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HERSTORY: WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER EXPERIENCES IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2022.140>

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HERSTORY: WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER EXPERIENCES IN SPORT
PSYCHOLOGY

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
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2022

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

HERSTORY: WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER EXPERIENCES IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore women's professional career experiences in sport psychology. Using qualitative methodology, seventeen female sport psychology practitioners participated in intensive semi-structured interviews from May 2021 to July 2021. This study resulted in two distinct manuscripts. First, guided by constructivist grounded theory methodology, embedded in a feminist standpoint framework, this study developed a grounded theory to help explain what sources attract and retain women in sport psychology. The developed theory includes the following main categories: sources of career attraction, training and professional development, and sources of career retention, and ten subcategories. This theory contributes to a scant body of literature addressing women's professional experiences in sport psychology and provides professional implications to help the field of sport psychology better understand women's career trajectories and how to better support them within the profession. Finally, this study introduces a positive discourse surrounding women's career experiences in sport psychology by highlighting their resilience and professional experiences.

Second, guided by a feminist standpoint and intersectional framework, this study explored intersecting identities and career experiences of ($N=17$) female sport psychology practitioners. Applying thematic analysis, the following five themes emerged: (1) perceived lack of credibility, (2) compensation disparities, (3) sexist attitudes, (4) pregnancy and parenthood, and (5) advocating for self and others. The results of this study document the continued career obstacles experienced by women in the profession by highlighting the intersections of gender, age, pregnancy, and parenthood. Furthermore, this study documented female sport psychology practitioners' resistance and deliberate efforts to promote inclusivity and equity within the field of sport psychology. Both manuscripts document the lived experiences of female sport psychology practitioners and provide professional implications to better support women within the profession.

KEYWORDS: Sport Psychology, Women in Sport Psychology, Career Attraction and Retention, Gender-Based Career Experiences

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Date

HERSTORY: WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER EXPERIENCES IN SPORT
PSYCHOLOGY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the individuals who have supported me throughout this project and my academic journey. To my partner and best friend Michael Curvey, thank you for all your love and support during this project and throughout my graduate school endeavors. This project would not have been possible without your support and patience. To my good friends and colleagues Shannon White, KC Jensen, and Kelsey Redmayne, thank you all for your support over the last four years. I appreciate each of you more than you will ever know.

To my wonderful advisor and committee members. Dr. Candace Hargons, thank you for adopting me into your research family and supporting me as a supervisee. I am a better researcher and clinician because of your mentorship. To my committee members, Drs. Rostosky, Fedewa, and Cormier. Drs. Rostosky and Fedewa, your support and encouragement has been much appreciated throughout the duration of this project. Thank you both. Finally, Dr. Cormier thank you for guiding me every step of the way and for helping me accomplish my academic goals as an aspiring sport psychologist. I would not be the professional I am today if it were not for your guidance and support over the last seven years.

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MANUSCRIPT 1. "I LOVE WHAT I DO, THAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE": WOMEN'S CAREER
ATTRACTION AND RETENTION IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Despite the recent growth of sport psychology as a profession, women are still underrepresented in the literature (Gill, 1995). To date, there appears to be only six published empirical articles pertaining to women in sport psychology (i.e., Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Krane & Whaley, 2010; Lovell et al., 2011; Roper et al., 2005; Roper, 2008; Whaley & Krane, 2012). In a conceptual article, Roper (2002) describes sport culture as a "gendered organization" where men have historically and currently hold more leadership positions compared to women (p. 56). Historically, opportunities for boys and men to excel in sport, as athletes and professionals, have come at the cost of excluding women (Darvin et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2015; Hall, 2001). For instance, the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris was the first-time women were allowed to compete; however, only 2.2% of participants were women compared to 45% at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio (Olympic.com, 2020). Despite drastic social restructuring and anti-discrimination laws such as Title IX, girls and women are still fighting for their place in sport. While opportunities and access to sports at the youth and intercollegiate level have increased, women are still underrepresented in professional sports and among leadership positions as coaches, administrators, and athletic directors (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Darvin et al., 2018; Kilty, 2006).

When examining sport psychology in particular, women have been historically underrepresented both in the literature and in professional roles as applied practitioners (Gill, 1995). However, in modern times there are more female sport psychology practitioners (SPPs) than ever before, due to the increased demand for sport psychology professionals and more robust graduate training opportunities. Previous literature

pertaining to women in sport psychology has focused on writing women into the history of sport psychology (Gill, 1995; Krane & Whaley 2010), women's professional experiences in sport psychology (Roper et al., 2005; Roper, 2008), and women's career obstacles in sport psychology (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Lovell et al., 2011; Whaley & Krane, 2012). While underrepresented in the literature, women have contributed to sport psychology in influential ways despite encountering career obstacles, such as gender-based discrimination and stereotypes (Krane & Whaley, 2010).

Women in Sport Psychology History

While sport psychology is considered a relatively young profession by many, sport psychology research and practice in the United States dates back to the 1930s (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). In particular, Drs. Dorothy Yates and Dorothy Harris are two female pioneers included in the history of sport psychology. In the early-mid 1900s, Dr. Yates was the first female clinical psychologist and professor to work with an intercollegiate sport team (Kornspan & MacCracken, 2001). Dr. Yates worked with members of her institution's boxing team to reduce pre-competition anxiety and teach relaxation skills (Kornspan & MacCracken, 2001). Dr. Harris was the first female sport psychologist to work at the United States Olympic Training Center. She helped establish the first sport psychology graduate program in the Department of Physical Education at Pennsylvania State University (AASP, 2020a). A number of women have followed in the footsteps of Drs. Yates and Harris. For instance, Drs. Vikki Krane, Jean Williams, Tara Scanlan, Penny McCullagh, Maureen Weiss, Robin Vealey, Diane Gill, and Kate Hays were all pioneers who contributed to the field of sport psychology as practitioners, researchers, educators, advocates, mentors, and leaders.

Women have held leadership positions in national and international sport-focused organizations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Association of Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) (Gill, 1995; Krane & Whaley, 2010). For instance, Dr. Jean Williams served as the first female president of the Association of Applied Sport Psychology from 1993-1994, and Dr. Diane Gill was the first female president of APA Division 47 from 1999-2001 (AASP, 2020b; APA, 2020a). Women have also contributed to sport psychology literature in substantial ways by creating new knowledge and serving as editors of sport and exercise psychology journals. For example, Williams and Krane (2015) co-edited a staple textbook in sport psychology education, titled *Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance* and published influentially in sport and exercise psychology journals. Furthermore, Drs. Tara Scanlan, Penny McCullagh, Maureen Weiss, Robin Vealey, Diane Gill, and Kate Hays¹ also contributed to sport psychology literature in substantial ways throughout their careers.

As sport psychology continues to evolve, and the demographics of practitioners continue to diversify, it is important to explore women's professional experiences in modern times to understand what factors attract and retain women in the field. For example, research has found some women gained interest in sport psychology due to their personal experiences as athletes or coaches (Krane & Whaley, 2010; Roper, 2008). However, there appears to be no research examining which factors of being a SPP promote and foster women's professional retention. Additionally, understanding what attracts and retains women in sport psychology is needed because the scant body of

¹ Naming influential female sport psychology practitioners in text aligns with feminist research paradigms as it centers *herstory* of sport psychology in the literature (Woodiwiss, 2017).

literature pertaining to women in sport has primarily focused on the marginalization of women, particularly in intercollegiate athletics.

While previous literature has documented gender-based discrimination and career obstacles experienced by female SPPs, there appears to be no literature that highlights the strength and resilience of female SPPs. As the percentage of female SPPs has increased in recent years, research is now needed to explore what factors promote career attraction and retention for women in sport psychology. Therefore, this study sought to develop a grounded theory explaining 1) what factors attract and retain women in sport psychology, and 2) how sources, such as sport culture, previous athletic and coaching experiences, or mentorship contribute to female SPPs' career attraction and retention.

METHOD

Guiding Frameworks and Qualitative Approach

A feminist standpoint framework was used to guide the current study. Feminism seeks to examine the world from women's and other marginalized groups' perspectives (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). Feminist research aims to promote social change by creating science that challenges androcentrism - centering men's needs, values, and world views above all and majority power dynamics (Bailey et al., 2019; Bierema & Cseh, 2003). A feminist standpoint focuses on the lived experiences of women and suggests that, to understand their experiences, women must be brought to the center of the research process (Gergen, 2017; Roper, 2001).

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology was utilized in the current study to explore what factors attract and retain women in sport psychology. The term *constructivist* is used to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the

interpretation and construction process of theory development (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, CGT uses an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, suggesting reality is subjective and constructed through the interpretations of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). When exploring what factors attract and retain women in sport psychology, CGT proved to be a useful methodology because no theory previously exists.

Participants

To qualify for the study, participants needed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) identify as a female, (b) be a sport psychology practitioner (c) have two or more years of applied sport/performance psychology experience, and (d) be 18 years or older. Following consent from the University Institutional Review Board, purposeful (Emmel, 2013), snowball (Noy, 2008), and theoretical (Charmaz, 2014) sampling methods were employed to recruit female SPPs for the current study. Purposeful sampling was used to select female SPPs who could provide insight regarding their lived experiences and the phenomenon being examined (Emmel, 2013). Additionally, snowball sampling allowed study participants to assist the researcher in the recruitment process by identifying other qualified participants (Noy, 2008). Last, theoretical sampling was used to define and solidify tentative categories and theories developed from initial sampling methods (Charmaz, 2014). Specifically, theoretical sampling centers the development and solidification of categories and theory collaboratively with research participants (Charmaz, 2014).

Seventeen cis-gender female SPPs voluntarily participated in the current study. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 46, with a mean age of 33.2. Years of applied experience ranged from 2 to 21, with a mean of 7.4 years of applied experience. Racially,

64.7% ($n=11$) of participants identified as White, 11.7% ($n=2$) identified as Black, 11.7% ($n=2$) identified as Asian, 5.9% ($n=1$) identified as Latina and 5.9% ($n=1$) identified as Middle Eastern. Lastly, 70.5% ($n=12$) of participants identified as straight, 17.6% ($n=3$) identified as bisexual, and 11.8% ($n=2$) identified as lesbian (see Table 1). Recruitment came to a stop once data saturation was reached. Data saturation was attained when interviews stopped yielding new information and theoretical sampling yielded robust categories and solidified theory development.

Table 1. Participant Information

Name*	Race	Sexuality	Years of Applied Experience	Degree	Current Professional Position
Abbey	White	Straight	3	MS	Applied Practice
Bethany	White	Straight	5	PsyD	Applied Practice
Ciara	White	Straight	2	MS	Applied Practice
Danelle	Black	Bisexual	2	MS	Applied Practice
Emily	White	Straight	7	PhD	Applied Practice
Franky	White	Straight	8	PsyD	Applied Practice
Gloria	White	Straight	11	PhD	Applied Practice
Hailee	White	Straight	21	PhD	Applied Practice
Patricia	Black	Straight	3	PsyD	Applied Practice
Jessica	Latino	Straight	14	PhD	Academia and Applied Practice
Kelly	White	Bisexual	12	PhD	Applied Practice
Laura	White	Bisexual	9	PhD	Academia
Molly	White	Lesbian	13	PhD	Academia

Natalie	Asian	Straight	2.5	MS	Applied Practice
Oliva	White	Lesbian	6	PhD	Applied Practice
Breina	White/Middle Eastern	Straight	4	PhD	Academia
Yin	Asian	Straight	4	PhD	Academia

*To protect the identification of each participant pseudonyms names are used throughout this manuscript.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview guide was developed and pilot tested ($n=2$) to ensure question clarity, content validity, and appropriate interview format. The semi-structured interview format, commonly used in CGT (Charmaz, 2014), ensured specific topics were discussed but allowed participants space to share their experiences without constraint. Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions such as “Tell me about the best parts of being a sport psychologist?” and “What recommendations do you have for improving the training, recruitment, and retention for women in sport psychology?” Participants were invited to participate in the study via an email invitation and a study flyer was distributed on the Society for Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology’s (APA Division 47) listserv. Participants who wished to participate in the study were instructed to email the principal investigator to schedule an interview. All participants completed a short screening/demographic questionnaire and provided informed consent prior to the start of their interviews. The principal investigator completed seventeen semi-structured interviews using Zoom Video Conferencing software from May 2021 to July 2021. Interviews lasted between 45 to 81 minutes, averaging 66.6 minutes. Participants received a \$40 gift card for participating in the study. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by Amazon Transcribing Services in preparation for data analysis.

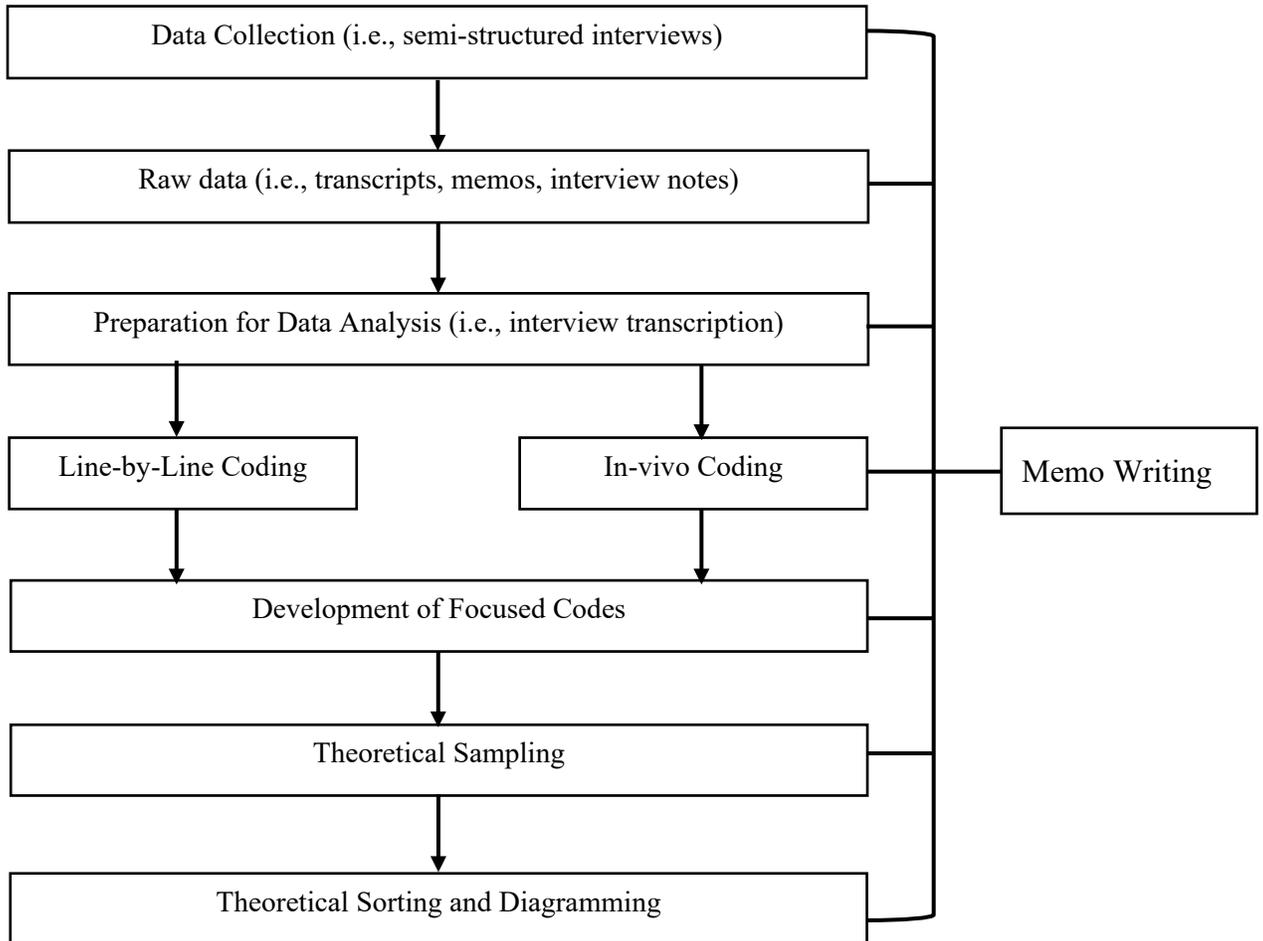
Data Analysis

The following phases of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) were used by the research team to analyze the data: (1) initial coding, (2) focused coding and categorizing, (3) theory building, and (4) memo-writing. Initial coding included both line-by-line and In-vivo coding. Line-by-line coding allowed the researchers to summarize, categorize, understand stories, and make observations. Codes generated during line-by-line coding were then used to establish potential category development, and finally theory development. In-vivo codes were used to represent participants “speech and meaning” and were used alongside line-by-line codes to develop potential categories and theory development (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134).

Focused codes were developed from line-by-line and in-vivo codes generated in the first phase of analysis. Focused coding helped identify codes that appeared more frequently, had greater significance than other codes, and had theoretical reach (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding identified connections between initial codes to determine potential theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014). Once data collection stopped theoretical sorting and diagramming begin (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sorting allowed the researchers to develop a theoretical integration of previously identified categories; thus, comparing categories at an abstract level to draw connections and relationships (Charmaz, 2014). Diagramming provided a visual representation of categories and helped the researchers define category relationships (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, memo-writing was included in all phases of the current study to create a space for reflexive practice, keep methodological and logical records, analyze, conceptualize, process, and critically think about the data being collected and reported (Charmaz, 2014) (See Figure 1). Last, to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the data six participants participated in member

checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking helped ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of data and theoretical conceptualization.

Figure 1. CGT Data Analysis Process



Trustworthiness and Credibility

Reflexivity. The principal investigator engaged in reflexive practice during all phases of the current study (i.e., study design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing). For example, the principal investigator reflected on her identities, social location, and lived experience as a former athlete, collegiate coach, and graduate trainee in counseling and performance psychology. Before the start of data collection, she answered the interview protocol herself to better understand how her lived experiences

and biases could impact the data collection process. Additionally, the seven-person coding team engaged in reflexivity while analyzing the data and co-constructing theory. Reflexivity took place among research team members individually, and as a collective group during research meetings to help each member understand how their own identities and lived experiences impacted the research process (Finlay, 1998). For example, research team members explored how their lived experiences both aligned and differed from the experiences of participants in the current study. In addition, reflexive memo-writing helped research team members record their methodological, logistical, and personal processes (Nowell et al., 2017).

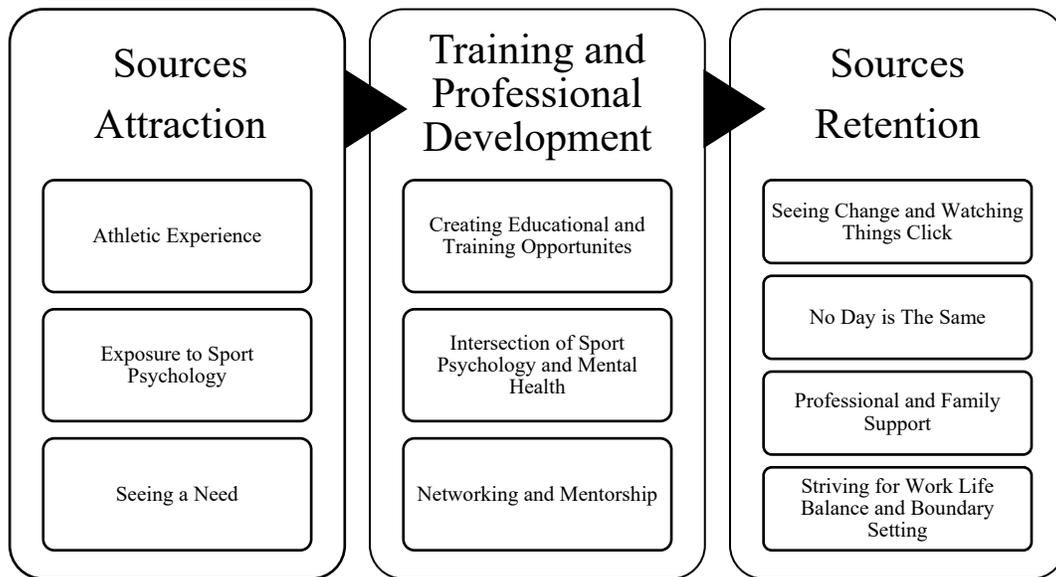
Triangulation. Data and researcher triangulation was employed in the current study to increase data accuracy and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Data triangulation was achieved by interviewing a large sample of female sport psychology professionals ($n=17$) who held different identities and social locations, educational backgrounds, and professional roles sport psychology. Researcher triangulation was employed through the collaborative data analysis and theory construction process (Nowell et al., 2017). In the current study, researcher triangulation promoted trustworthiness and credibility because multiple research team members took part in the data analysis and theory construction process supporting rigor and reliability (Salkind, 2010).

RESULTS

Results from the current study guided the development of a grounded theory to help explain female SPPs' career attraction and retention. The developed theory is comprised of three broad categories: sources of career attraction, training and

professional development, and sources of career retention, and ten subcategories (see Figure 2) to help explain what sources contribute to women’s attraction and retention in the profession.

Figure 2. Women’s Career Attraction and Retention in Sport Psychology



Sources of Career Attraction

Sources of women’s career attraction were explained by: (1) previous athletic experience, (2) exposure to sport psychology, and (3) seeing a need for sport psychology.

1. Previous Athletic Experience

First, participants discussed participating in several different sports and competing at different levels throughout their athletic careers (i.e., youth, high school, collegiate, and professional). For example, Danelle shared, “Sports have always been part of my life, and I knew I wanted a career in the sports realm.” While not a requirement to become a SPP, having experience as an athlete was a strong source of career attraction as it created

a strong connection to, and understanding of, sport culture and challenges athletes encounter. For instance, Jessica shared,

I was a volleyball athlete and then I started studying psychology and I [had] kind of heard about sport psychology before, but I didn't know much. I didn't have any access to sport psychology when I was an athlete myself.

Furthermore, Gloria discussed how her experiences as a high school and college athlete helped shape her professional aspirations and interests as a psychologist.

I was a student-athlete myself during both high school and my collegiate time. I also was passionate about psychology. I was one of those people who by 11th grade in high school loved AP psychology and told everyone, "When I go to college, I'm going to double major in English and psychology and I'm going to become a psychologist." And everyone was like yeah okay sure you will. But that is what I wanted to do and that is what I did. So, I love psychology. I just didn't realize I would apply it to athletes until I was shaped later by my high school and college experiences as an athlete.

Finally, Natalie shared how her experience working with a SPP as a professional athlete inspired her to pursue a career in sport psychology,

I was introduced to sport at a very young age in my life and then I took it up as a professional option for a couple of years, and while I was playing as an athlete, I think I was competing in the under 17, is when my coach suggested I consult with a sport psychologist. I remember coming back from my first session, I told my mom that if I don't make it as an athlete, I think I would really like to take [sport psychology] up as a job.

The above participants highlighted their athletic experiences and how their connection to sport culture helped inform their decision to become SPPs.

2. Exposure to Sport Psychology

Second, participants discussed not discovering the field of sport psychology until working with a SPP or learning about opportunities to combine sport and psychology in a professional manner. Participants discussed being exposed to sport psychology for the first time and knowing it was a career they wanted to pursue. Kelly shared, “I went overseas [to play] soccer on a team there, and they had a sport psychologist come in and work with us. I was like that's what I want to do.” Furthermore, Bethany shared, “I was always interested in psychology growing up, but then in college I was a collegiate swimmer and that was kind of my first exposure to sports psychology. I realized oh I can combine athletics and psychology.” Additionally, participants discussed learning about careers in sport psychology from mentors or advisors after participating in sport. For instance, Molly shared,

I decided to start applying for master's programs in counseling and I was meeting with my academic advisor who was a psychologist. She knew I was an athlete and she said, “You know I think you would be fine at this, but have you ever considered sport psychology?” I had never heard of it literally at the time there were no college classes where I was, and I guess I just had never heard the term sport psychology.

While exposure to sport psychology was often predicated by participants, previous athletic experience, Molly emphasized that not all female athletes have access to SPPs,

resulting in some women learning about the profession and career opportunities outside of the sporting context or once retired from sport.

3. Seeing A Need for Sport Psychology

Participants identified seeing a need as a third source of career attraction.

Participants reflected on how having access to SPPs could have benefited them as both athletes and emerging adults. For instance, Kelly shared,

My [athletic] experience would have been greatly enhanced if I had resources available that I felt comfortable using. I think I would have been much more apt to go to a sport/performance psychologist and then spill my guts. So, I became interested in it.

Additionally, Jessica highlighted seeing a need for sport psychology as an athlete who was studying psychology,

I was a volleyball athlete and then I started studying psychology. I started my undergrad in psychology and heard about sport psychology before, but I didn't know much. I didn't have any access to sport psychology back when I was an athlete myself.

Furthermore, Laura saw the need for sport psychology as a retired athlete reflecting on her experience, “You kind of realize what help you could have maybe had if you had [access to sport psychology] resources or someone to help [you].” Seeing a need for sport psychology within the sporting context was the result of participants previous athletic experiences and knowledge of sport culture. Through their lived experiences as athletes, participants were able to identify performance and individual-based gaps SPPs could help fill, thus contributing to their attraction to the field.

Training and Professional Development

Training pathways and professional development were broadly discussed in the current study. Participants discussed the process of becoming SPPs and how their educational pathways mapped on to their long-term career goals. Specifically, participants discussed: (1) the importance of creating their own educational and training opportunities, (2) the intersection of sport psychology and mental health, and (3) networking and mentorship.

1. Creating Educational and Training Opportunities

Participants highlighted the need to be both intentional and creative regarding their education and training due to the lack of graduate training opportunities in sport psychology until recent years. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of intentionally choosing or creating training opportunities that provided them with sport psychology specific knowledge and transferable skills to obtain their dream jobs. For instance, the need for creativity as a graduate student was made evident when Gloria shared, “Sometimes [I] had to be a little creative about creating my own practicum sites and making sure I had the proper supervision for it.” In addition to creating clinical training experiences, participants discussed the importance of creating opportunities and finding faculty that would support their research interests. This was made apparent when Patricia shared,

It [was] so difficult because I even remember when it came time for dissertation right? Like it was hard finding a chair because they're like what? I don't feel like I have enough expertise to do this, to be your chair. I was like I'm not giving this up.

Furthermore, Franky, a licensed sport psychologist, discussed how “It felt really important to be really creative” when she was an entry-level psychologist before finding her dream job in college athletics. Franky highlighted the importance of developing clinical skills that would be easily transferable to the sporting context. This sub-category highlighted participants efforts to become SPPs who were qualified to meet the unique needs of athletes that aligned with their personal career aspirations within the field.

2. Intersection of Sport Psychology and Mental Health

Participants discussed their desire to treat athletes from a holistic framework that often included working on the performance-mental health continuum (Herzog & Hays, 2012). In the current study, 70.6% of participants completed graduate training in counseling or clinical psychology at the masters or doctoral level. While the remaining participants did not have formal training in counseling or clinical psychology, they discussed the importance of using a holistic framework in their applied work and reported taking graduate courses such as counseling techniques, psychopathology, group therapy, and personality assessment. Gloria’s desire to treat athletes from a holistic framework was made evident when she shared,

During the time when I was an undergrad there was this separation of people. You could talk about sport or talk about mental health, and they weren't the same. So, I saw that and recognized right away that I wanted to be one in the same so that people weren't choosing, because I thought that that was a real problem for a lot of athletes that were feeling like what they needed overlapped in both and they weren't able to get that and had to choose to leave one identity at the door or not address mental health needs.

Furthermore, Bethany emphasized how performance and personal concerns are often interconnected,

I think it's best practice to be trained in both elements [sport psychology and mental health] because it's so hard to tease out. I think even within sessions it can bounce back and forth they are just intertwined so heavily that I think it's so valuable and so important to be able to do both.

Finally, Yin discussed how her holistic philosophy influenced her decision to pursue formal training in counseling in addition to her PhD in performance and exercise psychology,

[It is] so arbitrary to make the distinction of performance issue versus personal issues, you know. That's very arbitrary. So, I think considering the whole person is very important. That's also why I chose to get training in counseling.

The desire to use holistic frameworks and work on the performance - psychotherapy continuum, coupled with additional sources of career attraction identified in this theory, influenced participants' intentionality and creativity when choosing educational pathways and training opportunities in their pursuit of becoming SPPs.

3. Networking and Mentorship

Participants discussed the importance of networking and mentorship as trainees and early career professionals. For example, Patricia stated, “[I] network[ed] and made those connections.” Participants also discussed receiving mentorship from both male and female SPPs in the field but highlighted their appreciation for strong female mentors who could more closely relate to their lived experiences and gender-based career obstacles. For instance, Molly shared, “My advisor [in graduate school] she was always just such a

supportive presence and more than anything I learned by watching her.” Additionally, Hailee discussed the important role female mentors played in both her professional and personal development as a graduate student and early career professional. She stated, “It was female mentors that kept me healthy.”

While participants discussed benefiting from male mentorship, they highlighted the benefit of having female mentors and creating access to female mentors for aspiring SPPs. Participants highlighted the primary benefit of same-sex mentorship was relatability and shared experiences, such as gender-based career obstacles. This was made apparent when Laura shared, “I think [having a female mentor is] hugely helpful because they're going to have a lot of some experiences that you've had.” Finally, participants discussed creating access to female mentors. For instance, Franky shared, “I do a lot of mentoring now because I desperately wish I had that.” Thus, participants intentionally engage in both formal and informal mentorship and encourage networking to help support younger generations of female SPPs within the profession.

Sources of Retention

Participants discussed the following four sources of career retention: (1) Seeing change and “watching things click”, (2) no day is the same, (3) professional and personal support, and (4) striving for work life balance and boundary setting. Participants identified these four sources of career retention and discussed how each one has contributed to their retention within the field of sport psychology.

1. Seeing Change and Watching Things Click

First, participants found the most rewarding part of their jobs to be helping athletes and students to see change and “watching things click.” For instance, Hailee shared, “I love giving people back their own brilliance.” Bethany shared,

I think that its exceptionally rewarding when you see an athlete, and maybe you've been working on a performance related skill, and they just nail it and do it really well, and you just see that click for them and have the success that they've been working so hard for.

Furthermore, participants discussed the enjoyment and satisfaction of getting to be a small part of athletes’ success, whether it be personal or athletic. This was communicated when Kelly shared,

I love what I do; that's the bottom line. I love being able to be a part of the success that my clients see. I mean somebody comes into private practice and they're working on a relationship. I don't get to go watch their date, but if somebody is working on confidence, that can up their game. Then I see it in action. That's pretty unique.

And Emily shared:

I think watching them grow is the best part. They come in and, “Athletics is my life I can't fail!” Watching them branch out and grow it's been really cool. Then you hear later down the road a former student-athlete has referred somebody else to you. That's always a big win because they're talking about it with each other. So yeah, I love that part of my job.

In other words, it was a combination of special moments and playing a small role in athletes, and students' journeys that bring women professional joy and satisfaction, thus contributing to women's retention in the field.

2. No Day is The Same

Second, participants discussed how the dynamic and collaborative nature of their jobs helped retain them in the profession. For example, Patricia stated, "It's really fantastic because no day is the same. Each day comes with its own unique challenges". Additionally, participants discussed the unique culture and environment that allowed them to be part of a team and engage in several different professional responsibilities that included individual and group work, attending practices and games, and working with a wide range of medical professionals. For instance, Bethany shared,

No day is the same and that's one of the biggest appeals to me and one of my favorite questions when people ask me about my job or what I do or are like you know what's a day in the life? I'm like well here is the list of responsibilities that fall under there. So obviously mental health care but then performance psychology as well. Consultation and collaboration with any of our medical professionals, coaches' administration, occasionally parents, or other community providers. So, I would say like put those altogether and then throw in like observing practices as well. Pick a couple put them on my schedule and that's my day and it's not like repetitive and monotonous at all, which I love, and it's just new and exciting every single time.

Furthermore, Oliva discussed the unique opportunities SPPs have to see their athletes outside of individual sessions,

I tell folks that unlike a typical clinical practice we get to see our clients in their natural habitat, right? It's expected and it's part of the work that we do. So, we get that real life feedback that you just don't get when all you're doing is relying on a client's verbal report. So that part is really cool. The environment it's so dynamic and it just feels like where I belong. Which is really exciting.

The dynamic and collaborative nature of women's professional responsibilities was identified as a second source of career retain, as it allowed women to engage in several activities that generated excitement and satisfaction, thus helping reduce both day-to-day redundancy and professional burnout.

3. Professional and Personal Support

Participants discussed professional and personal support as a major source of career retention. Participants viewed having a strong professional network as a critical part of their support systems, particularly as many women may be the only, or one of the only, SPPs employed by their organization. Furthermore, participants discussed the importance of having family support as SPPs are often required to work nontraditional hours and travel. The importance of collegial support was made apparent when Bethany shared,

Really get to know your colleagues [and] network, I think that can be so helpful from just a multitude of aspects, not just you know career, but I think that work life balance, feeling like you have someone who kind of gets it, [people] that you can talk to and they can be helpful when stuff at work does come up, whether it's trying to expand your role, asking for a raise, looking for a new job, whatever it may be. I think having those people that just kind of get it can be so helpful and

you know, don't be afraid to kind of reach out. I always think, if I never sent that email, [to my current mentor] like there's a lot of things that I have right now that may not have happened and so don't be afraid to kind of put yourself out there.

Furthermore, participants also discussed the importance of seeking support specifically from other female SPPs in the field. This was made evident when Abbey shared,

Find other females that are able to give you support, but to [also] know that you're not the only female, you're not the only person going through this. Use each other; empower each other.

Finally, participants discussed the critical role of family support as professional responsibilities and expectations of SPPs often include working nontraditional hours and frequent travel. The critical role of family support was highlighted when Kelly shared,

My husband is very supportive. He gives up a lot. I'm about to travel with football [this season and he will have the kids]. So, he's a huge support for me. I would [also] say other sport psychologists at other schools are very supportive. I know right now if we had something negative happen in the news, I would have a bunch of text messages and calls of support because we do that for each other, especially if there's like a tragedy or something like that. So yeah, that's a lot of the support that I get.

Professional and personal support were identified as the third source of career retention.

While participants identified their love of sport psychology and the dynamic nature of their work environments as sources of career retention, professional and personal support contribute to career retention as it fostered collegial support and helped women meet the time demands associated with their professional role.

4. Striving for Work Life Balance and Boundary Setting

Finally, participants' intentional efforts to find work life balance and set boundaries was identified as the final source of career retention. However, in the current study, participants highlighted the need to be assertive as they strive towards finding balance and preventing burnout. Organizational expectations and lack of work-life balance was made evident when Emily shared,

I can't remember a vacation I've been on where I haven't gotten a call about work and none of my colleagues [in the counseling center] have to deal with that. I've been given referrals on Thanksgiving Day. The hard part is sometimes the compensation or the appreciation for that level of care isn't always there. There's kind of this movement in the field of being a little bit bigger advocates for ourselves so that we're actually getting paid for providing this quality care.

Furthermore, participants discussed the importance of setting boundaries in their pursuits of striving for work life balance. This point was highlighted when Oliva shared,

I hold really fierce boundaries. I have two phones, this is like physical separation, unless I'm on call. The work phone stays on silent when I'm at home, if I'm not on call. I might glance at it but just because I am kind of technically on call all the time in athletics. But I make it very clear to people that you won't push my boundaries.

Finally, participants discussed having to make professional decisions that aligned with their personal values and responsibilities. This was made articulated when Franky shared,

A lot of us have left better jobs to take less good jobs because family was more important; balance was more important. People leave power five schools to go to

schools that are smaller and less awesome because they want to be closer to family, because they want better balance, and they're okay to walk away from a little bit of money and prestige.

Striving for work life balance and setting boundaries was the final source of career retention identified by participants. While participants discussed specific sources of job satisfaction and support as salient factors of career retention, the *active* pursuit of striving for work life balance and setting boundaries was an ongoing process for women in the profession. Thus, striving for work life balance is a collective effort among female SPPs.

DISCUSSION

This study developed a grounded theory to help explain what sources attract and retain women in sport psychology. This study uniquely contributes to the literature as it discusses three sources of career attraction, four sources of career retention and highlighted three salient factors that contributed to women's training and professional aspirations in sport psychology. Additionally, this study uniquely contributes to the literature by introducing positive aspects of women's career experiences and satisfaction.

Career Attraction

First, this theory identified three sources of career attraction: (1) previous athletic experience, (2) exposure to sport psychology, and (3) seeing a need for SPPs. Due to the increased representation of female athletes, more women are gaining access to careers within the sporting context, including sport psychology (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Thus, this theory identified previous athletic experience as a *bridge* for female athletes to enter the field of sport psychology. This source of career attraction aligns with previous

literature that also identified athletic experience as a catalyst for women's entrance into the profession (Roper et al., 2005). While not a requirement to become a SPP, previous athletic experience creates both a source of credibility and knowledge surrounding sport culture, particularly at the collegiate and professional level, allowing greater access to the field of sport psychology and career advancement within the sporting context (Krane & Whaley 2010; Roper, 2008).

Furthermore, this theory identified exposure to sport psychology and seeing a need for SPPs as additional sources of career attraction. The increased demand and representation of sport psychology in recent years has increased access to sport psychology services, creating more opportunity for female athletes to work with SPPs. Thus, the inclusion of women in sport, coupled with the increased representation of sport psychology, has helped create more opportunities for female athletes to work with SPPs, subsequently serving as an introduction to the profession. Finally, the increased demands placed on athletes (Etzel et al., 2002; Lopez & Levy, 2013) and the continued efforts to de-stigmatize mental health (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Watson, 2005) has increased the need for SPPs as more athletes seek to utilize sport psychology and mental health services.

Training and Professional Development

Second, this theory broadly explained female SPPs' training and professional development. Specifically, this theory highlighted (1) the importance of creating unique educational and training opportunities, (2) the intersection of sport psychology and mental health, and (3) networking and mentorship. A scant body of literature has discussed the professional landscape of sport psychology and the numerous educational pathways and different professional titles (i.e., educational verse clinical SPPs) (Aoyagi,

2012; Hankes, 2010; Sly et al., 2020; Weinberg & Gould, 2007). For instance, previous literature has discussed the benefits of SPPs receiveing adequate training in both sport psychology and clinical/counseling psychology (Aoyagi, 2012; Sly et al., 2020).

However, receiving training in both domains can pose challenges as sport/performance and clinical/counseling psychology emerged from two different disciplines and very few programs offer training in both spheres (Aoyagi, 2012; Petrie & Watkins, 1994; Sly et al., 2020). Consequently, SPPs' have a range of different educational backgrounds with some practitioners being trained solely in sport psychology and others in both sport psychology and mental health (Weinberg & Gould, 2007).

The dichotomy in educational verse clinical sport psychology training pathways no longer aligns with the shift towards applied sport psychology positions that require training and certification/licensure in *both* sport/performance psychology and mental health (Hack, 2007). Thus, this theory highlighted the need for female SPPs to create their own training opportunities to ensure they developed the necessary skillset to be competitive in the current job market to use holistic approaches to address both performance and personal concerns (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Gardner & Moore, 2006; Hack, 2007; Sly et al., 2020). Holistic sport psychology seeks to approach performance enhancement through a lens that acknowledges both the athlete and person (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). Thus, the shift towards holistic sport psychology frameworks has embraced the idea that “performance and clinical issues are intertwined and that both must be assessed to understand the athlete completely” (Hack, 2007, p. 254). In alignment with the shift towards holistic sport psychology frameworks, there has been much discussion surrounding what qualifications are necessary to work on the

psychotherapy – performance continuum (Herzog & Hays, 2012). The ideological shift in how SPPs approach performance and athlete wellbeing, coupled with a job market that calls for certification or licensure in both sport psychology and mental health, has forced more SPPs to become licensed counselors or psychologists (Sly et al., 2020). Furthermore, the ability to work on the psychotherapy-performance continuum makes practitioners more marketable to large organizations such as collegiate athletic departments and professional sport teams (Herzog & Hays, 2012; Sly et al., 2020). Participants in this study saw the need for comprehensive training as they noted the interconnected elements of performance and personal concerns (Hack, 2007). Thus, participants in this study *created* opportunities to fill training gaps within the field to better serve populations utilizing sport psychology.

Furthermore, this theory highlighted the importance of mentorship and networking as female SPPs made decisions about their training and established themselves as early career professionals. Previous research has acknowledged the potential benefits of same-sex mentorship for female SPPs when navigating career obstacles related to identity and social location (Hyman et al., 2021; Roper, 2008). While the current findings highlighted the value of both male and female mentorship, a continued need for same-sex mentorship for aspiring female SPPs was discussed by participants. Finally, this theory highlighted the importance of networking and connecting with peers and established professionals within the field. Participants discussed the importance of networking at regional and national conferences and reaching out to established professionals for informal and formal mentorship. Moreover, networking also

served as a method for female SPPs to build a collegial support system, as both trainees and early career professionals.

Career Retention

Third, this theory identified four sources of career retention: (1) seeing change and watching things “click”, (2) no day is the same, (3) professional and personal support, and (4) striving for work life balance and boundary setting. Seeing change and watching things click was identified as a source of career retention as it provided female SPPs with a collection of moments that gave them professional joy and career satisfaction. Intentionally noting and identifying satisfying aspects of one’s work has been acknowledged in the literature as a source of career retention, specifically within the field of psychology, thus aligning with this study’s finding (Rupert et al., 2012). Additionally, participants identified the unique opportunities as SPPs to both watch clients overcome performance obstacles and grow as individuals. This finding also builds upon previous literature that found a significant relationship between *helping others* and career satisfaction (Westover et al., 2020). In other words, the opportunity to simply help athletes overcome both performance and personal obstacles serves as a source of career retention for women in sport psychology. Furthermore, this theory identified the range of responsibilities held by SPPs, such as individual and group therapy, consultation, sport performance, workshops, attending practices, and traveling to competitions, as a source of career retention for female SPPs. The opportunity to partake in several professional tasks and have professional autonomy aligns with previous research that found interesting work and professional autonomy promote higher levels of career satisfaction and reduces burnout (Rupert et al., 2012; Westover et al., 2020). Thus, the dynamic nature of sport

psychology promotes professional satisfaction and fosters career retention for female SPPs.

This theory also identified professional and personal support as a source of career retention for female SPPs. The importance of professional support has been discussed in the literature and was identified in the current findings as a source of career retention for women in sport psychology (Hyman et al., 2021; Roper et al., 2005; Roper, 2008).

Participants discussed consultation groups, collegial friendships, belonging to professional organizations, and working alongside colleagues as forms of professional support (Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004; Quartiroli et al., 2019). Furthermore, the role of personal support was identified as a source of career retention for female SPPs.

Participants discussed the critical role of family and partner support as they navigated their graduate and professional training. Building off previous literature (i.e., Quartiroli et al., 2019), this theory also found personal support as a critical source of career retention for female SPPs as it helped them to balance professional and personal obligations, particularly when working weekends or traveling with teams (Quartiroli et al., 2019; Roper, 2008).

Last, striving for work-life balance and boundary setting was identified as the final source of career retention for female SPPs. While previous literature has documented positive correlations between work-life balance, professional engagement, and performance (Iddagoda et al., 2021) many sport organizations have not yet embraced this ideological shift. Thus, demanding professional productivity over personal welfare, coupled with sport culture's *all in all the time* mentality, makes it particularly challenging for female SPPs to establish work-life balance (Graham & Smith, 2021; Waumsley et al.,

2010). While structural barriers to work-life balance were discussed, participants identified their *continued efforts* to find work-life balance and set boundaries. Specifically, professional boundary setting was identified as a deliberate effort to help foster work-life balance and women's professional longevity within the profession. Female SPPs' *collective* pursuit of striving for work-life balance is critical as more women enter the profession and strive for both personal and professional fulfillment (Posluns & Gall, 2020; Quartiroli et al., 2019). Finally, striving for work-life balance and setting professional boundaries is a continued deliberate push for equality and representation within the field of sport psychology (Gipson & Malcom, 2020).

Study Limitations and Future Research

While the developed theory discussed in this paper contributes to the literature and provides meaningful professional implications, the following limitations must be considered. First, this theory may not represent the professional experiences of female SPPs who hold specific intersecting marginalized identities. While this study used a representative sample regarding race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, further research is needed to better understand the unique lived experiences and career satisfaction of women who hold intersecting marginalized identities, and how their experiences align or differ from the theory discussed in this paper. For example, future research should focus on the *specific* intersection of gender and sexuality or race when examining female SPPs career attraction and retention within the profession. Second, while this study included women who worked in both applied and academic settings, this study focused on women's applied experiences. Thus, future research is needed to explore women's career attraction and retention specifically in academia. Third, it should be acknowledged that

this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the Covid-19 pandemic did not alter the study design or data collection process, it is important to acknowledge the contextual setting during the time of theory development.

PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, we make the following professional recommendations to further attract, educate, and retain women in sport psychology.

- First, while exposure to sport psychology is primarily facilitated through women's involvement in sport and exposure to sport psychology, it is critical sport psychology is also introduced to girls and young women who do not have access or experience working directly with sport psychology professionals by providing educational opportunities through career programming, job talks, and guest speakers. Additionally, continuing to expand undergraduate and graduate educational and training opportunities in sport psychology will help continue to create access for women. For example, sport psychology course offerings in undergraduate kinesiology and psychology programs are opportunities to expose female students to the profession. Furthermore, the increase in representation of women in the profession, and in leadership positions, will continue to create exposure and create access for young girls and women as they see leaders, applied clinicians, instructors, and researchers who share the same or similar identities as them.
- Second, to help female trainees and early career professionals navigate the profession of sport psychology it is critical to develop formal and informal mentorship opportunities. For example, while Division 47 of the APA offers a

formal internship program for young career professionals, there is no formal mentorship opportunities offered to graduate students. Thus, the development of formal and informal mentorship programming, specifically for women, may help create access to a more robust network, facilitate opportunity for mentorship, and increase community among female sport psychology professionals. Thus, future research is needed to develop and evaluate mentorship models specifically for women in sport psychology.

- Third, in order to help retain women in sport psychology increased attention and efforts must be given to promoting and fostering work-life balance (Quartiroli et al., 2019). For example, sport organizations and female sport psychology professionals need to have conversations around job responsibilities and expectations to ensure women can perform their jobs at the highest level and prevent overwork and burnout. Furthermore, both sport organizations and academic departments should take steps to help retain women in the profession by creating and fostering a supportive work environment that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by women in the profession, such as childcare and maternity leave.

CONCLUSION

As more women enter the field of sport psychology, it is critical we better understand what sources attract and retain women in the profession. Therefore, this study contributed to a scant body of literature by developing a grounded theory that helps explain sources of career attraction and retention for female SPPs. This grounded theory was developed to both better support women in the field of sport psychology and write

women's professional trajectories into the literature. Lastly, the development of this theory highlights the creativity and resilience of female SPPs and introduced a positive discourse surrounding women's professional experiences.

MANUSCRIPT 2. “CAN YOU WORK WITH ATHLETES AS A FEMALE?”: GENDER BASED CAREER EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SPORT PSYCHOLOGY PRACTITIONERS

Sport culture has been described as a “gendered organization” where men have historically and continue to hold more leadership positions compared to women (Roper, 2002, p. 56). Female sport psychology practitioners (SPPs) were more likely to be questioned regarding their abilities and viewed as less credible, effective, and knowledgeable based on patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes (Lovell et al., 2011; Roper, 2002). Furthermore, women SPPs, reported they were more often assigned to women’s teams compared to men’s teams because male athletes and coaches were more likely to question their sport knowledge and competence (Roper, 2008). Additionally, female SPPs were often perceived as motherly or sisterly, and not treated with the same respect and courtesy as male colleagues (Yambor & Connelly, 1991). Lovell et al. (2011) found athletes perceived female SPPs as more competent and qualified based on their body shape and attire. In particular, the results of this study found women who had lower Body Mass Indexes (BMIs) and dressed athletically were perceived more positively and creditable by athletes (Lovell et al., 2011). These results imply female SPPs who are perceived as too feminine or unathletic may be viewed as *less capable* compared to their male colleagues.

Furthermore, Whaley and Krane (2012) built upon previous literature by exploring women’s entrance into academia as SPPs. Participants discussed the expectations placed on them to take on additional tasks compared to their male colleagues, such as greater teaching and advising roles (Whaley & Krane, 2012). The results of this study are consistent with women’s experiences in academia in modern times. For example, Russell and Weigold (2020) found female professors are still

encouraged to pursue roles that align with stereotypical femininity such as helping and teaching. Such gendered expectations place additional demands on female faculty members making it more cumbersome for them to gain promotions within the academic ranks, compared to their male counterparts (Russell & Weigold, 2020). Gendered expectations were further discussed by Roper et al. (2005) who found women in sport psychology reported family responsibilities as a notable career obstacle. Women discussed the challenges of balancing family and professional responsibilities, particularly applied practitioners who were expected to work late hours, away from home and travel to competition sites on weekends (Roper et al., 2005). Thus, the expectations of female SPPs to work unconventional hours and be available during evening and weekends may be a factor that negatively impacts women's career retention in sport psychology. For instance, female SPPs may feel forced to pick between their professional aspirations and their family obligations.

As documented in existing literature, female SPPs encounter gender-based career obstacles and discrimination. A recent study by Goldman and Gervis (2021) examined female sport psychologists career experiences in the United Kingdom and found that male voices were still more valued compared to females with the same qualifications and professional experiences. Participants in this study reported experiencing both hostile and benevolent sexism (Goldman & Gervis, 2021). Hostile sexism included female SPPs having their expertise challenged, being harassed, being dismissed by male colleagues and excluded (Goldman & Gervis, 2021). Benevolent sexism included female SPPs being assumed as fragile, domestic, and less competent (Goldman & Gervis, 2021). The results

of this study document the continued career obstacles and sexism experienced by female sport psychologists in modern times.

Despite the reports of gender-discrimination and career obstacles discussed in the literature, today there are more female SPPs than ever before as the profession continues to grow in the United States and around the world (Whaley & Krane, 2012; Weir, 2018). While recent research has discussed female sport psychologists career experiences in the United Kingdom (Goldman & Gervis, 2021), additional research is needed to explore the professional experiences of female SPPs in the United States. Thus, this study sought to expand a scant body of literature and to explore how women's gender and intersecting identities influenced their career experiences in modern times.

Feminist Theory and Intersectionality

Feminist theory examines and conceptualizes the constructed world around us as it relates to gender and the experiences of women. Feminism examines and challenges the systems and structures that have been built by androcentric values and viewpoints (Krane, 1994, 2001). In other words, feminism aims to deconstruct systems that have centered men and othered women and marginalized groups. For example, feminist research paradigms and methods are rooted in giving voice to oppressed and marginalized persons, building relationships, acknowledging power dynamics, empowering, advocating, and creating change to promote and foster an equal and equitable world (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Krane, 2001).

Female SPPs were the first to introduce feminist perspectives and research paradigms to the profession (Krane, 1994; Roper, 2001). Feminist paradigms and research methods have been used in previous research to explore women's career

experiences in sport psychology to highlight inequality, gender-based discrimination, and career barriers (i.e., Roper et al., 2005 and Roper, 2008). While feminist research paradigms have been used in previous literature, there is currently only one research study that explored women's lived experiences in sport psychology using an intersectional framework (i.e., Hyman et al., 2021).

The term intersectionality was developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality acknowledges how multiple social categories (i.e., race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and age) and identities interconnect to compound forms of discrimination and oppression (Blodgett et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 1991). Hyman et al., (2021) explored Black female sport psychologists' ($N=6$) professional experiences using a Black feminist framework. Results of this study highlight the additional challenges faced by Black female SPPs when establishing credibility with athletes and coaches and the emotional toll of navigating not only a male-dominated, but also primarily White field (Hyman et al., 2021). To explore intersectionality more broadly the current study sought to explore the following research question: How have women's career experiences in sport psychology been influenced by their gender and intersecting identities?

METHOD

Guiding Frameworks and Qualitative Approach

This study was guided by a feminist standpoint and intersectional framework. A feminist framework allowed the researchers to explore women's career experiences through their personal accounts and experiences. Secondly, intersectionality acknowledges how women's multiple social categories (i.e., race, class, gender, ethnicity,

sexuality, disability, and age) and identities interconnected and created intersecting forms of discrimination and shaped their lived experiences (Blodgett et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 1991). Thematic analysis was used to guide the current study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis aligns with an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, suggesting reality is subjective and constructed through the interpretations of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). Thematic analysis guided by a feminist and intersectional framework allowed the researchers to capture how participants' intersecting identities contributed to their experience as SPPs.

Participants

Following consent from the University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, purposeful (Emmel, 2013) and snowball (Noy, 2008) sampling was used to recruit a sample of ($N=17$) female SPPs. First, purposeful sampling was employed to recruit initial participants who could provide insight regarding their lived experiences as female SPPs (Emmel, 2013). Secondly, snowball sampling allowed participants to share the study's information with their colleagues to assist with the study recruitment process (Noy, 2008). To qualify for the study, participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) identify as female, (b) be a sport psychology practitioner (c) have two or more years of applied sport/performance psychology experience, and (d) be 18 years or older.

Seventeen cis-gender female SPPs participated in the current study. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 46, with a mean age of 33.2 years and years of applied experience ranged from 2 to 21, with a mean of 7.4 years. Additionally, 64.7% ($n=11$) of participants identified as White, 11.7% ($n=2$) identified as Black, 11.7% ($n=2$) identified as Asian,

5.9% ($n=1$) identified as Latino and 5.9% ($n=1$) identified as White/Middle Eastern.

Furthermore, 70.5% ($n=12$) identified as straight, 17.6% ($n=3$) identified as bisexual, and

11.8 ($n=2$) identified as lesbian (see Table 2).

Table 2. Participant Information

Name*	Race	Sexuality	Years of Applied Experience	Degree	Current Professional Position
Abbey	White	Straight	3	MS	Applied Practice
Bethany	White	Straight	5	PsyD	Applied Practice
Ciara	White	Straight	2	MS	Applied Practice
Danelle	Black	Bisexual	2	MS	Applied Practice
Emily	White	Straight	7	PhD	Applied Practice
Franky	White	Straight	8	PsyD	Applied Practice
Gloria	White	Straight	11	PhD	Applied Practice
Hailee	White	Straight	21	PhD	Applied Practice
Patricia	Black	Straight	3	PsyD	Applied Practice
Jessica	Latino	Straight	14	PhD	Academia and Applied Practice
Kelly	White	Bisexual	12	PhD	Applied Practice
Laura	White	Bisexual	9	PhD	Academia
Molly	White	Lesbian	13	PhD	Academia
Natalie	Asian	Straight	2.5	MS	Applied Practice
Oliva	White	Lesbian	6	PhD	Applied Practice
Breina	White/Middle Eastern	Straight	4	PhD	Academia
Yin	Asian	Straight	4	PhD	Academia

Procedure

Participants who met inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study completed a short screening/demographic questionnaire and provided informed consent prior to the start of their interviews. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted using Zoom Video Conferencing software from May 2021 to July 2021. Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions such as “Tell me about any challenges you have encountered as a female sport psychology professional?” and “Do you have any other marginalized or intersecting identities and if so, how have they contributed to your unique experience?”. Interviews lasted between 45 to 81 minutes, averaging 66.6 minutes. Participants received a \$40 gift card to compensate them for their time. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Amazon transcribing services in preparation for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The following six phases of thematic analysis were used to analyze the data: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) defining and naming themes, and (5) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the research team used an inductive approach to analysis by familiarizing themselves with the data and generating initial codes. Codes were then sorted to generate and name themes (Terry et al., 2017). Finally, to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the data six participants participated in member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking was used to check the accuracy and trustworthiness of data and to ensure the five developed themes reflected participants lived experiences.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

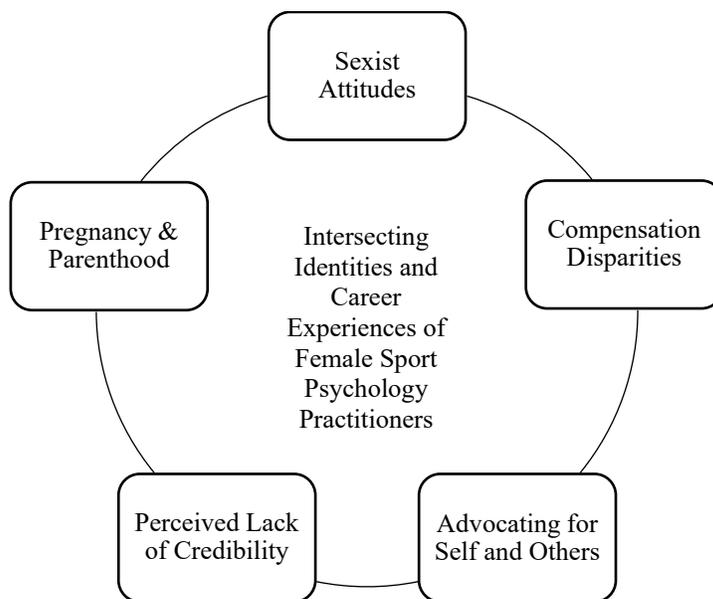
Reflexivity. Reflexivity was included in all phases of the current study (i.e., study design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing). For example, the principal investigator reflected on her identities, social location, and lived experience as a former athlete, collegiate coach, and graduate trainee in counseling and performance psychology. Before the start of data collection, she answered the interview protocol herself to better understand how her lived experiences and biases could impact the data collection process. Additionally, the five-person coding team engaged in reflexivity throughout the data analysis process. All research team members engaged in individual and collective reflexivity. Individual reflexivity was done by memo writing and group reflexivity took place during research meetings, to help members explore and process how their own identities and lived experiences impacted data analysis (Finlay, 1998; Nowell et al., 2017).

Triangulation. Data and researcher triangulation was employed in the current study to increase data accuracy and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Data triangulation was achieved by interviewing a sample of female sport psychology practitioners ($n=17$) who held different identities and social locations, educational backgrounds, and professional roles in sport psychology. Researcher triangulation was employed through the collaborative data analysis and theme construction process (Nowell et al., 2017). In the current study, researcher triangulation promoted trustworthiness and credibility because multiple research team members took part in the data analysis and theme construction process supporting rigor and reliability (Salkind, 2010).

FINDINGS

Participants in the current study discussed their experiences as female SPPs and the obstacles they encountered in the profession based on the intersections of gender, age, pregnancy, and parenthood. While many participants reported loving their jobs and feeling professionally fulfilled, they also discussed how gender has impacted their professional experiences. For instance, Gloria, a sport psychologist for a large university athletic department shared, “in athletics, sometimes your gender uniquely becomes more apparent [because] it's typically a more male dominated field”. As participants discussed career obstacles connected to their gender and different intersecting identities the following five themes emerged: (1) Perceived Lack of Credibility, (2) Compensation Disparities, (3) Sexist Attitudes, (4) Pregnancy and Parenthood, and (5) Advocating for Self and Others (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Intersecting Identities and Career Experiences in Sport Psychology



Theme One: Perceived Lack of Credibility

First, participants discussed the challenges they experienced gaining credibility as female SPPs and the perception and stereotype that women were less credible compared to male counterparts regardless of their training and professional experiences. This was evident when Patricia said, “I feel like in general men have this automatic credibility when it comes to sports”. Bethany echoed this sentiment when she shared, “It has its challenges, truthfully, especially as a young female professional.” Additionally, Gloria being asked, “Can you work with athletes as a female?” during her time as a trainee and early in her career highlighted the doubt people held regarding her ability to work with athletes as a female SPPs.

Furthermore, the intersection of age and gender as it related to perceived credibility was discussed by participants in relation to their professional experiences. Participants discussed feeling the need to not only highlight their credentials but share experiences that made them “qualified” to gain credibility. The intersection of age and gender and its impact on perceived credibility is best characterized by Ciara who shared,

I have to defend my credibility sometimes as not just a young professional but as a young female professional. Even in the army context, it definitely has its challenges. I have to adapt the way I present myself, especially in a male dominated environment. I come in and quite frankly, they see a tall blonde. They don't take me seriously until I demand respect. When I say demand respect, it's not anything mean, but I almost always have to gain credibility by sharing my education [and] my professional experience.

Additionally, participants discussed also being perceived as less credible as mid-career professionals when working with younger male colleagues. For example, Franky, a sport

psychologist who works in college athletics said, “I have to prove myself, and I’m not good with having to do that”. Furthermore, Kelly who is also a sport psychologist who works in college athletics shared,

I think it's unique, because if I am standing next to a male, even if it's a trainee, male people tend to defer to him. [For example,] I had a post doc, a very tall young male, [coaches] would ask him questions, and he didn’t know shit. He was here to learn from me.

Based on participants’ lived experiences, the intersection of gender and age contributed to female SPPs being perceived as *less credible* compared to men. Furthermore, the *intersection* of gender and age can pose additional challenges for young female SPPs as they enter the field and strive to establish a professional presence. Thus, female SPPs have had to go above and beyond to earn credibility and respect within the field.

Theme Two: Compensation Disparities

Second, participants discussed on average that women were still compensated less compared to male counterparts in the field of sport psychology. This was made apparent when Gloria shared, “How do we get paid equally for doing the same work because we see more and more women are in this field, but still getting paid 20 grand less than their male colleagues. So that is a big problem.” Furthermore, Hailee urged not just equality but equity, regarding the pay gap. She shared, “Equity, equity pay us. Don't make us beg if it's the same services, the same fucking service. Pay for it.” Moreover, Franky discussed the intersection of gender and age in regard to equitable salaries and pay,

Back in the early days when I would advocate for equitable salary and stuff like that, I think there were comments and impressions made about, like, being

presumptuous to think that I would deserve that [salary because of my age]. And so, I remember them being like, “Oh, you're young, well you haven't been doing this long. So, I think that was interesting having to really advocate that my knowledge base was not related to my age.

Despite ongoing efforts to close the gender pay gap in the larger context of work, particularly in the United States, participants in the current study discussed how many female SPPs are still undercompensated compared to their male colleagues.

Theme Three: Sexist Attitudes

Participants discussed experiencing sexist attitudes, particularly when working with male sport coaches. For example, Emily discussed feeling passed over after the following interaction with a male coach in her department,

I went to this one male coach's office, and he was late to our meeting because he was meeting with the male mental performance coach, and it felt like, “I'm showing you who I prioritized.” [When] we met and we talked he was basically like, “Well this other guy is a guy, so we're going to kind of stick with him for the most part, but I appreciate your interest.”

Furthermore, Jessica shared her experience being prohibited from travel with male teams because of her gender,

The teams trained in the training center that was 20 minutes away, a neighboring city or town. They would go by bus and for the first year I couldn't watch any practice because I couldn't be on the bus because “things happen on the bus.”

Similar to Jessica, Yin shared her experience coming to graduate school in the U.S. and being told she would never have the opportunity to work with male teams because of her

gender. “[When I started my program] they immediately said, well you're never gonna really be placed with [male] teams like football, baseball, and basketball”. Finally, Natalie discussed the need for organizations to respect female SPPs for their skills and time instead of *checking off boxes* when hiring. This was made evident when she shared, “It's not just about having [female SPPs] because that's what the gender policy of your company says. But having [female SPPs] because they are trained and know what they're doing; respecting them for their time and knowledge.”

While efforts have been made to include women in sport psychology, female SPPs still encounter sexism and are questioned regarding their ability to work with male sports, creating career obstacles and perpetuating harmful work environments for women in the profession.

Theme Four: Pregnancy and Parenthood

Participants broadly discussed experiences navigating graduate training and careers through pregnancy and parenthood. Particularly, participants discussed having to share the news of their pregnancy with athletes, coaches, and faculty and not taking medical leave needed to recover from giving birth. For example, Bethany shared “[It was] very interesting when I was pregnant last year to see clients react. I mean, at some point there's no hiding it.” In Bethany’s experience she felt her pregnancy made her more approachable. She explained, “I've gotten feedback from a handful of clients that it's been helpful and normalizing. They feel like they are just talking to someone else rather than it being like, ‘I'm going to go see the doctor.’” Furthermore, Breina shared “[As a doctoral student], once I got pregnant, I started not being considered for projects because it [was] going to be too much for me to handle [according to faculty and colleagues].”

Furthermore, the unwritten rule and expectation of returning to work quickly after giving birth was evident when Kelly shared, “It's frowned upon if you take the amount of time you need to recover medically from spitting a human out...like come on people.”

Participants also discussed the challenges of being a parent and having non-conventional work schedules that include working after 5pm and on weekends. This challenge was made evident when Franky said, “Being a mom has been really interesting. I think that I've struggled with that. It's both been one of the most empowering things and one of the biggest struggles [professionally].” Emily reiterated the challenged of being a parent and working in athletics when she shared,

Sometimes athletic culture is you stay late; you go to games; You do this and this and this. But it's kind of hard to do that when you need to get back to pick up kids or do daycare or that sort of thing. There's kind of this pressure to keep pushing and keep being ambitious, but then you also need to get home to see your children before bedtime, and you need to be able to put your phone down and really engage with your kids.

When discussing the challenges of being a parent and being expected to work nonconventional hours, participants discussed taking their young children to work with them, highlighting their attempt to balance both professional and parental responsibilities. Striking this balance was demonstrated when Franky shared,

I had women's volleyball ask me, “Can you do this presentation at 4:45pm? and I was like “Yes, can I bring my kid?” So, I wore her and gave this presentation. I remember a colleague being like “You're bringing her?” I was like, “Yep.” And, [I] recently did something with rowing and actually had my kid help me lead them

in some yoga, and they loved it. I think it's important for my athletes and my kid to see me in this way. I want my athletes to see an example of a strong female that can have it all, that can demand the balance, [who is] able to do both roles, and I want my kid to see that I do this cool stuff that I'm really fulfilled by.

Furthermore, Kelly shared an experience taking one of her young children to a game and her department administrators' reactions when seeing her holding her young child,

There was a coach [who] asked me to come to an introduction, a female coach that, you know, when she sees me at different events with my kids was like, girl power, you know. I was actually feeding a baby at [a game], and she came up to me, and was like, "That is the definition of a soccer mom." And I was like, "Amen." I knew she wasn't gonna have a problem with it, and I really didn't have another choice if she wanted me to come at the time she wanted me to come. And well, somebody, you know, administrators saw it, and I knew they were kind of uncomfortable with it, but when a colleague asked them about it, they said, "Well, it's not the choice I would make, but I'm not a mom."

Based on participants lived experiences, pregnancy and parenthood can complicate female sport psychology practitioners' ability to meet unspoken expectations, such as returning to work quickly after childbirth and being expected to work unconventional hours. However, female SPPs are pushing back against the idea that their identities and obligations as parents and professionals cannot coincide, as they seek to *do it all*.

Theme Five: Advocating for Self and Others

Finally, participants discussed the importance of advocating for themselves and others. The need for female SPPs to advocate for themselves and others in the workplace

was made evident when Danelle shared, “If you're not actively doing things to help everyone feel included and feel a sense of belonging, they're not gonna stay [in the profession].” Furthermore, the need to advocate for oneself when experiencing benevolent sexism was made apparent when Abbey shared,

It's almost like I have to educate [men] on how to work with a woman and what they're doing differently between me and another man, and how that is portrayed because they don't notice they're interacting differently necessarily until it's pointed out, which some people are like, “You know what, I recognize it, and I understand that I need to work to get better”, and some people are defensive.

Additionally, participants discussed the challenges and stereotypes of advocating for themselves. For instance, Kelly shared, “The hard thing is that when women advocate for ourselves, it is viewed differently. But, start doing it; that's never gonna change. So being willing to take one for the team”. Finally, participants discussed the importance of knowing their worth and what they were willing to put on the line when advocating, not only for themselves, but for others. This was exemplified by Hailee when she stated, “Step into your power” as a woman in this profession, and Franky when she said,

Every administrator I've ever worked with knows that I don't need this job, and so I advocate fiercely for my student-athletes and if that ever cost me my job, I'm okay. I can sleep at night. I've got other options. I think that has really encouraged me in that advocacy role.

As women continue to establish themselves in the field of sport psychology, it is critical they advocate for themselves and others in an effort to foster inclusion and equity and dismantle patriarchy within the profession.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite the increased number of women in sport psychology, women's professional career experiences are still underrepresented in the literature (Gill, 1995). For exceptions see Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Hyman et al., 2021; Krane & Whaley, 2010; Roper et al., 2005; Roper, 2008; Whaley & Krane, 2012. Although more women have entered the field of sport psychology, they continue to encounter career obstacles specific to gender and are still likely to experience gender-based discrimination (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; McCarver et al., 2019). Thus, this study sought to explore how gender and identity influenced female SPPs' professional experiences in modern times. Furthermore, this study sought to provide professional implications to help support and promote women's place in sport psychology.

First, this study found female SPPs are still, on average, perceived as less credible compared to male counterparts (Roper, 2002). This finding suggest sport culture continues to hold male-dominated perspectives and center the voices of male SPPs (Roper, 2002). While women may no longer struggle to gain access to the profession itself, they continue to encounter gender-based biases, stereotypes, and sexism making it more difficult to gain access to professional advancement (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Roper, 2002; Yambor & Connelly, 1991). For instance, female SPPs still encounter obstacles gaining access to revenue producing sports, such as men's football and basketball and are questioned regarding their ability to work with male athletes. The perception that female SPPs are unable to effectively work with male athletes aligns with the historical context of sport that centered the experiences of White middle- and upper-class men in the mid-19th century (Kidd, 2013).

In addition to being perceived as less credible based on gender, participants also discussed the intersection of age and gender as it related to perception of knowledge and credibility. For instance, concealing femininity as a young woman, physically presenting as athletic, and showing proof of qualifications or professional experiences were necessary to gain credibility (Lovell et al., 2011; Roper, 2008; Yambor & Connelly, 1991). Thus, this study supports the call to action to decenter male-dominant perspectives of sport psychology by continuing to use feminist and intersectional frameworks in research and practice to center the voices of practitioners with marginalized identities (Krane & Waldron, 2021; Krane, 2001). Intentionally dethroning androcentric views and shifting away from patriarchal systems will help shift the idea of who is considered *credible* and change fundamental ideology in the field of sport psychology. Moreover, eradicating the idea that women are less credible may also help close the gender pay gap within the profession.

The gender pay gap has been broadly discussed in sport and different bodies of literature (Roper et al., 2005; Manzi et al., 2021; Smith-Doerr et al., 2019). However, this is one of the first studies to explicitly discuss perceived gender-based salary disparities in sport psychology. Based on the findings of the current study, younger female SPPs were more likely to report lower compensation despite having advanced degrees and required clinical experience because they were viewed as *inexperienced* for being young. Thus, steps must be taken to eradicate gender-based salary disparities within sport psychology to ensure female SPPs receive equitable compensation for the same quality of work. While inequitable compensation is a result of systematic oppression, participants in the current study urged women to advocate for themselves by declining positions with

organizations not willing to fairly compensate them and urged women to shift away from the mindset of *settling for unfair compensation to get my foot in the door*. To date, there appears to be no research exploring correlates of gender-based pay gaps in modern times; however, a survey conducted by the Collegiate Clinical/Counseling Sport Psychology Association found a wide range of salaries among sport psychology professionals with similar job functions at their respective organizations (Golightly et al., 2018). While the result of this survey highlighted salary disparities among SPPs in applied setting, it did not provide gender breakdowns of compensation within sport psychology. Future research is needed to better understand if gender contributes to compensation disparities within the field of sport psychology in modern times.

Third, this study found sexism was still commonly experienced by women in the workplace and sport culture (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Russell & Weigold, 2020). This finding is consistent with previous research and suggests female SPPs' resistance and resilience, rather than changes in sport culture, may largely contribute to women's career retention in sport psychology. For example, despite experiencing sexism, female SPPs have influentially contributed as leaders, scholars, and practitioners to the field of sport psychology (Krane & Whaley, 2010). However, this study emphasizes the need for male allies to help generate substantial cultural change and hold male colleagues accountable when hostile and benevolent sexism occurs (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Hyman et al., 2021). In other words, this study implies the need for male allies to deliberately take action to help change professional attitudes in both sport psychology and sport culture by holding male colleagues accountable for sexist behavior and ideology (Goldman & Gervis, 2021).

Fourth, existing literature has documented how women's professional experiences were influenced by pregnancy and motherhood (Roper, 2008). The current study builds off previous research by highlighting the continued hesitation surrounding pregnancy in the world of work and sport context (Roper, 2008). Unspoken expectations of quickly returning to work after childbirth and feeling able to take full maternity leave were discussed by participants in the current study, suggesting guidelines and policies are needed to correct the unfair implicit and explicit expectations commonly placed on female SPPs to return to work after childbirth. Furthermore, because androcentric cultures imply motherhood is associated with lack of professional focus or incompetence in the sporting context, guidelines and policies are needed to protect female SPPs from being pushed out of sport as female sport coaches have been (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Kidd, 2013). For instance, existing literature has found one of the primary reasons women have stepped away from coaching careers is the inability to find work life balance and fulfill both professional and family obligations (Kidd, 2013).

In previous literature, authors have discussed women's struggles to balance family and professional obligations in sport psychology (Roper, 2008). Results of this study build off previous literature and highlight the continued pursuit to balance professional and family obligations. In the current study participants broadly discussed the ongoing struggle of finding balance and discussed bringing children to work when childcare was unavailable or when asked to work outside of standard business hours. This finding uniquely contributes to the literature as it documents female SPPs' resisting patriarchal work environments by bring their children to work when appropriate or necessary. Furthermore, participants viewed bringing their children to work as an act of

feminism, showing colleagues, athletes, and their children what it looked like to *do it all*. This finding also builds off previous literature that found female SPPs embraced feminist values as professionals in a male-dominated profession (Roper et al., 2005).

Finally, this study highlighted the resilience of female SPPs and their role as advocates for themselves and others. Participants in this study discussed deliberately advocating for women in sport psychology to promote quality and inclusion within the profession and sport culture at large. This highlighted the need for women to continue to push back against patriarchal systems to sustain and cultivate women's place in sport psychology (Goldman & Gervis, 2021; Krane & Whaley, 2010). In addition to advocating for self, participants discussed advocating for the clients and students they work with, emphasizing their desire to create a more equal and equitable environment for others within the sporting context.

Study Limitations and Future Research

The following limitations must be considered. First, this study provided broad professional implications that may not speak to *specific* professional subpopulations within the field of sport psychology (i.e., researchers, educators, clinical sport psychologists or educational sport psychology practitioners) or type of education (M.S in sport psychology, PhD in performance psychology, PhD in counseling/clinical psychology, etc.). Thus, future research should focus on examining women's career experiences within their specific professional subpopulations or educational backgrounds. Second, it should be acknowledged that this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the study design and data collection procedures were not impacted, the world of work and how women in the current study performed their jobs at the time of

data collection were impacted by the restrictions of the pandemic. Third, while this study included participants who primarily worked in applied and/or academic settings, this study focused on the applied experiences of female SPPs. Thus, future research is warranted to examine the lived experiences of female SPPs who work in post-secondary institutions as teachers, advisors, and researchers.

CONCLUSION

As more female SPPs enter the field of sport psychology, it is important that women's lived experiences are discussed in the literature to inform organizational and professional practices. Therefore, this study contributed to a scant body of literature by exploring gender-based experiences of female SPPs' career experiences within sport psychology. The findings of this study expand existing literature and emphasize the continued work that is needed to explore how gender influences women's professional experiences in the field of sport psychology, and the larger context of sport.

Declarations of Interest: This research was supported by the University of Kentucky's Arvle and Ellen Turner Thacker Endowment Fund. The funding agency had no role in study design, data collection or analysis, or preparation of this dissertation. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors.

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- 2017 – 2019 **Master of Science in Counseling Psychology**
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- 2015 – 2017 **Master of Science in Kinesiology and Health Promotion**
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- 2010 – 2014 **Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science**
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AWARDS

- 2022 **Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence in Advocacy and Social Justice (IDEAS) Student Award**
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PUBLICATIONS

- Curvey, R. M. G.,** White, S. C., Murphy, E. A., Scheadler, T. R., Englis, M. T., & Phelps, L. L. (2022). Multicultural training and awareness of sport psychology practitioners. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. Ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.2021-0046>
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