Factors Influencing Collegiate Volleyball Shoe Selection: An Institutionalized Perspective

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FACTORS INFLUENCING COLLEGIATE VOLLEYBALL SHOE SELECTION: AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PERSPECTIVE

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of Sport Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2014
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To my parents: Thank you for always believing in me and seeing my potential even when I could not.

To the FSU Sports Medicine Staff: Thank you for putting your trust in me and teaching me more than I could have ever imagined.

To the FSU Volleyball team: I appreciate you making these past two years an unforgettable experience.
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ABSTRACT

It is not uncommon for a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I school to have an athletic apparel contract (AAC) with an established athletic apparel company. These relationships have evolved over time to the point that the AACs seem to have become institutionalized in collegiate athletics. Institutionalization refers to the repetition of organizational arrangements (Washington & Patterson, 2009) to the point that it exists as a ‘norm’ within a culture. While there are certain benefits to these contracts, there are also associated risks. AACs often include clauses requiring every student-athlete at the school to wear brand name apparel for practice and competition, regardless of satisfaction with the product. Considering volleyball is typically a non-revenue generating sport at many NCAA Division I schools, student-athletes are often required to wear a certain type of shoe due to contract restrictions. Problems may arise if the sponsored shoes do not meet the needs, specifically the health and safety needs, of the student-athlete. Coaches are often involved in the selection of the teams’ shoes, while athletic trainers must manage any medical consequences resulting from ill-fitting shoes. Given the notion that AACs have been institutionalized in the collegiate athletic setting, including restricted shoe selection, this study was conducted to gain insight into the factors influencing volleyball shoe selection.

The study was qualitative and involved semi-structured interviews with 11 volleyball coaches and athletic trainers in the Southeastern and Atlantic Coast athletic conferences. For purposes of data analysis, the researcher utilized the four dialogic moments as described by Markula and Silk (2011): recalling, listening around, close reading, and representing self and others. Results were presented according to coaches and athletic trainers, separately. Factors identified by coaches were the evidence of dissatisfaction, general benefits of a school’s AAC,
insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors, and medical concerns. Factors identified by athletic trainers included medical concerns, general benefits of a school’s AAC, and insufficient volleyball shoe options from the sponsor.

In general, results of this study supported the notion that AACs have become institutionalized in select NCAA Division I volleyball programs through the development of volleyball teams being a dependent beneficiary from their school’s AAC. While the sponsored brands met participants’ expectations in regard to the quantity of volleyball shoes provided, the sponsored brands did not meet participants’ expectations regarding quality. Overall, participants were willing to overlook these negative concerns for the benefit of their athletic department as a whole. The subject matter adds value to the sport management profession by providing sport managers, Division I schools, and athletic apparel sponsors a perspective on the sponsor-school relationship as it pertains to athletic apparel contracts, but further research into other sports’ shoe selection processes, as well as the student-athletes’ and sponsored brands’ perception of the effect of an AAC is needed.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of AACs

There are over 1,000 schools in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (NCAA, 2013). The sheer number of schools in the NCAA offers numerous outlets for athletic apparel companies to market in the United States. These companies capitalize on the status of many NCAA universities by using them as marketing outlets. Athletic apparel companies create sponsorship opportunities in an attempt to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with a school. Through such partnerships, a university receives free apparel or cash in return for the right of the apparel company to outfit the athletic department, inclusive of the sports teams and staff.

While multiple definitions of sponsorship exist, sponsorship in this case can be defined as a relationship between a provider of resources and an individual or organization. The individual or organization forfeits certain rights or privileges in order to receive some type of commercial advantage for the sponsor (Lee, 2003). Sponsorships are most often in the form of a contract which includes particular allocations and restrictions. In this work, the researcher refers to the specific contracts between athletic apparel companies and collegiate universities as athletic apparel contracts or AACs. Although each AAC is different, many include similar provisions for the sponsored school. For example, Nike outlines in most of its contracts that all student-athletes, and often athletic staff members, are required to wear Nike apparel. Nike’s AAC with a prestigious Division I school includes the following, “UNIVERSITY agrees that Coach, Team and Staff members shall refrain from wearing athletic footwear manufactured by companies other than NIKE, or any such footwear which has been altered to resemble NIKE athletic
footwear, during UNIVERSITY Intercollegiate Athletic Program activity” (Kish, 2013). In addition, the school usually receives uniforms, equipment, monetary benefits, and other various perks as outlined in the contract.

AACs may serve as a subsidy for universities. These AACs generate income to help offset expenses within athletic departments including, but not limited to, apparel, equipment, and maintenance of non-revenue generating sports. Berkowitz, Upton, and Brady (2013) reported that, only 23 NCAA Division I university athletic programs generated enough revenue to cover their own expenses. In 2013, the University of Oregon signed an AAC with Nike which included receipt of $2.2 million worth of equipment and $600,000 in cash (Kish, 2013). Athletic apparel companies even offer incentives for athletic success. For example, Kish (2013) writes that Nike was contracted to grant a $600,000 bonus to the University of Utah if they attained the national title in football. The immense revenue that AACs provide are certainly enticing to collegiate athletic departments.

While AACs serve as a major asset to universities, athletic apparel companies also receive merchandising rights (Sanburn, 2013). These rights, depending on the contract, can range from logo displays in competition facilities to apparel mandates for an entire athletic department. According to Rovell (2011), the cost for a 30-second commercial during the 2011 NCAA Final Four basketball competition was $1.3 million. However, Nike sponsored all of the teams participating in the 2011 event. This means Nike received constant exposure throughout the games without having to pay additional advertising expenses. Furthermore, sponsors receive publicity from their sponsored teams revealing a new uniform or even student-athletes posting pictures of themselves wearing sponsored apparel on social media websites (Kish, 2013). As with any agreement of this caliber, each party must make a compromise to some degree. Because most sponsored schools have a variety of sports and only one sponsor, it is sometimes difficult to
 tailor contracts to the needs of an entire athletic department. These contracts can result in having
to sacrifice expectations of appropriate athletic apparel due to the limited variety of options
provided by the sponsor.

1.2 Complications Resulting from AACs

AACs are primarily developed to provide sports teams with the apparel and equipment
necessary for athletic performance. One topic that has drawn attention to apparel and AACs is
the “spatting” of football cleats. Spatting is a form of prophylactic ankle taping that stabilizes the
ankle by taping outside of the shoe (Axon, 2013). Many student-athletes have a preference for
spatting, but have been denied the privilege per the AAC with the school. For example,
University of California athletic director Sandy Barbour attended a football game where she
noticed that several student-athletes shoes were spatted. Referring to the terms of the school’s
contract with Nike, she informed the football equipment manager and head athletic trainer of the
restrictions on the number of student-athletes that could be spatted because the tape covered the
shoe’s logo (Axon, 2013). Logo visibility is very important for sponsors and jeopardizing this
relationship could hurt the beneficiaries. This limits the ability for the equipment staff, athletic
trainer, or even a student-athlete to alter their shoes. However, some contracts allow student
athletes to wear other brand’s shoes as long as the logos are spatted (Axon, 2013).

There are many concerns when it comes to athletic apparel companies controlling what
student-athletes can and cannot wear. With the issue of spatting, 20 of 54 institutions had
contracts that specified that the sponsoring company should be notified as to which student
athletes will be spatted (Axon, 2013). The provision of this information could be seen as a
violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act’s (HIPAA) Privacy Rule
which is designed to help keep health information confidential with the exception of approved
parties. Considering spatting is typically used to provide protection for injured players, releasing classified health information to the athletic apparel company to fulfill a contract could certainly cause conflict.

Another issue that raises concern when considering an AAC is the safety of the student athlete using the provided equipment. In a recent report from SB Nation, three NBA players had their basketball shoes completely fall apart during competition within a one month time span (Rosenthal, 2014). Manu Ginobili, Andrew Bogut, and Tony Wroten all had their shoes destroyed beyond the point of repair. These mishaps occurred during three separate occasions in the 2013-2014 NBA season. What was the common denominator? All of the malfunctioning shoes were the Nike brand. Fortunately, none of these particular players were injured as a result of the accidents. Media outlets replayed the incidents repeatedly, causing an uproar about the Nike brand and its product quality. Repeated negative information would undoubtedly harm the reputation of a business because it brings to question whether athletic apparel companies are making product safety a priority. These were only three incidents of which the public was made aware, but there certainly could have been more cases not reported by the media such as occurrences during practice or workout sessions. There is also the possibility that hazards associated with shoe safety are occurring in other sports. How can coaches and athletic trainers ensure that the shoes provided through their AAC will be a safe option for all their student-athletes? Further, if a shoe is deemed “unsafe” what options can the athletic apparel company provide the school to protect the health and safety of their student-athletes?

The NCAA collects annual data on injuries from athletic trainers in particular sports regarding type, occurrence, rate, mechanism, location, and other variables dependent upon sport. In a review of data from 1988 to 2004, Agel, Palmieri-Smith, Dick, Wojtys, and Marshall (2007) gather 16 years’ worth of data on NCAA institutions and sport injuries. Twenty-six percent of all
injuries, in practice and games, occurred from no apparent physical contact. These injuries include possible stress reactions or stress fractures, both of which are non-contact injuries by nature. Shoes have a perceived impact on the reduction of many non-contact athletic injuries. Improper footwear for particular job tasks can be detrimental to the individual.

Aside from safety concerns are the issues of product satisfaction. For instance, a certain brand may have a top-of-the-line basketball shoe, but may not have the best volleyball or track shoe; regardless, all teams representing that school are likely required to use the brand. AACs allow very little, if any, leeway when it comes to substituting other apparel from different brands. This is an issue that can put a school in a precarious situation. If a student-athlete prefers to compete in a certain shoe brand over the sponsored brand, it could lead to a demise of the relationship.

A specific example of this particular issue occurred in 2010 at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Marcus Jordan, son of basketball legend Michael Jordan, committed to play basketball at UCF under the condition that he was allowed to wear Air Jordan basketball shoes (a subdivision of the Nike brand; Limon, 2009). UCF, at the time, was an Adidas-sponsored school meaning all student-athletes were to practice and compete in only Adidas brand apparel. UCF was set to sign a 5-year contract renewal until Adidas was informed of Jordan’s intentions. Jordan in fact wore his Nike shoes for practice and competition. Jordan’s actions received national attention, leading Adidas to withdraw their offer for a contract extension with UCF (Gonzalez, 2009). Thus, UCF was left without a sponsor and ran the risk of having to outfit all 15 of their teams out of pocket. Luckily, Nike offered the school an AAC months later (Limon, 2010). This shows the effect of non-compliance with an AAC on the relationship between a sponsor and a school. This particular instance also highlights the tremendous financial burden of outfitting teams that is placed on a school if found non-compliant with their AAC.
1.3 Institutional Theory in AACs

AACs have become ingrained in the culture of NCAA Division I athletics arguably to the point of becoming an institution. An institution can exist in more than the physical dimension; it can serve as a series or group of organizational arrangements that challenge the traditional and/or rational explanations (Washington & Patterson, 2010). Institutional theory is concerned with why and with what consequences organizations exhibit these particular organizational arrangements.

The organizational arrangements in relation to this research are the reliance on AACs for revenue. The ‘why’ is the need for additional revenue to cover expenses. The overall positive and negative consequences of these organizational arrangements are increased revenue and possible product dissatisfaction, respectively. In all, institutional theory presents itself through the established organizational arrangements of the reliance on AACs for revenue. While there may be positive and negative consequences for these arrangements, there are over-powering objectives that exist to support the maintenance of the institutionalization of AACs in NCAA Division I athletics.

1.4 Isomorphism of AACs

The phenomenon of institutional isomorphism should also be considered when discussing the institutionalization of AACs. Institutional isomorphism is the similarity among organizations and the process through which these similarities emerge (Farquharson, 2013). It is the result of pressures placed on an institution to conform to a set of norms. The norms in this case would be the reliance on an AAC to cover expenses. Many schools are constantly exposed to these conforming pressures by being in an environment where the existence of an AAC is the norm.
This however brought to question whether AACs cause a school to prioritize revenue-seeking agendas in their organizational decision-making.

It appeared that most athletic apparel companies do not place an emphasis on creating volleyball products. With sports such as football and men’s basketball, which are characterized as revenue generating sports, non-revenue generating women’s sports like volleyball pale in comparison. The most publicized stage for volleyball in the U.S., outside of the Olympics, is collegiate volleyball. If it is not a priority across collegiate athletic departments, then it is understandable why athletic apparel companies do not have an extensive market for volleyball.

1.5 Research Questions

The researcher investigated the effect of the institutionalization of athletic apparel contracts on shoe selection among collegiate volleyball coaches and volleyball athletic trainers. Specifically for this study, the researcher examined the effect of athletic apparel sponsorships on shoe selection for NCAA Division I volleyball teams. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

- RQ 1: How, if at all, have AACs become institutionalized in NCAA Division I volleyball?
- RQ 2: How, if at all, does the institutionalization of an AAC affect volleyball coaches’ shoe selection?
- RQ 3: How, if at all, does the sponsored brand meet the coach’s expectations in regard to volleyball shoes meeting their athlete’s footwear needs?
- RQ 4: How, if at all, does the sponsored brand meet the athletic trainer’s expectations in regard to volleyball shoes meeting their athlete’s footwear needs?
1.6 Problem Statement

The restrictions imposed through AACs bring to question the safety, health, comfort, and product satisfaction of not only student-athletes, but coaches and athletic trainers alike. This problem is important to volleyball coaches because many are charged with the task of selecting shoes for their student-athletes, causing them to play a critical role in shoe selection. Despite the financial benefit an AAC brings to a school, it significantly restricts the number of options available for shoe selection. This problem is important to athletic trainers because they are concerned with the health, safety, and wellbeing of the athletes, and ill-fitting shoes could compromise these goals. It was important to assess whether or not volleyball shoe needs, as determined by the coach and athletic trainers, are being met by the school’s AAC.

1.7 Overview of Chapters

The remainder of this thesis is arranged in the following order. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature outlining the concepts of institutional theory, isomorphism, and dominant ideology theory in regard to AACs in NCAA Division I athletics. It also covers shoe selection considerations influenced by AACs. Chapter 3 delineates the research design, participants, sampling techniques, instrumentation, and data analysis that was used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 provides the results found through emergent themes from the participant’s interviews. Chapter 5 discusses these emergent themes, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and future directions.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Review Introduction

The lack of literature on AACs in collegiate institutions can make it difficult to grasp the importance of such relationships. The researcher’s intent with the following review was to outline the development of AACs as an institution, athletic apparel sponsorships, and shoe selection considerations influenced by AACs. The considerations reviewed in this study are product dissatisfaction and medical implications for athletic shoes.

2.2 Overview of Athletic Apparel Contracts

The origin of modern-day collegiate AACs began with a conversation in 1988 between attorney Robert Ades and Nike representative Sonny Vaccaro. Ades suggested the idea of outfitting the University of Miami basketball team in Nike shoes (Kish, 2013). This agreement would become the first of its kind in collegiate athletics and eventually set the precedent for future agreements. The contract seemed to be mutually beneficial to the parties involved. The University of Miami saw the opportunity to subsidize the cost of shoes, while Nike saw it as an opportunity to create dozens of new unparalleled sales channels to fans, alumni, and students (Kish, 2013). Until this point, each athletic department was responsible for the provision of athletic shoes for their teams. Soon after Ades and Vaccaro exchanged ideas, Vaccaro discussed the deal with Nike co-founder Phil Knight and came to the revelation that “now we own the school” (Kish, 2013, para. 18). Comments such as Vaccaro's raise the question as to whether these agreements are as beneficial to both parties as they appear.

Athletic programs, specifically NCAA Division I programs, have transformed over the years into multi-million dollar organizations (Berkowitz et al., 2013). With bigger athletic
programs comes bigger expectations, thus the need for a large revenue influx. According to reports from USA Today, only 23 NCAA Division I athletic programs generated a profit in 2013 (Berkowitz et al, 2013). This means that hundreds of athletic programs operate at a deficit. One way to combat the deficit is to seek alternative sources of income or subsidies to offset the cost of operations. One of the easiest ways for an athletic department to do this is through an AAC.

AACs can provide a substantial subsidy for athletic departments and as a result have become a staple in the athletic environment. Former NBA player Ed O’Bannon is currently filing an antitrust lawsuit against the NCAA and the Collegiate Licensing Company for lack of compensation from advertising with images of former NCAA student-athletes. An expert in the case, Ed Dessner, gathered the financial terms of AACs for 64 NCAA Division I Universities (Solomon, 2014). All 64 of these institutions have lucrative AACs with Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour ranging anywhere between $20,000 and $3.4 million in product, or as much as $3.8 million in cash (Solomon, 2014).

Although a complete list of collegiate AACs is not currently available, there are certainly more than 64 schools that have some form of an AAC. Schools such as the University of Oregon, with proud alumni Phil Knight, co-founder of Nike, Inc., are able to use their infamous AAC as a recruiting tool to entice incoming student-athletes (Rishe, 2013). The University of Oregon has more recently become known as the school that debuts the latest in Nike apparel. While at first glance one could likely assume the driving force behind such contracts is merely financial gain, perhaps the relationship should be viewed under a different light. One could argue that the idea of AACs themselves have become institutionalized in the world of NCAA Division I athletics.

2.2.1 Athletic Apparel Sponsorships

Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt (2009) defined sponsorship as, “a cash and/or in kind fee paid to a property (typically a sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for
access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property” (p. 170).

Sponsorship is an essential aspect of title events and the way these events are perceived by the general public. In this particular study, Clark and colleagues (2009) observed stock returns for companies that became title event sponsors for major sporting events such as Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournaments, NASCAR races, and NCAA bowl games. The results of the study were that title event sponsorship had a significant impact on the stock returns for these companies after a sponsorship deal was announced. Similarly, in an effort to study the effect of sponsorship signage in a playing arena on brand recognition, Maxwell and Lough (2009) reported that signage alone did not significantly increase brand awareness. Factors considered were sign placement, size, and color. While signage in the actual facility or arena may not have significantly contributed to brand awareness, this does not discredit the impact of signage on uniforms on brand awareness.

A report from the Portland Business Journal revealed that in 2002 Nike offered to pay the University of Alabama $100,000 to outfit the football team alone (Kish, 2013). Deals like this are not uncommon. As previously noted, the University of Oregon’s current Nike contract offers $600,000 cash and $2.2 million in equipment annually through 2018 (Kish, 2013). Furthermore, the University of Wisconsin’s current contract with Adidas provides the university with an annual allotment of $800,000 cash and $1.325 million in products (Kish, 2013). AACs can account for a large portion of an athletic institution’s revenue and in turn become a very valuable asset.

Corporate sponsorship creates a symbiotic relationship that provides revenue for institutions and brand image enhancement, awareness, and fandom for sponsorship corporations. Focusing on professional volleyball, Lee (2003) investigated players’ attitudes towards sponsorships and practices in the U.S. The majority of athletes noted they felt their freedom to
wear certain types of clothing or engage in particular activities were stifled by their sport teams’ sponsor (Lee, 2003). Participants commented on the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored athlete. For example, the athletes perceived that their personal benefits from the contract agreement were far less advantageous than the benefits of the sponsor (Lee, 2003). All of the athletes seemed to understand that an imbalance was not uncommon for the majority of sponsored relationships; instead, it was an imbalance the athletes felt they have learned to adapt to (Lee, 2003). Lee (2003) explained that many athletes felt grateful if a sponsor offered them a product or monetary benefit. Essentially, the athletes felt they had no say in what they wanted from the sponsors; rather, they had to settle for what the sponsor decided to offer (Lee, 2003).

Lee (2003) suggests a more collaborative relationship should exist rather than one focused on power between the athlete/sport team and the sponsor. Lee’s 2003 study with professional volleyball athletes lacked the perspective of the coach or athletic trainer. While this study focused on professional athletes, coaches and athletic trainers are much more involved in the apparel selection at the collegiate level. NCAA coaches are often ultimately responsible for ordering equipment and apparel for their teams. Likewise, if a student-athlete becomes injured or feels uncomfortable in the given equipment or apparel, they often report the issue to the athletic trainer. Athletic trainers have been known to modify the equipment or apparel for the student athlete as to increase comfort/function and decrease risk of injury. Many AACs place restrictions on alterations of apparel, making it difficult for the student-athlete to be comfortable and happy. Further research is needed to gather coaches’ and athletic trainer’s perspectives on the true benefits of AACs.

2.2.2 Institutional Theory in AACs

Athletic apparel contracts have become a major part of collegiate athletics and have presented themselves as norms across the prestigious Division I athletic programs. Institutional
theory is a concept that has been studied for more than three decades. To grasp an understanding of institutional theory one must be aware of what defines an *institution*. While an institution can represent a concrete structure, Washington and Patterson (2009) explain that institutions are more often representative of certain organizational arrangements that present a social order through chronological repetition. Let us take for example an NCAA Division I school’s AAC as an “institution.” A contract is certainly a tangible object when in paper-form, but it also represents a larger social representation that cannot be physically embodied. Athletic departments have to meet certain qualifications in order to assume NCAA Division I status. These qualifications include having at least seven men’s sports and seven women’s sports (or six for men and eight for women; (NCAA, 2013). They must also abide by various rules regarding competition participant minimums and scheduling criteria. Minimum financial awards must be met for the athletic program as well as an allowance for the maximum number of financial awards for each sport (NCAA, 2013). Many of these schools have exclusive AACs with companies such as Nike, Adidas, or Under Armour. There is an established social order among these athletic departments as determined by elite status and perceived success of the program. A complex social order is created through the NCAA Division I status of the school and the presence of an AAC. One may alternatively argue that the difference in perceived social order can be partly attributed to institutional theory.

Selznick, one of the pioneers in institutional research, viewed the process of becoming an institution, known as institutionalization, as one that occurs over time (Scott, 1987). As individuals interpret actions, they share their interpretations with others through a process “by which actions become repeated over time and are assigned similar meanings by self and others” (Scott, 1987, p. 495). This ‘process’ is known as institutionalization. Institutionalization involves continuous repetition of actions, behaviors, or interpretations that eventually conform to a set of
norms. In essence, institutions are, as eloquently explained by Selznick (1957), “a product of interaction and adaptation… receptacles of group idealism” (pp. 21-22).

Many institutional theorists would agree that institutionalization is indeed a progression that takes some time to reveal itself. A more detailed definition describes institutionalization as a process by which “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Researchers have presented institutionalization as repetition of actions over time; actions that symbolize similar meanings by self and others (Scott, 1987). In this case, AACs are the repeated actions that occur over time. The researcher argues that AACs represent more than what is defined on paper, but rather a whole new institution adapted by a school. The school often finds itself becoming attached to an AAC because as an institution, it becomes ingrained in the culture and daily workings of the school. Once something is institutionalized, it becomes very difficult to dissolve.

The argument that AACs have become an institution is based in part on the premise that such relationships have become a staple in the collegiate athletic community. AACs are used as recruiting tools and alternative sources of income. The argument can also be made that AACs are unofficially used as a sign of prestige. Much like successful collegiate sports teams, a school can enter a higher level of social awareness with a lucrative AAC. For example, the University of Oregon is grateful to have Phil Knight, co-founder of Nike, as a proud alumnus. Nike promoted the University of Oregon by providing them with the latest in Nike apparel. Oregon athletics events become a national stage for the debut of some of the latest technology in performance wear.

Given this information, AACs should be viewed as an institution. According to our previous definition of an institution, an AAC can be described as something that represents
certain organizational arrangements that present a social order through chronological repetition.

The organizational arrangements are the necessity for athletic departments to seek AACs as an alternative source of funding, the social order that is developed based on the value of an AAC, and the chronological repetition of the creation of new contracts or renewal of existing contracts.

Berger and Luckmann explained that institutionalization consists of three phases: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Scott, 1987). Externalization refers to taking action. In our case, externalization would be the creation of the AAC itself. Objectivation is interpreting those actions as an external reality (Scott, 1987). Objectivation is the realization that an AAC represents more than what is presented in writing. It is the awareness of the social cues surrounding the entrance of the phenomenon into the environment. Internalization is our own conscious awareness of the objectivated world (Scott, 1987). Internalization takes the awareness of those social cues and interprets them through a sense-making process. What does that particular AAC mean to the school that has signed? For some, like Oregon it represents an invaluable recruiting resource. NCAA Division I schools like the University of Western Michigan may view their AAC as valuable alternative source of income or budget subsidy. Although each school internalizes the meaning of their AAC differently, institutionalization is a social process that involves the acceptance of some shared reality. As Scott shares, the institutionalized concept is independent of validity but rather seen as just “the way things are” (Scott, 1987, p. 496).

2.2.3 Institutional Isomorphism in AACs

Washington and Patterson (2011) have outlined five key elements of institutional theory. The five elements outline that organizations are ultimately influenced by their institutional contexts, all organizations are affected by institutional pressures, organizations become isomorphic to enhance their survival, practices to gain legitimacy and conformity may be
counterproductive, and lastly, once a practice is deemed essential for legitimacy, that practice is seen as an institution. Although all are very important for developing an understanding of institutional theory, perhaps the most relevant to the research is the concept of institutional isomorphism. Institutional isomorphism refers to pressures placed on an institution by the environment in order to implement survival methods (Washington & Patterson, 2011). DiMaggio and Powell described these forces as mimetic, coercive, or normative (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001).

Mimetic isomorphism stems from pressures that occur when institutions mimic the actions of others because of uncertainty, ambiguity, or other ailments (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001). Some universities may feel pressured to develop an AAC in order to compete with other universities of similar status. Likewise, a school can be pressured to seek a more beneficial AAC to keep up with competitors.

Coercive isomorphism is the result of pressures from professional networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In this case, the athletic apparel company itself might serve as a source of coercive isomorphism for an AAC. It is common practice for most apparel companies to have it outlined in their AAC that student-athletes, and often staff, at the sponsored school are restricted to wearing their brand’s apparel. By imposing mandates, the apparel company utilizes coercive pressures to cause a school to conform to its demands. While this may benefit the apparel company, it does not always benefit the school. In the grand scheme of clothing and equipment selection across various brands, limiting a school to one brand is quite restricting. When other brand options are denied, this could create a greater risk for product dissatisfaction.

Normative isomorphism describes the pressures of professionalization stemming from two concepts. The first concept is that members of a certain profession (such as lawyers, physicians, and university professors) receive similar training which “socializes them into similar
world views” (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999, p. 657). The second concept is the interaction of these professionals in shared networks and associations, allowing them to circulate ideas among themselves (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). The process of rearing industry professionals in a similar fashion and allowing them to share ideas creates collectively understood communal norms. These norms create the normative pressures leading to institutional isomorphism. Normative isomorphism pertains to AACs in that collegiate athletic administrators’ develop and communicate within networks that focus on the importance of these agreements. With the perceived tremendous benefits (e.g., monetary gains) of AACs, these agreements are revered highly among athletic administrators. The normative pressures resulting in shared ideas among athletic administrators foster an environment in which the institutionalization of AACs can flourish.

**2.2.4 The Role of Dominant Ideology Theory in the Institutionalization of AACs**

In addition to institutional theory, dominant ideology theory (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978) may lend itself to the understanding of AACs in collegiate athletics. Dominant ideology theory includes the premise that in each society there are a certain set of over-arching beliefs or values (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). The researcher argues that the dominant ideology in the realm of NCAA Division I athletics is that schools depend on AACs as sources of supplemental income. The two theories, institutional and dominant ideology, mainly differ in that institutional theory deals with the development of an institution through dominant beliefs or values. Essentially, dominant ideology theory focuses on the dominance of a given phenomenon while institutional theory focuses on the process of that phenomenon becoming a dominant attribute. Given Abercrombie and Turner’s (1978) definition of dominant ideology being a set of values dominating all others, dominant ideology theory appears to parallel with institutional isomorphism in the attempt to explain the institutionalization of AACs. Dominant ideology
theory focuses on the prevalence of AACs while institutional isomorphism describes the pressures that lead to this prevalence. While attention is often focused on the benefits of AACs, there are ways that they can negatively affect a school. Schools subject to mimetic pressures can adopt solutions for nonexistent problems, and in turn can adopt problems for which they have no solution. For example, referencing the Nike sponsorship contract with the previously mentioned prestigious Division I school: “UNIVERSITY agrees that Coach, Team and Staff members shall refrain from wearing athletic footwear manufactured by companies other than NIKE, or any such footwear which has been altered to resemble NIKE athletic footwear, during UNIVERSITY Intercollegiate Athletic Program activity” (Kish, 2013). This agreement may be great for the Nike Company, but these types of contracts can put NCAA Division I institutions in precarious situations. Many of these agreements are so restricting that outsiders may wonder why some NCAA Division I institutions agree to such terms. While one factor, and probably most persuasive, is the pursuit of extra money, one could argue that institutional theory and dominant ideology play into the decision for a school to enter such an agreement. The pressures of institutional isomorphism can coerce a school into a “one size fits all” approach, leading a school to assume that one athletic apparel company’s product is best for all facets of its athletic department. This particular situation can certainly be problematic if all facets do not agree with this assumption. Resulting conflict arises when individuals within the school look outside of the sponsored brand for a more satisfying product.

2.2.5 Section Summary

In all, through the mimetic, coercive, and normative pressures of institutional isomorphism, the reliance on AACs for alternative sources of revenue has become
institutionalized in the collegiate athletic setting. The norms created by the institutionalization of these contracts leads to the dominance of AACs across the collegiate athletic community. While AACs can be an extreme financial benefit to a school, they may not be beneficial to all of its constituents. There is little to no room for product dissatisfaction when a school agrees to an AAC because all student-athletes, and often staff, are required to wear the provided apparel. The institutionalization of AACs can make it difficult for a school to appease the requests of this smaller subgroup of sports. The following section outlines in more detail the nature of athletic apparel sponsorships.

2.3 Shoe Selection Considerations Influenced by AACs

The following sections outline two major considerations in volleyball shoe selection that can be inhibited by AACs. While AACs have many perceived benefits, the researcher will discuss two specific reasons as to why an AAC may not be the best fit for a school. She will focus on product dissatisfaction and medical considerations. With an AAC, a school’s athletic department is forced to take a “one size fits all” approach for the distribution of apparel to its sports teams. While a company such as Nike may be known for its basketball shoes, it is not necessarily the leading brand for volleyball shoes. If a school is deemed a “Nike” school, then in most cases, all sports teams must wear Nike apparel, despite the team, coach or staff’s satisfaction with the product. Another consideration with shoe selection is the prospective medical problems for student-athletes that may result from using an inferior shoe. Limiting shoe selection, by way of an AAC, may hinder the coach’s or athletic trainer’s ability to provide the safest shoe option for an athlete. Athletic shoes serve to protect feet by increasing stability, providing comfortable support, reducing stress and shear forces, and offering the right amount of traction for the playing surface. Improper or ill-fitting shoes can lead to a number of injuries both acute and chronic (Shanmugam & Maffulli, 2008). Perhaps of most importance to the student-
athlete is comfort. All of these factors should be considered when selecting athletic shoes. Limiting options to one specific brand may not allow the coach or athletic trainer to select the best possible shoe for their needs.

2.3.1 Product Dissatisfaction

As previously mentioned, athletic apparel companies often provide sponsorships to sports teams. While the relationships are intended to be mutually beneficial, there are instances in which the team or even student-athletes may argue that the relationship is in fact not mutually beneficial. In particular, product dissatisfaction among athletes is not uncommon and sponsorship contracts can limit the ways in which the situation is handled. Dissatisfied student athletes and coaches are put in a bind when it comes to dissatisfaction with uniforms or equipment, especially if seeking alternative solutions violates a sponsorship contract. The Under Armour Company was founded on this principle of a student-athlete dissatisfied with provided apparel. According to Kraft and Lee (2009), Kevin Plank created the company, based on dissatisfaction with his own athletic apparel while playing football at the University of Maryland. Tactful marketing strategies to catapult the company included, but were not limited to, athlete endorsement, product placement, and word of mouth (Kraft & Lee, 2009).

Uniform dissatisfaction is frequent among female athletes. Historically, many sport companies tend to create clothing for a masculine identity. Wheat and Dickson (1999) surveyed NCAA collegiate women’s golfers using a mixed-methods approach to determine how golf uniform characteristics contribute to an individual’s satisfaction with the uniform. Evaluative criteria used to examine clothing were satisfaction, performance, quality, aesthetics, and femininity. All evaluative criteria had an influence on satisfaction of team uniforms. NCAA
collegiate female golfers seemed to be satisfied with brand names, but evaluative criteria relating to comfort, fit, femininity and style of these brands received negative responses (Dickson, 1999).

While uniform dissatisfaction exists, sponsorships limit alternative solutions for athletes by including in their contracts what they can and cannot wear. Although Kevin Plank was able to create a new multi-million dollar clothing line inspired by his dissatisfaction as a student-athlete, not all student-athletes are as fortunate. Collegiate women’s sports, much like the example in Wheat and Dickson’s (1999) study on female golfers, may receive apparel from brand name companies, but the provided apparel does not meet the expectations of the consumer. In addition to product dissatisfaction, the following section outlines some medical implications to consider regarding the selection of athletic shoes and how these selections can be inhibited by the existence of AACs.

2.3.2 Medical Implications

McNair and Marshall (1994) explain that one of the primary purposes of shoes is “to protect the individual from the possible injurious effects of repetitive loading” (p. 256). This task is accomplished by either reducing peak acceleration, increasing the amount of time to peak acceleration, or increasing the absorption of impact forces (McNair & Marshall, 1994). Speculation has been raised as to whether types or style of fit of shoes can contribute to injury. The proceeding section includes an examination of relevant clinical studies in regard to sport-related injuries and footwear differentiations in athletic activity.

The NCAA collects annual data on injuries in particular sports regarding type, occurrence, rate, mechanism, location, and other variables dependent upon sport. In a review of data from 1988 to 2004, Agel, Palmieri-Smith, Dick, Wojtys, and Marshall (2007) gather 16 years’ worth of data on NCAA institutions and sport injuries. Injuries resulting in 10 or more
days of loss of activity were those of ankles, knees, and upper legs. Twenty-six percent of all injuries, in practice and games, occurred from no apparent physical contact. These injuries include possible stress reactions or stress fractures, both of which are non-contact injuries by nature. Shoes have a perceived impact on the reduction of many non-contact athletic injuries.

Improper footwear for particular job tasks can be detrimental to the individual. The primary function of an athletic shoe is to lessen the effect of external stresses on the body created during activity. Murphy, Connolly, and Beynnon (2003) examined various intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can lead to lower extremity injury. Intrinsic factors included, but were not limited to age, gender, limb girth, postural stability, flexibility and body size. Extrinsic variables considered were level of competition, skill level, ankle bracing, and shoe type. Evidence from the four studies that Murphy et al. (2003) examined regarding shoe type led to the conclusion that there was an increase in male and female basketball player’s ankle injuries related to shoes with inflatable air cells in the heel. There was, however, no difference in ankle injury occurrences for those wearing low top, high top, or high top shoes with air cells.

In American football, there was an increased incidence of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries in athletes wearing edge style cleats versus other cleat designs. Of the two studies examined, there was no association between injury and type of shoe (Murphy et al., 2003). Murphy and colleagues concluded further research is needed to observe other factors such as traction, proprioceptive input, and joint mobility limitations to get a better understanding of the effects of footwear on injury.

In an attempt to alter ill-fitting shoes, many medical practitioners recommend/prescribe inserts or orthotics. Nigg, Nurse, and Stefanyshyn (1999) discussed the benefits of using inserts and orthotics for sport activities and proposed a new concept for this medical intervention. The authors reviewed previous literature on the matter supporting the case that inserts and orthotics
change skeleton alignment (Nigg, Nurse, & Stefanyshyn, 1999). Contrary to this notion, Nigg et al. (1999) support the concept that inserts and orthotics instead minimize muscle work. This means an ideal insert or orthotic is believed to reduce muscle activity. A reduction of muscle activity reduces fatigue and is presumed to reduce risk for injury. Perhaps the most important observation in this study is that there is still insufficient research regarding the magnitude of effect skeletal alignment or reduction of muscle activity from inserts or orthotics truly has on the reduction of injury.

As a follow-up study to examine the relationship between shoe comfort and injury frequency, Mundermann, Stefanyshyn, and Nigg (2001) solicited a group of 206 military personnel to participate in a study assessing perceived comfort of shoes and injury frequency over the course of four months. The sample was divided evenly into a control and treatment group. Individuals received their choice of one of six inserts. The inserts were worn in their combat boots during military training. At the culmination of the four-month collection period, an exit questionnaire was distributed to record aspects of injury related to frequency, occurrence, and severity and pain experienced. In regard to injury incidence, the researchers found that at the end of the four month period, ten subjects in the control group suffered a stress fracture or foot pain as opposed to three subjects in the treatment group. The study’s examination of shoe comfort revealed that all insert conditions improved comfort ratings compared to the control group (Mundermann et al., 2001). The importance of this study is that although inserts may not have shown evidence in decreasing injury, they can increase perceived comfort in footwear. Athletic trainers often provide shoe inserts to athletes to remedy the issue of ill-fitting or uncomfortable shoes. This is not to say that all issues of shoe discomfort can be cured simply by changing the inserts.
Nolan (2004) analyzed the implications of shoe midsole density on the magnitude of impact forces after an athlete lands from a volleyball spike approach jump. Twenty female elite NCAA volleyball athletes participated in the study. Twenty-seven retroreflective markers measured the magnitude of impact forces upon landing. The subjects repeated jumps 10 times with each midsole condition (i.e., soft, hard, and control) for a total of 30 jumps. It was concluded from the results that changes in midsole density had no effect on vertical ground reaction forces at landing. One proposed explanation for this result is a neuromuscular adaptation that takes place during impact. It was also stated that further research in needed to observe the significance of midsole densities on general non-rhythmic athletic activities.

In all, these studies provide information that while inserts or orthotics can increase perceived comfort of footwear for athletes, there is not enough evidence to suggest that this medical intervention can reduce the frequency of injury. Additional research that correlates injury frequency with shoe type or studies that focus on shoe function in sport specific tasks would be beneficial not only to coaches, teams, or athletic trainers that select footwear, but also for the companies that develop them.

2.4 Chapter Summary

The preceding content includes a discussion of the institutionalization of AACs in the collegiate athletic setting. Athletic apparel companies may lack products tailored to volleyball athletes. While AACs can serve as a major asset to a school and its athletic department, there are complications that may arise with such agreements. One of these complications is the issue of product dissatisfaction. Whether coaches or athletic trainers’ dissatisfaction occurs as a result of personal preference or medical necessity, AACs can restrict shoe selection options. Given this information, it is the researcher’s intent to interview volleyball coaches and athletic trainers (whom are most often tasked with selecting shoes for their teams) regarding the impact of AACs
on their decisions regarding volleyball shoe selection. The following chapter outlines the methods used to conduct this research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

3.1 Research Design

“Research is a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 4). There are four general classifications of research: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, and predictive (Gratton & Jones, 2004). This study used a descriptive research approach. Descriptive research is an attempt to describe a phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon being explored was the impact of athletic apparel contracts (AACs) on volleyball coaches’ and athletic trainers’ satisfaction with their AAC, medical problems that may be related to the AAC, and how the AAC may affect shoe selection.

The research approach for this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is a general term used to describe numerous approaches and methods for studying natural social life (Saldaña, 2011). Saldaña (2011) explains that data collected and analyzed through qualitative methods are typically (but not exclusively) non-quantitative in character, are comprised of textual and/or visual materials that document human experiences as they pertain to others or themselves in social action and reflexive states. Examples of some qualitative variables are feelings, interpretations, experiences, or thoughts (Gratton & Jones, 2004). In qualitative inquiry the researcher takes a more interpretive approach (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Qualitative research relies on analysis of non-numerical data to provide understanding. A qualitative design is used when the research objectives call for description, understanding, and/or meaning (Markula & Silk, 2011). Qualitative inquiry is rich with subjective meaning, thus qualitative studies typically have smaller sample sizes. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this particular study because the interest was in the impact of the
AAC in relation to shoe selection and/or medical implications resulting in part from the AAC.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect empirical data for this study. Semi-structured interviews involve the use of guides or outlines that allow the use of both scripted and unscripted questions to gain more in-depth information (Mason, 2004). Semi-structured interviews help the researcher to prepare for the interview with guided questions while allowing them to probe for more information during interview interactions (Hatch, 2002). Semi-structured interviews allow for an ontological focus on people’s knowledge, experience, understanding, interpretations and interactions (Mason, 2004). These types of interviews permit for more than a ‘yes or no’ response and allow the researcher to actively participate in the acquisition of information. The researcher utilized a semi-structured format because there were specific questions she wanted to have answered regarding volleyball shoe selection, but she also wanted to give respondents the opportunity to share any additional relevant insight they had on the topic.

3.2 Sampling Techniques

Each volleyball team in the SEC and ACC was emailed a request for the participation of one representative of the coaching staff and the team’s athletic trainer in the study. The sampling techniques used for this study were criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling refers to selecting participants based on some predetermined criteria (Markula & Silk, 2011). The criteria for participants in this study were to either be a coach or athletic trainer for a volleyball team in the SEC or ACC.

Another sampling technique utilized in this study was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is used to select participants because they are easy to access (Hatch, 2002). Being a current volleyball athletic trainer in the ACC, coaches and athletic trainers in the
ACC are far more accessible to this researcher because of frequent contact due to competition and networking.

Snowball sampling was final sampling technique used in this study. Snowball sampling refers to gaining access to more participants through their referral from other participants (Markula & Silk, 2011). The researcher’s location and social connections allowed her access to SEC universities as well. Access to these individuals was gained by face-to-face contact, referral from colleagues, and gathering of contact information from school directories.

The targeted number of interviews was six coaches and six athletic trainers. The researcher chose two sampling groups because the insight and knowledge of volleyball from coaches is often a lot different than athletic trainers. While coaches undoubtedly have extensive experience with either playing or coaching volleyball, athletic trainers are not required to have any volleyball experience for their jobs. The athletic trainer’s perspective may be different from that of a Division I volleyball coach. The researcher predicted that after six interviews from each classification of participant, the point of theoretical saturation would be reached. Theoretical saturation in our context refers to the point at which no additional responses can lead to the development of new categories; essentially, the researcher sees similar instances being repeated through data collection (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). There are currently no concrete guidelines determining when a researcher should reach the point of theoretical saturation. In a 2006 study by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, the researchers examined the phenomenon of theoretical saturation using interview data from a prior study on women in two West-African countries. Their findings revealed that researchers believed to have reached theoretical saturation after twelve interviews, although recurring themes were evident as early as six interviews. Given the population of the study, the researcher believed interviews from six coaches and six athletic trainers would provide enough information to create authentic representation.
3.3 Instrumentation

As previously stated, each volleyball team in the ACC and SEC received an email requesting the consent and participation (see Appendix B) from one representative of the coaching staff as well as the team’s athletic trainer in an audio recorded phone interview. Fifteen teams in the ACC and thirteen teams in the SEC were contacted. A timeline of two weeks was set to complete the interviews. The initial invitation emails were sent one week prior to this timeline as to give participants an opportunity to plan accordingly. Each participant was asked to reply via email and provide their contact information if they were willing to take part in the study. After a participant replied with interest in completing the interview, they were contacted again to schedule a time to complete the interview. Participants were informed that the phone interview was expected to last 25-30 minutes although interviews actually ranged from 15-25 minutes. Each phone interview was conducted in a private office to eliminate disturbances on the interviewer’s end.

Within the first three days of initial distribution of the invitation email, three coaches sent regrets on behalf of their staff as to not participate in the study for personal reasons. One automated ‘out of the office’ email was received from a team that was competing out of the country. Five interviews were scheduled and completed within the first the week of the two-week timeline. After receiving no further responses within the next week, a follow-up invitation email was sent to the remaining schools in the sample three days before the expiration of the two-week timeline. Other athletic training colleagues were contacted and encouraged to reach out to any volleyball athletic trainers they may know in the ACC or SEC regarding participation in the study. After the follow-up email and aid from other athletic trainers, four additional participants scheduled interviews before the two-week deadline. These four participants were encouraged to contact any potential participants they knew that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Two
more participants responded with interest in participating, but could not schedule an interview until the week after the announced deadline. These two interviews were accepted and scheduled for the following week.

A semi-structured interview protocol served as a guide for the participant interviews (see Appendices C and D). There were two separate interview protocols: one for a coach and one for an athletic trainer. Two separate protocols were developed because athletic trainers and coaches were presumed to have different perspectives on the shoe selection process for their teams. It was believed that athletic trainers would give a more medical account of the process while coaches may have had more insight regarding contract stipulations per their AAC. Additional consent to participate was reiterated immediately before beginning the interview. Aside from introductory and conclusive questions, the interview content was divided into three sections: shoe selection, medical implications, and institutionalization. Each section began with one open-ended question and several optional follow-up questions and was engineered to gain further information or redirect the conversation if the topic went astray (refer to Appendices C and D). Hand-written notes of the responses were documented as well as an audio-recording of the participant’s responses. Audio recordings have been stored on a portable external hard drive. Only the principal investigator and professor directing the thesis have access to the files.

3.4 Data Analysis

For data interpretation, the four dialogic processes/moments of interpretation as summarized by Markula and Silk (2011) were utilized: the first of these processes being recalling. During this phase, the researcher used memory to recall any hunches or accumulated personal impressions or emotions evoked within the interview. These emotions were revisited, analyzed and deemed valuable or invaluable to the research agenda.
The second process was listening around. This involves the researcher becoming as familiar as possible with the empirical data (Markula & Silk, 2011). During the interviews, the researcher kept hand-written notes as well as audio-recordings of the interview. In these notes, she documented hesitancy in responses, popular or frequent responses, notes about the participant regarding demographics and AAC stipulations, and additional follow-up questions as pertained to the participant. The researcher recalled that each participant had their own distractions during their interview. All participants had either just gotten off work, were at work and had to find a quiet place to talk, were at work and continued to work while she was speaking with them, or traveling.

Audio-recordings were utilized to ensure valid representation of the participant’s responses when coding the data for emergent themes. All interviews were transcribed to provide an accurate account of the participant’s response and to familiarize the researcher with their responses through repetition. One interview recording was terminated early because confidential information regarding the health status of an athlete was being discussed. In another interview, a participant began speaking to the topic before consent to record was established. Only notes after verbal consent was given were included in the results.

Another aspect of listening around involves coding to highlight emergent themes (Markula & Silk, 2011). Themes were developed based on frequency of mention in participant responses. As interviews were transcribed and notes were reviewed, recurrent themes emerged through responses. During this time the researcher analyzed the themes that emerged from the responses and determined whether or not the data addressed the initial research questions. The emergent themes coincided with the research questions. It is important to note that after writing a literature review which included topics relating to the importance of AACs to Division I schools, institutional theory in AACs, institutional isomorphism in AACs, the role of dominant ideology
theory on the institutionalization of AACs, product dissatisfaction, and medical implications, the researcher developed emergent themes based on these pre-existing concepts. It is possible that another researcher without prior knowledge of these concepts could have developed different themes from the empirical data. This is why member-checking was used in this study. Member-checking involves the sharing of results and/or analysis with peers, participants, or other researchers to increase validity (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Markula & Silk, 2011). Cross checking the emergent themes was needed to gather as much information as possible from participant’s responses.

The third process was close reading. During this process the researcher began to construct a story from the coded data (Markula & Silk, 2011). Through close reading she discovered the actual factors that seem to be influencing volleyball shoe selection and what future directions could be taken in order to enrich the content of this study. It was during this time that she determined the prospective impact of her findings on the world, which answered the question of ‘so what’. The constructed story in this case was a narrative of the emergent themes gained from participant’s responses.

Crabtree and Miller (1999) describe what they consider to be dimensions of a narrative approach to interpretation. In the narrative approach, the researcher assumes that people best depict their ideas in the form of a story. It is one of the most basic ways for humans to make meaning of life events (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). By transcribing interviews, the researcher brought forth these ‘stories’ to the reader to enrich the narrative representation of results.

Another dimension is the power of a narrative to shape human conduct while reflecting on a person’s life experience (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This dimension takes into account the textual information given from not only the direct words of participants, but their conduct which produces a moral narrative. For example, as will be discussed in chapter 4, some participants
were hesitant to answer certain questions or particularly constructed their answers in such a way as to not ‘disrespect their sponsor’. This produces a moral narrative for the researcher to further examine and include in results for a richer understanding of participant responses.

The last topic that will be discussed from Crabtree and Miller’s (1999) dimensions of the narrative approach is the assumption that narratives are relational. Each individual has their own interpretation of life experiences and how their experiences personally impact them. The researcher assumed that personal experiences and knowledge regarding AACs would differ between coaches and athletic trainers; thus two separate protocols were constructed for each type of participant. Crabtree and Miller (1999) emphasized that stories are not simply “told” by teller to listener, but are constructed and take shape from the interaction between teller and listener. The researcher accounted for this by using a semi-structured format for interviews. Probing questions created more in-depth storytelling from participants which provided richer information.

Narrative representation through direct quotes, environmental cues, and situational conditions were used to portray the empirical data collected as suggested by Markula and Silk (2011). Environmental cues and situational conditions referred to instances that included but were not limited to distraction, special considerations with the participant’s AAC at their school, hesitancy of response, and cause for lack of knowledge on particular subjects. The narrative was inclusive of the following process called representing self and others. The researcher chose a narrative approach to provide the reader with a primary account of participant responses to promote deeper understanding of the researcher’s interpretation of results.

The final process was ‘representing self and others’. This process took into account political, structural, and aesthetic issues that were relevant to the research (Markula & Silk, 2011). In this case, a perceived political structure was expected to encounter from the researcher’s role as a volleyball athletic trainer within the targeted sample. The researcher’s
position among this particular group of individuals may have influenced participant’s responses in multiple ways. Some seemed skeptical of the confidentiality of their responses while others felt comfortable speaking to someone that can share their insight on the issues presented. The researcher believed that at times some participants felt uncomfortable giving an honest response or may have given a socially desirable answer as part of hesitancy and concern that their response would be noted by their administrator and/or sponsor. The researcher considered her position as a volleyball athletic trainer in the ACC to only add credibility and trustworthiness to the relationship between herself and the participants.

3.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 delineated the methods that were used to conduct this study. The study consisted of 11 semi-structured interviews: five with volleyball coaches and six with volleyball athletic trainers. The interviews lasted approximately 15-25 minutes each and inquired about the impact of AACs on the participants’ decisions regarding volleyball shoe selection for their team. Each interview was recorded for transcription and quality assurance purposes. Responses were analyzed using the four dialogic processes/moments of interpretation as summarized by Markula and Silk (2011): recalling, listening around, close reading, and representing self and others. After this analysis, responses were organized according into emergent themes. Data was then presented via a written narrative overview including direct quotes, environmental cues, and situational conditions.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, analysis of interview responses were developed utilizing the four dialogic moments of interpretation as explained by Markula and Silk (2011). These four moments include recalling, listening around, close reading, and representing self and others (Markula & Silk, 2011). The following chapter will take the reader through the first three of these four moments of data interpretation while providing a narrative account of the interview process, participant’s reactions, justification and development of emergent themes and contextual clues contributing to the researcher’s personal interpretation of the results. The themes developed were shoes are not “one size fits all”, the established duty to protect the sponsor-school relationship, and the benefits of an AAC outweigh the cost of shoe dissatisfaction. These themes were developed through the first three moments of interpretation and will be discussed further in the fourth moment, representing self and others. The moment of representing self and others, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

4.2 Participant Recruitment

Participants in the study were coaches (i.e., head coaches, associate head coaches, or assistant coaches) and athletic trainers from NCAA Division I universities in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). An EXCEL spreadsheet was created by compiling the names, school affiliations, and email addresses of all potential participants in each conference. These particular conferences were of interest because every school within these two conferences has an AAC with an athletic apparel company. Furthermore, the researcher’s current position as an athletic trainer in the ACC and her professional network allowed her more
access to these particular individuals. An additional EXCEL spreadsheet was created to
document each participant’s actual name and pseudo name, school affiliation, phone number,
classification (coach or athletic trainer), and time and date of their phone interview. Participants
(Table 4.1) included one head coach, four assistant coaches, and six full-time licensed athletic
trainers. Two male coaches and three female coaches were interviewed with their years of
Division I coaching experience ranging from 7 to 28 years (average 14.4 years). All six athletic
trainer participants were female with their years of experience in the field ranging from 1 to 15
years (average 6.3 years). Four of the five coaches noted being directly involved in the shoe
selection process for their team while two athletic trainers said they had very minimal
involvement. Among the participants, three apparel brands were represented: Nike, Adidas, and
Under Armour.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, recruiting participants was a difficult process. The timeline
to conduct the interviews contributed to the difficulty of gathering participants. The two-week
timeline for conducting interviews was scheduled during a time known as a quiet period for
NCAA volleyball. A quiet period is a span of time when a coach is only allowed to make in-
person contact with a recruit if they are on the coach’s campus, however a recruit can visit the
coach’s campus and be contacted by the coach via telephone (NCAA, 2014). Coaches often use
quiet periods as vacation time or an opportunity to travel abroad with their team. Two teams
responded to participant invitation emails explaining that they would be out of the country
competing for the two-weeks outlined in the study. (Arrangements were made with one athletic
trainer, Tricia, to conduct her interview the following week when she returned from an overseas
tour with her team).
Furthermore, at the end of the first week of interviews, only five interviews had been conducted. The researcher enlisted the help of colleagues that were athletic trainers for other sports as well as some participants who had completed their interview to spread the word about the study. As a result, many of the participants that later agreed to participate as goodwill or a favor to a friend. After four additional days with no further responses, a follow-up invitation email was sent out to all remaining eligible participants as a reminder that there were only three days left to participate. By the end of the two week deadline, nine interviews had been conducted with two scheduled for the following week due to scheduling conflicts.

**TABLE 4.1: Interview Participant’s Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of D1 Experience</th>
<th>Years in the Profession</th>
<th>Apparel Contract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Head Coach</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Nike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Assistant Coach</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Under Armour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Athletic Trainer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Under Armour</td>
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*Note. D1 = NCAA Division I*
4.3 Recalling

The dialogic moment of recalling involves the researcher to internally debate or rethinking hunches and any accumulated impressions from the empirical data (Markula & Silk, 2011). Initially the researcher constructed the interview protocols (Appendices B and C) based on an assumption that most AACs among Division I schools were more similar than they actually turned out to be. With the researcher’s personal experience of her team’s AAC, her school’s sponsor provides one shoe option each year and requires each volleyball player to wear a shoe within their brand. Medical exceptions are difficult to obtain and product satisfaction among athletes is low. Despite the researcher’s critical assessment of her team’s sponsor-provided footwear, the tremendous benefits of the AAC across her school’s athletic department seem to overshadow any negative implications that may occur. The researcher assumed that every team’s situation was similar to her situation in that they were provided one shoe option from their sponsor and all athletes were required to wear a sponsor-provided shoe with very few exceptions. As discussed in the next chapter, some AACs were more lenient regarding acceptance of alternative shoes for athletes. It was discovered that Under Armour does not manufacture a volleyball shoe, so they allow their sponsored schools to select any type or brand of volleyball shoe they prefer. Constructing an interview protocol under the assumption of dissatisfaction allowed for more critical inquiry as opposed to an open-ended, neutral set of questions. However, the researcher found that the questions she selected evoked meaningful responses to the research questions in the study and coincided with the agenda of the study which was to take an institutionalized look at the factors that influence volleyball shoe selection.

The researcher intended for the interview protocols to serve as a semi-structured guide to the conversation with participants. Beginning each interview with a disclaimer set a very formal
tone for the beginning of each interview. Although the researcher attempted to create a relaxed environment for each individual, the participants may have been intimidated by being read a disclaimer and having their responses audio-recorded. While each participant seemed timid at first, once they were given a chance to give some insight on their professional experience, participants seemed more comfortable. Wording and/or order of questions was often altered to fit the context of the situation. For example, after interviewing Tyler, who is employed at an Under Armour school, questions regarding his contract were altered after it was discovered that the Under Armour brand does not make a volleyball shoe. Under Armour allows their sponsored volleyball teams to wear whatever volleyball shoe they would like. Therefore, the shoe selection process for an Under Armour school is different than that of a Nike or Adidas schools which were bound to wearing sponsored-provided shoes per their AAC. In the same manner, Tanya began talking about medical issues regarding volleyball shoes earlier than was outlined in the protocol, so questions were rearranged for better flow of conversation.

The dialogic moment of recalling allowed the researcher to reflect on any initial impressions or assumptions that took place before or during the interview process. Acknowledging these additional cues allows the reader to more fully understand the researcher and their influence on the study.

4.4 Listening Around

According to Markula and Silk (2011), the dialogic moment of listening around involves the researcher familiarizing themselves with the empirical data through re-reading, re-listening, transcribing, and using memory to study material. It also involves an initial examination of the material to code and highlight for emergent themes. During the process of ‘listening around’, the researcher visited the two contextual cues of inconvenience for participants and hesitancy of
responses. These cues were developed after replaying the audio-recorded interviews and revisiting the recruitment process for each participant. Additionally, central topics of discussion were attained from responses and served as the basis of development for emergent themes. These topics materialized as the factors that influence volleyball shoe selection. The factors were separated between coaches and athletic trainers. Factors that developed from coach interview responses were the evidence of product dissatisfaction, the general benefits of a school’s AAC, insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsor, and medical concerns. Factors that developed from athletic trainer interview responses were medical concerns, general benefits of a school’s AAC, and insufficient volleyball shoe options from the sponsor.

4.4.1 Inconvenience

As noted in section 4.2 on participant recruitment, many coaches were busy during the time interviews were conducted, yet some were able to coordinate and still participate. Many volleyball athletic trainers at the Division I level are responsible for more than one sport. Five of the six interviewed athletic trainers were responsible for multiple teams. As a result, scheduling around their other teams’ schedules made it inconvenient for many participants to schedule interviews. It was important to keep in mind that even though it was a quiet period, each individual still had a work schedule to attain. Participants had to conduct interviews around their busy schedules which resulted in interviews ranging from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM EST. Participants spanned over two different time zones.

A specific example of inconvenience was displayed by athletic trainer, Jane. She was very short and abrupt with responses throughout the beginning and middle of her interview. At one point in the interview when she was asked about her personal benefit from her school’s athletic apparel sponsorship, she replied “what does this have to do with volleyball shoes”? It
was later discovered that she was in the middle of conducting a rehabilitation session with one of her athletes and was distracted. While some participants were able to find a quiet place at work to take part in the phone interview, five participants, Tyler, Renee, Laura, Maddie, and Leah, all preferred to be contacted after work and one participant, Claire was traveling during her interview.

4.4.2 Hesitancy

One particular emotion that the researcher noticed from some participants was a feeling of hesitancy. Two schools that were solicited for participation in the study rejected the invitation to participate for “a number of reasons”. Three participants, in response to questions pertaining to dissatisfaction or problems they may have had with their sponsor, were especially hesitant or cautious with their answers. For example, when Kyle was asked if he thought his sponsor-provided shoe was the best option for his team, laughed nervously and asked “You’re saying no one knows who’s saying this, right”? It was observed in the hand-written notes that he inquired about the confidentiality of the results before the disclaimer was given at the beginning of the interview. One of Kyle’s concluding remarks summed up his hesitation:

I know you were struggling trying to get some people to respond, and some of it, quite honestly could be the same fear I initially had was… Ok, this is something we’d initially been told not to talk about. And so, I think it’s more or less making everyone feel comfortable publicly. (Kyle)

Maddie quickly answered a question regarding the positive effects of her team’s shoe selection process but took an approximate 7 second pause before answering a question regarding the negative effects. Maddie seemed very cautious in her word choice as if trying to get the point across in the most politically correct way possible. Alice was similar in her responses. She would
go on rants about her dissatisfaction with Adidas volleyball shoes, but always came back to the notion that she was greatly appreciative for her sponsor. Take this excerpt from Alice’s interview for example: “Adidas is very good to us and I’ve been bashing on them for the last 20 minutes. They give our players a lot of gear. And I think it’s very beneficial from a holistic standpoint”. She made comments like, “I meant no disrespect” (regarding her view on her sponsor’s shoe) and “when I was at [my previous school], they told us to be very grateful of our contract”. It seemed as though Alice felt guilty about expressing her true opinions about Adidas volleyball shoes.

It appeared that the hesitation in responses stemmed from an unwritten code of respect for the sponsor-school relationship. Each participant seemed to take comfort in the fact that results would be anonymous. The fear that some individuals had in even participating in the research speaks volumes to the control that a sponsor has over a school. As we discussed in the literature the incident of a University of Central Florida athlete’s non-compliance with his school’s AAC, expressing dissatisfaction is often viewed as a threat to the sponsor-school relationship by athletics administrators and employees (Limon, 2010).

4.4.3 Factors Influencing Volleyball Shoe Selection: Coaches

There are several factors influencing volleyball shoe selection that emerged from coaches’ interview responses. These factors include evidence of dissatisfaction, general benefits of a school’s AAC, insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors, and medical concerns. Each of these factors contributed to the development of the emergent themes that will be discussed in later in this chapter.
4.4.3.1 Evidence of Dissatisfaction

Two schools had built-in exceptions to sponsor-provided footwear per their AAC. The two coaches who are currently at schools sponsored by Under Armour explained that Under Armour does not currently manufacture a volleyball-specific shoe. As Tyler, an assistant coach at an Under Armour school, stated

Actually, I think it’s beneficial for us that we don’t have to wear Under Armour’s shoe, because if you make everyone wear, one type of shoe, you often find that different people have different feet. It doesn’t really work out. (Tyler)

The most dissatisfaction seemed to stem from schools sponsored by Nike or Adidas. AACs with these companies required athletes to wear sponsor-provided shoes. The remaining three coaches at non-Under Armour schools did not believe their brand provided the best shoe option for their team. These three coaches also agreed that if they were not bound by their current contract restrictions, their shoe selection process would differ in some capacity. Kyle stated

We would try a couple of different options during the spring, during off-season, and we would certainly look at the best fit for the player’s foot. Find what was the most comfortable for that particular player and not worry so much about a particular brand. (Kyle)

Kyle also explained how his processes for shoe selection have changed over the years seemingly due to the development of AACs over the years.

Our process was having them try different shoes during the Spring so that we could identify what shoe they liked best to know what to buy in the Fall. Now, quite honestly, in the last half of my career, we have been a sponsored school. So therefore, we’ve been told more of what volleyball shoe or what shoe we needed to buy based on the sponsor of
the program for the school versus us actually going out and finding the best volleyball shoe. (Kyle)

A negative consequence that many coaches expressed were that their sponsored shoe (those not sponsored by Under Armour) was not the best fit for their team’s needs. In regard to the latest innovations in shoes, Claire, who oversees ordering of apparel for her team commented on her team’s relationship with Adidas.

Over the years Adidas shoe technology has begun to improve including this past year, but the girls are excited to use this shoe because a couple people tried it on to see what it felt like, and they felt it was going to probably be the best shoe that they had worn with Adidas in the past couple years. (Claire)

Claire explained that if this technology were implemented, her perception of her sponsor-provided shoe could change for the better. When asked if the coaches had ever tried to go outside the restrictions of their contract regarding shoes, two coaches admitted that they attempted to do so at some point in their coaching career. This was usually a last resort for certain athletes who had an injury or a unique foot that was not supported by the sponsor-provided shoe(s).

Coaches were asked about the characteristics of an ideal volleyball shoe and they responded with flexibility, comfortable, good stability, ample cushion, light-weight, sufficient traction, nice style/attractiveness, lateral ankle support, and reinforcement for toes. Kyle wanted “one that has good flexibility in the shoe… From the time you put it on, it’s a comfortable shoe. You’re not having to take three or four days to break it in… Has good cushion and good lateral movement”. Tanya preferred a shoe that was “A little bit lighter; something that’s going to supports. And something that we haven’t had, and think we’re going to start moving towards is something that supports your ankle a little bit more”. Of all these characteristics, comfort, light-
weight, traction, and ankle support received the most mention. However, no coaches believed that their sponsor provided a volleyball shoe with all of these characteristics.

When asked what brand they considered to have the best volleyball shoe, *all* coaches replied that the Mizuno brand was the best. There was an overwhelming dominance in the mention of the Mizuno brand. As mentioned in the review, Mizuno has been the official sponsor of USA Volleyball since 2001 (Kauffman, 2012). The visibility of this brand with professional volleyball could be a major factor in this overwhelming representation of the brand during the study. Claire recalled a conversation with her head coach about the teams’ footwear, “Our head coach said if it wasn’t the case [being bound by contract restrictions] we would probably be wearing Mizunos. Mizuno would probably be the top one that we would consider”. Kyle stated, “I think the two top ones out right now are probably Asics and Mizunos. We’ve got a couple friends that I coached formerly that are on the national team and they both have stuck with those types of shoe”. Tanya preferred the Mizuno volleyball shoes as well. When asked what specific brand she preferred, she replied, “I know I’ve had success with Mizuno. I know that’s something I’ve liked, I’ve worn myself. And I haven’t heard too many complaints about Mizuno court shoes”.

**4.4.3.2 General Benefits of a School’s AAC**

Coaches expressed the many positive effects of having an AAC, such as extreme discounts on shoes purchased, the latest in shoes, clothing for the team and staff, and a seemingly endless supply. There were two main beneficiaries as depicted by coaches’ responses: athletic departments and teams.
4.4.3.2.1 Department-wide Benefits

All five coaches expressed that their athletic departments benefit greatly from the monetary contributions of their sponsor. While none of the coaches seemed to have full knowledge on the breadth of their AAC, they all made comments regarding the amount of money and/or gear the entire athletic department received. “I wouldn’t know all the specifics of it, but I’m sure it saves them [the school] a ton of money” said Tyler. Head coach Kyle responded, “Money”. The sponsorships, certainly the amount of money that you’re given for a sponsorship is very great, and it brings some visibility to your program to have a big-name sponsor that’s attached to your university”. Tanya also commented on the value that a sponsor has on the brand image of the school itself. She says, “It’s kind of a branding type of thing. People associate or know a university by the brand they’re using”.

Coaches were also asked questions regarding their own personal benefits from their school having a sponsorship. As an athletics employee at a Division I school, the researcher has personally received discounted or free apparel from her school’s sponsor. It is important to recognize that many of the participants in this study are receiving personal benefits from these contracts and it is highly unlikely that they would want to say/do anything to disrupt this relationship. Interestingly, Tanya stated,

I haven’t had to buy a new pair of tennis shoes on my own in the last seven years just because they [Adidas] do take care of us as a staff. And they take very good care of our girls. (Tanya)

In addition, Leah shared, “They have good gear so we do look good when we’re out recruiting or when we’re just out in the community”. Overall coaches perceive the department-wide benefits their school’s athletic department receives are primarily in the form of money and
discounted or free athletic apparel for athletes and employees alike. The next section will outline what coaches recognized as specific benefits for their teams provided by their AACs.

4.4.3.2.2 Team Benefits

All coaches conveyed that they receive a tremendous amount of equipment, including shoes, for both their athletes and themselves. Most teams are provided with multiple pairs of shoes throughout the season at extremely reduced prices, if not free. Tanya said, “We have some girls that will blow through a court shoe within the first month or so of wearing them… We have the flexibility of providing as many shoes as the girls need, which is great”. Similarly, Kyle commented “We are given a lot of equipment that our team is able to use for both practice and games. And this is the full equipment. Not just shoes but everything. And certainly [having] everything match is nice”. Each coach communicated that they were very well taken care of by their sponsors in terms of the amount of products they received.

While coaches were satisfied with the quantity of products they received from their sponsor, there is still much to be said about the quality of those products. As mentioned earlier, none of the coaches believed that their sponsor-provided shoe was the best option for their team. It seems that what the sponsors lack in quality, they make up for in quantity.

All coaches commented on the importance of attracting recruits not only for their volleyball teams, but other sports as well.

We are fighting to be at the top of the conference in every sport. So the identity out there nationally through commercials, through print media, is important in that relationship you’re having with coaches and with recruits… Therefore it’s a visibility thing for all of us. (Kyle)
Claire discussed how her sponsor’s development of new volleyball shoe technology can serve as an advantage for her program.

One of my friends is a head coach at another institution who uses Adidas. They are not at the same level that we are so they are not having the opportunity to use that technology this year. So it’s just a special privilege that we rank high on the food chain. Basically it’s an advantage against other schools that have Adidas for that reason. (Claire)

Some coaches shared examples of how other sports are benefitting from their schools’ AAC. Tyler shared his particular experience with the men’s basketball team at his school.

I actually got a chance to go out to the men’s locker room for basketball and they play, I think 28 games or something like that, and they had 20 pairs of shoes that they use throughout the course of the season. They’re definitely using them as a recruiting tool for kids. When you walk in, you see this giant wall just full of shoes that they have. (Tyler) Leah capitalizes on the products provided by her sponsor as well as the prestige of her school’s football team to help in the recruiting process. As she stated, “I think it helps with recruiting. With our football team doing so well and wearing Under Armour from that stand point. And then when we have kids come on visits, we have them try on the stuff”. In all, AACs help coaches attract recruits through the provision of enticing athletic apparel and the visibility and commercialism of their products through the school.

**4.4.3.4 Insufficient Volleyball Shoe Options from Sponsor**

Mixed responses were given when each coach was asked to compare their shoe selection process to that of other teams at their school. Coaches made comments regarding their football and/or basketball programs possibly getting more shoe options from their portion of the sponsorship. Claire stated,
I haven’t heard very much about football complaining one way or the other to be quite honest with you. And I’m sure that’s just because they have great choices so if a kid of theirs is struggling with one pair, they have another model that they can try on. (Claire)

Tyler, a coach at an Under Armour school, shared his experience of visiting his school’s men’s basketball locker room shortly after being hired at his school.

I actually got a chance to go out to the men’s locker room for basketball and they play, I think, 28 games, or something like that, and they had 20 pairs of shoes that they use throughout the course of the season. (Tyler)

Jane expressed that she believes the higher revenue-producing sports at her school have more shoe options to choose from.

I think some of your money-making sports, your footballs and basketballs, probably get a little bit more. I think maybe just the basketballs and football have a little more variety, maybe just a couple extra pairs [of shoes] or what not. (Jane)

Leah was told by her equipment manager that her volleyball team receives more product, per athlete, than their highly-ranked football team. “Our equipment manager says that we get more than football. Probably just because of the number [of athletes]”.

While coaches noted that they were given a desirable amount of shoes from their sponsor, the lack of variety in volleyball shoe options was what seemed to cause disappointment with coaches and their sponsor. In the next section, the researcher discusses medical concerns as a factor influencing coaches’ volleyball shoe selection.
4.4.3.5 Medical Concerns

Medical considerations were also shown to be of high priority among coaches with all coaches stating that they consider medical implications in the selection of their team’s volleyball shoes. With limited options provided by their sponsor, they coaches are forced to seek alternative solutions to ill-fitting footwear. Some of these alternatives include having the athletes wear additional braces or insoles for support or even stretching and physically changing the build of the shoe. Two coaches mentioned that their athletes wear ankle braces or ankle tape for preventative measures. Some of their previous shoe-related concerns included rolled ankles and shin splints. When asked if they believed their sponsor-provided shoe ever contributed to injury on their team, all responded that while it may not have been the sole cause of the injury, a sponsor-provided shoe may have contributed to an athlete’s injury at some point in their career.

I think we certainly have had shoes that have been more comfortable from year to year and we’ve had some that I’ve felt did not provide enough cushion in the shoe… It isn’t necessarily 100% that’s maybe the result of it, but you can look back and there have been some different problems with the shoe that didn’t fit that particular player just right, and it potentially resulted in some problems that they’ve [the athletes] had. (Kyle)

Jane explained that for the first time her staff included their head volleyball athletic trainer in the shoe selection process this past year. Kyle said in regard to selecting shoes for his team,

With the amount of jumping that we do, we’re always concerned with those shin splints and stress fractures in the legs and feet, so we want to make sure that there’s enough cushion that the feet are being able to use in order to keep the girls comfortable throughout an extended amount of time. (Kyle)
In all, coach communicated evidence of there being an insufficient supply of volleyball shoe options from sponsors as justified through their need to seek alternative solutions for appropriate fit and/or support. Considering the medical implications of proper footwear, coaches responded that their athletes use ankle braces, orthotics, and even shoe stretchers to alter the fit of their sponsor-provided shoes. Coaches also mentioned that higher revenue-producing teams at their school seemed to have more shoe options.

In this section, the researcher has illustrated the factors influencing volleyball shoe selection according to coaches. These factors include evidence of dissatisfaction, general benefits of a school’s AAC, insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors, and medical concerns. The next section will outline factors influencing volleyball shoe selection as it pertains to athletic trainers’ responses.

4.4.4 Factors Influencing Volleyball Shoe Selection: Athletic Trainers

In the same manner as with coach interview responses, athletic trainer responses were examined to find the factors that influence their volleyball shoe selection. The factors for athletic trainers included medical concerns, general benefits of a school’s AAC, and insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsor. While there is some overlap in themes between coaches and athletic trainers, it is important to include the responses from both groups of participants for further validation of themes presented later in this chapter.

4.4.4.1 Medical Concerns

Athletic trainers are concerned with the health, safety, and well-being of their athletes. Given this notion, it was imperative that the researcher ask athletic trainers about any medical concerns or complications they may have experienced with their team’s shoe needs. Overall, athletic trainers expressed that each athlete is unique and therefore has unique needs in regard to
footwear. Five athletic trainers indicated that, ideally, each athlete would have a shoe that catered to the specific needs of their feet, regardless of brand. Jane stated, “I think putting everyone in one brand of shoe isn’t going to be beneficial for every person out there because we’re all built differently. So we all have different mechanics”.

Five of the six athletic trainers said that their sponsor gave their teams some type of medical leeway in their shoe selection. For example, three athletic trainers said that if they presented their sponsor representative with a physician’s letter explaining why it was medically necessary to wear a different shoe, the sponsor would more than likely allow that exception; though it is unclear what a ‘medical necessity’ is. This ambiguous term can cause a lot of confusion in regard to AACs. ‘Medically necessary’ is currently a subjective term that seems to be regulated by the use of physician’s letters. Realistically, athletic trainers are in more frequent contact with the athletes than are the physicians, so the researcher was interested to hear what they considered to be medically necessary.

Alice provided her definition of a medical necessity; “If it is physically hindering their performance or whatever they have to go out and do. Whether it be volleyball training, performance in any way, then I think that is the true definition of it being medically necessary”. As an athletic trainer, I am in contact with many athletes that simply have uncomfortable footwear. Given these terms of ‘medical necessity’, comfort may not be enough reason to for a sponsor to grant a different shoe option. To gather more insight, I asked athletic trainers if they viewed athlete comfort as a medical priority. Four of the six athletic trainers believed that it was in fact a medical priority. Donna shared her view on comfort relating to the medical needs of the athlete. “If they are not comfortable, they are going to compensate somehow and then they are going to cause injury” Donna said.
Much like with the coaches, the Mizuno brand of shoe was overwhelmingly recommended among athletic trainers as the ideal brand of volleyball shoe. While, as previously stated, athletic trainers were more concerned about the athlete’s foot needs rather than brand, when asked if they recommended a certain brand of shoe, five of the six participants mentioned Mizuno. Donna response to the question regarding the best brand of shoe essentially summed up athletic trainers’ responses.

My first thought is Mizuno just because of the history. However my real answer to someone if I was just walking in a store would be you need to try them on. It doesn’t matter what brand it is. Your foot might like Nike, your foot might like Adidas better.

(Donna)

Alice went as far to say, “[I] basically want Adidas to pick up a pair of Mizunos and say ‘make this’ and put an Adidas logo on it”. Three athletic trainers specified that a few of their athletes had either worn or preferred Asics shoes as well.

All athletic trainers were asked if they believed their sponsor’s shoe had ever contributed to injury on their team. Of the six athletic trainers interviewed, two believed that their shoe did contribute in some capacity to at least one injury on their team. However, athletic trainers felt that if any contribution was made by the shoe, it was very minimal. Injuries were more likely the result of over-training, poor court surface, or unforeseeable accidents.

When asked to describe the characteristics of an ideal volleyball shoe, athletic trainers responded with good cushion, supportive, light-weight, comfortable, durable, good traction, and shoe height somewhere between a high-top and low-top shoe. Maddie favored a high-top shoe for her front row players that do a lot of jumping and accepted a low-top option for her back row players that have to be more agile. Lauren explained that her ideal volleyball shoe would be
“comfortable for the athlete. About mid-height around the ankle and has good traction”. Of these characteristics, mid-top height, light-weight, and supportive received the most mention.

Perhaps the most important to mention in this case is that none of the interviewed athletic trainers believed that their sponsor-provided shoe achieved all of the ideal characteristics of a volleyball shoe. Many mentioned, however, that in order to find a volleyball shoe suitable for athletes having issues, they often turned to other types of shoes (i.e. basketball or cross trainer) within their brand. This concept will be discussed further in the section on insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors.

4.4.4.2 General Benefits of a School’s AAC

Although athletic trainers admitted that they were not directly involved in the shoe selection processes for their teams, they were aware of some of the benefits of their AAC received by their athletic department, team, and themselves. Athletic trainers overwhelmingly made comments regarding the immense benefits of their school having an AAC. In Maddie’s description of how her athletic department benefits from their Nike sponsorship, she expounded on recruits’ perceptions of their uniforms.

Oh you’re a Nike school? So you get really awesome jerseys’! So that’s a really good thing… You know, Oregon definitely gets that, them being owned pretty much by Nike. So when it comes to like the combat uniforms for football and things like that, that’s what the kids want. (Maddie)

As far as department-wide benefits, five of the six athletic trainers made comments regarding the ‘gear’ and apparel all athletics employees receive. Two other athletic trainers made comments regarding the benefits of discounted apparel for teams and employees. Maddie said, “We get the same gear as the team. I’m not sure if that’s just a perk of being Nike, but that’s a
perk of the school, being an employee of a sports team”. When asked about the financial benefits from her school’s AAC, Donna stated “I don’t even know if it’s a financial gain or just not as great a financial loss”. This remark was particularly interesting to the researcher because while some schools receive additional cash revenue from the AACs, many do not. The AAC mainly serves as a subsidy by offsetting the cost of uniforms and equipment as was the case at Donna’s school.

Jane commented on the benefit of uniformity and brand image of that her sponsor provides her school. “It gives us a uniform. The athletic trainers can uniformly look the same… I appreciate that, things being more orderly. Uniformity is good in my opinion, so when you have sponsorships, you can do that”. Others commented on the effects of branding identity and recruitment. “It goes back to branding and its true of any of the bigger DI schools. You could close your eyes and picture their uniforms. You know what they look like and you know what their sponsorship is” said Donna. As we discussed in the recruiting element of coaches’ responses, branding and image can be very important for a school in regard to portraying a certain image and standing out among other schools with similar resources.

It was presumed from athletic trainers’ interview responses that the positive implications of their AACs outweighed the negative effects they may have on their team’s shoe selection process. At all the interviewed schools, women’s volleyball is a non-revenue producing sport. A women’s volleyball team having a sponsorship can serve as a great asset; an asset that is seemingly more important than the need for a better volleyball shoe. Perhaps Alice summarized it best with this quote:

When you’re talking about female sports that are non-women’s basketball, they’re going to be, for the most part across the country, your non-revenue generating sports. So the
fact that they have that sponsorship is huge… So I think, for the smaller teams, your non-revenue sports, your non-basketball teams, I think it’s very beneficial to have that sponsorship. (Alice)

Overall, athletic trainers recognized the general benefits of their AAC as department-wide benefits which included free and/or discounted apparel for teams and employees, an increased brand image for the school, and in some cases, extra money. As a result of their teams playing a non-revenue-producing sport, athletic trainers found that the general benefits of their sponsorship were greater than their need for a better volleyball shoe. The last factor influencing volleyball shoe selection according to athletic trainers is the insufficient supply of volleyball shoes from sponsors. This factor will be discussed further in the following section.

4.4.4.3 Insufficient Volleyball Shoe Options from Sponsor

Athletic trainers noted that they were often faced with the task of altering ill-fitting footwear. While some sponsors allow for substitution of footwear as deemed ‘medically necessary’ by a physician, this is usually a last resort to footwear alternatives. Athletic trainers expressed that they use ankle braces, inserts, and other methods to make shoes more suitable for their athletes. Three athletic trainers made it mandatory for their team to wear prophylactic ankle braces (or ankle tape) and/or customized orthotics/insoles as a preventative approach to injuries. The fact that these processes occur shows that sponsors are not providing the best and/or enough volleyball shoe options for the various needs of volleyball players. When asked if her sponsor provides the best shoe option, Alice replied,

The thing is that Adidas isn’t a volleyball company. They’re running. They’re football. They’re maybe soccer. I feel, again this is my opinion, like those are their moneymaking sports. So that’s why they invest in creating quality products… Basketball players have
more than two options for their shoes. Or the football players have more than two options for the type of cleats that they have. So again, it becomes more about marketing than about quality of product. (Alice)

When questioned about specifics regarding their school’s relationship with their sponsor, five athletic trainers responded that they are bound by contract restrictions to wearing only sponsor-provided shoes (with the exception of medical cases as previously mentioned). If there was not a volleyball shoe that fit the needs of a particular athlete, three of the six athletic trainers felt that there were enough options within the brand to satisfy their athlete’s needs; whether it was a volleyball shoe, basketball shoe, or cross training shoe. Lauren affirmed that she never had to go outside of her sponsored brand to find a shoe. When asked if she ever had to go outside of the restrictions of her Nike contract, she responded,

I can’t say I have. I think the only other time we bought kind of like a basketball shoe. But it was still Nike for one of the girls. Even if I had to find a different shoe, I was able to make it work with some type of Nike shoe at least. (Lauren)

Two athletic trainers admitted to having to go outside of their sponsored brand on occasion to find an appropriate fit for a few of their athletes. Alice told a story of one of her athletes that had a unique foot surgery and playing in the sponsor’s volleyball shoes were so intolerable to the point that she admitted to altering a pair of Mizuno shoes to appear as an Adidas shoe.

I think it was a TV game for volleyball and one of my girls had a foot surgery that was pretty unique. And she said that when she wore her Mizunos, and I don’t know if it was just that her Mizunos were broken in more because she was a freshman and she had them since high school. I don’t know what it was about the Adidas shoes, but she couldn’t play in the Adidas shoes. So I took some black tape and just covered all of the logos on the
shoes so that she could play in the Mizunos. That’s probably the only time that happened and my coach didn’t care. Of course our athletic director noticed it from the crowd. So from that stand point, if it was for medical purposes and I had all the logos covered, she didn’t like the idea, but I kind of slid it by her because it was for, I think, two more games of the season that we needed to do it so she didn’t make a big fuss about it. (Alice)

Although most athletic trainers were not keen on the exact shoe options presented to their team each year, five recalled their teams receiving more than one volleyball shoe option. Four athletic trainers made comments in some capacity to the durability of the provided footwear. While all athletic trainers said that their sponsor provided enough shoes for the normal amount of wear their athletes’ shoes experience throughout a year of training, two athletic trainers commented on the poor durability of their sponsor’s particular shoes. They felt that their athletes were going through pairs of shoes much too quickly. As Lauren mentioned, “They [the shoes] withstand half of the season and then they’ll switch out into new shoes, so they kind of wear out pretty quick. That’s the only thing I’d say negatively against them”.

The majority of athletic trainers, five of the six, felt that other higher revenue-producing sports at their school, such as football and men’s basketball, receive more clothing and equipment options from their sponsor than their own team. All athletic trainers perceived this imbalance was a result of profit-guided decisions by the sponsor. While athletic trainers reported receiving less than the higher revenue-producing sports, most said that their teams were very well equipped by their sponsor, however the quality of shoe was lacking. There were exceptions. Lauren expressed that while basketball and football at her school probably received the most apparel from their sponsor, her team was not too far off in the amount of apparel they received.
While athletic trainers felt that there were not enough volleyball shoe options provided by their sponsor to fit the individual needs of all their athletes, they spoke to the sufficient amount of shoes their athletes needed to compete during the season. Although most athletic trainers were not keen on the exact shoe options presented to their team each year, five recalled their teams receiving more than one volleyball shoe option. With her team’s Nike sponsorship, Jane recalled her team receiving two or three shoe options from Nike each year but inevitably, the majority of the team selected the same shoe. Similarly to the analysis of coaches’ responses, the quantity of sponsor-provided shoes made up for the lack of quality and specificity.

4.4.5 Protecting Sponsor-School Relationship

One particular factor that the researcher noticed among both groups of participants was an unwritten duty to protect the sponsor-school relationship. As was noted earlier in the chapter by hesitancy to participate or even respond to certain questions, there is a context that exists in this discomfort. We need to honor our contract company. To revisit the earlier scenarios, two schools declined participation in the study for “a number of reasons”. Kyle let out a nervous laugh and asked, “You’re saying no one know who’s saying this, right”? Alice felt remorse after “bashing” her sponsored brand in many of her comments. She later commented, “If they’re giving us a ton of money and a ton of extras, we need to represent them well”. She also stated that she “meant no disrespect” in regard to her opinionated view on her team’s sponsor-provided shoe. It seems that at some point in the institutionalization of AACs, employees were made to believe that expressing dissatisfaction with a product was equivalent to disrespecting a sponsor. Instead of taking this opportunity to provide constructive feedback, most participants viewed it as a somewhat safe ‘place’ to give their true opinions.
4.5 Close Reading

The last dialogic moment that will be presented in this chapter is close reading. Markula and Silk (2011) describe this process as the researcher identifying the key themes to be recognized in the work. At this point the researcher ties the findings to portray an ideological construction of the social world (Markula & Silk, 2011). The focus is on the production of meanings and identities, which in this case are the development of emergent themes as they pertain to coaches and athletic trainers. The factors influencing volleyball shoe selection as depicted by athletic trainers and coaches were used to develop overall themes to be taken away from this research. Each factor contributes to a particular theme. As mentioned earlier, certain factors had overlap between the athletic trainer and coach participants. As a result, three main themes were developed to encompass all factors and responses; as opposed to separating the themes by participant classification (e.g., coach or athletic trainer). The three themes that will be discussed in the following sections are shoes are not “one size fits all”, the existence of an established duty to protect the sponsor-school relationship, and the benefits of an AAC outweigh the cost of shoe dissatisfaction.

4.5.1 Emergent Themes

4.5.1.1 Shoes are Not “One Size Fits All”

It was discovered from both coaches and athletic trainers that each athlete’s shoe needs are unique. This is noted by the five athletic trainers that indicated the ideal situation would be to have each athlete to have a shoe that catered to their specific needs. Even head coach Kyle wanted to “find what was the most comfortable for that particular player and not worry so much about a particular brand”. Or as evident from Tyler’s comment,
Actually, I think it’s beneficial for us that we don’t have to wear Under Armour’s shoe, because if you make everyone wear, one type of shoe, you often find that different people have different feet. It doesn’t really work out. (Tyler)

The fact that athletic trainers and coaches used ankle braces and orthotics for certain athletes shows that a single shoe style may not suit the needs for every athlete. Three athletic trainers made it mandatory for their athletes to wear some type of prophylactic ankle brace, ankle tape, or insoles/orthotics as an approach to injury prevention. This is evidence that there are still safety needs not being met by the shoe manufacturer.

As mentioned earlier, some sponsors provided teams with multiple shoe options however the options were rarely as broad as those provided to revenue-generating sports. Athletic trainers, such as Lauren, went as far as issuing their athletes basketball or cross trainer shoes. As shown in both groups, there is insufficient variety of volleyball shoe options provided by the three main Division I sponsors; Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour.

I haven’t heard very much about football complaining one way or the other to be quite honest with you. And I’m sure that’s just because they have great choices so if a kid of theirs is struggling with one pair, they have another model that they can try on. (Claire)

It seems that these sponsors realize the importance of having a wide variety of shoe options for other sports such as football and basketball, but have neglected this notion for the production of volleyball shoes. Participants believed this imbalance was due to financial incentives.

Overall, coaches and athletic trainers revealed that a “one size fits all” approach is not the ideal method of shoe selection yet it is an approach some schools are forced to take. The three coaches from Nike and Adidas schools agreed that if they were not bound by their current contract restrictions, their selection process would differ in some capacity. It seems as though
most coaches and athletic trainers feel that their shoe selection process could be improved, although it is highly unlikely that sponsoring companies are aware of this high rate of dissatisfaction. As will be discussed in the next section, the true opinions of employees can sometimes be thwarted by the attempt to protect a sponsor-school relationship.

4.5.1.2 Established Duty to Protect Sponsor-School Relationship

While recruiting participants for the study, the researcher sensed hesitancy and fear of expression of opinion. This hesitancy first began with participation rejections from two schools that made their decision to decline based on “a number of reasons”. As Kyle stated:

I know you were struggling trying to get some people to respond, and some of it, quite honestly could be the same fear I initially had was… Ok, this is something we’d initially been told not to talk about. And so, I think it’s more or less making everyone feel comfortable publicly. (Kyle)

Nervousness and hesitancy were denoted from participant responses through repeated questions of confidentiality, cautious responses, and outright confession of concern. Much of the hesitation seemed to stem from the apparent threat of disrespecting a sponsor by expressing dissatisfaction of a product. As Alice commented, “I meant no disrespect” (regarding her view on her sponsor’s shoe) and “when I was at [my previous school], they told us to be very grateful of our contract. Many have been given the impression that if they say or do anything to ‘disrespect’ the sponsor, they will ruin the sponsor-school relationship and the rest of the school will suffer as a result.

These responses bring about a few questions. Who is telling these coaches and athletic trainers not to talk about their AACs? Does expressing dissatisfaction equate to disrespect? These cues lead one to believe that at some point in time, an unwritten rule has been enforced essentially urging beneficiaries of AACs to simply accept what they receive from these contracts
and not argue. It almost seems that in order to keep your sponsor happy, you cannot say anything bad about them. Logically, this makes sense. As the old saying goes, “don’t bite the hand that feeds you”; but at what cost? If you are not receiving everything that you need, should there not be some room for constructive criticism without fear of backlash? As a result, coaches and athletic trainers have been conditioned to ‘respect’ their sponsor, but in doing so, have had to sacrifice what is best for their teams. It leads to a situation where the overall benefits of an AAC seemingly outweigh any negative affects they may have on a school. The following section elaborates on this topic.

4.5.1.3 Benefits of an AAC Outweigh the Cost of Shoe Dissatisfaction

The last emergent theme that surfaced through interviews with coaches and athletic trainers regarded the overall benefits of an AAC seeming to outweigh costs of shoe dissatisfaction. While the two Under Armour schools seemed to be pleased with their shoe selection process (arguably due to the fact that they have free reign on their choice of shoe), the Nike and Adidas coaches saw opportunities for improvement in their sponsor-provided shoes. Both coaches and athletic trainers spoke to the benefits that they receive from their AAC. Even though all were not completely satisfied with the quality of their sponsor’s shoe, they were given more than enough shoes to replace the wear-and-tear they experienced throughout the year. Not only were teams given enough shoes to compete, but whole athletics departments received monetary contributions from their sponsors; not to mention the personal benefits coaches and athletic trainers received such as free shoes and clothing. As discussed in the literature review from a report from Berkowitz, Upton, and Brady (2013), Division I institutions have become heavily reliant on AACs to help offset costs of apparel, equipment, and other expenses. The
relationship seems to have progressed from a beneficial arrangement to a situation of heavy dependency on AACs.

While coaches and athletic trainers seemed to be content with the benefits of their AAC, there still was this underlying notion of overall shoe dissatisfaction. Whether it was not getting everything they wanted out of a shoe, having to alter a shoe in some way to fit the needs of an athlete, requiring a physician’s note for use of a different shoe, or even preference of another brand over their sponsor’s brand; clues of dissatisfaction existed among both coaches and athletic trainer. But if there is so much dissatisfaction, why is nothing being done to change the situation? It goes back to the previous theme of not wanting to hurt the relationship between the sponsor and a school. As a result of this silence, it appears that coaches and athletic trainers have been made to believe that the general benefits a school receives from an AAC are more important than any expression of dissatisfaction. Certainly there is a professional way to express dissatisfaction, but if participants are timid to give honest responses in a private/confidential environment such as this study, can we assume that they would go directly to their own administrators or sponsor about an issue?

4.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 guided the reader through three of the four dialogic moments of data interpretation as explained by Markula and Silk (2011). These three moments were recalling, listening around, and close reading. Through the process of recalling, the researcher was able to express her personal impressions on her view of what inspired the study and how she dealt with these impressions through the creation of the interview protocol as well as the actual interview process.
Next was the process of listening around which included re-reading, re-listening, transcribing, and using memory to study material and code for emergent themes (Markula & Silk, 2011). Through this process the researcher discovered the factors that seemed to contribute to volleyball shoe selection for Division I volleyball teams as described by coaches and athletic trainers. These factors explained by coaches were the evidence of dissatisfaction, the general benefits of a school’s AAC, insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors, and medical concerns. The factors described by athletic trainers included medical concerns, general benefits of a school’s AAC, and insufficient volleyball shoe options from sponsors. The researcher also visited the topics of inconvenience for individuals to participate in the research, the hesitancy to participate or respond to certain research questions, and participants feeling they had a right to protect the integrity of the sponsor-school relationship.

Lastly, the process of close reading involved the development of themes to encompass not only the factors of shoe selection, but the contextual narratives regarding institutional structure, the importance of an AAC to school, team, and employee, and the apparent delicate nature of the sponsor-school relationship. The next chapter will combine these emergent themes with the ideas of institutional theory, institutional isomorphism, and the role of dominant ideology theory as presented in the literature review.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have explained the researcher’s intent to observe the factors that influence volleyball shoe selection from an institutionalized view, presented a review of institutional concepts for the reader, the methods for participant recruitment and instrumentation of the research design, and the results of participant interviews as presented through emergent themes. The following chapter includes a discussion of emergent themes and connects them to the institutional concepts and additional cues that developed from the researcher’s analysis of the four dialogic moments of interpretation. This chapter also includes limitations of the study as well as future directions for further research.

5.2 Emergent Themes

In this section, the researcher will discuss the emergent themes and make ties to the ideas of institutional theory, institutional isomorphism, and dominant ideology theory (Washington & Patterson, 2009; Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). Markula and Silk (2011) describe the final dialogic moment of interpretation as representing self and others. This process takes into account the political, structural, and aesthetic issues relevant to the research (Markula & Silk, 2011). Though aesthetic issues were not deemed applicable to this study, political and structural issues were present. These issues have been incorporated into the discussion of the emergent themes presented in chapter 4 as will be indicated in the remainder of this chapter.

5.2.1 Shoes are Not “One Size Fits All”

As discussed in chapter 4, athletic trainers and coaches generally agreed that shoes are best selected when the particular needs of an athlete are prioritized. McNair and Marshall (1994)
explain that one of the primary purposes of shoes is to “protect the individual from the possible injurious effects of repetitive loading” (p. 256). Athletic trainers discussed the use of ankle braces and/or orthotics to provide some or all of their athletes extra reinforcement in their shoes. While athletic trainers and coaches did not believe their teams’ sponsor-provided shoes were a direct cause of injury, their utilization of ankle braces and/or orthotics suggest that shoes may serve as a contribution to injury. If these devices are being used to enhance the injury prevention qualities of a shoe, there is an implication that a shoe, in the state that it is produced by the manufacturer, can lead to injury.

As a volleyball athletic trainer, the chief complaint the researcher heard and continues to hear from her athletes is the issue of discomfort. The initial treatment is usually the substitution of new inserts/orthotics. Mundermann, Stefanyshyn, and Nigg (2001) concluded that although the use of inserts may not statistically decrease the occurrence of injury, they have the ability to increase perceived comfort in footwear. Since athletic trainers verbalized the importance of athlete comfort, and discomfort can lead to an athlete compensating their movement, this creates flawed mechanics and bad habits in sport-specific techniques.

It is important for sponsors to realize the importance of a good, sport-specific shoe. The fact that athletic trainers and coaches believed their sponsors did not provide the best shoe option for their team speaks to their dissatisfaction with their sponsor-provided shoes. Sponsors seemed to lack the variety that coaches and athletic trainers felt was necessary for the sport of women’s volleyball. From the responses it appears that if athletic apparel companies were to offer more options and variety for volleyball shoes, product satisfaction would increase. It is not the researcher’s intent to suggest that every sponsor needs to have a shoe that suits the needs of
every athlete. The intent is rather to bring awareness to the fact that each athlete's needs are different and there should be more volleyball shoe options to cater to these needs.

5.2.2 Established Duty to Protect Sponsor-School Relationship

The nervousness and/or hesitancy of expressing opinions by participants caused the researcher to question the complexity of the sponsor-school relationship. These cues gave the impression that some source of power was determining the appropriateness or ‘respectfulness’ of responses. Participants seemed generally uncomfortable answering questions regarding dissatisfaction or negative aspects of their shoe selection process. These actions give insight to the political structures of representing self and others. There was a constant mention of ‘respect for the sponsor’ that appeared mainly when these questions were asked. What causes this uncomfortableness? The researcher deduced that coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) may have influenced participant responses. As cited in chapter 2, coercive isomorphism is the result of pressures from professional networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It was also noted in chapter 2 that source of these coercive pressures may have stemmed from the athletic apparel company. The researcher believes that a hierarchy of powers exists. Coercive pressures from the athletic apparel company are placed on the school administrators. These pressures appeared to be the compliance of student-athletes to wear the sponsor-provided shoe (with the exception of Under Armour schools). Given these stipulations from the sponsors, athletic administrators at schools then placed additional coercive pressures on coaches and athletic trainers to not only comply with these stipulations, but to gracefully accept them in order to please the sponsor. As a result, coaches and athletic trainers are led to believe that going against stipulations and expressing dissatisfaction can lead to the demise of the sponsor-school relationship.

Additionally, remarks from respondents revealed evidence of the institutionalization of AACs. If we recall from the literature review, institutions are representative of certain
organizational arrangements that present a social order through chronological repetition (Washington & Patterson, 2009). The organizational arrangements in this case were the reliance on AACs for revenue and benefits. This dependency resulted in an unwritten code of ethics designed to maintain the good standing of a sponsor-school relationship. This is apparent not only through hesitancy of responses, but of the 28 emails sent, two rejection emails were received from schools that wished not to participate for ‘a number of reasons’.

There was also evidence supporting the notion institutionalization is indeed a process that occurs over a period of time. Institutionalization involves continuous repetition of actions, behaviors, or interpretations that eventually conform to a set of norms (Scott, 1987). As Kyle mentioned, there was a time when certain schools did not have AACs that pertained to their volleyball teams. The growth of AACs over the past few decades has changed the shoe selection process for many teams. This shows how that the institutionalization of AACs has directly affected shoe selection for Division I volleyball teams. AACs certainly have an established presence in the realm of Division I athletics. As previously mentioned in the methods for selection of participants, every school within the Southeastern and Atlantic Coast athletic conferences has some type of AAC in place for all of their sports teams. This overwhelming presence only adds to the strength and maintenance of the institutionalization of AACs in collegiate athletics.

5.2.3 Benefits of an AAC Outweigh the Cost of Shoe Dissatisfaction

Across the board, athletic trainers and coaches expressed that their sponsorships benefit their entire athletic department. These benefits seemed to outweigh any dissatisfaction or qualms they had with their sponsor-provided shoes. The findings support the notion presented in the literature review that with the implementation of an AAC, a school’s athletic department can be forced to take a ‘one size fits all approach’ for the distribution of apparel to its sports teams. For
example, a school is deemed a “Nike” school, in most cases all sports teams must wear Nike apparel. An AAC is geared towards a generalized benefit for an athletic department.

The component of AACs being a generalized benefit for the entire athletic department is perhaps what makes AACs most sustainable. The sustainability of AACs lends to their involvement in dominant ideology theory (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). Dominant ideology theory includes the premise that in each society there are a certain set of over-arching beliefs or values (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). The dominant idea is if there is a greater benefit for all, each university is more than likely to renew and constantly promote their sponsorship. For example, in the section on satisfaction among athletic trainers, Alice noted that her school’s sponsorship is a benefit to the smaller, nonrevenue generating sports that normally would not receive the extra money if they had to do it on their own. The dominant idea among coaches and athletic trainers is that there is a need to accept the terms of the AAC for the ‘greater good,’ preserves the institutionalization of AACs.

Both coaches and athletic trainers spoke to the competitive benefits of having an AAC regarding recruiting advantages. Coaches shared examples of how recruits are captivated by all the equipment they would receive as a student-athlete at their school. Reflecting on Volleyball Assistant Coach Tyler’s description of how his school’s basketball team used their sponsorship as a recruiting tool by showing their recruits the “wall of shoes” that they would receive from committing to their school is a prime example. As athletic trainer Maddie and Coach Tyler expressed, recruits are beginning to place more of an emphasis on the type of sponsorship a school has in their decision-making process. A competitive AAC is a tool that coaches can use to draw in the recruits they are seeking.
This competition among schools leads to the evidence of institutional isomorphism in the implementation of AACs. As discussed, institutional isomorphism refers to the pressure placed on an institution by the environment in order to survive (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Kyle mentioned that schools are in a constant fight to gain more visibility and prestige. While there are three types of institutional isomorphism: mimetic, coercive, and normative; mimetic and normative isomorphism were the most apparent within this theme. Mimetic isomorphism stems from pressures that occur when institutions mimic the actions of others (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001). The mimetic pressure is the arms race that results from competition for recruits among competing schools. The arms race often involves promoting benefits of an AAC as a recruiting tool.

Normative isomorphism refers to pressures of professionalization stemming from two concepts. The first concept is that members of a certain profession are socialized into similar world views (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). The professionals in the case of this study are coaches and athletic trainers that have been groomed in an environment that places a heavy emphasis on the importance of AACs. These professionals have been taught to honor and respect their contract through compliance as to not disrupt the benefits for the majority of their athletic department. The second concept refers to the interaction of these professionals in shared networks, allowing them to circulate ideas among themselves (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). Referring back to participant responses, Claire mentioned that one of her friends is a head coach at an institution that also uses Adidas products. She mentioned that her friend’s team does not have the same benefits as her team, which puts them at an advantage. As coaches and athletic trainers share ideas, they become more aware of their environment and can make adaptations to stay competitive.

Another benefit communicated by participants was the impact their AAC made on the branding and image of their school’s athletic department. Many believed that their AAC helped
their school to achieve the desired public image. Referring back to the literature review, the University of Oregon has successfully made use of their relationship with their alumnus Phil Knight, co-founder of Nike, to ‘re-brand’ themselves (Rishe, 2013). They have recently become known as the school that debuts the latest in Nike apparel. A sponsor can certainly help boost the prestige of an athletic program. For example, when athletic trainer Donna commented about her school’s image, she mentioned that people can recognize their school’s uniform simply by closing their eyes and visualizing what they look like. The apparel provided to each school seemingly plays a major role in image. Many athletic trainers spoke to the uniformity that their AAC afforded their school. Uniformity leads to brand recognition and branding helps with the competition for prestige.

Despite the immense benefits provided by each school’s AAC, there was still the issue of shoe dissatisfaction that existed among participants. None of the participants mentioned giving critical feedback to their sponsors regarding shoe development/design. Would the simple adjustment of allowing a space for this feedback not remedy the situation? The real question is, why are coaches and athletic trainers not verbalizing their dissatisfaction to their sponsors? The answer can be found in the previous theme; there is an established duty to protect the sponsor-school relationship. As a result, by not verbalizing concerns of shoe dissatisfaction, coaches and athletic trainers are essentially communicating that the benefits received from a good-standing relationship with their sponsor outweigh their issues of shoe dissatisfaction. The issue lies within the structure of AACs. If there were a different balance in power, perhaps many of the issues of dissatisfaction would be resolved.

5.3 Limitations

Limitations exist as a result of the nature of social science research. Since there are infinite variables to consider, one cannot know everything about a given social environment at
any given time. As such, some of the limitations of this particular study will be discussed in this section.

Although theoretical saturation has been found to occur between six to twelve interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), this study’s eleven participants, five coaches and six athletic trainers, from two conferences, the ACC and SEC, may have been a limitation of the study. Inclusion of these conferences may have provided different insight on the issues presented as well as the potential for reaching the targeted number of participants. Participants, specifically athletic trainers, often had very little insight into their shoe selection process. For example, one athletic trainer only had one year of experience in the field, so her insight was quite limited. Perhaps the inclusion of the equipment manager, in some cases, may have provided more detailed information. Equipment managers seemed to be heavily involved in the shoe selection process for many of the teams interviewed.

The timeline to complete the interviews was during a quiet period where many coaches and athletic trainers were either on vacation or traveling abroad with their teams. Two emails with regrets were received due to these circumstances. It can be difficult to contact coaches of any NCAA sport because of stipulations on times that they are allowed to practice, recruit, and compete. Perhaps if the study was completed during a time when coaches were considering their shoe options for the next season, more relevant insight to their processes could have been achieved.

Social desirability was another limitation in this study. Many participants had to be reassured that neither their names nor school affiliations would be used in the results. Many were hesitant to express any negative opinions about their brand due to being seen as ‘disrespectful’. In an effort to conceal identities, pseudo names were used for each participant. Perhaps collecting
information in the form of focus groups would provide a more comfortable environment for participants to express their views on their particular sponsorships.

5.4 Future Directions

For future works in this area, a longitudinal study could be conducted between five and ten years from now to examine any changes in the institutionalization of AACs in Division I athletics, the influence of these AACs on shoe selection, and/or the development of new technologies related to volleyball shoes. Further studies may also warrant responses from other stakeholders such as equipment managers, student-athletes, and sponsor brands. As the results showed, equipment managers were heavily involved in the ordering and/or selection of volleyball shoes. Responses from student-athletes can be of more value as they are the ones directly affected by the selection of the shoes.

Aside from future research directions, a more practical approach to enhance the shoe selection process for Division I volleyball teams would be the production of a wider variety and/or more ideal volleyball shoe options from athletic apparel sponsors. It seemed that participants were generally dissatisfied with the number of shoe options made available by their sponsor. Development of quality volleyball shoe options could improve this dissatisfaction. Focus groups could be created to gather constructive feedback from coaches, athletic trainers, equipment managers, student-athletes, or sponsor brands. These focus groups could concentrate not only on the development of new shoe options, but the viability of current shoe options.

To further develop the theme of benefits of an AAC outweighing factors of shoe dissatisfaction, a cost-benefit analysis could be constructed to provide more substantial evidence as opposed to inference from participant responses. A cost-benefit analysis could provide an objective view of the situation and provide concrete suggestions for improvement.
5.5 Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of the institutionalization of athletic apparel contracts on shoe selection among collegiate volleyball coaches and volleyball athletic trainers. The four research questions that guided the study were: How, if at all, have AACs become institutionalized in NCAA Division I volleyball? How, if at all, does the institutionalization of an AAC affect volleyball coaches’ shoe selection? How, if at all, does the sponsored brand meet the coach’s expectations in regard to volleyball shoes? How, if at all, does the sponsored brand meet the athletic trainer’s expectations in regard to volleyball shoes?

This study supports the notion that AACs have become institutionalized in select NCAA Division I volleyball programs through the development of volleyball teams becoming a dependent beneficiary from their school’s AAC. As the dominant idea and dependency on AACs for additional benefits and revenue becomes institutionalized at the department-wide level, the same is mirrored through volleyball teams. The institutionalization of AACs affects coaches’ shoe selection by limiting the number of desirable shoe options available for the coach to choose from. The sponsored brands met coaches and athletic trainers’ expectations in regard to the quantity of volleyball shoes provided, but sponsored brands lacked in coaches and athletic trainers’ expectations regarding quality. While the sponsors did not meet the expectations of quality from coaches and athletic trainers, participants were willing to overlook these negative concerns for the benefit of their athletic department as a whole. Coaches and athletic trainers portrayed that the benefits of their AACs far were enough to overlook the negative implications. While limitations were noted, they did not hinder the value of this research. The design of this study is applicable to other sports as well. If there were an interest in the effect of the
institutionalization of AACs on shoe selection for other non-revenue generating sports, this research design could easily be replicated through minor changes in the interview protocols.

This study supports further research into other sports’ shoe selection processes and the student-athlete’s as well as the sponsored brands’ perception of the effect of an AAC on their opinion of product satisfaction as well as the development of new shoe technologies to satisfy the expectations of volleyball coaches and athletic trainers.
APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Sponsorship: “A cash and/or in kind fee paid to a property (typically a sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property” (Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt, 2009, p. 170).

Institution: An ideological metaphor for a system or process that is repeated through chronological repetition (Washington & Patterson, 2010).

Institutional theory: A theoretical posture concerned with why and with what consequences organizations exhibit particular organizational arrangements that challenge traditional and/or rational explanations (Washington & Patterson, 2009).

Institutionalization: The process by which actions become repeated over time and are assigned similar meanings by self and others (Scott, 1987).

Institutional isomorphism: The similarity among organizations and the process through which these similarities emerge (Farquharson, 2013). Also the result of pressures placed on an institution by the environment for the purpose of survival (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Alternatively, “isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (Washington & Patterson, 2009, p.3).

NCAA Division I: The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a non-profit organization that serves as the governing body for many colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. The NCAA aims to safe-guard student-athletes and establishes programs that equip them with skills applicable not only to sport participation, but life goals as well. The NCAA is currently divided into three divisions. Division I represents the major athletic universities that generally have elegant facilities, extensive budgets, and more athletic scholarships than Division II and Division III. Division I schools must have at least seven men’s sports and seven women’s sports (or six for men and eight for women). There are various rules that must be met regarding competition participant minimums and scheduling criteria. Schools with football programs are classified as either Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) or Football
Championship Subdivision (FCS). FBS schools must average 15,000 individuals in paid attendance per home game. There are minimum financial awards that must be met for the athletic program as well as an allowance for the maximum number of financial awards for each sport. (NCAA, 2013).

**AAC:** Acronym for “Athletic Apparel Company,” which was termed specifically for this research. AACs are representative of sponsorships provided to collegiate athletic programs from athletic apparel companies.

**Coercive isomorphism:** Isomorphism that results from formal and informal pressures exerted upon the institution (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001). These pressures often come from some professional entity.

**Mimetic isomorphism:** Isomorphism that results from pressures, such as “ambiguous goals, environmental uncertainty, or poorly understood technologies”, that cause an institution to mimic the action of others within the environment (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001, p. 50).

**Normative isomorphism:** Isomorphism that results from the pressures on an institution to draw from resources similar to other competitors in the environment (Washington & Patterson, 2011).

**Spatting:** The application of athletic tape to the outside of a shoe for the purpose of ankle and/or foot stability.

**HIPAA Privacy Rule:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued the Privacy Rule to implement the requirement of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. A major goal of the Privacy Rule is to assure that individuals’ health information is properly protected while allowing the flow of health information needed to provide and promote high quality health care. It was established to protect the public's health and well-being (Office for Civil Rights, 2003).

**Theoretical saturation:** The point at which no additional responses to a survey lead to the development of new categories. The researcher sees similar instances being repeated through data collection and decides to discontinue assembling any additional data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).
APPENDIX B

INVITATION LEITER

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Education
Department of Sport Management

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding factors influencing collegiate volleyball shoe selection. You were selected as a possible participant due to your status as a coach or athletic trainer of an NCAA Division I volleyball team. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Amanda Robinson, a current Sport Management master thesis student and athletic trainer at Florida State University. The purpose of this study is to gain insight from Division I coaches and athletic trainers regarding criteria for volleyball shoe selection, product satisfaction, and restrictions placed by sponsoring athletic apparel companies.

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to schedule and complete a 25-30 minute phone interview regarding volleyball shoe selection. Phone interviews will be recorded for data accuracy. The study has no associated risks and no direct benefits. The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent allowed by law. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Audio recordings will be stored onto a portable external hard drive. All audio files will be password protected. Only the principal investigator and professor directing thesis will have access to the files. Audio recordings of conversations will be erased after being transcribed.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Florida State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. The researcher conducting this study is Amanda Robinson, supervised by Dr. Janelle Wells. If you have a question, you are encouraged to contact them at ***. If you would like to participate in the study, please email Amanda Robinson at ***expressing your interest in participation and to schedule an interview date/time.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB at 2010 Levy Street, Research Building B, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742, or 850-644-8633, or by email at humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Amanda L. Robinson
APPENDIX C

COACH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol (Coach)

Date ________________
Time ________________
School __________________
Interviewee ________________

Hello and thank you for your willing participation in this interview concerning volleyball shoe satisfaction. This research is being conducted as part of the completion of a thesis program for me, Amanda Robinson, a current sport management masters student at the Florida State University. I also serve as the athletic trainer for the Florida State University women’s volleyball team. I am conducting this study to gain further insight as to what factors influence shoe selection for Division I volleyball teams. The interview itself will take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete. Anonymity of responses is guaranteed. You have indicated that you would like to participate in this research, however if at any time you wish to change your decision, you will not be penalized. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

How many years have you coached at the Division I level?

1. Can you provide a history of your experience with the shoe selection process?
   a. What is your role in the process of shoe selection?
   b. Who else is involved in the process of shoe selection?
   c. Are you bound by contract restrictions to a certain brand of shoe?
   d. Are you offered more than one shoe option?
   e. Have you ever been in a situation where you tried to go outside the restrictions of your sponsorship contract? If so, what was the result?
   f. If you were not bound by contract restrictions, how would your shoe selection process differ?

2. How do you and your team benefit from having a shoe sponsorship?
   a. From your perspective how do athletic departments benefit from shoe sponsorships?
   b. From your perspective how do other institutions within the conference benefit from shoe sponsorships?

3. How has the shoe selection process been positive for your team? Negative?
   a. From your perspective how has the shoe selection process been positive and/or negative for other sports at your school (e.g., revenue generating sports)?
   b. From your perspective, what are some positive and negative features of the shoe selection process for other sports at your school (e.g., revenue generating sports)?
4. Do you feel that your sponsored brand provides the best shoe option for your team? Why?
   a. As a coach, what do you consider to be a “good” volleyball shoe?
   b. Is there a specific brand of volleyball shoe that you prefer?
   c. Can you describe what your ideal volleyball shoe would look like?

5. Do you consider any medical implications when it comes to shoe selection?
   a. Are athletic trainers or any other medical personnel involved in the selection process? Why or why not?
   b. Do you believe that your sponsor-provided shoe has contributed to injury on your team?

Are there any questions you have for me?
APPENDIX D

ATHLETIC TRAINER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol (Athletic Trainer)

Date ____________________________
Time ____________________________
School __________________________
Interviewee _______________________

Hello and thank you for your willing participation in this interview concerning volleyball shoe satisfaction. This research is being conducted as part of the completion of a thesis program for me, Amanda Robinson, a current sport management masters student at the Florida State University. I also serve as the athletic trainer for the Florida State University women’s volleyball team. I am conducting this study to gain further insight as to what factors influence shoe selection for Division I volleyball teams. The interview itself will take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete. Anonymity of responses is guaranteed. You have indicated that you would like to participate in this research, however if at any time you wish to change your decision, you will not be penalized. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

• How many years have you been an athletic trainer at the Division I level?
• What sports have you worked with?
• Have you had prior experience with your team having athletic shoe sponsorship?

1. Are you involved in the shoe selection process for your team? If so, what is your role?
   a. Who is involved in the process of shoe selection for your team?
   b. Are you bound by contract restrictions to a certain brand of shoe?
   c. If you were not bound by contract restrictions, how would your selection process differ?
   d. Are you offered more than one shoe option?
   e. Have you ever been in a situation where you tried to go outside the restrictions of your sponsorship contract? If so, what was the result?

2. How do you and your team benefit from having a shoe sponsorship?
   a. From your perspective how do athletic departments benefit from shoe sponsorships?
   b. From your perspective how do other institutions within the conference benefit from shoe sponsorships?

3. How has the shoe selection process been positive for your team? Negative?
   a. From your perspective how has the shoe selection process been positive and/or negative for other sports at your school (e.g., revenue generating sports)?
4. Do you feel that your sponsored brand provides the best shoe option for your team?
   a. As an athletic trainer, what do you consider to be a “good” volleyball shoe?
   b. Is there a specific brand of volleyball shoe that you prefer?
   c. Can you describe what your ideal volleyball shoe would look like?

5. Do you consider any medical implications when it comes to shoe selection?
   a. Do you believe that your sponsor-provided shoe has contributed to injury on your team? If so, what types of injuries?
   b. Have you ever perceived it medically necessary for one of your student-athletes to wear a different shoe brand?
   c. Do you consider student-athlete comfort to be a medical priority?

Are there any questions you have for me?
APPENDIX E

IRB MEMORANDUM

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8873 • FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 04/30/2014
To: Amanda Rotman <arl134@my.fsu.edu>
Address: 1816 Jackson Bluff Rd. Apt. E. Tallahassee, FL 32304
Dept.: SPORT MANAGEMENT
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair
Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Factors Influencing Collegiate Volleyball Shoe Selection: An Institutionalized Perspective

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 04/30/2015 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Janelle Wells <jewells@fsu.edu>, Advisor
HSC No. 2014.12.20
REFERENCES


Sponsorship Recognition in Women's College Basketball. Sport Marketing Quarterly, 18(4), 188.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Robinson was born January 23, 1990 in Orlando, FL. She attended the University of Central Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Athletic Training in May 2012. Shortly following graduation, she received her certification and licensure to practice the medical profession of athletic training in June 2012. In the Fall of 2012, she continued her education at the Florida State University when she began pursuing a Master of Science degree in Sport Management. She also serves as the certified athletic trainer for the Florida State University women’s volleyball and women’s golf teams. She will graduate in the Summer of 2014.