that affect women in the NCAA Division II setting.

The literature review sources were retrieved using Google Scholar search, MSUMs Livingston Lord Library, the NATA database, and the NCAA. Search criteria included gender bias toward women/mothers in the collegiate setting and the general workforce, the role of women as caretakers in the household and child-rearing, role overload and role conflict in collegiate athletic training, the positive and negative role that support networks play for mothers in the collegiate athletic training setting and the general workforce. Additionally, research regarding the differences between the three levels of the NCAA collegiate athletic divisions, employment data on women in athletic training and career selection, reasons for retention and attrition for mothers certified in athletic training in the collegiate setting, and a comparison of retention and attrition of mothers coaching in the collegiate setting.

Attrition rates of female certified athletic trainers in the collegiate setting are on an upward trajectory. Graf (2014) states that female athletic trainers often have to deal with coaches going to male athletic trainers to make sure that the female had evaluated and treated an injury right or explained an injury correctly. I can personally attest to this phenomenon. Three women make up the full-time athletic training staff at the researcher's institution; there is a

combined 54 years of athletic training experience, yet the coaches and administration hold this staff to a double standard for medical issues or issues involving confrontation. The staff is chastised for taking any questions or complaints to the athletic director before discussing them with the coach. However, a coach is allowed to go directly to an outside person or the athletic director with issues or complaints about the staff. There is no requirement that they need to speak directly to the athletic training staff. "Sport has traditionally been an area of society that has made access difficult for those who differed from the white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied majority" (Mazerolle, Borland, & Burton, 2012). Graf (2014) notes that women, specifically female athletic trainers, lack opportunities for leadership positions in collegiate athletics primarily because men hold primary control. These individuals are responsible for setting the agenda about hiring and workplace policy (Graf, 2014). Sadly, many women are overlooked when hiring people for leadership positions by buying into these claims.

The researcher has experienced that a large portion of our society still believes that a woman's place is in the home. At times, women are our own worst enemies. It does not take much time on social media to see the shaming women place on each other. Instead of holding each other up, we criticize and tear others down. Graf (2014) states that female athletic trainers struggle to find a balance of work and life while trying to battle discrimination in their workplace. Prior studies have shown the significant factors that mothers in athletic training face and ultimately change their employment setting or leave the profession entirely (Graf 2014). Throughout the literature review process, factors noted include female employment as certified athletic trainers, gender bias, role as caretakers, guilt factor, athletic culture, role overload/conflict, support networks, and women's experiences in other roles within athletics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There is an increase in individuals wanting to balance work and personal life responsibilities (Lakshmypriyak & Krishna, 2016). "Women do not view their job as justification for attending less to their families, household work, and other social activities" (Lakshmyprivak & Krishna, 2016). Based on the research of work-life balance theory by Kumar and Janakiram (2017), the authors cited authors Greenhans and Allen's definition of work-life balance as the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individual's life priorities. Based on Kumar and Janakiram's (2017) research, two theories lend themselves most appropriately to this study—compensation theory and spillover theory. "Compensation theory of work-life balance describes the efforts intended at countering unconstructive experiences in one domain through increased efforts for optimistic experiences in another domain" (Kumar & Janakiram, 2017).

Spillover theory was first recognized in 1980. Graham Staines was one of the first to recognize that emotions and behaviors experienced at work can spill over into the home environment (as cited in Sok et al., 2014). Kumar and Janakiram (2017) suggest that workers carry over or spillover the feelings, emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviors they establish at work into their family lives and vice versa. Pradhan (2016) further defines spillover theory as one domain impacts the other domain in the same way, despite having established boundaries between the individual's family and work domain. "Negative work-home interference is experienced when pressures from the work and home domains are mutually incompatible" (as cited in Sok et al., 2014). The authors' further state that negative spillover between work and home is a necessary precursor to lower job satisfaction reduced physical and mental well-being, turnover intentions and behaviors, absenteeism, loss of commitment, and performance.

Spillover theory describes the reasoning for attrition for mothers in athletic training from the collegiate setting. Pradhan (2016) states that spillover is a process where work and family affect each other; this generates similarities between the two domains. Spillover theory has proven how positive and negative experiences can be transferred from one role to another (Sok et al., 2014). Based on existing research, spillover theory explains why mothers in athletic training leave the collegiate setting or the profession. Many women in athletic training feel as though they must choose between work and family and cannot blend the two worlds. Researched reasons for attrition include gender stereotyping, women as the caretaker, guilt, culture of athletics, role overload/role conflict, and lack of support networks—all negatively affect women. Pradhan's (2016) definition of one domain impacting another despite having boundaries is all too often the description of how the world of college athletics and the athletic training world are engaged.

In the researcher's experience, no time is considered personal or off-limits. Sok et al. (2014) state that time-based conflict occurs when the time devoted in one domain makes it difficult to meet another's expectations. The expectation is that the certified athletic trainer must be available to coaches and student-athletes at any time of day, seven days a week. The researcher and co-workers have been called at all hours of the night with issues both major and minor. Staff members have been forced to answer phone calls, texts, and emails when on vacation time. The same has happened with a co-worker being inundated with calls and texts during a family member's funeral. Ultimately having to step away to answer questions that were not emergent. In the athletic training realm, all too often, college athletics' needs spill over into all aspects of the athletic trainer's personal life. Role overload and role conflict are two significant factors leading to burnout and attrition of male and female athletic trainers.



Strain-based interference occurs when fatigue and strain from one domain affect performance in the other domain (Sok et al., 2014).

That being said, spillover is not always a negative thing. Sok et al. (2014) defined positive work-home intervention as a transfer of positive skills, behavior, and values from the originating domain to the other.

Positive spillover from the workplace to home has the potential to influence employee values and attitudes in the other domain: via an instrumental path, in which skills, abilities, and values are applied effectively in another role, and via an affective path, in which affect, or emotion is carried over from one role to another (as cited in Sok et al., 2014).

The interactions observed between student-athletes and the children of members of the department are positive. There is a positive spillover of kindness, caring, and attention between the collegiate student-athletes and employee children. The researcher can personally relate to many of these positive spillover experiences of her children. However, a favorite example is the kindness shown by two football athletes that came in every day (without being asked) to care for the researcher's newborn son while she taught a class. To this day, those two young men and my youngest son have a special bond, and they spend time together every time they come back to visit. Spillover theory, both positive and negative behaviors and emotions, built in the work domain and transferred to the home domain, determine how the home and work domains are balanced (Sok et al., 2014).

## **Review of Literature**

Athletic trainers are characterized as hardworking professionals, laboring under challenging conditions such as low pay, long hours, minimal staffing, and high stress with little time off (Eason, Mazerolle, Monsma, & Mensch, 2015). This description applies regardless of the collegiate level (NCAA DI, DII, or DIII) that employs the certified athletic trainer. Statistics from the NATA regarding attrition rates are representative of all certified members regardless of work setting. The vast majority of the current research has been completed at the NCAA DI level. The authors of these studies recommend that future research be conducted at the NCAA DII and NCAA DIII settings. This literature review will explore the factors that affect the retention and attrition factors that affect female athletic trainers that have or are planning to start a family.

Female certified athletic trainers currently make up 48% of the total NATA membership (Kahanov, Loeb sack, Masucci, & Roberts, 2010). The collegiate athletic training setting is the largest employment setting for certified athletic trainers (Mazerolle et al., 2015a). Despite the almost equal ratio of total male to female athletic trainers, females make up only 28% of full-time collegiate staff (Mazerolle et al., 2015a). This trend is concerning when looking at employment equality. The collegiate athletic setting carries a tremendous demand on time and workload of all the athletic training settings (Mazerolle et al., 2015a).

National employment trends have focused on sex as an issue in reduced wages for women, which have been attributed to employment absence for caregiving and a consistent theme of family and work conflicts, resulting from the need to balance home and work priorities (Kahanov et al., 2010).

Mazerolle et al. (2015a) conducted a study of female certified athletic trainers' career and family aspirations. Results indicated that the NCAA DI setting was demanding and not conducive to women wishing to become parents. Their analysis also indicated that most NCAA DI settings did not have any family-friendly policies to help women balance career and parenting roles. Long work hours and inadequate compensation for female athletic trainers further added to the burden placed upon female athletic trainers (Mazerolle et al., 2015a). "The emigration of female athletic trainers from the profession has been theoretically associated with the desire to attain balance among family commitments, personal time, and work responsibilities (Mazerolle et al., 2015a, p 171). Eighty-six percent of female certified athletic trainers reported significantly more conflicts balancing professional and personal responsibilities than their male colleagues (Kahanov et al., 2010).

Mensch and Mitchell (2008) explored the reasons why students choose the athletic training profession. The number one reason for choosing the profession was the association with sports (100% of respondents). More importantly, a desire to help people and be part of a team were determined to be the most significant factors in choosing this career (52% of respondents). Monetary gain was ranked lowest (four percent of respondents) in choosing the profession of athletic training. Despite the desire to help people and be part of a team, women choose to leave the profession or the collegiate setting around 30 years old (Mazerolle et al., 2015a). Most are choosing to leave the profession because of a desire to start a family.

Kahanov et al. (2010) conducted a study of female athletic trainers in both the collegiate and secondary setting. The ratio of married and single women was equal for both settings (45% married, 41% single). Thirty-nine percent of the participants had children, and 61% did not yet have children. Of the 39% that had children, 42% changed their job setting after starting their

family. Additionally, most women who did not yet have children indicated they planned to start a family once they transitioned to a more family-friendly career.

### **NCAA collegiate divisions.**

"The NCAA is a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and life-long success of college athletes" (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). There are 350 member institutions in Division I, 310 member institutions in Division II, and 438 member institutions in Division III (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). While the NCAA governs all three athletic competition divisions, there are vast differences between the three divisions. Student-athletes competing in Division I and Division II must meet the NCAA standards, while those at Division III must meet the school's admissions standards (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

According to the NCAA website, 57% of Division I student-athletes receive athletic aid in multi-year cost of attendance scholarships. In Division II, 60% receive partial scholarships for the cost of attendance, and 80% of Division III athletes receive non-athletic aid (there are no athletic scholarships at NCAA DIII institutions). Financial numbers for the three divisions are posted on the NCAA website. According to this information, the NCAA funds Division I institutions with \$744 million each year. Division II receives \$53.3 million in funding. Division III receives \$35.2 million in funding, and \$171.5 million goes toward various programs that support all three divisions. The average funding rate for each division is \$2.1 million (DI), \$174,000 (DII), and \$82,000 (DIII). This disparity in funding alone sets up a dramatically different situation for each level of competition.

Division I institutions typically have large student bodies, large athletics budgets, and offer the most generous number of scholarships (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

Division I is divided further into three categories; those competing in bowl games are part of the Football Bowl Subdivision. Those in an NCAA championship series are part of the Football Championship Subdivision, and a third group does not sponsor football (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Division II provides an opportunity for student-athletes to compete at a high level while excelling in the classroom and campus experiences (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Division II offers a "partial-scholarship" model with funding from a mix of athletic scholarships, academic aid, need-based grants, and employment earnings (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Division III is the largest division in terms of the number of institutions and number of participants in the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). Colleges and universities that subscribe to the Division III philosophy enable students to integrate and balance their athletics experience with academic interests and other co-curricular activities (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.).

### **Gender stereotypes.**

Perez, Cleary, and Hibbler (2012) stated that the social institution of sport has long reflected societal attitudes toward women. Discrimination against women in both athletic careers and American society, in general, has been a problem throughout history. Athletic culture is overwhelmingly male-dominated. While the rest of the world seems to be catching up, albeit slowly, to women's abilities to serve in leadership roles in business and leadership, the world of sport and collegiate athletics, in particular, are lacking the ability to change.

Athletic training in the collegiate setting is no different. Athletic trainers are expected to work long hours, have few days off, have significant travel expectations, and adapt to last-minute changes or emergencies. Overall, the athletic trainer's schedule comes at the whim of the head coach they work with. Typically, a head coach will schedule their practice around their student-

athletes class needs, followed closely by their personal schedule, i.e., their family's needs.

Rarely, if ever, does the coach ask if a practice schedule will fit in with the personal needs of the athletic trainer. These factors present a challenge for the mother in athletic training. They have been documented in multiple studies as the reason for female certified athletic trainers' attrition starting at age thirty.

Fuegen et al. (2004) researched the stereotyping of women versus men in the workplace. The authors argue that women were viewed as less competent in the workplace than men when asked to perform the same task. However, when it came to parenting, men and women were judged with a significantly different standard. "An employed mother was judged to provide more physical care than an employed father, and an employed father was regarded as a better parent than an employed mother" (Fuegen et al., 2004). They also found that mothers were expected to provide more physical and emotional care than fathers. Yet, mothers who crossed established gender roles were seen as less nurturing and less professionally competent than working fathers.

"In the United States, the ideal worker enters the workforce in young adulthood, works 40 or more hours per week, is always available to the employer, works consistently for 40 or more years, and does not take time off to raise children" (Fuegen et al., 2004). Therefore, the ideal traits for a woman to be viewed as a good mother are the opposite of being a successful employee. Fuegen et al. (2004) additionally stated that mothers are typically judged more harshly in the workplace than fathers. Fathers are typically held to lower performance and time commitment standards than working mothers (Fuegen et al., 2004). Ultimately, the authors found that employed fathers are viewed as better parents and professionally more accomplished than employed mothers.

"Gender-role stereotypes are at times applied to women working in male-dominated areas, especially college athletics" (Mazerolle, Burton, & Cotrufo, 2015d). Women are typically seen as motherly and nurturing figures by student-athletes and coaches. The first barrier is the care and concern they put toward student-athletes. "Female athletic trainers are described in various studies as caring, nurturing, and even motherly, while male athletic trainers are described as agentic, forceful, self-confident and aggressive" (Graf, 2014). The words used to describe women share a sense of weakness or softness, while those used to describe men paint a picture of strength or firmness, ultimately leading the reader to attribute women to a stereotype that is not suitable to support the desired needs of male athletics. Often comments are made about a male coach serving as a father figure. They imply a sense of strength, toughness, and grit. The researcher has been referred to as a second mom to her student-athletes, caring, comforting and kind. This philosophy is not surprising; after all, when men are firm, direct, and hard-nosed, they are considered strong and confident. Women that display those characteristics are considered dramatic and sensitive.

Title VII and Title IX were passed to provide equal opportunities to women in employment and education (Mazerolle et al., 2012). In 2012 Mazerolle et al. stated that sport has traditionally been an area of society that has made access difficult for those who differed from the white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied majority. "Although Title IX protection may serve as motivation for female ATs to enter the collegiate ranks, the legislation does not mandate equal work environments for male and female ATs" (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Mazerolle et al. (2012) investigated gender bias in the ranks of female collegiate athletic trainers. They concluded that since the passage of Title IX in 1972, the percentage of women holding positions in collegiate coaching and administrative ranks have declined. The number of women employed in the

collegiate athletic training setting is significantly underrepresented, given the growing number of women entering the athletic training profession (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The authors further state that for female athletic trainers, the ability to fulfill all her roles (mother, caretaker, spouse, ATC) is the most significant determining factor for retention in their position. Unfortunately, within the collegiate setting, social norms leave women feeling as though they need to choose work or family (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). Internal pressure leaves women feeling that they must choose work over family. Society then shames women for not choosing family over work.

Mazerolle et al. (2012) further noted that while Title IX encourages women to enter the collegiate athletic ranks, it does not mandate equal work environments for men and women. Women routinely receive fewer resources and opportunities than they have earned based on their job performance and criteria. This is a form of discrimination that affects the functional outcomes for many women. Women are also faced with treatment discrimination. Treatment discrimination comes in the form of their work assignments, the opportunity for promotion and salary increases, and ultimately the support one receives from their administration. Men dominate the leadership positions in the NCAA. Most significantly, Mazerolle et al. (2012) noted that 90% of NCAA DI athletic directors were male, 70% of the associate/assistant athletic directors are male, and 84% of the head athletic trainers were male. This demographic allows men to set the tone regarding hiring and work policies.

With most administrators and coaches being male, female athletic trainers need to navigate the male-female interaction more than the female-female interaction. Graf (2014) notes that women, specifically female athletic trainers, lack leadership positions in collegiate athletics largely because men hold primary control. Graf (2014) further states that these individuals are responsible for setting the hiring and workplace policy agenda. Sadly, many women damage



themselves when it comes to hiring people for leadership positions. "A mutual understanding whereby both women and men acknowledge that men have more power, control, and access than women" (as cited in Graf, 2014). "Women athletic trainers had to deal with coaches going to male athletic trainers to make sure that the female had done it right or explained an injury correctly to them" (as cited in Graf, 2014). In the experience of this investigator, as a female certified athletic trainer that has stood her ground against male coaches and administrators, often told to back down, and it was unacceptable to challenge the male coach or administrator.

Women are chastised for taking a complaint to the athletic director before addressing the coach. Yet, the coach can go straight to the athletic director to complain about us without ever having to talk to us face to face. I was once informed I was incapable of understanding the complexities of collegiate athletics. My colleagues and I have repeatedly been questioned about our capabilities and knowledge. Our male coaches will seek medical advice from other sources because they deem that our combined 54 years of experience lack in knowledge. Along with the issue of women being seen as too soft comes the insinuation that having an emotional connection with a male student-athlete equates with the woman having romantic feelings for this individual (Graf, 2014). "If female athletic trainers were friendly, they were sociable, which meant they were a distraction to the male athletes" (as cited in Graf, 2014).

### **Women as caretakers**

The spread of women into the job market in the 1960s challenged the notion that women are the primary caretakers of the family and home (Sayer, 2005). The challenge of balancing career and family is hardly new for women. While men are taking on more of the caretaking burden, women are still three times more likely to face hardships in work-family conflict than men (Parker, 2015). Despite more men being present in the caretaker role in the family model,

the bulk of the caregiver responsibility falls on the mother. "Women's movement into paid work has not led to a redistribution of household labor between men and women because women's performance and men's avoidance of unpaid work remains a potent daily enactment of unequal gender relations (Sayer, 2005). Sayer (2005) also argues that society continues to add pressure to this scenario by placing guilt on women that are choosing to have a career and a family.

"Although work-life enrichment is increasingly recognized as a benefit of working while simultaneously engaging in a parental role, athletic training leaders are not seen to be helped by this benefit" (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). Nearly all mothers in athletic training report conflict in balancing their personal life and work-life with work-life conflict arising from time spent at work, travel requirements, and inflexible schedules (Naugle, Behar-Horenstein, Dodd, Tillman, & Borsa, 2013). "Conflict is also exacerbated by a variety of individual contributors, such as the need to parent and complete household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other domestic tasks" (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c).

Control over work schedules can come with managerial and administrative positions. However, in the researcher's observations of working mothers in athletic training, managerial positions are not the norm and do not come easily for those in their childbearing years.

As a result, those who work full-time and raise children have represented a minority in the workplace. Additionally, both in the general workplace and in athletics, women have historically been underrepresented in managerial roles, placing them further in the minority (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

Managing childcare is another issue that mothers in athletic training face on a continuing basis. To manage the demands of work and the care required for preschool and elementary school-aged children, mothers in athletic training must negotiate with childcare providers and

often employ nannies to care for children outside of the typical working hours of the general working population. For mothers in athletic training, “childcare arrangements are as important as job requirements for working nonstandard hours, whereas, among men, the presence of children of any age is of little consequence in their ability to work nonstandard hours” (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). For many families in collegiate athletic training, childcare boils down to shift work.

Family time has significantly reduced, and couples report less marital and family satisfaction. This negative impact has been shown to produce harmful effects on the well-being of employees. Stress-related heart, gastrointestinal and mental health conditions are rising in mothers in athletic training adding to the stress level and decreased work-life happiness (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

As family responsibilities increase, the number of women in the workplace decreases. “Women tend to perceive a greater conflict between professional and family responsibilities and greater difficulty reentering the profession after leaving for family obligations” (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). In athletic training, policies that work in other formal work settings simply do not align with the collegiate profession's demands.

Women place more emphasis on family and the role of caretaker, a dogma that creates the platform for conflict. Because of prevailing societal gender norms, women characteristically have a more challenging time managing work and family responsibilities. They report constantly feeling as if they must prove their worth (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c).

Working women will face more challenges balancing career and family than working men because of their philosophies regarding motherhood and traditional cultural gender stereotypes (Mazerolle et al., 2015d).

Few studies looked at retention and attrition factors for men in any athletic training setting. Mazerolle and Pitney (2012) studied retention factors of male athletic trainers at the NCAA Division I setting. They noted that the factors of weekly work hours, travel, and coach expectations equally impact men and women and the dissatisfaction that occurs in the collegiate work setting. Through their study, the male participants indicated two primary reasons for their desired retention, the NCAA Division I atmosphere and work environment. Men had a stronger desire to remain in the NCAA Division I setting because they enjoyed the excitement of the competitive, high-caliber athletes found in this setting (Mazerolle & Pitney, 2012).

Both men and women equally indicated that having a supportive work environment, including an encouraging and supportive head certified athletic trainer, was a significant factor in choosing to persist in the collegiate setting (Mazerolle & Pitney, 2012). Men have also been shown to shift their work setting from collegiate to clinical to accommodate their family needs, where women make complete career changes to fulfill these needs (Mazerolle, Eason, Pitney, Mueller, 2015e). While both studies indicated that men and women feel the same pressure of work-life conflict, men tend to stay in athletic training but switch their work setting, and women tend to leave the profession entirely.

### **Guilt factor.**

Guilt comprises feelings of tension, remorse, regret, and a sense of doing something wrong (Thomson, Ebisch-Burton, & Flacking, 2015). Many mothers in athletic training expressed a deep sense of guilt because they were missing their children's events because their

working responsibility was to take care of other people's children (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). "Multiple demands on parents related to work and child-rearing responsibilities create time-constraint issues and adversely affects both the quality of work and the attention paid to family" (Kahanov et al., 2010). Kahanov et al. (2010) investigated to what degree parenting and family obligations led to the low number of female mothers in athletic training in the collegiate setting. They established five themes based on the parenthood and employment experiences of mothers in athletic training. The themes were: struggling with time management, difficulty juggling parenthood and work responsibilities, traditional gender-role issues, career decisions based on children, or a combination of all these issues. Within their study, Kahanov et al. (2010) found 25% of female mothers in athletic training indicated they neglected family nights because of work obligations and believed that work and family commitments were too significant to handle well at the same time. Almost all the participants believed as though their family was often neglected due to work commitments.

#### **Athletic culture.**

Opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport continue to grow. However, women's opportunities to continue this love of sport in paid professions are diminishing (Inglis et al., 2000). Kamphoff (2010) states that in the United States, sport is a popular cultural practice where dominant ideologies are constructed, maintained, reproduced, and defined around patriarchal ideologies. This patriarchal nature has impacted women's coaching experiences and the decision to terminate their careers (Kamphoff, 2010).

Everhart, & Pemberton (2001) turned a harsh lens upon the gender-biased athletics system. Sport became part of the school curriculum in the mid-1800s. The authors suggested this was an important line of defense against the feminization of males because of the growth of

female teachers. Pemberton (1997) noted that more women joined the teaching force in response to men's departure to early periods of war. Furthermore, she noted that sport was developed as an effort to foster and preserve healthy male development. Sport intensified traditional notions of masculinity that educators found sports so attractive and incorporated them into the official school program (as cited in Everhart et al., 2001). Sport was literally incorporated in the educational curriculum by men, for men, to serve men, evolving as a celebration of maleness, valuing strength, power, and competition (Everhart et al., 2001).

“Grounded in ideals of masculinity, sport, more than any other part of the educational curriculum has been, and continues to be, a gender issue” (Everhart et al., 2001). Conversely, female sport has been shaped by male values and experiences, suppressing the development of female values (Everhart et al., 2001). The culture of women’s sports was founded in physical education philosophy—a philosophy of participation, cooperation, and play.

“The guardians of sports education for males...(who)...feared the development of sports for girls and women because of what it might mean to their entrenched power and traditions” (as cited in Everhart et al., 2001). These guardians of sport in the NCAA attempted to limit how Title IX applied to intercollegiate athletics. They also supported the Tower Amendment to exclude revenue-producing sports from Title IX (football and men’s basketball). Senator John Tower introduced the Tower Amendment as an amendment to Title IX in an attempt to remove athletics from the umbrella of Title IX, and athletic programs would not need to comply with the equal opportunities required under this protection (Staurowsky, 2016).

The culture of collegiate athletics is still firmly rooted in competition between work and life. The sports culture is known for long, irregular hours, including nights and weekends, demanding constant face time, dedicating 24 hours a day, seven days a week to work-related

responsibilities (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). This culture does not allow for the traditional ideal of separate work and personal lives. One is constantly spilling into the other. Furthermore, the pressure to win and the competitive nature of sports culture can challenge work-life balance for athletic trainers and the ethical obligation to keep athletes healthy with the erosion of any form of off-season (Goodman et al., 2010).

Most athletic training departments are housed within the athletics department, with the head athletic trainer reporting to an athletic director. Often, this administrator came into his role through the coaching ranks, and they do not have the training or knowledge to understand the medical decisions that athletic trainers make. This organizational model is antiquated and does not reflect athletic training's growth and transition as a professional medical field. The push to move athletic training out of athletics and into the health services department of all institutions is still in its infancy. It will be met with significant resistance by those in the athletics model.

Goodman, Mazerolle, & Eason (2017) suggest the advantage of athletic training being housed within athletics can foster relationships and communication between coaches and athletic trainers. However, disadvantages include conflict of interest in athletes' medical care, role conflict for athletic trainers, and poor work-life balance. "Collegiate athletic trainers are often wedged in high-pressure, challenging situations in which their ethical duty to provide proper medical care is confronted by participation so they can contribute to the programs and coach's success" (Goodman et al., 2017). The authors noted that many athletic trainers have been put in the spotlight or fired due to conflicts with coaches over medical care and return to play decisions for student-athletes.

Role incongruity is another factor the authors noted in their study. They defined role incongruity as the degree of expectations for one's performance in a misaligned role with the

individual's disposition, attitudes, self-perception, and values. Many participants in their study believe that aligning their department with other health care professionals would improve student-athletes' outcomes and advance the athletic training profession. Goodman et al. (2017) concluded that the athletic department's expectations, attitudes, and values were misaligned with the ATs' self-perceptions, attitudes, and values.

### **Role overload/role conflict.**

Athletic trainers in the traditional collegiate setting have a demanding role, complicated by travel obligations, multiple team coverage responsibilities, teaching, student supervision, and administrative duties (Mazerolle, Pitney, & Eason, 2015c). The average number of hours spent at work by an athletic trainer (male or female) during in-season sports coverage is 70 hours per week. This has also been the experience of the researcher. The work demand was 12 to 14-hour workdays for 25 days straight during fall football camp in August. The staff would get one day off just before classes started and then go back to 12-hour workdays six days a week and a minimum of four hours on the seventh day.

Inadequate staffing comes into play significantly with the start of classes. Every athletic trainer on staff has multiple team responsibilities. In October, winter season sports began, for this researcher meant having to cover multiple practices and competitions on the same day. This pushed daily working hours back to over 14-hour days. This expectation of 12 to 14-hour days, six to seven days a week, lasted from August to May. The months of June and July were the only months allowed to take vacation time. "In college athletics, as with other corporate settings, the concepts of work and career trajectories have become institutionalized. For instance, working excessive hours has commonly translated into a sign of commitment, productivity, and motivation for advancement" (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Mazerolle & Eason (2016c) noted that



hours worked and travel for athletic trainers had the most significant adverse effect on work-life balance (p. 569). Expectations of coaches did not often match the expectations of the athletic trainer's role (Eason, Mazerolle, & Goodman, 2017). “These conflicting expectations seemed to stem from a lack of understanding of how the sports medicine department worked” (Eason et al., 2017).

The pressure to win and the financial incentive attached to success has translated into increased pressure to work excessive hours and log an obscene number of miles traveled. For dual-career mothers in athletic training, trying to compete in the pressure of this male-dominated culture is nearly impossible. This pressure to maintain the high expectations of work in collegiate athletics results in an absence from the family role and often has negative consequences for their marriage (Eason et al., 2017).

As stated previously, some of the primary reasons for attrition for mothers in athletic training are the number of expected hours of work, travel obligations, lack of work-schedule flexibility, demands & expectations of coaches and administrators, and lack of opportunity for advancement. The organizational structure of athletic training within the athletics model is the underlying cause of work-life conflict for athletic trainers (Mazerolle et al., 2015c). Participants in the Mazerolle et al. (2015c) reported working far more than 40 hours per week, working six to seven days per week, and limited or non-existent time off. These working conditions are expected of athletic training staff members; it is part of the culture of athletics and the institutional organization. The increase in work-life conflict is increasing the rate of burnout among athletic trainers. Burnout first appeared in the literature in 1970. It was characterized by three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment

(Naugle et al., 2013). Athletic trainers experience burnout at an exceptionally high rate due to prolonged stressors within their job settings, the number of years worked, hours per week worked, and physical activity levels (Naugle et al., 2013).

Goodman et al. (2010) defined role conflict for mothers in athletic training as incompatible or inconsistent expectations brought on by NCAA bureaucracy and pressure to win. In a study of retention and attrition factors for female ATs, conducted by Goodman et al. (2010), participants often spoke of complex working relationships, unrealistic expectations, and overall lack of respect from coaches as a contributing factor to role conflict. Burnout for many athletic trainers, especially mothers in athletic training, is linked to these aspects of role conflict. A decline in ATs, both male and female, was typically noticed around 30 years of age, indicating a correlation between role conflict and desire to continue in the profession (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). Burnout rates are highest among women and “has been linked to a lack of personal or family time, lack of control over work schedule, and a large number of work hours” (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011).

Eason et al. (2017) also defined three additional themes contributing to role conflict for the certified athletic trainer. These themes are intersender conflict, interrole conflict, and role ambiguity (Eason et al., 2017). Intersender conflict is the incompatibility of one person's demands in the role set with another person's demands in that same role (Eason et al., 2017). Intersender conflict exists because coaches and athletic department personnel lack the general knowledge of the athletic trainer's role and the profession (Eason et al., 2017). Interrole conflict happens when an individual position involves multiple roles that deviate and are accompanied by different expectations (Eason et al., 2017). Interrole conflict occurs when the certified athletic trainer attempts to balance multiple roles such as academic, clinical, and administrative (Eason et

al., 2017). Finally, role ambiguity is the lack of clear information regarding role expectations, the method for fulfilling the role expectations, and the consequences of role performance (Eason et al., 2017).

Goodman et al. (2017) studied the benefits and barriers of the athletic training department being housed within the athletics department (athletic model of organization). Goodman et al. (2017) specifically looked at role strain. Role strain is formed from two components, role conflict and role incongruity (Goodman et al., 2017). Role incongruity was defined as the degree to which performance expectations for a role are misaligned with the individual's disposition, attitudes, self-perception, and values (Goodman et al., 2017). Participants in Goodman et al. (2017) believed there was a significant misalignment of their role as certified athletic trainers and the athletic department's overarching goals. Many of the study participants indicated they carried heavy administrative duties on top of academic and clinical duties. They expressed difficulty in adequately fulfilling all their responsibilities. Participants also struggled with a lack of staffing and conflicts with coaches and administrators within the athletics model. "When you look at a medical model...they understand how many patients a doctor sees...well, maybe if we had help through the medical model and people who understand seeing patients...we would have better staffing" (Goodman et al., 2017). Besides, the increased summer workload with NCAA allowed practices, the work-life balance has been decreased even further, without any additional support in staffing. This leads to role overload.

Role overload also has a significant impact on the mother in athletic training. "Role overload is concerned with role expectations exceeding available time and resources" (Goodman et al., 2010, p. 293). Job demands and limited staff at levels outside of the NCAA DI level summarize role overload (Mazerolle et al., 2015c). Furthermore, the authors found that role

overload is consistent with high levels of stress and burnout due to long work hours, limited days off, and understaffing. The evolution of collegiate athletics has become more of a business than an extracurricular activity (Mazerolle et al., 2015c). Rules have changed drastically over the past twenty years. Many of these rules pertain to when teams can begin in-season practice, what they are allowed to do out of season, the number of contact days a coach can have with their athletes, and rules to ensure that they stay safe. In the opinion of my fellow athletic training colleagues, these rules have almost negated a true off-season for student-athletes.

To ensure the student-athletes safety, the NCAA made rules requiring medical coverage for activities in the off-season, which nullifies any downtime that athletic trainers have. “The NCAA’s rules and policies on student-athlete participation and preparation have evolved over the years to include longer in-seasons, longer nontraditional seasons, voluntary workouts (e.g., captain’s practices), and an emphasis on year-round conditioning” (Goodman et al., 2010). This has led to increased role overload for athletic trainers. The erosion of the off-season and mandated athletic training coverage requirement set forth by the NCAA has placed stress on athletic training staff and increased the work-family conflict for mothers in athletic training.

An often-overlooked factor affecting attrition rates of female athletic trainers comes because of changes within the educational requirements of the strategic alliance between the NATA, Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), Board of Certification (BOC), and the National Athletic Trainers Association Research Foundation (NATARF). Educational processes and certification standards have evolved dramatically over the past two decades. Many of the decisions of CAATE were driven by adverse outcomes of athletic healthcare and the legal action that ensued. Students can no longer practice their athletic training skills without the presence of a certified athletic trainer. This includes travel, practice,

and event coverage. CAATE has also placed a limit on the number of hours students can work a week and now require all athletic training students to obtain a Master of Athletic Training before they can sit for their certification exam. These processes have resulted in a “disconnect between perceived job responsibilities and actual professional expectations” (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). “To maximize their educational opportunities with patients, students might not be socialized into the reality of the everyday work experience, such as downtime, insurance processing, paperwork, inventory, administrative duties, or coach and physician conferences” (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011).

Role strain, role overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, a familiar pattern is developing. “Managing administrative or teaching roles; a demanding patient care load; and practice, conditioning, events and games, and travel responsibilities can weigh on athletic trainers” (Goodman et al., 2017). Work-life balance is an issue not only for certified athletic trainers. Mazerolle et al. (2012) state that Americans work longer and experience more work-family conflict than other industrialized countries. Work-family conflict does not discriminate amongst economic levels; it affects all job levels, especially health professionals (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

### **Support networks.**

Mothers in athletic training indicated strong support networks as the primary reason for their success in maintaining work-life balance. These support networks came in the form of their spouse/partner and their administration and certified athletic training coworkers. This section will focus solely on the effect that administrative support has on mothers in athletic training.

The administration establishes the workplace environment. They can write and promote policies that enable a family-friendly atmosphere and help employees with work-life balance. Organizations that try to support their employees' work-life by offering programs like flexible

scheduling, on-site childcare, fitness facilities/memberships, and paid time off (PTO) have a positive effect on work-life satisfaction and retention of employees. “A supervisor who shares the same personal and family philosophy as his or her staff has been discussed as helpful in the pursuit of work-life balance for ATs employed in the rehabilitation setting” (Mazerolle et al., 2015b). The amount of supervisory support in an organization can heavily influence overall job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to stay (Goodman et al., 2010). Conversely, a lack of organizational support, specifically due to administrator and coach conflict, was a subtheme of role conflict and role overload and ultimately contributed to athletic trainers' attrition (Goodman et al., 2010).

Mazerolle et al. (2015c) explored work-life conflict for athletic trainers outside of the NCAA DI setting. They identified the relationships between supervisors and coworkers as facilitators to work-life balance (p. 754). Support was received from the supervisor by allowing the athletic trainer to provide flexibility and independence over scheduling, setting of contract lengths, and job sharing. “Supervisors are often described as the gatekeepers of helping employees find work-life balance, as they need to support, endorse, and at times model these practices of work and life initiatives” (Mazerolle et al., 2015c, p 757). Supervisors should respond to the demands placed on employees with understanding and sensitivity, demonstrating a family-values system and value their employees beyond their work roles.

In Part Three of their study on benefits and barriers in the academic and medical model, Eason et al. (2017) described organizational infrastructure as the collection of policies and procedures in an organization that defines the duties, roles, and responsibilities of the employees.

Organizational infrastructure, specifically the lines of leadership, can greatly affect the day-to-day and overall efficiency of an organization and its

departments. Commonplace among these workplace settings is supervisor support and understanding of work-life balance, family needs and values, and professional autonomy in the workplace (Eason et al., 2017).

An organization's culture is the direct influence of the leaders; these leaders must establish a clear vision for their employees. In Part Two of the same study, Eason et al., 2017 discussed trust relationships. A trust relationship involved respectful interaction and fair treatment between members of an organization. “Trust relationship not only enabled cooperation among organizational members and patients but also affected the intrinsic motivation of health workers” (Eason et al., 2017).

Communication and cooperation are critical factors in supporting a healthy work-life balance in athletic training. Many athletic trainers feel they cannot step away from their team obligations because of the intimate knowledge they have of the athletes and their sport demands and injuries. This contributes to a negative work-life balance. Encouraging an atmosphere of cooperation can help alleviate some of the stress of needing to be present at all times. “The creation of a group of staff members working toward the same goals and supporting one another was viewed as a means to gain work-life balance in the collegiate setting” (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 86). Encouragement of activities outside of the workplace has a positive effect on preventing burnout in mothers in athletic training. “Prioritizing personal time has been cited consistently in the literature as crucial for ATs to take care of themselves, their families, or both if necessary” (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p 86).

**Women in other athletic roles.**

Women in the workforce face multiple realities that are starkly different than those faced by men. Inglis et al. (2000) researched women's realities in collegiate athletics' coaching and administrative ranks. Title IX has given women the ability to have equal opportunities in athletics and education; while opportunities grow, women's opportunities to achieve paid roles in sports diminish (Inglis et al., 2000). Female coaches choose to leave their positions for the same reasons as female athletic trainers. They cite burnout, time/family commitments, discrimination, and lack of administrative support as factors for attrition (Inglis et al., 2000).

Many women in both coaching and administrative areas allocations of workload appear to be equitable with their male counterparts when the distribution allows men more time and responsibility in administration while women must spread themselves between coaching, teaching, and administrative roles. "Men end up taking more of the power in decision-making, thus creating the second problem of the perception and the reality that men are more important" (Inglis et al., 2000). Research participants also routinely experienced harassment: this harassment originated from staff and athletes within the athletics department. Participants also were made to feel that any gender issues were their problem and did not reflect or affect the department. It was the responsibility of the woman to raise and find a solution for any gender-related issue. The authors identified this as a silencing technique (Inglis et al., 2000).

"In the United States, sport is a popular cultural practice upon which dominant ideologies are constructed, maintained, and reproduced" (Kamphoff, 2010). Former female coaches were interviewed by Kamphoff (2010) regarding their decision to leave collegiate coaching. The interviews revealed some disturbing themes leading to their attrition (Kamphoff, 2010). These included the devaluation of girls and women in sport, isolation, gender-related bias, marital



status and personal support system, homophobia, and having credibility questioned because of their gender (Kamphoff, 2010). This gender disparity created five subthemes: lack of adequate resources, compensation and duties, lack of administrative support, negotiations and gender hierarchy, and women as caretakers (Kamphoff, 2010). All participants in the study discussed the privilege that men and male sports receive in collegiate athletics. Men received more resources and funding, yet women were judged at the same standard. Overall, the perception was that a good coach is a man (Kamphoff, 2010).

### **Synthesis of Research**

Throughout the literature review, there were five major recurring themes discussed in multiple studies. These themes are gender bias, role as a caretaker, athletic culture, role overload/role conflict, and support networks. Gender bias shows the depth of inequality that women in the collegiate athletic setting face. Women are routinely faced with harassment and discrimination within the athletic department and made to feel like any gender issues are only a problem for them. Women are not regarded as assertive and goal-oriented, and when they are, they are labeled in a derogatory fashion. Many women, especially those working in the athletics setting, are labeled negatively for violating traditional gender norms. These women can easily find themselves isolated, not considered nurturing, but not professionally capable either.

Despite the passage of Title VII, Title IX, and the growing number of women entering the athletic training profession, opportunities for women, especially in the collegiate setting, are shrinking. Very few women are allowed to become head athletic trainers or attain other higher levels of athletic administration. “Very few Division I head athletic trainer and athletic director positions are held by women, an important variable as the individuals filling those positions make the hiring selections within their institutions” (Pike, Mazerolle, & Barrett, 2017). These

positions are held by men. These men make the hiring and employment policies, which often make it impossible for women to attempt to be successful, especially once they become parents (Pike et al., 2017).

Gender stereotypes depicting women as the sole/primary caretakers of the house and children may be antiquated but remain a societal standard. Almost every mother in the workforce struggles to balance work demands and responsibilities with those at home. For mothers in athletic training, this can be even more difficult. The demands and responsibilities of an athletic trainer at the NCAA DII level are extreme. It is not uncommon to work over 60 hours in a week, six and sometimes seven days in a row, travel requirements for multiple sports in multiple seasons, with working hours extending well beyond the standard nine to five experienced in most workplaces. Speaking as a mother in athletic training, the researcher spends a significant amount of time putting out fires between work and family obligations or planning for those inevitable to a career in collegiate athletics.

Collegiate athletics is mired in a masculine culture. The article authored by Everhart et al. (2001) discussed the history of bias in the sport system. This struck a nerve. Having grown up in an era where most sports opportunities were available to me, it was information that I had not thought about. Secondary to having masculine control is the “need” for face time and being available 24/7. It has been my experience that when collegiate coaches cannot access every resource 24 hours a day, seven days a week, they become irrational. They tend to become so mired in the day-to-day coaching that they forget how to think beyond the box they place themselves in.

Role overload and role conflict are the most significant factors leading to attrition of both male and female athletic trainers (Goodman, Mazerolle, & Pitney, 2015). In the NCAA DII

setting, it is rare to find an athletic training department that is fully staffed with the recommended number of certified athletic trainers (according to the AMCIA) ("Recommendations and Guidelines," 2010).

According to the NATA, in most instances, there are two to four certified athletic trainers, responsible for 200 to 500 student-athletes and 16 or more sports. That is a tremendous patient load for so few people to uphold the appropriate quality of care and manage liability. Athletic trainers may also be asked to supplement the department and university's needs by teaching one or more courses, providing administrative duties, or supporting other department facets such as overseeing a fitness center, swimming pool, or intramurals (Mazerolle & Eason, 2018). Athletic directors' pair these jobs together to "justify" a full-time position because they have no knowledge or understanding of the role that an athletic trainer provides to the institution (Eason, Mazerolle-Singe, Pitney, Denegar, & McGarry, 2020).

Finally, there have been NCAA rule changes that have eroded the off-season for players and staff. Coaches can now hold mandatory practices and conditioning sessions during the summer months (Mazerolle, Eason, & Goodman, 2016). In the past, these sessions were voluntary and allowed student-athletes and staff the opportunity to have a true off-season to refresh and recharge (Mazerolle et al., 2016). This increased workload has not increased the hiring of athletic training staff but has negatively impacted collegiate athletic training staff departments creating burnout and increasing attrition rates.

Support networks have been shown as a crucial element in the sustainability and retention of employees regardless of the work setting (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013). For mothers in athletic training, having a supportive head athletic trainer and coworkers is vital to the survival of the mother in athletic training (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The evolution of support within the

researcher's workplace has come at the head certified athletic trainer's persistence. When the head certified athletic trainer started at Southwest Minnesota State University, children were not welcome in the athletic department. The head football coach did not know the grade levels of his children. The head women's basketball coach forced his high school son to work a camp right after discovering his best friend was killed in an accident. The head athletic trainer had four young children. She had to fight through a significant amount of discrimination and attempts at intimidation to build the support system that exists today. I have worked with this head athletic trainer for 22 years. Had she not laid the groundwork for a robust support system within our athletic training department, it would be impossible for me to continue to work while having young children.

Lack of support and conflict between administrators and coaches was a catalyst for mothers' turnover in athletic training (Mazerolle et al., 2012). When administrators allow mothers in athletic training flexibility and control over their work schedule, it has been proven that it facilitated a better work-life balance and allowed mothers in athletic training to persist in the collegiate setting far longer than they could without it (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Administrators set the department's policies, and they lead not only through words but through actions (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Administrators who set a clear vision for a department follow through on that vision, retain their staff longer and have a happier, more productive staff (Mazerolle et al., 2012). This creates trust and positive work culture.

This research will examine how these factors affect female certified athletic trainer retention and attrition at the NCAA Division II collegiate setting. Retaining more women in the collegiate athletic training setting and increase the number of women in leadership roles, athletics needs to develop a family-friendly and supportive work environment. This will not

only affect women but will affect men. The history of sport is long on tradition and has not had to yield to the changes occurring within our society fully. If this study could provide one voice to that change, then it will be successful.

### **Critique of Research Methods**

The various studies that were reviewed in the review of the literature used a variety of research methods. Methods included a survey with statistical evaluation for developing themes and determine the significance of these themes. Participants were interviewed and asked to describe their perceptions and experiences within their athletic training field setting. Mixed methods use surveys to determine specific data and follow up with interviews to elaborate on this information. Criterion sampling was used in all of the studies. Criterion sampling is appropriate given the nature of the study and that each was directed toward a specific population with the proper credentials. The most considerable weakness in these studies is the small sample size, most of the participants were in the NCAA DI setting, and the bulk of the research has been conducted by the same two to three researchers.

These research methods will be helpful as this study proceeds forward. The researcher plans to conduct a qualitative phenomenology study using criterion sampling to determine participants' specific demographics. Once the participant group has been determined, they will be contacted to obtain as many participants as possible for interviews regarding their perceptions and experiences with the factors relating to retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Unfortunately, it is anticipated that the sample size will be small. This is a concern for validity and significance. The number of female certified athletic training mothers within the researcher's competing conference, the Northern Sun

Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC), is minimal. The researcher is the only female certified athletic trainer in the conference with children under 18.

### **Conclusions**

This review of literature examined the factors that facilitated and inhibited longevity for female certified athletic trainers. This research examined the challenges women face as caretakers within the workplace and how work demands are not conducive to work-life balance. Work-life balance has been researched extensively at the NCAA Division I collegiate level, with only a few studies conducted at the NCAA Division II level. This research intends to add female athletic trainers' experiences working in the NCAA Division II setting to the existing research. As a mother in athletic training, I have faced many of the challenges discussed in the research. I am also fortunate to have a supportive head certified athletic trainer and role model. The reviewed studies' data back up the trends of retention and attrition of mothers in athletic training in collegiate athletics.

In the reviewed studies, there are several aspects for further study. The researcher's area of interest is how retention and attrition differ at the NCAA Division II level compared to the NCAA Division I level. "The ability to balance personal and professional obligations has been identified as an important retention factor, especially for those working in the sports culture, as it can improve job and life satisfaction and increase professional and organizational commitment" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b, p. 83). Little research of this nature has been conducted at the NCAA Division II level. The researcher will add to the literature base by interviewing female certified athletic trainers across Division II athletics to understand the factors within collegiate athletics and the effect these factors have had on them within their institutions. Once the data is deconstructed into main themes and appropriate subthemes, the researcher will analyze it to

determine how these areas' perceptions affect certified athletic trainers and the retention or attrition rates within athletic training.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Athletic training at the collegiate level is a demanding profession. Athletic trainers must be able to manage multiple professional roles, work long hours, commit to few days off, and be flexible to constant changes made by head coaches. As stated in the literature review, the culture of sport continues to be a male-dominated culture despite all the advances made by women since Title IX. “Despite the progress women have made since the inception of Title IX, many still face discrimination in the sport workplace” (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Bruening and Dixon (2008) studied NCAA DI head coaches that were also mothers; they found that sports culture is institutionalized. “Institutionalization of this culture has established a barrier that limits employees from expressing their preferences without being asked, as they perceived a risk to their career progress by doing so” (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). They further state that praise and promotion are attributed to commitment and productivity at all costs while taking time away from career responsibilities for parenting is seen as a barrier that limits employees' overall success.

According to the NATA, the female membership rate is over 50%, with less than 28% of those women employed in the collegiate setting. This deficit in employment has been documented in multiple studies at the NCAA DI level that looks at work-life balance and the ability to parent effectively. “Traditionally, working women endure more challenges balancing career demand and family responsibilities than working men, often because of their mothering

philosophies and traditional gender stereotypes” (Mazerolle et al., 2015b). Research has noted several vital policies/philosophies that can support mothers in athletic training and contribute to the retention of this demographic in the collegiate athletic training setting. A study conducted by Goodman et al. (2010) found four themes that contribute to mothers in athletic training retention in the collegiate setting. These themes are increased autonomy, increased social support, enjoyment of the job/job fit, and kinship responsibility. The purpose of this research rationale is to investigate what factors contribute to the retention and attrition of female athletic trainers in the NCAA DII setting. The challenge of working in the collegiate setting is growing as more institutions are facing significant budget cuts. NCAA DII institutions are at the forefront of this challenge. The requests being made on athletic training staff are increasing, and this has been shown in prior research at the NCAA DI level to be a factor that drives women with children out of these positions. This investigation determined the factors that are viewed as a benefit and what factors need to be changed to retain female athletic trainers at the NCAA DII setting.

The following sections will discuss the research question being addressed in the study, the research design method, and how participants were selected. The following section will discuss the study procedures, including participant selection, protection of the participants, and how data collection and analysis will be conducted. The final sections will discuss the researcher's role, the researcher's prior knowledge and bias, ethical considerations of the study, and a summary of the chapter.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Existing research at the NCAA DI level has shown that the high demands of collegiate athletics coupled with the stereotypes and cultural issues with childrearing are reasons for attrition from the collegiate athletic training profession. The NCAA Division II level varies from



the NCAA Division I level. Competitive drive is the lifeblood of college athletics. This need to win and desire for perfection can place a heavy burden on the caretakers of student-athletes. This researcher has seen this burden fall hard upon women regardless of their role within athletics. These demands were handed down and supported by males in authority. While women are making significant strides in other avenues of higher education, the same cannot be said within college athletics. The culture of college athletics is firmly rooted in a patriarchal system. This patriarchal system continues to hold women to stereotypes of inequality. The work done by a woman is not equal to that of a man in the same position, or women were given multiple job responsibilities to justify their job, and men did not have the exact expectations.

Women are typically seen as more nurturing in both the work setting and in the home, bearing childcare's primary burden in most families. This is challenging for female athletic trainers in the collegiate setting. This setting brings heavy work responsibilities, long hours, few days off, and frequent travel. These aspects make parenting challenging for many women working in the collegiate setting. Having a solid support network was indicated as one of the critical factors that allow women to persist in athletic training at the collegiate level. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine which of these factors have the most significant effect on the retention and attrition of female athletic trainers at the NCAA DII collegiate level.

### **Research Question**

What factors contribute to female mothers' retention and attrition in athletic training in the NCAA Division II collegiate setting?

## **Research Design**

This will be a grounded theory qualitative phenomenology study with an advocacy lens. Specific demographic information will be used to select the sample for interviews. Interviews will be conducted relating to perceptions of factors that affect mothers' retention and attrition in athletic training in the NCAA DII setting. Qualitative research is used to study an issue that affects a group of people, identifies variables that are not easily measured, and allow silenced voices to be heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is used to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power between the researcher and the participants. The phenomenological research design was chosen because it describes the lived experiences of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study seeks to determine what factors have led mothers in athletic training retention and attrition in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. In behavioral sciences, the goal of understanding requires the examination of different phenomena, interventions, experiences, attitudes, and cultures (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed a critical defining feature of phenomenology; it discusses lived experiences and how subjective and objective experiences are common among other individuals. Finally, I will use an advocacy lens to offer suggestions on improving career conditions for mothers in athletic training based on the results of the research.

The basic tenet of this worldview is that research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change participants' lives, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives. The issues facing these marginalized groups are of paramount importance to study, issues such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony. As these issues are studied

and exposed, the researchers provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives (Creswell, 2006).

Qualitative research suits this research study because it begins with an assumption and using theoretical frameworks; it addresses the problem and the meaning to individuals or groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Participant Selection**

This study will be conducted using purposeful sampling of female certified athletic trainers. Purposeful sampling is defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as an intentional sample of people who can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination. Because this research examines the phenomenology experienced by female athletic trainers and the factors that affect their retention and attrition, purposeful sampling of participants is the best choice for this study. Sampling will consist of mothers in athletic training employed in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Participants will be asked to indicate their marital status, number of children, ages of children, education level, years of experience, years of employment at current institution, size of the total student body, the number of student-athletes, the number of sports sponsored by their institution, the number of sports they are responsible for and the number of full-time staff in their department.

The predicted sample size for mothers in athletic training will be relatively small despite surveying female athletic trainers from the 362 NCAA DII member schools. This prediction is based on prior research of women's significant attrition rate from the profession once they start their families. It also predicted that the ages of the children of mothers in athletic training would be weighted toward 16 years of age and up because of the high attrition rates of young female professionals. This assumption is based on a small sample of mothers in athletic training in the

NCAA DII conference of the researcher's place of employment. At the time of this study, the conference has seven female head certified athletic trainers; five indicate they have children, and none have children 18 years of age and younger. This reflects a significant gap in age (10+ years) between these two groups.

Sampling will be purposeful and based on specific criteria. This research focuses on a distinct group of people; mothers in athletic training are employed in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. I will seek out mothers in athletic training via the NATA member database. Certified athletic trainers are required to renew their membership each year. With renewal, questions are asked about employment setting, gender, age, and contact information. This information is available to other certified athletic trainers for research conduction with certified NATA members' requests. For this study's purpose, the researcher hand-mined collegiate athletics webpages for names and email addresses of NCAA DII female certified athletic trainers.

Demographic questions will be emailed to the participants prior to interviewing. The questions that will be asked will relate directly to their family status (children or no children), number and age of children, their work status (years of experience, size of the institution, number of certified athletic trainers in the department). Once this information is obtained, the researcher will send the demographic survey to these individuals. Based on the individuals that choose to respond to the requested survey information, the researcher will extrapolate the data to determine how many women have children, the ages of their children, those that plan to have children, and those that chose not to have children.

These four categories are fundamental for the selection of interview candidates. These categories represent the categories that most significantly are affected by the factors that influence retention and attrition rates of female athletic trainers. Once individuals are selected

for the interview process, the researcher will contact each individual, requesting their participation in the study's interview portion. Upon accepting the invitation to participate, contact information will be gathered from each individual, and dates and times for the interview will be scheduled. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom (Zoom.us) and will be recorded for accuracy.

### **Procedures**

Approval was received on June 14, 2019, to proceed with the IRB process and data development and collection. June/July 2019, the IRB process with Minnesota State University Moorhead was begun. The Dean of Education at Southwest Minnesota State University indicated that an IRB specific to SMSU would not be needed. In June 2020, the researcher will contact the NATA and request member contact information for all female athletic trainers in NCAA DII. During June 2020, interview questions will be constructed and sent to the committee for approval. Once approval is received, email requests for participation will be sent out to all NCAA DII female athletic trainers in the NATA directory. Approximately two weeks after deployment, a follow-up request for participation will be sent out. A third and final request for participation will be sent out two weeks after the second request if needed. Approximately four weeks after initial deployment, interviews will be scheduled and conducted. Interviews will be conducted in July and August of 2020, with follow-ups occurring as needed. Upon completion, interviews will be transcribed, and analysis of data will begin.

NCAA Division II institutions are located in 44 of the 50 states, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). The states that do not have an NCAA DII institution include Arizona, Louisiana, Maine, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Wyoming (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.). School size and location will have

urban and rural variations, diversity, enrollment, and staffing capabilities. All NCAA DII members must abide by the same rules; however, each institution will vary in their funding level, the sports they sponsor, and requirements for coverage and travel. Due to member NCAA DII institutions' varying geographical locations, interviews will be conducted via Zoom (Zoom.us), using the Minnesota State Zoom account for health care providers. This account is Health Insurance Portability, and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protected and will allow for confidentiality during the online interviews. The other benefit of using Zoom (Zoom.us) is the ability to record the sessions for accuracy in transcribing the sessions. Recordings will be stored on a secure drive on the researcher's institutional server.

#### **Protection of participants.**

Participants chosen for the interview will be read a statement of informed consent for participation in the study. The statement of informed consent and the participant's response was recorded as part of the interview process. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the interview process at any time or chose to bypass any question that they do not wish to answer at that time. If the participant chose to withdraw from the interview process through informed consent, they would agree to allow the researcher to use their data to that point for study purposes. Participants and their institutions will be given non-descript identifiers to maintain participants' anonymity to ensure they do not feel their employment could be compromised.

#### **Data collection.**

Participants were chosen based on their status as a female certified athletic trainer with employment at an NCAA DII institution. The researcher selected participants based on their biographies on their respective school websites. Most institutions provide a short biography of their athletics employees. These biographies indicate the family status of each employee. Once

the participant agreed to participate in the interview process, a request was sent for a meeting time via Zoom (Zoom.us) to conduct the interview. The interview was conducted at a convenient time for the participant and allowed to take place in either their home or their workplace. In this research study, interviews were held via Zoom (Zoom.us) due to the distance in the primary researcher's location and socially accepted practices for meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once interviews were completed, the recording was uploaded into TRINT (TRINT.com) web application for transcription. Transcriptions were sent to each participant to check for errors. Upon completion of correction by the participants, the researcher started coding the information into appropriate themes. Follow-up interviews were scheduled with each participant as needed. The same procedure for transcription and coding will be followed for any further interviews. Interviews were conducted over three weeks. Transcription through TRINT (TRINT.com) was completed within 48 hours of the completion of the interview. The participant was asked to return the transcription corrections within one week of being sent to them. Coding was completed in the month following the interviews.

Interviews, transcriptions, and all resulting data were stored on the researcher's work-issued, secure network drive. This drive is password protected and can only be accessed by the researcher. Upon completion and publishing of this study, all data will be removed from the drive and deleted.

### **Data analysis.**

Primary data collected for this phenomenological study are interviews, "Phenomenology does not dictate to phenomena, but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness, and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task" (Giorgi,

2012). As cited in Creswell and Poth (2018), an interview is where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription. Roulston (2013) discussed transcription practices in the data analysis process. Roulston (2013) states that care must be taken to reflect particular ways of talking, so there is no contribution to a negative stereotype of specific groups. Furthermore, she stated that transcription practices that focus only on the topic of talk invariably omit features of talk that have important implications for how talk is understood.

The researcher will use Schweitzer's adaption of Giorgi's (2012) phenomenological method of research. According to Holroyd (2001), there are six stages of analysis in Schweitzer's adaption: intuitive/holistic understanding of the raw data, forming a constituent profile, forming a thematic index, searching the thematic index, arriving at an extended description, and synthesis of extended descriptions.

The first stage of analysis occurred in the review of the literature. To achieve an intuitive and holistic understanding of the data being analyzed, a thorough examination of the existing literature and prior studies must occur (Holroyd, 2001). During the examination of prior research, the researcher needs to take note of their preconceived bias (Holroyd, 2001). This bias must be noted within the study methodology (Holroyd, 2001).

According to Holroyd (2001), the second stage summarizes the raw data from each participant. Once interviews have been transcribed and checked by the participants for accuracy, the researcher performed an in-depth reading of each interview to determine which category data from the interview process will be sorted.

Stage three involves forming a thematic index. Holroyd (2001) defines this formation as the removal of non-relevant statements, defining specific words that highlight the meaning of the



participant's experience, and finally establishing an index of these meanings so the data may be examined collectively. In this study, the researcher identified themes based on prior research. The themes identified from prior research include gender stereotypes, women as caretakers, guilt factors, culture of athletics, role overload, role conflict, and support networks. The goal of the analysis is to determine which of these factors most significantly affect retention and attrition rates of female athletic trainers.

Stage four compares the items in the thematic index created in stage three to form interpretive themes, making sure to note the experience's meaning (Holroyd, 2001). The interpretive themes for this study are; expectation of women versus men in the workplace, the expectations of women with children versus that of women without children, ability of women to fulfill all their roles (mother, caretaker, spouse, ATC), management of childcare, feeling neglectful of the family due to work, pressure to win in sport, ethical obligation to keep athletes healthy, effect their organizational model, expected hours of work, travel obligations, work-schedule flexibility, demands and expectations of coaches and administrators, lack of opportunity for advancement, support of partner/spouse and finally support from administration.

Stages five and six involve the description each of these interpretive themes in detail and connecting them to the investigated phenomena. In this stage, the researcher determined the effect each of the interpretive themes has on either the retention or the attrition rates of female athletic trainers. The researcher rated these themes from those having the most significant effect to those with the most negligible effect on retention and attrition rates.

During this preliminary analysis, a coding system consisting of short words or phrases will be developed to label pieces of data on the research questions' transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199; Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). Open coding allowed the researcher to

consider a wide range of data, then discern what is relevant to the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 204). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest using a codebook to define codes (p. 191). Also, as the transcripts are read, emergent ideas were recorded as memos in the text's margins. These memos were assigned numbers for the last grouping. These memos and assigned numbers were defined in the codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 187).

Next, the researcher employed the process of axial coding to group codes into similar categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). Merriam (1998) likens this process to the inductive constant comparative method in which one compares a piece of data with another to sort the data into categories. The subsequent transcript will undergo the same process of open and axial coding. At this time, groupings from the first interview to the second will be compared and merged, making one master list of categories.

Categories may be refined as more codes are developed and different ideas or patterns emerge from the transcripts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the movement from inductive to deductive reasoning throughout the analysis process. During the beginning of the study, information is deductively derived into categories. Inductive and deductive reasoning are utilized midway through analysis as categories are tested and modified to introduce new codes and data. Finally, deductive reasoning is primarily used when the researcher is looking for more data to confirm or support the categories, or nothing new is emerging from the transcripts.

The categories eventually represent the findings of the study. Therefore, enough categories need to be made to encompass all relevant data; categories should be mutually exclusive; be responsive and sensitive to the data therein; and should be conceptually congruent, rendering the findings to be at the same level of abstraction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The evidence used to develop each category were listed in a spreadsheet. This way, the categories can be evaluated for consistency and retrieval of data to illustrate the more efficient findings. Categories will be named using themes derived from the participants, themes from the theoretical framework or other sources from the literature review, or the researcher's reasoning. The categories may be linked to create the final themes with sub-categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam (1998) suggested diagramming to represent the themes, linkages, or subcategories representing the findings.

## **Instruments**

### **Role of the researcher.**

The researcher is employed at Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) in Marshall, MN. The researcher has been employed full-time as a certified athletic trainer for 18 years and is a mother of three children, ten years of age and younger. SMSU is an NCAA DII member institution and competes in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. The most recent enrollment numbers for the institution are 2379 students across all majors. SMSU sponsors 18 varsity sports serving 410 student-athletes (SMSU Athletics, n.d.).

The researcher's interest in the subject matter of retention and attrition rates at the NCAA DII level is borne from the researcher's lived experiences and the researcher's immediate supervisor's experiences. While numerous studies have viewed women's difficulties with families in the NCAA DI setting, very few have explored this at the NCAA DII level. Despite the vast amount of research that has been conducted, little has changed to decrease the attrition of women from the collegiate setting beginning at the age of 28. The researcher hopes to positively affect women having the ability to persist in the collegiate athletic training field.

**Previous knowledge and bias.**

The researcher acknowledges that the question being investigated has been experienced personally for the past 18 years. The potential for researcher bias is high based on lived experiences. Due to the high probability of researcher bias, the researcher will critically review the findings of the study by multiple peer reviewers within the athletic training field.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that rather than attempting to eliminate biases, it is essential to identify them and monitor them by reducing their impact on the study (p. 16). Biases can manifest during the literature review, data collection, analysis, and reporting stages of research. During the literature review, DaCosta (2012) suggests sharing differing viewpoints than your own (p. 69). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that biases shared during the interview process can affect the participant's answers (p. 130). Therefore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advise researchers to explore only the participant's assumptions, not share assumptions. During data analysis and reporting the findings, biases need to be checked to uphold research ethics standards. Skewing data, or only looking for and reporting evidence that supports the researcher's preferred outcomes, not only demonstrates bias, but it is unethical.

**Ethical considerations.**

The researcher utilized Creswell and Poth's (2018) framework for ethical considerations at each point in the research process. Before conducting the study, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting data, and publishing the study (p. 55). Before conducting the study, IRB approval was obtained from the Minnesota State University, Moorhead, IRB board. Participation in this study is voluntary. Each participant is allowed to consent to participate or to withdraw from the interview process. In designing the study, the researcher did consider the possibility of retaliation or embarrassment from the administration toward the female athletic trainers for

giving their candid responses during the interviews, should the administrator take offense or become concerned. Each participant will be given the question set in advance of the interview and informed that other participants' identities would not be disclosed. Each participant was informed that this study could reveal helpful information in creating a more effective, more coherent athletic training support system.

An informed consent form was developed which informs the participants of their freedom to choose to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, explicitly details the purpose of the study and their role as participants, details interview procedures, and discloses no harm. The form also ensures the protection of the research site's identities and the participants using pseudonyms, storing data in secure locations, and destroying data after the study.

There are no conflicts of interest as the researcher will not include her place of employment and co-workers in this study. During the data analysis, reporting, and publishing phases of this study, I will adhere to the ethical practices of clear and transparent language, reporting all findings, and maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

### **Trustworthiness.**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 300). Several research techniques were incorporated to establish trustworthiness in this qualitative research project. The first of these techniques was member-checking.

The researcher partnered with participants who offered their insights in group interview settings. Presenting their constructed meaning as clearly as possible, member-checking was utilized to ensure credibility. A participant from each group interview was allowed to read the case findings and clarify meanings before publication.

The concept of transferability in qualitative research differs from that of quantitative research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained,

Thus, the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (p. 316)

Introductory vignettes precede each case finding along with brief descriptive vignettes of the interview participants. These descriptive elements offer readers the opportunity for transferability.

Creswell (2018) reminded, “The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data. Both dependability and confirmability are established through auditing of the research process” (p. 265). The dependability of this qualitative research is established through oversight and audit by its research advisor and committee.

Confirmability is also established through triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to viewing something from multiple angles to ensure accuracy. Stake (2006) defined its purpose “to assure that we have the picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases, and not likely to mislead the reader greatly.” In this research, findings and assertions are based on multiple data sources. Further, the data itself is of various types, including interview and documentary analysis.

Finally, positionality enters into the trustworthiness of this research. The researcher positioned herself as a participant in the research and the topic being studied. As a female

certified athletic trainer, the researcher has a stake in this educational program's success. The researcher's goal is clearly stated, to propose best practices in the field of adult education.

## **Conclusions**

This research examined the factors that facilitated and inhibited longevity for mothers in athletic training. The researcher examined the challenges that women face as caretakers within the workplace and how work demands are suited toward men or women without children. Finally, the way administrators can facilitate mothers in athletic training's success in the collegiate athletic workplace. As a mother in athletic training, I have faced many of the challenges discussed in the research. I am also fortunate to have a supportive administration and role model. The data in the studies reviewed to date back up the trends of retention and attrition of mothers in athletic training in collegiate athletics.

In the existing studies, there are several recommendations for further study. The area of most interest to this researcher is what specific factors play a role in the retention and attrition of mothers in athletic training at the NCAA DII. The breadth of research to date has been conducted at the NCAA DI level. Multiple factors influence the way athletic training operates between the three NCAA divisions. This study aims to explore the factors that affect female athletic trainers at the NCAA DII level. "The ability to balance personal and professional obligations has been identified as an important retention factor, especially for those working in the sports culture, as it can improve job and life satisfaction and increase professional and organizational commitment" (Mazerolle et al., 2015b).

The next chapter will discuss the findings of interviews of female athletic trainers that do not have children but are planning a family, female athletic trainers with children 18 years of age and younger, female athletic trainers with children 19 years of age and older, and female athletic

trainers that chose not to have children. Chapter four will also include the researcher's role in the study, a detailed description of the participants, how the research methodology was applied to the data analysis, and finally, a presentation of the interview process results.

## **Chapter 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

This study focused on female certified athletic trainers working in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that facilitate retention and lead to attrition of female certified athletic trainers in the collegiate athletic training setting. This was a qualitative phenomenology study with an advocacy lens. The researcher's goal was to gain insight into the factors of retention and attrition through the lived experiences of female certified athletic trainers employed in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Raab, Wolfe, Gould, and Piland (2011) found that a quality certified athletic trainer exhibits five latent constructs. These constructs are care, communication, commitment, integrity, and knowledge. The female certified athletic trainers' professional philosophies that participated in this study were manifested through the interview process, as were the five constructs discussed in the Raab et al. (2011) study. "The subconstructs of care, communication, commitment, and integrity are all affective traits; they evoke feelings and are driven by a person's values. The values enable ATs to establish rapport with other people" (Raab et al., 2011). This study allows research participants to share their stories of struggles and successes. Further analysis also uncovered reasons why they have persisted in the profession and the factors pressing some into considering resignation. In this section the researcher used the interpretive definitions for results that were previously defined in Chapter One.



The topic of this study was chosen because of the lived experiences of the researcher. The researcher is a female certified athletic trainer with 18 years of employment in the NCAA DII collegiate setting and is a mother of three children under 11 years old. During the interview process, the researcher noted similarities in many of the experiences shared by other women in the profession. The researcher acknowledges the potential for bias because of the many shared experiences she had in common with the participants.

### **Description of the Sample**

The researcher populated a spreadsheet document that included each NCAA DII institution, the institution conference of athletic participation, the names of all female certified athletic trainers rostered for each school and noted if family status was indicated within the bio of each athletic trainer. The first round of participation requests was sent to four individuals in each of the following categories. Certified athletic trainers under the age of 29 years and with no children. Certified athletic trainers over the age of 30 years, with no children. Certified athletic trainers with children 18 years of age or younger, and certified athletic trainers with children 19 years of age or older. In the first round of participation requests, six individuals agreed to participate in the interview. The second round of requests was sent out to a more extensive selection of female certified athletic trainers. The researcher used purposeful sampling to obtain four additional female athletic trainers. The final participant volunteered at the suggestion of another study participant bringing the total to eleven subjects.

The mean institution enrollment was 7,839 ( $n=11$ ;  $\pm 4841.4$ ) students, and number of student-athletes for the institutions was 448 ( $n=11$ ;  $\pm 95.8$ ). Six participants were head certified athletic trainers, and five were assistant certified athletic trainers. Having the experiences and perceptions of both head certified athletic trainers and assistant athletic trainers accounts for the

broad scope of experience in the profession and the role and expectations of their position. The average years of certification for head certified athletic trainers was 27.1 (n=6;  $\pm$  6.1) years, the average for the assistant certified athletic trainers were 7.8 (n=5;  $\pm$  2.2) years and the average number of full time certified athletic training staff members was 4.9 (n=11;  $\pm$  1.5). The mean number of sports sponsored by the institutions was 16 (n=11;  $\pm$  2.9). Five of the participants were married, four were single, one was divorced, and one was engaged. Five participants had children. Five of these children were over the age of 19, and five children were under 18. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown for the study participants.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Name	Total school size	Title	Years Certified	Total Sports	Total Student-Athletes	Number of sports responsible for	FT Staff	Marital Status	Number and age of children
Participant 1 (P1)	16,326	Head Athletic Trainer	35	17	341	5	3	Married	2 girls; 24 & 27
Participant 2 (P2)	8,856	Head Athletic Trainer	29	14	385	2	6	Divorced	NA
Participant 3 (P3)	17,357	Assistant Athletic Trainer	8	20	650	2	4	Single	NA
Participant 4 (P4)	6,522	Assistant Athletic Trainer	10	16	500	5	5	Single	NA
Participant 5 (P5)	3,765	Head Athletic Trainer	32	11	330	2	4	Married	1, 28

Participant 6 (P6)	6,158	Assistant Athletic Trainer	10	22	525	3	4	Married	1, 11 months
Participant 7 (P7)	6,522	Head Athletic Trainer	20	18	523	3	5	Married	2; 35, 37
Participant 8 (P8)	7,104	Head Athletic Trainer	20	18	444	3	7	Married	4; 14, 12, 6, 3
Participant 9 (P9)	2,279	Assistant Athletic Trainer	6	15	402	5	5	Single	NA
Participant 10 (P10)	7,534	Head Athletic Trainer	27	15	375	2	3	Single	NA
Participant 11 (P11)	3,802	Assistant Athletic Trainer	5	17	453	4	8	Engaged	NA

### Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

As previously stated, this study was a qualitative phenomenology study with an advocacy lens. A qualitative method was chosen because it allowed the participants to offer an in-depth understanding of the experiences and philosophies throughout their careers as female certified athletic trainers. The advocacy lens was chosen to bring a voice to female certified athletic trainers' positive and negative experiences and demonstrate the need and opportunity for change to better the environment for these professionals. Despite many vast differences in the background of the female certified athletic trainers, the participants' experiences were remarkably similar.

Phenomenology uses criterion sampling, in which participants meet predefined criteria. The most prominent criterion is the participant's experience with the phenomenon under study. The researchers look for participants who have shared

an experience but vary in characteristics and individual experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Data collection consisted of four stages. Stage one, participants were sent an email communication explaining the study's purpose and a request for their participation in the study. The first round of participant requests yielded a total of five participants. The second round of participation requests was sent to a larger group of female certified athletic trainers. The researcher made a purposeful, formal request of three female certified athletic trainers that she had collegial ties with through work with NCAA DII wrestling. The researcher sought out these three young professionals hoping that collegial familiarity would lead to a greater willingness to participate in the study.

The second request for participants was sent out two weeks after the first request was sent. In stage two, those who indicated their willingness to participate were sent an email with the informed consent, a series of demographic questions, and dates for them to choose for the interview. They were asked to read, sign, and return the informed consent form, complete the demographic questions, and select an interview date and time. The demographic questions related to the student enrollment, athletic participation data, the participant's workload, family makeup of the participant and their athletic director.

In stage three, the researcher scheduled the interview via ZOOM (zoom.us), and the invitation was sent to the participant. The interviews were conducted via ZOOM to accommodate various geographic locations of the participants and maintain the safety of the participants and researcher due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Twenty questions were developed to obtain the participants' experiences in their role as female certified athletic trainers. The ZOOM interviews were recorded and stored on a password-protected

laptop. Stage four consisted of the transcription and accuracy checking of each of the 11 total interviews. The researcher used TRINT (TRINT.com) web-based transcription service to transcribe the recorded interviews.

Recorded interviews were uploaded to Trint, and the transcription process was initiated through the program. Once the Trint program completed the transcription process, the researcher began checking the transcripts for errors. Transcripts were then read and cross-checked by the researcher with the recording to correct errors and ensure accuracy. During this process, the researcher made notes of any items that needed clarification or warranted further follow-up. The participant was contacted by the researcher when clarification or follow-up was needed.

The researcher used Schweitzer's adaptation of Giorgi's phenomenological method of research (Holroyd, 2001). The first stage of Schweitzer's adaptation required reading data to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of the phenomena under investigation and identify all preconceptions and judgments. Once transcription accuracy was completed, the process of interpretation of the raw data began. This stage involved the summary of the raw data from each participant. The researcher performed in-depth reading of the transcriptions to determine which category the data belonged. The researcher noted that the interviews were conversational in nature versus straightforward question and answer. This conversational approach was used to increase participant comfort with increased sharing of experiences and the emotions attached to these experiences.

Stage three involved the formations of overall themes determined from the raw data from the interview process. The themes determined by disseminating the data include gender stereotypes/professional inexperience, women as caretakers/guilt factors, the culture of athletics, role overload/role conflict, and support networks. The participants viewed both gender

stereotyping and professional inexperience as an interchangeable factor where coaches and administrators questioned them through interviews. The participants also indicated that guilt was linked to women's tendency to be greater caretakers by nature. Role overload and role conflict are often connected in athletic training literature. Role overload for a certified athletic will inevitably lead to role conflict and vice versa at some or multiple points in a certified athletic trainer's career.

Stage four is the creation of interpretive themes through the comparison of the items in the thematic index. The interpretive themes for this study are: the expectations of women with children versus women without children, the ability of women to fulfill all their roles (mother, caretaker, spouse, ATC), management of childcare, feeling neglectful of family or work obligations, ethical responsibility to care for student-athletes, the impact their organizational model has on working hours, travel requirements, work-schedule flexibility, demands and expectations of coaches and administrators, the ability for career advancement and finally the support of the partner/spouse, coworkers, and administration. Stage five will determine the extended description of the themes. The researcher connects these themes to the reasons leading to female certified athletic trainers' attrition from the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Stage six will synthesize the data from the themes and provide an in-depth picture of the study participants' experiences and the correlation to retention and attrition in the NCAA DII collegiate setting.

### **Presentation of Data and Result of the Analysis**

The primary themes revealed through the interview process were role overload/role conflict, support networks, women as caretakers/guilt factors, the culture of athletics, and gender equity. Role overload and role conflict were viewed as the greatest challenge for the female certified athletic trainer and the profession's desire to persist. Support networks, primarily from

fellow certified athletic trainers, administration and spouses, and women as caretakers and the guilt factor were equally noted as a significant factor in the decision to remain in the collegiate athletic training setting. The culture of athletics and gender stereotypes were challenges, but it was part and parcel to choosing to stay in the collegiate setting for the participants. Next, each theme will be discussed individually, and the sub-themes related to each theme will also be discussed in detail. The researcher will include direct quotes from the study participants.

### Research Question

“What factors contribute to the retention and attrition of female mothers in athletic training in the NCAA Division II collegiate setting?”

### **Role Overload/Role Conflict**

Role overload/role conflict was separated into six sub-categories for this study. Each of these sub-categories is listed in Table 2. The first sub-category is the barriers perceived by certified athletic training parents. The second sub-category describes how the responsibilities of work affect their feeling of exhaustion and potential burnout. The third sub-category discusses the participants' perception of the coaching staff's knowledge of the certified athletic trainer's role. The fourth sub-category is the participants' perception of the administration's knowledge of the certified athletic trainer's role. The fifth sub-category is the effect that work responsibilities have had on their mental, physical, and emotional health. The sixth sub-category discusses how work responsibilities affect the ability of the participants to complete work requirements.

Table 2

*Role Overload and Role Conflict.*

Subcategory	Synopsis
Perceived Barriers	<p>The vast majority of ATCs indicated lack of control over schedule and hours were the most significant challenge.</p> <p>Half of the ATCs stated that balance and support were essential strategies for countering the lack of control.</p>
Workload & Exhaustion	<p>All ATCs stated that workload combined with staffing shortages has led to a feeling of burnout and exhaustion.</p> <p>All ATCs indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has added to their workload and routinely leaves them mentally and physically drained.</p> <p>The majority of ATCs discussed that work follows them home. Completing documentation and the expectation of student-athletes, coaches, and administrators of “24/7” accessibility was rated as the top factors.</p>
Coach’s knowledge of the role of a certified athletic trainer.	<p>Most of the ATCs indicated they believed the coaches they work with understand a certified athletic trainer's role.</p> <p>Some ATCs believed their coaches understood the role of a certified athletic trainer to a degree, but not as well as they should.</p> <p>An ATC believed as though the coaches did not understand the role of a certified athletic trainer.</p>
Athletic director’s knowledge of the role of a certified athletic trainer.	<p>Some ATCs indicated they believed their athletic directors understand the role of a certified athletic trainer.</p>



	Half of the ATCs believed that their athletic directors understood the role of a certified athletic trainer to a degree, but not as well as they should.
	Few ATCs believed that their athletic directors do not understand the role of a certified athletic trainer.
Mental/Emotional, Physical Health.	Most ATCs believed as though their mental/emotional health has suffered.
	Few ATCs believed their mental/emotional health improved.
	Half of the ATCs believed their physical health suffered because of their job.
	Few ATCs believed their physical health improved because of their job.
	An ATC did not feel like her job negatively or positively affected her job.
Work Responsibilities.	The majority of ATCs stated they did not have enough time to complete the daily tasks of their job or professional improvement opportunities.
	An ATC stated she believed she had enough time in her day to complete all required and desired tasks.

### ***Perceived Barriers***

The most prevalent comment of the participants was that your schedule is never your own. P7 stated, “you used to work for the student; now it’s more that you work for the coach and what the coach wants. That is not always what is best for the student.” For P9, “I feel like the expectations for our profession continue to grow, and there are less support and less compensation.” The head coach of each team determines all facets of scheduling in relation to

collegiate athletics, and in the experience of the participants, this is supported by the administration. Raab et al. (2011) stated,

Quality athletic trainers commit much time to the profession. They make themselves available to others and understand that the profession is not typically constrained to set hours. Commitment is evident to others when they can rely on the athletic trainer to assist them when they need assistance.

The expectation is that the certified athletic trainer will be flexible to the schedule and hours that the head coach sets for the team. This includes being willing to adjust to last-minute changes without complaint. P10 stated, “in DII, the hours and not having a set schedule are a huge barrier for female certified athletic trainers that desire to have a family.” P1 responded that,

There is a misconception that you have to work 60 hours a week. That you have to cover everything. We don't have to be at the beck and call of the coach and please their every whim. We have to change our mindset that we have to be here constantly. That we are the only ones who can care for our team. If you're going to stay in this profession, you have to find balance.

P4, P6, P8, and P9 all shared similar experiences. They stated that their schedule is the coach's schedule. This makes it challenging to find a balance, and you have to be very good at time management.

### ***Workload and Exhaustion***

All the participants discussed feeling exhausted due to circumstances revolving around work. This exhaustion led to feelings of burnout, stress, and significant health conditions. Issues that commonly led to feelings of exhaustion were the workload during specific times of the year

and lack of adequate staffing to support the needs of the student-athlete body. This means the certified athletic trainer is often working seven days a week, covering multiple daily practices, competitions, and maintaining the athletic training room's daily function. P1 shared that her staff was reduced eight years prior; this meant she worked seven days a week because there were not enough people to cover everything. By the middle of October, she was burnt out, and there were still seven months left to her newly required workload. P2 had a slightly different take on her work duties. For many years, her home life was not pleasant, and being at work helped relieve her stress at home. P7 stated,

Exhausted, absolutely! But I've never not done it (work). I've just pushed through. It wasn't until I ended up in the hospital with a life-threatening condition (because I kept pushing). That's when I learned you can't do this alone; no one can. You must have good people around you.

P8 shared a similar feeling regarding workload issues. "There have been times when I've said I can't breathe. That's when I know it's too much and I need to figure something out. Saying no and give yourself grace". At the time of the interview, participant nine P9 was experiencing extreme stress at her institution. For her, exhaustion ruled her day, and she did not feel as though she had an opportunity to recharge and unplug from work. She brought work tasks home with her daily, fielded multiple calls regarding injuries well beyond standard working hours. Her perception was that work ruled every aspect of her life.

The current COVID-19 pandemic also led to feelings of burnout and exhaustion. The constant evolution of policies and best practices, and decisions about safe return to the sport has fallen heavily on the collegiate athletic training staff. For many, this has been overwhelming. Consuming all hours of the day, seven days a week. Requirements for smaller practice group

sizes, space capacity regulations, testing, contact tracing, and sanitation have added significantly to the certified athletic trainer's daily workload.

Half of the participants directly addressed how the protocols for the safe return of collegiate sport had taken a mental, physical, and emotional toll on them. Their days went from primarily athlete injury care to COVID-19 tester, contact tracer, mask, and social distance monitor for these participants. For the head certified athletic trainers, the mental toll of explaining and defending policies that local and federal health officials determined was taxing. In addition to this, having to deal with the emotional fallout of putting students in quarantine and isolation repeatedly because of the close contact during sports play was emotionally overwhelming.

The final factor that consistently leads to certified athletic trainer exhaustion is the need to be available to student-athletes, coaches, and administrators at all times. Most participants noted that the evolution of cell phones has made it easier for the people she works with to reach her at any time of day, for any reason. As noted by Raab et al. (2011), the expectation is that the quality athletic trainer shows enthusiasm about helping others, thus showing their commitment by taking the time to show that they care. All participants noted that student-athletes all have their personal phone numbers, which encourages the expectation that certified athletic trainers should be accessible all the time. P3 shared,

The student-athletes have my personal number to text me at all times of the day or night. I might put it off, but knowing it's lingering, it just festers, and I can't enjoy what I'm doing until I deal with it.

P9 further stated,

If I'm away from work, I worry about my student-athletes. Are they okay? Did I remember to follow up? Are they doing the rehab I spent so much time creating for them? You try to concentrate on family, but you can't.

A few participants have been in the profession for over 25 years. They bring a perspective of experience and learning as they gained more confidence in their practice. P1 stated, "when I was younger, I let work invade everything. In my later years, I don't. As you get older, you gain perspective; not everything is about work. Not everything is about those student-athletes". P2 shared a similar sentiment.

I used to let work invade my personal time. Now when we have family events, we sit for the first hour, and everyone gets five to ten minutes to complain about work, and then there is no more work talk the rest of the time.

P11 was new to her current position, coming from a very tumultuous situation at her former institution. She shared the following,

At my former institution, I did not think about myself. I was worried about my student-athletes because I did not have good support from fellow ATCs, coaches, and administration. Now, at my new institution, it's probably the best I've ever felt in my career. I make a rule when I'm out and away from work. I will not talk about work. When I'm with family, I want to enjoy that time with them.

### ***Coaches Knowledge of Role***

The third sub-category is the coach's knowledge of the role of the certified athletic trainer. Most of the participants believed the coaches understood the athletic trainer's role in the healthcare of collegiate athletics. These participants believe their coaches understand the role

because of the athletic training staff's education, past, and present. A few participants expressed feelings that their coaches did not understand a certified athletic trainer's role to the degree they should. P3 believed as though her importance was a matter of convenience for the coach she worked with. P1 considered the lack of complete understanding was a need to maintain control over all aspects of their team. While P7 believed that the coaches she works with do not understand the role of a certified athletic trainer. Including the training and education that athletic training students must go through to become certified.

P8 said she believed that her coaches understood an ATC's role, which stemmed back to her predecessor. He did an excellent job of educating the coaches, and she works hard to continue that education. P6 stated that the coaches she works with are seasoned, and she feels fortunate that they seem to have it figured out. P5 feels that her coaches have a better understanding now than before COVID-19. During the COVID-19 shutdown, she and her staff spent a lot of time educating the coaching staff about the profession and its importance in their program. P1 stated that while she believes that the coaches understand the role of a certified athletic trainer, many do not want to give up the control of decision-making to her (regarding injuries and participation).

Several participants believed as though their coaches do not understand the role of a certified athletic trainer. P3 noted that at her institution, "we are part of the team when it's convenient, and healthcare professionals when it's convenient." She further shared stories of coaches that undermined her decisions and tried to dictate what she should do regarding student-athlete health care. P7 shared,

No, to this day, I don't think they have any idea. I don't think they understand the education we have gone through to get to where we are today. Because they don't understand that they can't understand what we do for a living.

One interesting note, P11 and P7 work at the same institution. While P7 noted that she does not feel like her coaches understand a certified athletic trainer's role, it bears noting that the experiences of P11 at her prior institution were so egregious that perhaps any positive experiences with the new coaches she works with are understanding and supportive.

### ***Administration Knowledge of Role***

The fourth sub-category is the athletic director's knowledge of the role of the certified athletic trainer. Some participants were confident that their athletic director understood the role of a certified athletic trainer. P6 and P8 noted that their athletic directors understand that the athletic training department must support the entire department and not just one team. They have received support and backing from their athletic directors in staffing and budget support to ensure their department can adequately support the student-athlete body. Half of the participants believed that their athletic directors understood the role of a certified athletic trainer to a degree, but not as well as they should. These participants stated that their athletic directors allowed them to run their departments as they saw fit and wished their athletic directors would come to their department and check-in more with staff. A couple of participants stated that they did not believe their athletic director had any idea of a certified athletic trainer's role. They indicated their athletic directors provided them little support and did not treat them as part of the department.

P1 has had three different athletic directors during her time at her current institution. She feels that all three of them have understood the role of a certified athletic trainer. P8 indicated

that she had experienced both ends of the spectrum regarding athletic director understanding. “I feel like my first athletic director was a coach’s athletic director. He didn’t understand that we are in contact with every student-athlete. We are vital to the function of the department”. She went on to note that her current athletic director was a former student-athlete of the institution. She has a good, long-standing relationship with him, which has helped build a strong support system.

Many participants wished their athletic director would come to the athletic training room and interact with them and observe what they do daily. P11 stated, “my former athletic director had no idea what I really do. All he thought I did was tape ankles and carry water. He had no idea of what I really do and why it’s important”. P9 feels like her athletic director is aware of what certified athletic trainers do but does not understand the entirety of the role. She added, “he makes us feel like we’re just a number, very replaceable.” P2 feels that her athletic director understands why we have to be at practices and competitions, but he doesn’t support us the way we should be supported. Participant five has a unique situation, “my athletic director is married to an athletic trainer, so if he doesn’t understand, he’s in big trouble.”

### ***Mental/Emotional and Physical Health***

The fifth sub-category is the effect of work responsibilities on participants mental/emotional health and physical health. Many of the participants believed as though their mental/emotional health has suffered due to their profession. Many indicated that the stress of not turning work off had led to increased stress and anxiety. A couple of participants stated they believed their mental/emotional health had improved. They indicated that they were stronger and more capable of handling the stresses of athletic training with age. Half of the participants indicated they believed their physical health had suffered because of their job. Some participants



suffered significant health issues due to injuries at work. A few participants stated their physical health had improved because they need to maintain a high level of fitness to perform their job correctly. For one participant, she thought she has maintained a satisfactory level of mental and physical health throughout her career.

Of the participants, that indicated their mental and emotional health has suffered. A few believed that they had become mentally and emotionally stronger through the course of their career. A few other participants stated their physical health had taken a hit through the course of their careers. P3 stated, “it’s a big stressor. A lot of my identity is tied to my job. I am passionate about what I do, but I also lose sleep about it. I can’t suddenly turn it off”. P4 and P6 shared this sentiment of passion for career and the constant worry about student athletes' health and well-being. P2 has had her mental well-being compromised by the added stress of COVID-19.

Mentally it’s been hard. Especially now, with COVID-19, it’s hit me hard. My mentor always said you have two buckets. If you empty one and never fill it back up, you will become uneven. You have to have people filling that bucket back up.

Conversely, P8 believed that mentally, she has gotten stronger. Partly because of getting older and having more experience.

For the participants that indicated their physical health has suffered, P8 said physically her health has not improved. Stating that standing for hours on end at practice, competitions, or daily student-athlete care takes a toll on your body. P5 and P7 experienced significant injuries because of work. P5 shared, “physically, it’s the first time I’ve ever been injured on the job, and it happened because I was tired.” P7 experienced a life-threatening health condition. She

detailed her experience about pressing through extremely difficult working conditions. Despite not feeling well, she pressed on because she didn't have enough staff to allow her to step away and care for herself. These circumstances landed her in the hospital and required her to take an extended medical leave of absence from work for her body to recover fully.

### ***Work Requirements***

The final sub-category within role conflict and role overload is the effect that work responsibilities have on the participants' ability to complete daily work tasks or complete professional improvement opportunities. The majority of participants stated they did not have enough time within their day to complete the tasks required for their job. They also indicated they did not have adequate time to attend opportunities for professional improvement. Again, lack of staffing was a significant issue noted by the participants for reasons why they struggled to have enough time in the working day to complete everything. As P10 stated, there is always more work than there are bodies to complete the work. Athlete care can rarely wait for a more convenient time, but paperwork will still be there no matter when you get to it. Very few participants believed they had adequate time to complete their daily tasks and complete professional improvement opportunities.

Most participants did not feel like they had enough time to complete the daily documentation tasks or complete meaningful professional development activities. P10 stated, "there is never enough time. The shortage of staff is a major contributor. There is too much to do and not enough time to do it". P9 shared, "absolutely not. It's this instant gratification world we live in. You spend 12 hours working and still have to document after that. There is just no time left to improve yourself". P4 explained,

Depending on the day, we get wrapped up in so many extra things. You feel like you could stay a little bit later and get things done or bring them home. But sometimes, you really want to go home and be home.

Perhaps P1 encompassed the sentiment of the group majority the best.

When you're in your active season, it's hard to find the time when you spend so much time away from your desk doing hands-on tasks. There is a reason professors get release time when they have extra duties. We don't have release time; we have to fit it in with everything else. Sometimes I feel like I'm on a treadmill that is going just a little bit too fast for me. I'm trying really hard to keep up with it, but I don't do a good job at it.

### **Support Networks**

Support networks were an essential factor for the participants and their ability to continue to work as certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Support came from various sources within the athletic department. The researcher asked questions relating to the support from the athletic director, coaches, fellow certified athletic training co-workers, the department's overall atmosphere, the specific support that certified athletic training parents receive, and the support between the female members of the department. Mazerolle et al. (2015) found that female certified athletic trainers noted the importance of support from peers, coaches, and family to balance college athletics and parenting demands successfully. Table 3 illustrates the breakdown of participant responses to the interview questions about support networks in the NCAA DII collegiate athletics setting. The support network theme will be analyzed in the same format as the prior theme.

Table 3

*Support Networks within NCAA DII Collegiate Athletic Departments*

Subcategory	Synopsis
Athletic Director Support	<p>Half of ATCs describe their athletic director as supportive as a female certified athletic trainer and as parents (when applicable).</p> <p>A few ATCs describe their athletic directors as unsupportive as female certified athletic trainers and parents (when applicable).</p>
Coach Support	<p>Some ATCs responded that they believed their coaches were supportive of their role as a female certified athletic trainer and as a parent (when applicable).</p> <p>The minority of ATCs believed they were unsupported by the coaches as a female certified athletic trainer and as a parent (when applicable).</p>
Coworker Support	<p>Most ATCs reported that their fellow athletic training co-workers' support is the main reason for their retention in the collegiate field.</p> <p>Few ATCs reported that her head athletic trainer did not choose to understand and support as they are capable of being.</p>
Department Atmosphere Family Friendly	<p>Many of the ATCs describe their athletic department as family-friendly.</p> <p>A couple of ATCs describe their athletic department as not family-friendly.</p> <p>A few ATCs describe their athletic as neither supportive nor unsupportive of families.</p>
ATC Parents Specifically Supported	<p>Some ATCs indicated they feel there is positive support for certified athletic training mothers.</p>

Few ATCs indicated that her department did not provide support for certified athletic training mothers.

Few ATCs indicated that they experienced differing levels of support from different areas within the department. Some were positive and some negative.

Women Supporting Women

All ATCs indicated they had a solid collegial relationship with other women in the department.

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### *Athletic Director Support*

Athletic directors oversee the athletic department's operations and set the tone for the atmosphere within the department. For the participants in this study, their support is a significant factor in their decision to continue working in the collegiate setting. Half of the participants described their athletic directors as supportive of athletic training and believed they encouraged a supportive department atmosphere. Few participants did not feel as though their athletic directors were supportive of athletic training. The lack of support had one participant considering a career change. The other participants indicated they were close enough to retirement that they would not consider a change in employment at this time.

The most common comments were that their athletic director did not micromanage their decisions, supported budgetary and scheduling decisions, and told their staff that family came first and followed through with this directive. P7 said that her athletic director was willing to gain more athletic training knowledge, which led to better support. P1 compared the three athletic directors she has worked under at her current institution. Her first athletic director was a pioneer in Title IX; she was an empowering mentor and understood the balance between athletics and parenting. Her second athletic director supported her as a certified athletic trainer, but not as

a mother. Her current athletic director is a mother as well and is highly supportive of a family environment. The athletic training staff at P9's institution is outsourced from the local hospital. She made the following statement about the relationship between their staff and the athletic director,

I feel as though we have no support. It has been made clear that we are not in this (student-athlete care) together. We aren't even a thought to him. We are the last to find out everything; there is no communication.

P2 feels that her staff is not supported in the way they should be, stating, "our athletic director needs to go to bat for us. You can't practice without us there".

### *Coach Support*

Collegiate coaches dictate the daily schedule of the athletic trainer. All the participants indicated that the lack of control over their schedule and making changes at the whim of the coach was challenging. Many certified athletic trainers believed they were supported as certified athletic trainers and specifically as certified athletic training parents. Conversely, few certified athletic trainers indicated that they did not feel supported by the coaching staff. Specifically, the expectations they desired for themselves were not the same for support staff members.

P8 feels lucky that most of the coaches she works with are former student-athletes of the institution. She has known most of them as student-athletes and has a solid and long-standing relationship with them. P1 stated that she feels the athletic department's coaching members have well supported their staff. P4 did not feel as though she has had any negative encounters with her coaches and believes that in many ways, she is better supported in her role because she is a woman. P5 shared that she does not feel as though the coaches fully support her department.

They all have young families and want the flexibility and support for themselves, but that doesn't carry over beyond what they want. They still think we should be here from 5a-10p every day and that it's not a big deal to ask that of people.

### *Coworker Support*

Support from fellow certified athletic training coworkers was noted as an essential factor in their success as both a certified athletic trainer and as a parent. "Female ATs believed that with the right work environment and overall support system, they were able to achieve WLB" (Mazerolle et al., 2015). The majority of participants described their certified athletic training peers as supportive and positively influenced their retention in the collegiate athletic training setting. One participant believed that her head athletic trainer did not support certified athletic training staff members and played a key role in why a certified athletic training coworker who was a mother left her position at the institution.

P10 has had the same colleagues for 25 years. They have grown together and worked very hard to support each other. P1, P7, and P8 reflected on the certified athletic trainers that first hired them and the examples they displayed. All three noted that these mentors believed that family was important and balance between work and family was vital to keeping young professionals in athletic training. P8 added that the relationship she has with her staff has helped her establish herself and maintain her longevity. P9 stated, "I feel like we are a giant family. My coworkers understand life is imperfect, things come up, and we help each other the best we can". P11 is new to her institution and is coming from a challenging working situation. Her response was,

This is the most supportive staff I've ever been part of. It's a comforting environment. Before coming here, I was the head ATC at a rival school. My

assistants were always young. They did not show me that they could be trusted to cover things without me around.

### *Department Atmosphere*

Department atmosphere was a contributing factor to the overall satisfaction of the participants in this study. Half of the participants described their department as family-friendly. This typically meant that coaches, administrators, and support staff members were comfortable with having their children at work with them at various times. They indicated that the department's overall environment was accepting of family interaction, as long as it did not significantly distract from the department's overall function. Two participants stated that their athletic department did not have a family-friendly atmosphere. One participant noted that this was a recent change based on the new athletic administration and the philosophy cultured by the athletic director's leadership.

For P8, she believed the department as a whole is family-friendly. P4 stated, "I do feel like there is a family atmosphere. We have quite a few coaches with young families. But as far as support staff, I do think it's different; the requirements are different". Some respondents had a neutral response about the family nature of their department. They did not perceive it as more or less family-friendly. P10 believed that her athletic department tries hard to be family-friendly. P9 stated,

I feel like it's a 50/50 split. We have coaches that pretend to have our back and then turn around and stab us in it. But then our student-athletes, when they walk in the door, they say they feel at home with us.

P7 shared a negative perspective of her athletic department.



It used to be family-friendly. It changed with the new athletic director. People in our department don't get along as well as they used to. There is a lot more division. I feel like we are pitted against each other. We have to go out of our way to circumvent that.

### *ATC Parents Support*

The sub-theme of support for certified athletic training parents is essential to examine because this group of individuals often require more help in covering practices and events due to family needs. Some of the certified athletic trainer participants believed that athletic training parents received positive support from the department. P10 commented that the athletic training parents on her staff receive the support that they ask for. She continued to state that those that had spoken up and asked for help when they needed, typically received the help they asked for. If there was no communication of need, then the expectation was that they did not need any special support. P5 did not feel like there was support from the athletic department toward certified athletic training parents. P2 and P9 believed certain areas within their department supported certified athletic training parents, while other areas did not. P9 described her immediate coworkers and most of the coaches as highly supportive. The administration was not supportive. The department supervisors that outsourced athletic training to the university were very supportive, but the hospital administrators were not supportive. P1 believed that the leadership shown by the administration has helped shaped positive support throughout the department. P7 shared that the stress of COVID has taken a toll on her athletic department. "Everyone is a little edgy right now; with COVID, everything is unsure. But when there is a real issue, we can definitely work things out".

### ***Women Supporting Women***

Most of the participants in this study indicated that their athletic departments employed few women in the ranks of administration and as head coaches. Having a solid support network of other women may be seen as a vital component to female retention within athletics as a whole. All eleven participants said they have strong collegial relationships with other women in the athletic department. However, there was no strong friendship bond with women outside of the athletic training department. P2 and P5 noted that they were the only female department head within the athletic department.

P2 was told she needed to learn to golf if she wanted to be included in the department's workings. Her perception was that she needed to find a way to fit into “the good old boys club” to be taken seriously. P9 looks at the women in her department as her cheer team and the reason she is still with the institution. P1 and P10 joked that they commiserate well with other women in the department. P5 shared, “I wish we had more females on staff. Besides myself, the other women are my two assistants and a handful of assistant coaches. I feel like I have a good connection with them. We share the same mindset”.

### **Women as Caretakers and Guilt Factor**

According to the Centers for Disease Control (September 16, 2020), two out of every three caregivers in the United States are women, meaning they provide daily or regular support to children, adults, or people with chronic illnesses or disabilities. This statement was held true when discussing the role of women in the caretaking role and the feelings of guilt associated with the participants' struggles. Table 4 discusses the five sub-categories within the theme of women as caretakers and guilt. These sub-categories include gender differences, missing family events for work, parental rating, childcare responsibility, and the benefit of their job to children.

Table 4

*Women as Caretakers and the Guilt Factor*

Subcategory	Synopsis
Gender Differences	<p>Some ATCs stated they believe women carry more guilt regarding their family situation than men do. They also feel that women are more inclined toward caregiving than men.</p> <p>An ATC discussed the differences in thought processes of men and women. Men tend to compartmentalize while women intertwine their thought processes.</p>
Missing Family Events for Work	<p>Most of the ATCs stated that they have missed numerous family events and carry guilt and regret because of it.</p> <p>Some ATCs stated that they had missed numerous family events, but they did not carry guilt or regret.</p>
Parental Rating	<p>Some ATCs rated themselves as a five out of ten as parents while working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.</p> <p>An ATC rated herself as a seven out of ten as a parent while working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.</p> <p>An ATC rated herself as an eight out of ten as a parent while working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.</p> <p>An ATC rated herself as a ten out of ten as a parent while working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.</p>
Child Care Responsibility	<p>Half of the ATCs indicated that they are primarily responsible for childcare in their household.</p> <p>An ATC indicated that there is an equal split of childcare responsibilities in their household.</p>

Benefit to Kids

The majority of ATCs believed that children positively benefit from being with their mothers or female caretakers that work as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting.

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### *Gender Differences*

The participants discussed their perception of the gender differences they have experienced regarding caretaking and their role in athletics. A study by Endendijk, Groeneveld, Bakermans-Kranenburg, and Mesman, (2016) referenced biosocial theory. These authors suggested,

Where gender roles and the characteristics associated with these roles lead to beliefs and expectancies about men and women's different nature and behavior. According to this theory, gender differences in social behavior arise from societies' division in gender roles, and particularly on the female role of homemaker and the male role of economic provider (p 3).

Based on interviews, three participants stated they believed that women are more inclined toward caregiving than men are and that women carry more guilt of missing out on family time. P8 noted her perception that men can compartmentalize thoughts and tasks, where women tend to intertwine their thoughts and tasks regularly. P7 shared, "men don't tend to carry the guilt feeling the women do. Anything we can do to mitigate that makes for a better environment, which will keep women in this profession". P1 added, "too many young professionals all of a sudden have kids and feel like they can't do this anymore because they're not getting the support they need."

P2 stated that “women feel guilty. We tend to be the bigger caregivers. Men tend to be able to get over it, brush it off. For women, we just can’t do that”. Finally, P8 added in her perspective, “women have highway systems in our head, we don’t think in a box. With our highway systems, we’re always thinking about a million different things”. For these women, they perceived the true nature of women has a strong tendency to lean heavily to a caretaker's role. This tendency leads women to carry tremendous stress about their student athletes' care and their children. In all these statements, the participants believed that women carried a more significant emotional toll when it came to providing care for student-athletes and their families.

### *Missing Family Time*

Working in collegiate athletics requires employees to work long often, unconventional hours. For those working in athletics, missing family events is inevitable. When asked, all the participants stated that they regularly miss family events because of work responsibilities. The majority of participants shared that they carry a deep sense of guilt and regret over their missed events. P3 shared that when she was hired at her current institution, she moved much closer to home, but because of work responsibilities, she could not go home to see family with any more frequency than when she was further away. P1 noted regret that she didn’t make family more of a priority earlier in her career. She believed she could have worked harder to make work coverage work out for her to attend these missed events. P1 also stated,

I felt crummy; I missed weddings, kids' sporting events. My husband wants to travel, and unless it's a specific date over spring break, we can never go. You're sad you're missing these events. You're standing on the sideline getting Snapchats of all the fun your family is having, and you just get mad. You're angry that your job takes you away from that. As I reflect on the early years in

my career, I regret not taking the time. I think it could have been worked out. I just never took that time for myself.

P8 struggles when she misses her kid's events because of work. For P4 and P9, they feel very hurt by not being able to attend family events. Being the only one, not in family pictures. Both made the statement that these are moments they will never get back. P5 and P11 shared similar stories of guilt over work and family events. P11 struggled to ask for time off for her brother's wedding because it was during football season, and the coach she worked with did not support time off for anything during the season. P5 shared,

When I was younger, I missed a lot. I thought work was the most important thing. I forgot about my family. I missed my cousin's wedding, and to this day, she has never forgiven me, and I will never forgive myself.

P2, P6, and P10 stated that they did not carry regret or guilt over missing these moments while they missed many family events. P2 and P10 added that work was a welcome relief to tense situations within their home life. P2 further stated,

I've had to miss multiple events, but it was also a point where I had to keep our household afloat. Keep earning money. Luckily, everyone in my life has been very understanding. They have opened my eyes in the last five years and told me this is ridiculous; you're never home. You need to be done.

### ***Parent Rating***

The participants who had children and the participant who was engaged were asked to rate themselves as parents working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting. The scale was set as one to ten, with one being poor and ten being superb. P4, P5, and P8 rated

themselves a five out of ten. They believed that they either missed too much time with their children or had to make too many sacrifices because of their mother's collegiate athletics position. P8 added, her kids are surviving and are really good people. That is how she rates her success. P4 feels able to do some of the things she wants and needs but not fully participating the way she would like to. P5 stated,

I wish I could say I was a ten; I always thought I would be a great mom. I think my son would tell you I'm a better mom now than when he was growing up. I missed a lot of stuff for him. Or he spent so much time with me at work or with relatives because I was working. It's not that he didn't love those moments, but he would rather have had that time with me instead.

P1 rated herself as a seven out of ten. This rating came in retrospect to conversations with her children, who are now adults.

When my kids were younger, I would have said a four or five. I felt terrible because I was missing a lot of what they were doing. They were so involved in athletics, and I couldn't make everything. But after talking to them now, I've gained perspective, so I'd say a seven in retrospect.

She stated that it helped to know that her children understood her job and that it did not affect them that she thought it had.

P7 rated herself as an eight out of ten. She stated that she worked incredibly hard to maintain a balance and do all the things she needed to do, but this effort came at her health price.

P6 rated herself as a ten out of ten. She stated that when she is at work, she is fully present at

work, completely immersed. When she is home with her daughter, she is fully immersed in her home life.

### *Child Caretaking*

Participants with children and the participant that is engaged were asked to describe the dynamic in their household when it comes to childcare. Specifically, they were asked about who bears the brunt of the responsibility when dealing with child illness, medical appointments, arranging for childcare providers. P1, P5, P6, P7, and P8 indicated that they were the primary caregiver for their children's needs. This was most true when it came to child illness, medical appointments, or other last-minute needs. P7 stated, "my kids were stepsons, but because of my medical background, I handled all the illness and medical appointments. I try hard to make it better and be accommodating than what I experienced when my boys were young". P1 added, "last-minute issues it was usually on me. My husband was good at the daily shuffling. But medical appointments, and sick kids, that was usually me. P6 shared,

I definitely carry the bulk of the responsibility in our family. I was furloughed for a time because of COVID, and my husband got used to me doing all the childcare load. That will need to change as we start back to sports practices and competitions.

P1, P5, P6, and P7 stated that their spouse did help with daycare or school shuffle. However, arranging alternate childcare fell mainly on them. P8 indicated that there is an equal split of childcare responsibilities between her and her spouse. Stating that childcare depends on the day and time of the need. Depending on schedules, they may split the day and move things around to make it work. It is important to note that her spouse is also a full-time employee of the same university athletic department. She noted that their responsibilities could overlap, and



one or the other will have to make a sacrifice. P4 is engaged, and her fiancé is also employed at the same institution as a coach. She anticipates that she will most likely bear the bulk of the childcare responsibility.

### ***Children Benefit***

The caregiver theme's final sub-category is the benefits children receive from their mothers or other female role models, such as an aunt working as a certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting. The majority of participants believed that children positively benefited from this experience. The participants' common theme was the importance of seeing strong female role models within the athletic setting. Many believed that the only athletic role models children see are male athletes, male coaches, and specifically males coaching female teams. P1 stated, “they benefited from the environment and the work ethic athletics required. They also got to see positive female role models, not just guys coaching girls”. P7 shared that her kids were so excited and thought it was cool to get to come to practice with the college kids. P2 and P10 stated that they believed kids benefited from seeing strong women as strong leaders.

### **Athletic Culture**

As discussed in the literature review, athletic culture is deeply rooted in a patriarchal system and has been slow to change. Bruening and Dixon (2007) studied the gender experiences of mothers that were head coaches in the NCAA DI collegiate setting. They noted in their review of literature that,

Traditionally during the childbearing years, full-time employment has not been established as a norm for mothers. Those that do work full time and raise children represent a minority in the workplace. In athletics specifically, women historically have been underrepresented in managerial roles. Women who have

achieved managerial roles have found that increased autonomy has also meant increased pressure to succeed and increased hours to do so. Ultimately these women have been impacted in both their career and family lives, often facing stress, guilt, and other adverse health outcomes (p 11).

The participants who have been in the athletic training profession for 20 or more years echoed this sentiment. Throughout the interview process, participants discussed situations where they were held to different standards than their male counterparts. Table five describes the three primary sub-categories discussed as important by the certified athletic training participants.

Table 5

*Culture of Athletics*

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Synopsis</b>
Support and Athletic Culture	<p>Most ATCs believed that the athletics' culture was not supportive of working mothers, women, and families.</p> <p>An ATC believed that the NCAA DII culture was supportive of working mothers, women, and families.</p>
Male vs. Female Teams	<p>Few ATCs indicated that they prefer working with a specific gender of student-athletes.</p> <p>Half of the ATCs indicated that they have no preference for the gender of student-athlete they work with.</p>
Male vs. Female Coaches	<p>An ATC indicated that they prefer working with a specific gender of the coach.</p> <p>Most ATCs indicated that they have no preference for the gender of coach they work with.</p>

### *Support and Athletic Culture*

Most participants believed that the culture of athletics was not supportive of women and families. Participants again related to coaches' stories about expectations, insisting that they be available in the office 15 hours a day. Dealing with schedule changes with little to no warning and the expectation that these professionals could easily comply with these desired changes. P3 said there had been numerous times she has had to cancel personal plans because of the head coach's last-minute schedule changes. P8 stated, "this is what I signed up for. I'm not going to make it more than what it is. If that's the case, then I need to do something different". P6 added, "it's the give and take of the job. No matter what job, you're going to miss something". P11 believed that the athletic culture at her institution was supportive of working mothers, women, and families, stating that NCAA DII is unique because you can be part of a great athletics program and still have a family. However, it is important to note that this participant is relatively new to her institution and described her employment at her prior institution as a horrible situation. She has had a welcome relief being at this new institution.

P1 was told that childhood was just a stage she needed to get through, and then she wouldn't have the work-family conflict issues. She also stated that she was expected to do all the things the male coaches would do and work the expected hours. P9 shared a story of the only female head coach being denied a professional working relationship with the male athletic director at her institution. The athletic director stated that any kind of relationship with a woman other than his wife was inappropriate and unacceptable. P5 stated, at the collegiate level, I don't feel that I would have had the same experience as I had working at the Catholic high school (when my son was younger). The expectation is to be available "24/7/365". P2 described a situation where her assistant staff member was having an inappropriate sexual relationship with

student-athletes. Instead of terminating their employment, they were encouraged to continue if it made the team win. Indeed, many of these issues within the athletic department go unseen if you do not live in that world. P2 added, “the majority of athletic directors are in it for the coaches. My athletic director has no choice but to support my area. But it isn’t the same support as the coaches get”.

### *Male vs. Female Teams/Coaches*

Overall, the participants indicated they did not prefer the gender of the sport and coach. Few participants indicated that they prefer working with a specific gender of student-athlete, and five indicated that they have no preference. For the participants that preferred a gender, this gender was primarily male. The reasoning for this was the ability to be more direct with males and an overall like of the sport. P7 shared, “I don’t know that it matters as I think the sport dictates the coach. Working with a coach can be rewarding when you understand where they’re coming from”. P4 added, “I’ve worked both men’s and women’s team and had good experiences with both. But I prefer male teams. You can be upfront with them. Same goes for male coaches.”

P3 prefers working with fast-paced/collision sports, and those tend to be men’s sports. She also added that she prefers working with female coaches because they tend to be more detail-oriented. Many male coaches she has worked with have been sexist and difficult. P10 Shares some of the same sentiment as P3. She does not have a preference for student-athletes she works with. She also currently prefers working with female coaches as they are not as challenging to work with as some of her male coaches. Those who did not have a preference noted that they enjoyed the differences between the two genders.

Many also believed it was important for them to work with women's teams and serve as a positive role model. P2 shared an important insight as females working with female sports teams.

I don't have a preference for coaches. But at the same time, we don't have many female coaches. That is really annoying to me. Why are there so many men coaching female teams? I also get great enjoyment working with male and female athletes. For women, they need a strong female role model. Since we don't have any female head coaches, it's even more important for me to be that strong role model for them.

In all, the participants enjoyed working with men and women as coaches and as student-athletes. While some had difficult times or individuals they worked with, they all believed they served an essential role in mentoring the student-athletes. Through interviewing the participants, it was clear to the interviewer that all these women were strong and independent women. They all held firm to their beliefs and did not shrink to pressure that compromised their ethics or the student-athletes care.

### **Gender Equity**

Although women are making great strides in gaining equity in leadership positions within athletics, there is still a significant discrepancy, especially in sports medicine. Lewis, Jin, and Day (2019) found that in the NCAA DII collegiate setting, out of a total of 322 head team physician positions, only 29 of these positions were held by women. The authors also examined the data for athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting, finding that out of 315 head athletic trainer positions, only 109 of these positions were held by women. Several participants mentioned that there are little to no female head coaches within their department. They were

extremely displeased with this fact and were compelled to serve as a strong female role model for the female student-athletes at their university. Table six shows the four sub-categories the participants indicated as most impactful within their careers as certified athletic trainers related to gender equity.

Table 6

*Gender equity*

Subcategory	Synopsis
Salary Equity	<p>The majority of ATCs reported that they believed they were not paid equitably for their work or education level.</p> <p>An ATC believed that she is receiving equitable pay for her work and level of education.</p> <p>Few ATCs indicated that they had received less pay than their male counterparts despite having more experience and a higher education level.</p>
Trust in Ability	<p>Half of the ATCs reported that they had their medical opinion routinely questioned/contradicted by coaches, administration, and physicians.</p> <p>Few ATCs reported that they had not had their medical opinion routinely questioned/contradicted by coaches, administration, and physicians.</p>
Double Standard	<p>Most ATCs believed their administration has a double standard when it comes to expectations within the athletic department.</p> <p>An ATC believed that there is no double standard in expectations within the athletic department.</p>

**Equitable Treatment**

Five ATCs believed that women are treated equitably within their athletic department and institution.

Half of the ATCs believed that women are not treated equitably within their athletic department and institution.

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***Salary Equity***

In the 2018 National Athletic Trainers' Association Salary Survey, female ATs continue to earn less than their male counterparts, with a difference of \$8,700 per year (NATA, 2016). The vast majority of participants reported that they felt strongly that they were not paid equitably for the education, skill, and workload they carry for their position. P11 believed that she is receiving equitable pay for her level of work and education. It bears noting that she indicated her prior institution paid all athletic training staff poorly. So, any raise in pay would have been met in a positive light. Some participants indicated that they are union employees. The collective bargaining unit determines their pay scale and any pay increase for their specific union. For these individuals, there is no opportunity to negotiate pay increases or bonuses. Pay is determined for all employees based on a predetermined set of standards.

The only opportunity they saw for advancement was into the head athletic trainer role for those participants who were assistant athletic trainers. Participants that were head athletic trainers, a few had thoughts of attempting to move into athletic administration. Still, all of them agreed that there was little opportunity for advancement beyond their position as the head athletic trainer. A couple of participants specifically discussed instances where male counterparts in their institution receive significantly more pay despite having less experience and education. P2 stated, "I don't appreciate that the assistant coaches at my institution make more

money starting than what I currently make as the head athletic trainer with 25 years of employment”. P3 shared,

At one institution, I found out that a coworker was making \$2000 more than I was, and he had less education and experience. I am one of those statistics where I’m making less than my male counterparts and have more qualifications.

### ***Trust in Ability***

Some of the participants considered themselves fortunate not to have had their medical opinion questioned. Others often are faced with challenges and criticisms of their medical opinion. A little more than half of the participants reported that they have their medical opinion routinely questioned or contradicted by coaches, administrators, and physicians. Some participants reported that they have not had their medical opinion questioned or contradicted by coaches, administrators, and physicians.

P3 discussed how her team physician talks to the female athletic training staff versus the male athletic training staff. She elaborated that he will not engage in detailed discussion with women the way he will with men. This leaves them searching for answers in a way their male counterparts don’t have to. P7 exclaimed,

Yes! How loud can I say it? I’m constantly questioned. I love the coaches that say, “I had that injury in college, and this is what we did.” But guess what, I have a medical degree, and you’re a coach. I don’t care what their answer is. This is what I’m doing for your kid, and if you don’t like it, there is the door. I think we’re going to fight that for the rest of our lives.



When P1 started in athletic training, her athletic department was still split into a men's and women's department. On the women's side, all staff members were female. So, as she was starting, she was surrounded by other women. No one went running to the men's department to complain. Once she started at her current institution, she had a supportive mentor as a head athletic trainer, and her athletic director was a pioneer for Title IX. Because of these strong leaders, she feels like she has not had any genuinely negative experiences.

P11 experienced a complicated working situation at her prior institution. She shared, "when I became the head athletic trainer, the same decisions that were okay when I was an assistant suddenly were not okay. Everything I did was questioned". P2 stated, "I definitely get second-guessed and questioned. Coaches tell me it's their job to push us to the edge. Their goal is to try and break me to get the answer they want". P5 feels fortunate sharing,

I've been lucky, but maybe that is because I was older when I came to the university. More established in my career. Our young female assistants are questioned all the time because coaches don't think they know what they're talking about.

Finally, P8 shared her opinion of this topic,

I don't think I've ever been questioned. As a female, you have to be very strong. Prove that you deserve respect. You earn it like everyone else. I'm known to be pretty firm, and people understand that. But I'm also open to listening, which is important—being open to a conversation but sticking to your guns when you feel passionate and sure about something.

### ***Double Standard***

The third sub-category discussed by the female certified athletic trainers was that of a double standard. A double standard is defined as judging heterosexual men and women differently for the same behavior (Gomez Berrocal, Vallejo-Medina, Moyano, & Sierra, 2019). Several participants stated they have experienced a double standard themselves or have witnessed a double standard of expectations between the male and female coaches of their department. P3 stated, “I have a colorful vernacular. The coaches can cuss an athlete out, and not an eyebrow is raised. But if I cuss, I’m in huge trouble”.

P8, P1, and P5 all shared a similar experience. Their coaches are allowed to jump the chain of command and go straight to the athletic director with complaints about the athletic training staff while they were expected to adhere to the chain of command strictly. They all state that even though the coaches could jump straight to the top of the chain, the athletic director openly listened to their side of the story and had their back regarding most every situation contended. P9 shared a problematic situation regarding her athletic director.

We get little to no support from our athletic director. We have one female head coach on staff, and he never will acknowledge any of her or her team’s accomplishments. While at the same time showering his male coaches with copious amounts of praise. He will not allow her to attempt to have the same professional relationship that he allows his male staff members.

### ***Equitable Treatment***

The fourth sub-category explored whether the participants believed women were treated equitably within the athletic department. The participants' responses were split, with half of the participants feeling that their athletic department/institution did treat women equitably and the other half feeling that women are not treated equitably. P10 credits the union for ensuring there

is equity at her institution. But even with the union, she believes that women have had to historically fight for equity.

P1 joked that she feels like all athletic staff members are treated equally poorly. P8 stated that she feels there is mutual respect, and if she believed otherwise, she would readily address it. The sentiments from the female certified athletic trainers that did not feel there was equity were strong. P7 stated, "it's a school atmosphere thing. We are an engineering school, so we're male-dominated. They are pushing women into engineering, but I don't think it has gotten to the point where it needs to be". P4 feels that the institution as a whole could do a better job of gender equity. P2 added that superficially it appears to be equitable, but behind the scenes, it is not. P5 shared the most substantial perspective,

It's the good old boys' network. I think when you're in a male-dominated athletic department with very few females, it's hard to really be part of building those relationships. One of my biggest problems with our campus was hiring two male head coaches for women's teams. The administration never considered a female for these positions. Sometimes putting a female as the head of female teams is the right decision for the young women as a role model.

### **Synthesis**

This study focused on the phenomena that drive female certified athletic trainers' retention and attrition from the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The themes and sub-categories described above revealed the most significant challenges faced by female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII setting. For these participants, the themes discussed within this study were seen as part of the requirements of working within the collegiate athletics setting. There is a growing concern regarding role overload and role conflict and the effect this will have on

NCAA DII athletic training and the toll it places on young female professionals. There was a resounding acknowledgment of solid support systems at work and home for the study participants. These support systems were and continue to be the most substantial contributing factor for retention.

The participants supported the theory that women tend to be viewed and have a natural tendency to feel compelled into primary caretakers. This was even true of those participants that did not have children. They tended to view their student-athletes as an extension of their family. Participants also believed as though collegiate athletics' overall culture was not supportive of mothers as certified athletic trainers. Many were stating that despite coaches and administrators having young families, the flexibility they desired for themselves did not extend down through the department's support staff. Participants believed there was a lack of gender equity within their department, but through discussion, it became apparent that this fight was an uphill battle that they didn't feel they could win. As long as the majority of members of the administration were male, the participants believed that the department hierarchy would continue to stay male dominant.

### **Summary**

Throughout this study, the participants discussed the reasons that most challenged their abilities as female certified athletic trainers and, for many, a mother. The participants recognized role overload/role conflict, support networks, the role of caretaker, the culture of athletics, and gender equity as the significant factors that influence retention and attrition of women from the NCAA DII collegiate athletic setting. Six study participants have been certified for 20 plus years. The experiences of these women are valuable as they have persevered within this profession. They have traversed through many changes within athletics and have faced

numerous challenges, and still have persisted within the collegiate setting. The mentorship they have received and return to their staff is a key component for successfully retaining women in the collegiate athletic training setting.

For the young professionals who do not yet have children, the most significant factor that concerned them about having children in the future was their ability to have time for their family primarily due to the time, schedule, and travel requirements. Support networks were also crucial for our female certified athletic trainers to be successful in the collegiate athletic training setting. For those who have had success, their head athletic trainer and spouse's support was most important, followed closely by coaches and administrators' support.

Chapter five will present the researcher's analysis of the findings concerning prior studies of retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers from the collegiate setting. This chapter will also discuss the study's limitations, the implications of the study, and future research.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The retention and attrition rates of female certified athletic trainers at the NCAA DII collegiate level of competition were examined through the experiences and perceptions of five female head certified athletic trainers and six female assistant athletic trainers. Chapter Five provides an evaluation of the results and if it addresses the purpose of the study. It also draws comparisons to prior research and determine implications the findings show to support women's persistence in the collegiate athletic training setting. Finally, this chapter provides the researcher's self-evaluation and what areas of further study are recommended.

This chapter summarizes the study, including the study's significance, a synopsis of the literature reviewed, the methodology of the study, and a review of the findings. After the summary, the results are discussed in light of existing research in the field of athletic training. The next section of conclusions based on the results includes comparing the findings based on the theoretical framework and previous literature, including the interpretation of the findings. The researcher also discusses the study's limitations and implications and the practical application to the certified athletic training profession. In the final section, the researcher makes recommendations for future research and offer concluding thoughts.

### **Summary of the Results**

The need for this study is twofold. First, the high attrition rate of young female certified athletic trainers from the collegiate setting is of great concern. The studies included in the literature review illustrates a rising trend of young professionals seeking to leave the collegiate setting when they were ready to start a family. The second purpose seeks to address the lack of research regarding female certified athletic trainer retention and attrition in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The bulk of published studies on female certified athletic trainer retention and attrition is currently focused on the NCAA DI collegiate setting.

Employment in the collegiate athletic setting comes with many challenges. It is a profession that does not conform to regular working hours and time off can be fleeting for many, and work-life balance can be challenging to maintain. As noted in Chapter One, not only do female certified athletic trainers struggle with the workload and expectations placed upon the certified athletic trainer, they also face the stereotypical pressures society places on mothers. As collegiate athletics continues to evolve, the expectations placed on certified athletic trainers continue to increase. Many participants in this study believed that the NCAA DII athletic model

operates with the NCAA DI's pressure and expectations but with the financial means of the NCAA DIII. As evidenced in the literature review, there are many differences between the three levels of NCAA competition. These differences make it essential to examine if the same issues contributing to female certified athletic trainers' attrition at the NCAA DI setting are the same or different in the NCAA DII setting.

This study's literature review covered five significant themes relating to female certified athletic trainers' attrition and retention. These themes included role overload/conflict, support networks, women and caretakers, the culture of athletics, and gender issues. Spillover theory was used to identify the participants' positive and negative experiences in their role as a certified athletic trainer and their life outside of the athletic training facility. "The idea of spillover is common in the work-life interface, where work often affects the ability to attend other events or fulfilling other obligations simply because of a lack of time" (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015f).

Certified athletic trainers are health care professionals that must work under stressful conditions that are typically emotionally draining and requires a significant amount of interpersonal contact with student-athletes, coaches, and administrators (Cayton & Valovich-McLeod, 2019). Gnacinski, Nai, Brady, Meyer, and Newman, (2020) stated that work-family conflict and work-life balance collectively suggested that personal characteristics and occupational realities of the profession pose challenges to the optimization of nonwork or personal time for certified athletic trainers. In the Cayton and Valovich-McLeod (2019) study, the Role Strain Scale was administered to collegiate athletic trainers with the following results.

Approximately half of the participants experienced moderate to high levels of role strain, with role overload contributing the highest, followed by hours worked per week (> 50 hours per week, 53%), number of credits taught (>3 hours per

semester, 35%), and number of students supervised as a clinical preceptor ( $\geq 5$  students per semester).

Participants in this study all indicated that role overload/conflict was a heavy burden within their careers. The participants noted vital points were the growing expectation of performance and availability and inadequate staffing, which resulted in high student-athlete to certified athletic trainer ratios.

Mazerolle and Eason (2015) stated that women in the collegiate athletic work setting require supportive supervisors and colleagues that value work-life balance, job sharing, and creating time away to rejuvenate.

Cayton and Valovich-McLeod (2019) further noted in their study that

Athletic trainers who prioritized personal time gained interpersonal support from athletic directors, administrators, coaches, and athletic training colleagues to implement work schedule flexibility. Adding athletic training staff, integrating family into the workplace, and social support from family and friends are effective in decreasing work-family conflict.

For the participants in this study, those who have persisted in the profession for 20 or more years attributed their ability to sustain a professional career and maintain family time to the head certified athletic trainer, their fellow certified athletic training colleagues, and some cases, their athletic directors.

Cayton and Valovich-McLeod (2019) found that "women had the propensity to feel guilty when having to leave work for family or choosing work over family, finding it stressful to manage work and family (causing burnout), and were less likely to use work-leave benefits" (p.



230). This statement held true with the experiences of the participants of this study. Those that have been in the profession for 20 or more years were able to find a better balance. However, as young professionals, they all carried a large load of guilt when they missed family time or in leaving work for family time.

The fourth theme, the culture of athletics, was challenging to define. Much of the culture within an athletic department is characterized by unwritten expectations of administrators and coaches. As Mazerolle and Eason (2015f) cited, female athletic trainers discussed excessive working hours were viewed as a sign of commitment, motivation, and productivity, and thus becomes expected because of organizational culture, which extends beyond the sports industry into health care. When participants were asked if they felt their department was family-friendly, most of them indicated a positive family environment within their workplace. However, this family environment revolved around kids and family being accepted in the workplace, so the parent could "spend time with their child" while still fulfilling their expected work duties. Mazerolle and Eason (2015) noted in their study that "an individual's values and needs can help alleviate the strain of balancing work, family, and personal needs, which for female AT's may include wanting more time away for the job and more time with family." This statement puts a different light on the definition of a family-friendly environment in the collegiate athletic setting.

As cited in Mazerolle and Eason (2015), work-centered preference, such as that of collegiate athletics, carries a mindset that does not include raising a family, facilitating promotion to head certified athletic trainer for women that do not intend on having a family. Oglesby, Gallucci, & Wynveen, (2020) found that female certified athletic trainers expressed a belief that their gender played a role in maintaining careers as an athletic trainer. Citing a study conducted by Mazerolle and Eason (2015), many female

certified athletic training participants at the NCAA DI level thought that the primary focus of females should be child-rearing rather than pursuing a career, which made these participants fear that being athletic trainers would interfere with their responsibilities as mothers.

This qualitative research study used a semi-structured set of interview questions to glean female certified athletic trainers' experiences and perceptions in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The participants in this study represented four categories of women in the professional workforce. Female certified athletic trainers under the age of 30 with no children, female certified athletic trainers over the age of 30 with no children, female certified athletic trainers with children 18 years and younger, and female certified athletic trainers with children 19 years and older. Experience as a certified athletic trainer ranged from six years to 35 years. The participants shared similar positive and negative experiences throughout their careers regardless of length in the profession. Many researchers have noted that the keys to managing burnout and the subsequent attrition are establishing boundaries, determining priorities, learning to say "no," and having a solid support system (Oglesby et al., 2020). The participants who have persisted as a certified athletic trainer in the NCAA DII collegiate profession are all elements they spoke of when discussing their retention in the profession.

### **Discussion of Results**

Prior to this study, little research had been conducted on the attrition and retention of female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. This study sought to fill the need to research this phenomenon within a division other than the NCAA DI level of competition of athletic competition within the NCAA. The study results indicated that many of

the factors that affect retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers at the NCAA DI collegiate setting also affect female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting.

The primary factors that affected attrition were role overload/conflict and women's societal expectations as the primary child caretaker, and lack of support systems. For the participants in this study, these factors had them considering retirement, leaving for different positions in athletic training, or considering leaving the profession altogether. Role overload/conflict was the primary factor for the participants that have been certified 20 years or more and their considerations of early retirement from the profession. For these participants, retirement is anticipated within the next five years, with many considering opting out earlier as the department's working conditions erode. For the younger professionals, a combination of the three factors influenced their decisions to marry and start discussing children. Combining these three factors created stress for these women in feeling as though they must choose family or career and that having a balance in both is not possible.

Not every participant felt as though their support systems were lacking. The certified athletic trainers who had remained in the profession attributed their success to the support they received within the athletic department, specifically, the head certified athletic trainers that mentored them early on. They carried this standard forward when they were promoted to the role of the head certified athletic trainer. This supports the need for role modeling and mentoring within the profession and its impact on young professionals' retention. For the younger professionals, most stated they had exceptional role models and mentors within the sports medicine department. These mentors helped them feel as though the work-life balance is achievable within the collegiate athletic training profession.

While participants all shared issues with gender discrimination and the culture of athletics, these factors were not significant in their decision to change jobs or leave the profession. For many, gender discrepancies are part of athletics' culture, something they tolerated and accepted as part of the position. Unfortunately, gender discrepancies are seen as a normal part of the culture. Perhaps that philosophy will change in the near future.

### **Conclusions Based on the Results**

This portion of the chapter will be discussed in two sections. The first section will compare each theme's results with spillover theory, and conclusions will be drawn based on these comparisons. The second section will explain the findings of the study concerning the previous research.

### **Comparison of the Finding with the Framework**

#### ***Spillover Theory***

This study sought to explore the factors contributing to female certified athletic trainers' attrition and retention rates in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Many theories could have been applied to help explain this phenomenon. For this study, spillover theory was chosen to bring meaning to the female certified athletic trainers' experiences. Kumar and Janakiram (2017) defined spillover theory as a carryover of feelings, emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are an established part of their work into their family life, and vice versa. Spillover further explains how the positive and negative experiences are transferred between the work and home domain (Sok et al., 2014).

Athletic training in the collegiate setting tends to be suited toward employees without children. From the researcher's experience, the expectation is to be available to the student-athletes, coaches, and administrators at all times. The researcher further perceived that taking

time away from work to tend to family or social needs was viewed as unfavorable. As referenced in chapter one, Fuegen et al. (2004), Sayer (2005), Kamphoff (2010), and Inglis et al. (2000) discussed the societal guilt pressure placed on working women. With nearly all certified athletic training, mothers reported difficulty in balancing personal and work lives (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016a). Employment opportunities for women have grown in athletic training. However, despite this trend, few women are employed as head certified athletic trainers. A large number choose to leave the profession by 30 years primarily because of a desire to start a family (Kahanov & Eberman, 2011).

Conversely, Mazerole & Pitney (2012) reported that certified athletic trainers working in the clinical setting believed that clinical work was better suited to work-life balance. This perception is supported by Kahanov and Eberman (2011), with 45% of women in the collegiate ranks planning to leave for a career setting more suited to family life. This study examines the barriers to female retention in athletic training and what aspects most significantly affect women's abilities in the NCAA DII collegiate setting to achieve work-life balance and slow women's attrition rate from the collegiate setting.

Pradhan (2016) defined spillover theory as the impact the domains have upon each other regardless of the established boundaries. For study participants, the creation of boundaries seemed to come with experience/longevity in the profession, support from prior mentors and current staff, and a relationship with the administration that allows them to make these decisions. Participants all described numerous instances where work carried into home life. This left them feeling resentful that work was taking away from their family time. To keep women in the collegiate setting, something will have to give with expectations, support, and autonomy. The following sections will discuss spillover theory as it relates to each theme of this study.

### *Spillover Theory and Role Overload/Role Conflict*

The findings of this study as it pertained to role overload/role conflict are consistent with the negative aspect of spillover theory and increased desires for attrition from the profession of a certified athletic trainer (Mazerolle et al., 2015c; Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Eason et al., 2017; Naugle et al., 2013; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). The participants indicated numerous areas where role overload/role conflict crosses over more often into their family and personal life. Some of the participants believed that the coaches and administrators understood the role of the certified athletic trainer. In contrast, others alleged that these two groups did not understand the different roles to the degree that they should. The perception coaches and administrators have of the certified athletic trainer's professional role can significantly impact the certified athletic trainer's daily life.

Almost all of the female certified athletic trainers indicated that one of the most significant challenges to maintaining work-life balance is the lack of control over their schedule. The coaching staff determined their daily schedule. They were expected to conform to the schedules and constant changes in that schedule with minimal consideration given to the effect it had on individuals outside of the immediate coaching bubble. This made it difficult for the participants to schedule personal appointments and plan and attend family activities. This lack of autonomy had a considerable negative effect on the women in this study.

The female certified athletic trainers also discussed how insufficient staffing and expanding workload left them feeling exhausted and burnt out. Many indicated that there never were enough hours in the day to complete all of the required tasks of their position. They routinely brought work home in an attempt to be present with their family. Furthermore, student-athletes, coaches, and administrators also all had the personal phone numbers of the

certified athletic trainer, making them accessible to these individuals at all day and night hours. In listening to these women describe this experience of attending to work duties while trying to be present at home, the researcher questions whether this time could be considered family time. Being in the presence of your family does not equate to spending time with them, connecting with them, and being present in the moment.

In all, the effects of role overload/role conflict and its impact on work-life balance for the female certified athletic trainers were quite adverse. Most of the participants felt as though their mental health had suffered because of their job expectations. They indicated higher levels of stress and anxiety and noted that these feelings had increased each year. The expectations of their profession also took a physical toll on their body. Several participants shared instances where they were injured on the job or were stricken with life-threatening health conditions, ignoring the signs for medical attention because they felt they needed to be at work.

### *Spillover Theory and Support Networks*

Strong support networks have been shown in the literature as one of the essential factors in the retention of female certified athletic trainers (Mazerolle et al., 2015c; Goodman et al., 2010; Eason et al., 2017). Spillover theory explains how the relationships between supervisors and coworkers' as important facilitators of work-life balance for female certified athletic trainers. The participants described the positive and negative impact that their athletic administration and coaches have on maintaining balance in their career and family life.

Having solid support networks both at work and at home can reflect a positive association between work to home and home to work. The female certified athletic trainers overall indicated strong support networks within their athletic departments and at home. The majority felt supported as parents by their athletic directors and the coaches with whom they work. Support

from their head certified athletic trainer and certified athletic training colleagues were the most important in establishing work-life balance.

The policies and practices established in the athletic training department by the head certified athletic trainer were noted as the primary factor for the decision to continue in the role of a certified athletic trainer at the collegiate level. The participants in the head certified athletic trainer's role shared that the experiences they had under the head certified athletic trainers when they were younger in their profession were crucial to their longevity and the reasoning behind the policies and practices they have established in their departments. A few participants felt that their head certified athletic trainers did not have policies and practices supporting work-life balance and family needs. There were concern and hesitation to start a family for these women if they stayed in the position and at their current institution. They were not confident that they would be given the same flexibility afforded to other women at different institutions.

### ***Spillover Theory and Women as Caretakers and the Guilt Factor***

Spillover theory describes the challenges that female certified athletic trainers experience while balancing a collegiate athletics and parenthood career. Naugle et al. (2013) reported that female certified athletic trainers stated that work hour expectations, travel requirements, and inflexible schedules create the largest source of conflict in finding work-life balance. Further, Mazerolle and Eason (2016c) found that women tend to emphasize the caretaker role, with societal norms making it difficult for them to manage both work and family responsibilities. Participants shared their philosophy of the role of women as caregivers. They revealed their perception that women tend to carry more guilt when not attending to family needs. However, the same guilt was felt by our participants when they took time away from work to spend with family. They described feeling they placed a tremendous burden on other staff members that



were also overworked. They worried that they had placed an unfair request on top of their workload, which led to an increased feeling of guilt and worries, resulting in them not being fully present with their families.

They also believed that women have a natural predisposition to the caregiver role than men. This phenomenon has also been noted in prior research (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c; Mazerolle et al., 2015c). This area is most affected by the overflow of work to family life and vice versa. Most female certified athletic trainers indicated that they bore a great sense of guilt and regret over missed family time because of work responsibilities. All but one participant that had children indicated that they were primarily responsible for childcare in their household.

In this study, the female certified athletic trainers, regardless of family status, all recounted numerous instances where they missed family events due to work responsibilities. These moments left them with feelings of great sadness, regret, and anger because their jobs took them away from the most important people. At times, for two participants, work provided a much-needed reprieve from their marriage and family stresses.

The participants who had children all discussed having robust support systems at home from spouses, family, and friends. These support systems made it possible for their children to be involved in activities and manage childcare duties' constant shuffle. However, despite robust support systems, these participants were saddened that they missed so much time with their children. Some of the participants moved heaven and earth to ensure that neither their jobs nor their family suffered because of the other's needs. But this came with a price tag regarding their physical health.

### *Spillover Theory and Culture of Athletics*

Spillover theory describes the impact that athletics' culture has on female certified athletic trainers' work-life balance. As established in the prior section, women are predisposed to caretaking and struggle to balance work and family (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c). Pressure to win and the general competitive nature of sport erode work-life balance for female certified athletic trainers (Goodman et al., 2010). Mazerolle et al. (2016c) further stated that athletics' culture creates a natural competition between work and life.

Most of the participants in this study felt that athletics' culture does not support working mothers, women, and families. The primary factors noted included long workdays (12 or more hours daily), schedule changes with little or no communication, and the expectation of availability to student-athletes and coaches at any time it is needed. Most of the participants stated that the occurrences mentioned above happened daily, with coaches and administrators assuming that the certified athletic trainers could easily accommodate these requests. Personally, there have been times when the inability to accommodate last-minute changes was addressed with the head coach. The response is typically one of disgust and a "how dare you" attitude toward not complying with their wishes. This creates a negative spillover into family life, where work is expected to take precedence over others' caregiving needs in support of the team.

While the participants noted a negative attitude toward support toward working mothers, many also stated that they were aware of what they were signing up for when they entered the profession. While this may be a valid statement, the number of women choosing to leave the collegiate, professional-level indicates that this expectation of workload is becoming less acceptable among young professionals. If colleges and universities want to maintain longevity

within their athletic training departments, it appears that some changes will be needed to keep women in the profession.

### *Spillover Theory and Gender Equity*

Spillover theory relates to gender equity in a similar manner as it does to the culture of athletics. In Fuegen et al. (2004), the ideal worker works 40 or more hours per week for 40 or more years and does not take time off to raise children. Similar to the culture of athletics section before, many of the participants indicated there were issues of gender equity within their athletic department. While Title IX has allowed for more opportunities for women, it does not mandate equal work environments (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The subthemes were salary equity, trust in ability, double standards, and equitable treatment. Despite their perception of gender inequity, many women felt this, unfortunately, came part and parcel with working within athletics.

Almost all of the participants indicated they are not financially compensated for their work and education level compared to males in the department. This overflows into their home life, affecting their financial ability to support themselves, let alone a spouse and children. One participant noted that the hours the certified athletic trainers keep are often outside of the traditional hours that daycares are open. This often creates an additional financial burden paying for babysitters and nannies outside of the traditional working hours.

Many female certified athletic trainers indicated that they routinely have their medical opinion questioned or contradicted by their male coaches and administrators. They also believed in a double standard in expectations, including women being treated equitably compared to the department's coaches and administrators. In the researcher's experience, having to tackle this daily becomes exhausting and frustrating. For many of the participants, they shared that they carry home their frustration, anxiety, depression, and at times anger. This can affect their home

life, marriage, and interactions with their children. In the researcher's experience, bringing negative work emotions home leads to spousal tension, a short temper with children and can easily lead to resentment in caring for children and household tasks. This creates a negative spread into family life.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

All participants in this study have experienced many successes and hardships within their professional careers. One component that nearly all of them had in common was a strong mentor as a head athletic trainer when beginning their careers. Support from these individuals left an indelible mark on these women. Encouragement to stay in the profession and those who are now in the head athletic trainer's role, paying forward the same philosophy about family and work-life balance were common statements. There were several themes formed through the interview process with the female certified athletic trainers. These included role conflict/role overload, support networks, women as caretakers and the guilt factor, gender stereotypes, and the culture of athletics.

For many certified athletic trainers, role overload and role conflict are the harsh realities of their daily working lives. Role conflict was defined by Henning and Weidner (2008) as the existence of clear but competing or incompatible expectations. Role overload is defined as expectations that make too many demands for the time and energy available, or there is a conflict between quality and quantity given the time constraint (Henning & Weidner, 2008). The participants shared many experiences of role overload and role conflict. Role overload and role conflict were deemed the primary factors that led to female certified athletic trainers' attrition rates from the NCAA DII collegiate setting. This is also supported by numerous studies from the NCAA DI collegiate setting (Mazerolle et al., 2015c); (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Eason et al.,

2017; Naugle et al., 2013; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011). The participants in this study repeatedly explained the ongoing hardships of a lack of staffing, lack of resources, and overall lack of control of their schedule.

Through the discussion of role overload and role conflict, the female certified athletic trainers who participated in this study were asked to share their perceptions of the primary barriers to persistence in the collegiate athletic training profession. They were also asked how the workload of collegiate athletic training in the NCAA DII collegiate setting affected their feelings of exhaustion and burnout. Issues relating to schedule, hours worked, and travel was listed as the factors that contributed most to women's attrition with families and those that desire to have children away from the collegiate athletic training profession. Participants also explained the knowledge coaches and athletic directors had of the role of the certified athletic trainer. The female certified athletic trainers also discussed working as a certified athletic trainer in the NCAA DII collegiate setting has affected their mental and physical health.

Participants indicated the barriers they face include the hours required to complete a certified athletic trainer's job and having little to no control over your work schedule were the two most significant challenges that female certified athletic trainers face. Participants shared stories of making changes to schedules at the last minute, including canceling appointments, juggling childcare, changing or canceling plans with family and friends. They carried a heavy burden from these last minute, and often unexpected changes affected their daily life and mental well-being. In chapter two, Mazerolle et al., (2015c) stated that certified athletic trainers in the traditional collegiate setting carry significant demands for travel, multiple team coverage, teaching, student supervision, and administrative duties. While all the participants acknowledged that this is part of the job, they lack the option to say no to a coach's demands.

The expectation is they must fulfill the duties of their job until the job is done. This includes accommodating all practice and competition changes regardless of the circumstances driving the change. This finding is supported by Goodman et al. (2010) that the expectation for mothers in athletic training is incompatible with the bureaucracy and pressure to win in the NCAA athletic setting. Participants agreed that for female certified athletic training parents and those desiring to have children, this is the most significant obstacle for women feeling as though they can be successful parents and athletic training professionals. Because of the irregular hours that certified athletic trainers must work in the collegiate setting, childcare options can be complicated. A certified athletic trainer must often be at work before daycare or school opens and is still working long after these places have closed. Finding and paying for childcare for nontraditional hours is also a burden that many female certified athletic trainers have to bear.

Participants explained how their work duties have led to exhaustion and feelings of burnout. This finding is supported by Kahanov and Eberman (2011), stating that burnout rates are highest in athletic training among women primarily due to the lack of personal time and lack of autonomy over work schedule and hours. The female certified athletic trainers stated that the addition of student-athletes and staffing shortages had left them with more work than there are hours in the day to complete. The majority of study participants said they routinely take work home with them, choosing to complete daily documentation or professional development tasks at home so they could at least be present in the same place as their family (role overload). Goodman et al. (2010) defined role overload as job expectations that exceed available time and resources. In addition to documentation, student-athletes, coaches, and administrators have access to their certified athletic trainer's personal cell phone numbers. All participants shared that they are on call at all times and are expected to answer all calls from student-athletes, coaches,

and administrators regardless of the time of day or any private event they may be attending. This makes it difficult for certified athletic trainers to have downtime and, indeed, rejuvenate. This finding is further supported by Mazerolle et al., (2015c) when they stated that role overload contributes to high levels of stress and burnout among certified athletic trainers due to excessive work hours, limited days off, and lack of staffing.

Finally, the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on certified athletic trainers' lives was described. The strain of maintaining the NCAA's safety protocols, the athletic conference, and state and local health guidelines had added tremendously to the certified athletic trainers' workload. Participants described the mental stress of contact tracing, having to repeatedly place student-athletes in quarantine because of exposure due to their sport activity, having to cancel competitions, determine testing protocols and strategies, keeping abreast of the ever-changing guidelines, and being challenged on health department guidelines by student-athletes, coaches and administrators. The pandemic has brought about challenges that none of the participants ever expected to face. It has been an exhausting challenge to try to make collegiate athletics operate when the world is facing such a disruptive health crisis.

Participants assessed the knowledge and understanding the coaches at their institutions have of certified athletic trainers. Half of the female certified athletic trainers believed their coaches understood a certified athletic trainer's role, while the other half thought their coaches lacked understanding. Many of the athletic trainers thought that the coaches they worked with had some understanding of a certified athletic trainer's role. Still, they did not believe that they fully understood the education and the entire scope of practice required of a certified athletic trainer. A few had dealt with coaches who did not want to give up decision-making power to

anyone else. In some situations, the certified athletic trainer learned how to manipulate the situation, so the head coach felt like they were the one making the decision.

They attributed this to their predecessors' education and overall department structure for the half that felt as though their coaches understood their role. Also, they stated that they had spent a significant amount of time educating the athletic department members as well. Almost all participants believed that the coaches needed to have a desire to understand the role of a certified athletic trainer. If there was no desire to understand, then any amount of education simply was ignored.

Participants also assessed the level of knowledge and understanding that their athletic directors have of the certified athletic trainer's role. Responses were split amongst the respondents, with slightly more feeling that their athletic director did not fully understand the certified athletic trainer's role. Participants shared statements regarding the athletic directors' education regarding the certified athletic trainer's role by their predecessors and themselves. Participants described the sentiment that their athletic directors had the level of knowledge and understanding they were willing to accept. Many of the female certified athletic trainers believed their athletic directors only to support the coaches' needs. The athletic training department was considered a checkmark on a piece of paper and not as a substantial piece of its function.

All the participants noted their athletic director's desire to spend more time in the athletic training room. The assistant athletic trainers stated that they wished the athletic director would check in on the entire staff and connect with them. The sentiment from all the participants was a desire for their athletic director to spend time in the room and observe the department and the staff, and not only see them on the sidelines during games or practices. They believed that if athletic directors spent time doing this, they would better understand the certified athletic



trainer's role and better understand the areas that might help provide better care for the student-athletes.

Collegiate athletic health care is constantly evolving, and professional development and continued education are critical factors to maintain knowledge, skills, certification, and licensure (National Athletic Trainers Association [NATA], 2021). In addition to professional development, certified athletic trainers must complete thorough documentation of their daily work with the student-athletes. This can be challenging even on the best of days. A certified athletic trainer in the collegiate setting will work with multiple student-athletes at one time.

Staffing shortages are common in the NCAA DII athletic training setting, which increases the patient to certified athletic trainer ratio and decreases the amount of time available during the working day to complete the required documentation. The participants were asked if they felt like they had enough time to complete the required documentation. The overwhelming response was that there was never enough time to complete everything they needed to complete to maintain compliance with their job and maintain their certification. Lack of staffing was the primary factor that kept the participants from believing they could accomplish all their tasks within their working hours. Lack of staffing means fewer certified athletic trainers to care for the growing numbers of student-athletes. The additional COVID-19 responsibilities have added to the strain of the certified athletic trainers' ability to complete the required work tasks.

Participants reflected on whether their mental or physical health has suffered or improved through their careers. Most of the participants believed their mental health has suffered. Many indicated they had become far more anxious than when they started. Several participants stated that much of their identity is wrapped up in their job. The constant stress and worry about their student-athletes and their work duties have left them struggling to sleep well and turn the stress

and worry off and recharge. A couple of certified athletic trainers shared that they suffered significant injuries because they continued to push through work responsibilities despite feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. They regretted not listening to their bodies and not taking a step back to protect their health. Their injuries would have been preventable had they allowed themselves to take time off they needed. The head certified athletic trainers did share a vital philosophy learned through their 20 plus years of experience. They all shared that time away is essential, that it is okay to put yourself first. Some learned the hard way through an injury that it is okay to step back and take time for yourself.

The female certified athletic trainers discussed the importance of support networks and their role in their careers. Strong support networks were seen as a crucial component for the successful retention of women in the athletic training profession. Our participants' support came from fellow certified athletic training coworkers, athletic administration, coaches, and spouses/partners. In the literature review, Mazerolle et al., (2015c) stated that having a supervisor who shares the same family philosophy helps achieve work-life balance for certified athletic trainers.

Participants described how they felt supported in their careers by their athletic director. Comments from the respondents varied from feeling well supported to feeling not supported at all. The level and type of support varied between the participants. Those who felt supported stated that the overall department atmosphere and support they got in their role as a certified athletic trainer was good, but they did not feel the same support for parenting needs. Goodman et al. (2010) found that a lack of organizational support created role conflict and role overload and led to female certified athletic trainer attrition. While few participants felt unsupported by their athletic directors, one participant's statement that this experience had her considering a career

change is of concern. This relates to a lack of support leading to young female certified athletic trainers' attrition from the collegiate setting.

The participants reflected on the amount of support given to them by the coaches they work alongside. This is an essential factor because the head coach's decisions dictate the certified athletic trainer's schedule. While all of the certified athletic trainers indicated that they struggle with the lack of control over their daily schedule, the majority felt the coaches they work with supported them as athletic trainers and in their role as a parent. Many participants stated that they felt fortunate that their coaches have been very supportive and easy to work with overall. This is consistent with Eason et al. (2017) finding that having a trust relationship enabled cooperation and intrinsic motivation among organizational members.

Eight of the 11 participants met the support given by certified athletic training coworkers with resounding positivity. Supervisors should respond to employees' demands with understanding, sensitivity and show them they are respected beyond their operational role (Mazerolle et al., 2015c). This support was seen as a necessary form of assistance by the participants. A strong collegial support system with coworkers was necessary regardless of having children. A robust support system from coworkers is crucial when faced with an unpredictable schedule and irregular working hours. A head certified athletic trainer that provides a family-first model for their staff models the behaviors they expect for their staff and colleagues who are willing to help when needed to play a crucial role in retaining female certified athletic trainers.

Participants were split on their impression of the family-friendly nature of their athletic department. An organization's culture is a direct reflection of the leadership (Eason et al., 2017). For several participants, they felt that their department was very supportive of families.

Much of this philosophy came from the amount of department personnel with young children. The certified athletic trainers with children felt there was a family-friendly environment because of the support given primarily by those within the athletic training department. Some participants commented that the coaches often have their children on the sidelines or traveling to competitions. However, they did not feel that that same consideration extended to them as was that to the support staff. Noting that coaches would schedule their practices around their family obligations, but as a support staff member, the idea of an athletic trainer requesting a practice change to accommodate their family obligation was out of the question. In all, the participants were less concerned about having a family-friendly athletic department and cared more that they had the latitude to control their department's overall function. Mazerolle et al., (2015c) described supervisors as the gatekeepers of employee work-life balance, and they must endorse and model these same behaviors for their staff.

Participants who responded felt like the certified athletic training parents on their staff were supported by administrators, coaches, and fellow certified athletic training coworkers. The primary source of that support came from within the athletic training department and the head athletic trainer's philosophy. Strong supervisor support is most impactful on job satisfaction, commitment, and persistence (Goodman et al., 2010). Participants stated that having an administration that allowed them to run the athletic training department as they saw fit allowed them to implement a proper family-first policy. Establishing work-life balance will always be a difficult task within the collegiate athletic training setting but having the ability to determine policies that support the department's needs helped to make achieving work-life balance possible.

The female certified athletic trainers discussed the connections they have with other women in the department. The purpose behind this question was to determine if having other

women within the athletic department that may be experiencing many of the same issues as the female certified athletic trainers made a difference in retention. According to Inglis et al. (2000), female coaches are also leaving collegiate athletics positions due to burnout, work expectations, discrimination, and lack of administrative support. Most of the participants felt like they had a collegial connection with other women in the department, but this relationship did not necessarily extend beyond work. Regardless of age or position, the women supported each other professionally, but there were no solid personal relationship ties among women within the athletic department. One factor brought to light by several participants was that few women were employed in their athletic departments. Several participants noted that there were fewer female head coaches and the same demographic in the administrative ranks. This is also a concern in terms of the retention of women in the collegiate athletic setting. Once again, Title IX has given equal athletic and educational opportunities to women, but in the same measure, the opportunities for paid roles in athletics have decreased for women (Inglis et al., 2000).

Participants addressed women in the role of caretaker and the guilt factor typically associated with missing family time. Five specific sub-themes were developed through the interview process. The stereotypical and societal differences between men and women, the effect missing family time has on the participants, how they rate themselves as a parent and athletic trainer, who endures the most regarding childcare duties in the family, and if they feel that their children gain any benefit from their job as a certified athletic trainer.

As addressed in the review of literature, there are many stereotypical ideas of a woman's role in the household and regarding the care of children within society (Mazerolle et al., 2015c; Mazerolle & Pitney, 2012; Mazerolle & Eason, 2016c; Kahanov & Eberman, 2011; Bruening & Dixon, 2008). The participants who responded to this question shared very thoughtful responses

to why women bear the most significant emotional burden regarding familial responsibilities. The participants believed that women, regardless of family desires, had a natural tendency toward the caretaker role. Comments were made that men tend to compartmentalize things such as having their workbox or their family box. This ability allowed men to focus more easily on a singular task. Women tend to intertwine their thoughts and tasks regularly. As the participants explained this phenomenon, they stated that just because a man is capable of compartmentalizing does not mean that they do not care about their family. It simply means that this is their sole focus when at work and vice versa when they are home. For women, this is not as easy a task. As P8 stated, "with our highway systems, we are always thinking of a million different things. Carrying a much greater emotional toll in terms of care for family and student-athletes."

The effects of missing family time and events on the participant's emotional well-being evoked strong reactions. While all the participants acknowledged that missing family events were an inevitable part of the job, it did not come without emotional baggage and regret. Most of the participants with 20 plus years of experience stated that their most considerable distress was not making family a priority earlier in their careers. P1 and P5 stated that this prioritization was the most important thing they wanted to pass on to the younger generation of certified athletic trainers.

Participants were asked to rate themselves as parents given their responsibilities as certified athletic trainers. One was considered inadequate, and ten was considered excellent. The results from this portion of the interview were mixed. Most rated themselves as a five out of ten and explained how they missed too much time with their children, or their children had to make sacrifices because of their role as certified athletic trainers at the collegiate level. Only one participant rated herself on the high end of the scale. It would be interesting to follow up with

this participant as her child gets older and gets involved in activities. These athletic training mothers all admitted that they had regret about things they missed, especially for their children.

In this study, the certified athletic trainers indicated they bore the bulk of the childcare for their families. According to Bruening and Dixon (2008), childcare arrangements are as necessary as female certified athletic trainers' job duties. This was especially true when it came to last-minute issues, child illness, and childmedical appointments. P8 had a unique situation. Her and her husband work at the same institution. This dynamic creates a unique situation for her family, and they work to manage short notice childcare issues together. However, she did note that she is the one that typically negotiates her workload to care for the child. P5 worked as a certified athletic trainer at a private Catholic High School when her son was young. She appreciated that her athletic director was highly supportive of her family and was willing to make accommodations as needed. This also ties into the gender differences regarding women having a greater tendency toward being a caretaker.

Participants discussed if they believed children benefited from their mothers or other female family role models working as certified athletic trainers in the collegiate setting. The majority of participants responded that they felt children could gain a positive benefit from women in their lives that are certified, athletic trainers. The most common response from all the participants was that children (boys and girls) benefited from seeing strong female leaders and role models.

Participants identified two sub-categories that related to the overall culture of athletics. These topics included the athletic department's overall culture and working with male and female teams and coaches. These factors are essential in determining if the athletic department's overall

culture and the team structure's makeup impact the retention or attrition of female certified athletic trainers.

The study participants stated that athletics' culture requires long hours, few days off, flexibility, constant travel, and expectations of availability at any time needed by the administration, coaches, and students. Participants were asked to discuss how their athletic department's culture influenced their support as certified athletic trainers and as parents. The majority of participants did not respond favorably to this question. The primary factors that led the participants to perceive athletics' culture as not supportive of certified athletic trainers as parents were the control coaches have to change practices and competitions without considering the certified athletic trainer's scheduling needs to work with their team. There is an expectation that the certified athletic trainer will manipulate their schedule to accommodate the head coach's decisions. For many female certified athletic trainers, this is an arduous task. Whether they have a spouse or significant other can accommodate this flexibility need is not always possible. This leaves many scrambling to find alternate childcare. Many pay for their children to be in daycare full-time and pay for additional childcare for early morning hours, late-night hours, and weekend events. This financial stress adds to the guilt of constantly leaving their children in others' care and plays a significant factor in women's attrition rates from the collegiate setting.

Concerning preference of working with male or female coaches or teams, participants indicated they did not have a preference of gender of the sport and coach. A few did prefer working with a particular gender of the athlete. But all participants expressed no issue with working with male or female coaches. This is an essential factor in the retention of female certified athletic trainers. Having a good working relationship with the head coach leads to good communication and better support for everyone involved.



Enjoying the student-athletes that a certified athletic trainer works with is also essential. This clientele is what most certified athletic trainers would say is the reason they enjoy what they do. They all felt it was essential to be a role model to both the male and female student-athletes. For both the male and female athletes, this group of female certified athletic trainers felt it was vital that they see strong women in leadership roles and deserving of the same respect as their male counterparts.

Participants identified four sub-themes as significant issues for the participants in this study. These topics included gender equity in salary, trust in their abilities, a double standard of treatment and expectations, and women being treated equitably within the department. According to Mazerolle et al. (2012), sport is an area of society that is difficult for those that differ from white, male, and heterosexual to access.

The vast majority of participants did not feel that they were paid equitably for the education, skill, and workload they carry for their position. For half of the participants, their pay rate is determined by the collective bargaining of their union. The problem for these participants concerning the union is the union does not understand the role and responsibilities of a certified athletic trainer. Some of these participants have attempted to have their position reclassified to represent better the work and education involved in athletic training. These efforts have not been successful. As noted in chapter four, the NATA salary survey shows that women are underpaid compared to their male counterparts. For the women in this study, two of them specifically addressed situations in their careers where they were paid significantly less than a male counterpart with less experience and education.

Participants discussed having had their medical opinion questioned or second-guessed by coaches or administrators. Some participants felt as though they had not had their medical

opinion questioned by coaches or administrators. But for more than half of the participants have had their medical opinion challenged by coaches and administrators regularly. The participants felt that this type of challenge came with athletics' culture; as P2 stated, "my coaches think it is their job to question me, push me to the edge to get what they want." Those who have been in the profession for 20 plus years learned how to manage these complex situations professionally.

Several participants indicated that they experienced or witnessed a double standard of treatment and expectations for themselves or certified athletic training coworkers. For many, they shared that coaches were allowed to jump the chain of command and take complaints about the certified athletic trainer directly to the administration. Still, they were expected to stay within the command chain and approach the coach before moving up the line. Some also shared that the way they are spoken to as women is not done in the same manner as their male counterparts. They discussed that doctors would take the time to sit and have conversations with the male certified athletic trainers regarding an injury but would barely address any female certified athletic trainer's questions. They felt that the male coaches had to speak over them and maintain masculinity about toughness and how injuries were treated when they played the sport many years prior. The insinuation was that the female certified athletic trainer was "soft" instead of recognizing that sports medicine has evolved and how injuries are cared for is not the same in practice, ethically and legally. This is consistent with the literature review findings, with women lacking in leadership positions in collegiate athletics because men hold primary control (Graf, 2014).

Regarding the equitable treatment of women, the responses were split fairly evenly for this sub-category. For those who are part of a union setting, they credited the union to maintain equity. They noted that this equity, even with union support, did not come without a fight, but

this was seen as a benefit of having union support in the workplace. P8 stated that if she felt there was an issue with equality in her department, she would address it. Several of the participants felt that women were not treated equitably but that it was systemic beyond the athletic department to the entire institution's operation. They discussed the difficulty of breaking into the "good old boys' club." Women who want to break into the administration ranks have to conform to the male administrators' traditions.

These women have in common that they all are strong, independent women who are not afraid to voice their opinion when something is not correct. This is a character trait that was noticed through the course of the interview process. These women have not persevered in the masculine culture of athletics by taking a back seat. These women are passionate about their careers and are not afraid to stand their ground when needed.

### **Limitations**

Due to the focus on female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting the limitations for this study include the generalizability of this study to other certified athletic training populations such as male certified athletic trainers, or those working in the NCAA DI, DIII setting. Qualitative research allows the reader to determine how the information provided may benefit; therefore, the results may be transferable to similar contexts (Goodman et al., 2010). This study examined the phenomenon of female certified athletic trainer attrition from the NCAA DII collegiate athletics setting and determined what factors may exist that would facilitate retention.

This study represents a small sample of female certified athletic trainers working in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The participants also represent primarily central and midwestern regional institutions. The inclusion of participants from other geographic regions such as

eastern, southern, western, and pacific could have provided different contexts, different roles, different perceptions, and experiences. In addition to different regional perspectives, a broader range of ages and years of experience could have provided greater perspective into factors affecting attrition and retention rates.

An additional limitation for this study was the exclusion of certified athletic trainers who had chosen to leave the collegiate setting for a different role outside of athletic training altogether. The inclusion of this demographic would allow for a grander scope of experiences and perceptions that led to their decision to leave their role and possibly the profession as a whole. Understanding the experiences that tipped the scale and left these professionals feeling as though they could not succeed as a collegiate certified athletic trainer would be an essential factor in determining changes that should be addressed to retain women in the profession.

This study also focused on the NCAA DII setting. This topic could benefit from inspection at the NCAA DIII setting and more studies completed at the NCAA DII setting. All but one participant was employed or contracted to work at public institutions. Comparing perceptions and experiences between those contracted to an institution from a hospital or clinic could provide insight into a better structure to serve the athletic training profession and retain women. Further investigation should be done between experiences of female certified athletic trainers at public institutions and private institutions. Private institutions often have different funding sources and opportunities that can be a pro or con to individuals working in athletic training. Understanding all of the nuances that can affect attrition and retention is essential to creating and changing policies and philosophies that can help retain women in the athletic training profession at all collegiate settings.

### **Implications**

This study adds to the limited research on the factors that affect retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The primary research source regarding female certified athletic trainer retention and attrition has been conducted at the NCAA DI collegiate setting. This study relates directly to full-time female certified athletic trainers, specifically parents or desire to be parents in the future. This study also relates to those full-time female certified athletic trainers employed in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Many factors exist at the NCAA DII collegiate level that does not exist at the NCAA DI collegiate level. The most significant of these is financial support and access to resources. For NCAA DII institutions, the lack of financial support and access to resources contributes to limited staffing, leading to roleoverload and role conflict for certified athletic trainers.

In conjunction with prior studies, this study can be used by the NATA, NCAA, and the individual institutions in developing policies that can provide support for the retention of female certified athletic trainers. These policies could include requiring adequate staffing consistent with the recommendations of the Appropriate Medical Coverage of Intercollegiate Athletics (AMCIA), policies that hold coaches accountable for last-minute schedule changes (those that are within their control), such as a minimum notification policy. Educational requirements for administrators and coaches to better understand the role of the certified athletic trainer. This would allow for a more collegial working environment and provide a better work-life balance for all.

Using data relating to role overload/role conflict and the direct impact these factors have on retaining female certified athletic trainers would be beneficial. Comparisons of adequately

staffed programs have complete autonomy. Those not housed within the athletics department with those that lack these features could provide a unique insight into the dynamics that contribute to attrition and those that facilitate retention. Exploring these areas could also reduce conflict with coaches and administrators, cultivate mutual respect, and appreciate and build a more robust overall social support system for the female certified athletic trainers.

The participants indicated mentorship as a critical component of their perseverance in the athletic training profession. Having solid mentors can have a positive impact on the professional development of young certified athletic trainers. As more women leave the profession, fewer role models have successfully walked the certified athletic trainer and parent path. There is a need for change within athletics and the support given to athletic training. A shift is happening where young professionals no longer are willing to work endless hours, receive substandard pay, and feel like they are at the mercy of administrators and coaches who do not fully understand their role or the work that goes into the profession. This conflict is not sustainable and will continue to result in a turnover. Changes in organizational culture need to occur to facilitate the retention of women in athletic training.

Through this study, one area noted by the researcher was the relatively high number of head athletic trainers under 30 years of age. This may not seem concerning to the average person, but youth is not always advantageous in the scope of athletics when jumping straight into a significant leadership role. A solid and powerful athletic director can swallow up a young certified athletic trainer, leaving them to feel as though they cannot voice their opinion and advocate for themselves. When the statistic of the vast number of young head certified athletic trainers were noted to the head certified athletic trainers in this study, the response was not one of surprise. Each head certified athletic trainer stated that it was not surprising that athletic

directors would put young people in that position to influence them with their power and position, control their decisions, and leave them to feel at the department's mercy. This is an area where the NATA could serve future certified athletic trainers more effectively. Through education in leadership, mentorship programs, and a deep dive into how newly certified athletic trainers transition into the professional field.

Athletics are deeply rooted in tradition. It is undeniable that being a part of athletics requires long hours well beyond typical traditional working hours. Games and practices will always occur on weekends, evenings, and at times holidays. When entering into the athletic training profession, these are expectations of the position. However, just because this is the norm of athletics, it does not give the green light for colleges and universities to expect their certified athletic training staff to work 12-to-14-hour days six days a week for ten months (sometimes more) out of the year. This working demand cannot be sustained long term. To affect change and truly make a difference in the retention of female certified athletic trainers, the NATA, NCAA, and institutions must examine the policies that directly affect the abilities of certified athletic trainers not only to achieve work-life balance but also help in preventing physical and mental fatigue that can lead to adverse outcomes for student-athletes.

The domains of care provided by certified athletic trainers continue to grow; rule changes create more athletic contact opportunities and ultimately required medical coverage. Colleges and universities are seeing ever-shrinking budgets, overall student retention is strained, and the pressure is mounting to recruit students to campus. Some institutions are cutting sports to make ends meet, while others are adding sports as a way to increase student enrollment. The potential for liability in these areas is increasing as well. In our increasingly litigious society, not having the appropriate staffing to protect student-athletes and institutions is a dangerous proposition.

There must be a discussion between the NATA, NCAA, and colleges and universities about how to adequately staff their athletic training department to meet the mounting expectations and keep the student-athletes, institution, and certified athletic trainers safe.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Areas for future research include researching the understanding of athletic administration of the AMCIA, role overload, and role conflict for certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. Researching these factors will help determine if the athletic administration can adequately support the athletic training department and ultimately facilitate better medical outcomes for student-athletes and better work-life balance for certified athletic trainers. Another area to study is the retention and attrition factors for NCAA DIII collegiate certified athletic trainers. While the same legislative body governs NCAA DIII as the NCAA DI and NCAA DII, there are many differences in how the NCAA DIII operates compared to the other divisions. It is important to note these differences for NCAA DIII as well.

The bulk of existing research has studied the factors that affect the retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers; it is crucial to study men's retention and attrition from the collegiate athletic training setting. This information can help the athletic training profession as a whole to provide a better work-life balance for all certified athletic trainers.

Another consideration for the study is preparing young professionals to enter into the collegiate athletic training profession and, with the changes in education and certification, assessing if the appropriate skills are being taught or mentored to young professions to help them succeed in the collegiate setting. A study of certified athletic trainers' perspectives and experiences that have left the collegiate setting for a clinical setting. Understanding the specific factors that caused them to leave and finding a better fit for work-life balance in the clinical



setting is essential for improving the collegiate setting. Finally, the researcher recommends how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected certified athletic trainer attrition. The certified athletic trainer's role in the return to collegiate sports competition has taken a mental, emotional, and physical toll on this study's participants, the researcher included. The researcher suspects there will be significant attrition from the collegiate athletic training setting due to the mental, physical, and emotional burden brought on by trying to return to collegiate competition amid the COVID-19 pandemic safely.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative phenomenology study with an advocacy lens investigated the reasons behind the retention and attrition of female certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. This study sought out the experiences and perceptions of female athletic trainers employed as certified athletic trainers in the NCAA DII collegiate setting. The participants were employed as head and assistant certified athletic trainers with a minimum of six years of experience and a maximum of 35 years of experience. Participants fit into one of four categories. Women under the age of 30 with no children, women over the age of 30 with no children, women with children 18 and under, and women with children 19 and older. These participants were asked a series of questions relating to their experiences and perceptions during their athletic training careers. Study results will fill a gap in information relating to female certified athletic trainers' retention and attrition in the NCAA DII collegiate setting.

This study found that role overload and role conflict were the most significant factors that pressed female certified athletic trainers to leave their positions. For the certified athletic trainers in this study, the mounting expectations and responsibilities and decreasing staff sizes of athletic

training departments lead to job demands that are more than can be completed or completed well by the certified athletic trainers. This adds to the attrition rates of women from the profession because of the struggle to achieve work-life balance. Support networks, especially those of fellow certified athletic trainers and spouses, were most influential in retaining women in athletic training and head athletic trainers; having administrators who allowed them to run their athletic training department to see fit increased their likelihood for retention.

Several certified athletic trainers mentioned another supporting factor: having a solid and supportive mentor early in their career. They sought to pay this mentorship forward to younger staff members and student-athletes.

This study indicated that females are more inclined to caregiving and carry more guilt than their male counterparts. The participants all indicated that they had to miss family time and events due to work-related requirements. Even though they carried a certain level of acceptance as this being part of the job, most of them carried guilt and regret missing these events. This guilt had the younger participants questioning their desire to stay in the collegiate setting. Finally, gender bias and athletic culture were discussed by the participants. Many of the participants indicated that they had experienced gender bias or doublestandard at some point in their careers. This was seen as an unfortunate part of the athletic culture, and they found ways to navigate through most of these situations. These women were all strong women, sure of themselves and confident in their ethics and abilities as certified athletic trainers.

## Appendices

### Demographic Questions

1. What is your title?
2. How many years have you been certified?
3. How many sports does your institution sponsor?
4. How many sports are you responsible for and what are those sports?
5. How many clinical staff members are in your department (including yourself)? Will you be gaining or losing any FT positions (to your knowledge in the next 2 years)?
6. Do you have academic responsibilities (including serving as a clinical instructor)?
7. How many total student-athletes are enrolled in your institution?
8. What is your marital status?
9. Do you have children? Do/did you desire to have children? (for those without children)
10. How many kids do you have and what are their ages?
11. Is your athletic director male or female? Do they have children?
12. Do you feel you are paid equitably for the amount of work you do? Do you have opportunity for advancement? Pay increase based on merit?
13. What is the occupation of your spouse? (as applicable)
14. Are you children in traditional daycare setting (home-based) or center-based? (as applicable)
15. Who provides childcare during non-standard hours? (as applicable)

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

#### *Stereotypes*

1. Explain how you feel supported in your career and as a parent by your AD, coaches, and AT co-workers?
2. Have coaches or administrators questioned or second-guessed your medical opinion and sought out the opinion of a male colleague? If so, please explain.
3. To your knowledge, have you been reprimanded for things that male coaches of ATCs are able to get away with? Please explain.

#### *Caretaker*

1. Can you describe the culture of your athletic department? Would you consider it family friendly? Explain.
2. What are the biggest barriers you experience to feeling successful while balancing the role of parent and athletic trainer?
3. Can you think of an example when work duties leave you too exhausted to attend to home responsibilities or vice-versa?

#### *Emotion*

1. Have you ever needed to miss family events due to work related duties? How do you feel when this happens?
2. Have you experienced a situation when you find yourself thinking about your work when you are at a family event? Please explain.

3. How would you rate yourself as a parent because of your responsibilities as an athletic trainer? Please explain.

#### *Culture*

1. Do you prefer working with male or female teams? Male or female coaches? Please explain.
2. Do you feel like the coaches you work with understand the role of an ATC? Why/why not
3. Do you feel like your AD understands the role of an ATC? Why/why not

#### *Role*

1. Does the thought of going to work ever leave you physically, mentally, &/or emotionally exhausted? Please explain.
2. Do you feel like you have enough time to do all the things you want/need to for your job? Why/why not?

#### *Support*

1. Do you feel supported by your colleagues and administration in your current role?
2. Are your co-worker supportive of your need to leave to care for a sick child or to attend a child's event? Please explain.

#### *Relationships with colleagues*

1. Do you feel as though you have a connection with the other AT women who work in your department? Please explain.
2. Do you feel as though women are treated equitably in your athletic department?

#### *Mental/Physical/Emotional Health*

1. Since you started at this institution has your physical &/or mental health suffered because of your job duties? If so, How?
2. Do you feel as though your children benefit from your work responsibilities? Explain.

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