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Original Research

National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Football Players' Perceptions of Women in the Athletic Training Room Using a Role Congruity Framework

Caitlin O'Connor, MS, ATC*, Heidi Grappendorf, PhD*, Laura Burton, PhD†, Sandra M. Harmon, BA‡, Angela C. Henderson, PhD‡, and Judy Peel, PhD*

*North Carolina State University, Raleigh

†University of Connecticut, Storrs

‡University of Northern Colorado, Greeley

Abstract

Context: Previous researchers have demonstrated that male and female athletes feel more comfortable with treatment by a same-sex athletic trainer for sex-specific injuries and conditions.

Objective: To address football players' comfort with care provided by same-sex and opposite-sex athletic trainers for sex-specific and non-sex-specific injuries and conditions through the lens of role congruity theory.

Design: Cross-sectional study for the quantitative data and qualitative study for the qualitative data.

Setting: Two National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Football Bowl Series university football programs.

Patients or Other Participants: Male football players within the 2 university programs.

Data Collection and Analysis: We replicated existing methods and an existing survey to address male football players' comfort levels. Additionally, an open-ended question was used to determine male football players' perceptions of female athletic trainers. Paired-samples *t* tests were conducted to identify differences between the responses for the care given by a male athletic trainer and for the care given by a female athletic trainer. Three categories were analyzed: general medical conditions, psychological conditions, and sex-specific injuries. The qualitative data were coded and analyzed using content analysis.

Results: Male football players were more comfortable with treatment by a male athletic trainer (mean = 3.61 ± 1.16) for sex-specific injuries and conditions than they were with treatment by a female athletic trainer (mean = 2.82 ± 1.27; *P* < .001).

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No significant results were found for comfort with overall psychological conditions, although a female athletic trainer was preferred over a male athletic trainer for the treatment of depression (mean = 3.71 ± 1.07 versus mean = 3.39 ± 1.16 , respectively; $P < .001$). Qualitative data provided support for role congruity theory.

Conclusions: Both quantitative and qualitative evidence were provided for the support of role congruity theory.

Keywords: [comfort level](#), [gender-specific medicine](#)

Address correspondence to Heidi Grappendorf, PhD, North Carolina State University, Biltmore Hall, Box 8004, Raleigh, NC 27695. Address e-mail to Heidi_grappendorf@ncsu.edu.

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