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## **Coaches' Perceptions of Girls' Sport at Title I High Schools**

Katie Shelgren Boggs

*University of Tennessee*, kboggs4@vols.utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Katie Shelgren Boggs entitled "Coaches' Perceptions of Girls' Sport at Title I High Schools." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Recreation and Sport Management.

Adam Love, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Jeffrey Graham, Steven Waller

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

# **Coaches' Perceptions of Girls' Sport in Title I High Schools**

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Katie Shelgren Boggs

August 2019

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## ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study was to understand coaches' perceptions of the importance of girls' sport participation in high schools, as well as the realities these coaches faced at Title I high schools. There is little existing research covering how coaches view and prepare female athletes in low-income communities and what their goals are for these athletes moving forward in both the short- and long-term sense.

This study used Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of capital as the theoretical framework, and studies how coaches of female high school sports in low-income community affect the accumulation of social, economical, and cultural capital for these athletes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 different coaches at Title I high schools in two East Tennessee counties. A constructivist approach was used in order for the coaches to dictate what information was important and necessary for study. Data analysis was done by open coding the transcriptions of the interviews and using an inductive approach to finding themes and patterns.

The findings showed how coaches are concerned with forming their athletes into more confident and capable people holistically, not just on the field or court. These coaches are often restricted in facilities, fundraising, and outside athletic opportunities because of the low-income nature of their school, but they did not use this as an excuse not to win or be fully committed to growing their program. The conclusions drawn from this research show the need for continued support of the growth of female high school sport programs and the funding necessary to allow coaches to mold successful athletes and people.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION**

Sport is often viewed as a providing a valuable gateway to a “better life” for people growing up in impoverished communities. Television shows, ESPN documentaries, and feel-good coverage during sporting events paint this picture of upward mobility through athletic participation. However, the reality is most high-school athletes will not be playing professionally, no matter their background. The popular National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) commercial states, “There are over 480,000 college athletes. Only 2 percent will go pro” (NCAA, 2016). This is particularly the case in women’s sports, as well as “non-revenue” men’s sports, such as track and field or soccer, which are being played across the country in secondary schools receiving additional aid—known as Title I schools. Specifically, Title I schools have a high percentage of low-income students and receive extra financial assistance to help students reach academic standards. These federal funds are allocated based on calculations of census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Approximately 19 percent of the students benefitting from Title I funds were in grades 9-12, where this study is focused (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Sports can offer many potential benefits to participants but may also create “false hope” for students who tie their future aspirations too closely to dreams of sporting success at the college or professional level. It is important to note this because of the role sport plays in pop culture and general society, and then how this affects the people playing sport and which sport they choose. The purpose of the current study was to investigate

coaches' perceptions about these goals, opportunities, and the ultimate purpose of sports participation for girls in Title I high schools.

Girls' participation in sport has increased substantially in recent decades, but substantial gender inequity still exists at the high school level. While studying the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s, Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, and Wilkinson (2015) reported an increase of about 34 percent in girls as high school athletes, but there was still a prevalent gender gap of sport participation across all three decades and all races. They concluded gender gaps persist more than racial gaps in sport participation even when accounting for factors that may select students into sports. Knifsend and Graham (2012) also researched the lack of racial differences in female sport participation at a high school level and the gender-based discrimination they face as an athlete. However, both white and black girls' sport participation levels increased as socio-economic status increased (Shifrer et al., 2015). The existing research on sport participation based on gender and socioeconomic status sparked the interest to complete this study. The positive outcomes of sport participation are both assumed without proof and researched, such as the study done by Troutman and Dufur (2007), which concluded female athletes are more likely to graduate college than their non-athlete counterparts. Yet, these benefits are extended to males more frequently than their female counterparts. The current research focuses on the struggles coaches face to engage, encourage, and coach low-income female athletes. The adults in charge of the athletic experience of these girls are not only dealing with the gender discrepancy throughout all levels of sport, but also the need to teach sports for the first time to girls who have never been athletes, take on parental roles, and give their own resources to

further the team. Coaches in these situations are taking on the responsibility to grow their female student-athletes' athletic abilities, personal character, long-term opportunities, and a myriad of other expectations put on them by themselves, parents, and the community surrounding their high school.

Although stories of sport as an avenue for upward mobility continue to abound, the current research investigated coaches' perceptions of how sport increases various forms of capital both in present situations and in the future for current female high school athletes. Using sport as means of achieving social uplift is prevalent among high school athletes, especially males. According to Forsyth, Jones, Duval, and Bambridge (2019), females felt a gender discrimination in sport, which started as being discouraged from participating while school-aged. This inequity reveals the bigger picture of how sport as a gateway is more apparent to men, even though it may not be more accessible. As sport participation continues to develop and change, it is important to look fully at the role of coaches and how they impact the future of girls' sport participation as well as give realistic short- and long-term goals to females being coached.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a wide breadth of literature surrounding the topic of how sport impacts people based on their socio-economic status and surrounding community. Studies have examined after-school sport programs, official high school athletics, and community teams. In this literature review, I focus on three primary areas of this research—(a) the impact of sport on high school students, (b) sport in low-income communities, and (c) the availability of sport. These three bodies of research contribute to the current study by highlighting the realities of playing sport at Title I high schools and how women or low-income students access athletic participation.

#### **Impact of Sport on High School Students**

People often have varying opinions on the effect of sport in young athletes' lives and the outcomes it produces. Sport has been shown to serve as a social resource for minority youth, but it may not affect the specific variables like grades, achievement test performance or educational expectations between the students' sophomore and senior years of high school (Melnick & Sabo, 1992). However, the students studied during these years also did not score lesser than their non-athletic counterparts, challenging the sometimes-held mentality of sport creating a negative impact on grades (Melnick & Sabo, 1992). Research has also indicated that sport can create a link to opportunities to stay in school or create the appeal for students to stay in school, such as when Coakley (2009) explained how sport can enhance someone's future opportunities when, "athletes develop abilities and forms of social and cultural capital that lead to career opportunities

and success” (p. 346). Much of the literature is based on this belief as well, rather than the idea that sport directly raises students’ grades. Research is often based on programs that use sport as an incentive to draw the hard-to-reach populations in, and then positive counseling, educational resources, and caring teachers step in to help with the job or school possibilities. One study looked at 15 organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit, which supported sports programs focused on developing social capital for children. These organizations listed the top reason for investing in these programs as a belief in social responsibility (Miragaia, Martins, Kluka, & Havens, 2015). Many people continue to buy into the belief that sports create better or smarter people, but in reality they are buying into a belief more centered on that research, which is seeing sport as a springboard to use to then become better or smarter, ultimately benefitting the community at-large. The current study sought to examine if coaches differentiated between sport as an avenue of upward mobility itself or sport as presenting a possibility for students to create their own upward mobility through education or growing their personal responsibilities and disciplines.

Although there are many long-term views of how sport can impact students, people also use athletics in high school to ward off short-term troubles or danger. According to one study, sport creates greater involvement for the athlete in their school as a whole, even without a positive correlation to educational success (Melnick & Sabo, 1992). A study by Veliz and Shakib (2012) showed another short-term benefit of sport, positively correlating higher participation rates with lower major crime rates and fewer suspensions. They continued to attribute the higher sport participation rates with a more

positive school environment, which gave students a chance to feel connected in ways other than crime (pp. 574-75). Similarly, Troutman and Dufur (2007) concluded that female students who participated in sport were more likely to finish college within six years of their high school graduation than those girls who did not participate, as well as score higher on standardized math and reading exams. This research shows sport is created and used as a safe place away from whatever negative influences are around the students. Practice, travel, and competitions all take time. For many high schoolers, this time is more productive out on the field than doing whatever their non-athletic counterparts are a part of, especially in many of the areas sport programs are centered in. The cited research also focuses on how sport positively impacts the rest of a students' life outside of athletics, and the current study explores how coaches take this into consideration when addressing student-athletes.

### **Sport in Low-Income Communities**

Whether in sport or academics, long-term goals are difficult for any student to achieve without a high level of parental involvement, which is often lacking within the communities being investigated in this study. For example, one program in Quebec successfully used hockey as a way to teach players life skills and values alongside education and sport-related skills. However, a particularly important external asset to the program, Camiré and Bernard (2013) noted, was the “parents supported their child’s participation in the program in many ways” (p. 195). The parents offered emotional support, logistical help, and financial assistance throughout the program (Camiré & Bernard, 2013). In low-income communities, parents are often working or otherwise

occupied, not allowing them to have this same devotion to their children's sport. Especially for women's sport, the lack of professional opportunities known in these communities creates barriers for how sport can benefit athletes in the long run, which can also prohibit parental involvement. In Dyck's (2011) study of Canadian athletes who earned scholarships to U.S. universities, athletes' parents were often involved as the strongest supporter and guiding figure in their athletic endeavors. That is not to say all students in the categories of racial minorities or poverty are without supportive parents, and these parents can show support in non-traditional ways as well. Such as in the case of Sylwester's (2005) study, the parents of one female athlete found additional aftercare support for their youngest child so the older daughter was free to continue with athletics rather than coming home to babysit. These parents provided for their daughter without directly contributing to team fundraisers or other more traditional ways.

It is important to make sure the coach understands the added responsibilities of providing parental-like support to their athletes, as well as knowing the positions the athletes are in at home. Because of the research showing the importance of parental involvement, almost all of the coaches studied in this research take on helping with college applications, life skills, and other life-long implications. Workers, whether teachers, coaches, or administrators, at Title I schools to fully understand the communities they are working in and not be disillusioned to their students' situations. In a study by Djonko-Moore (2015), teachers at high poverty, racially-segregated schools had decreased attrition and mobility if their assumptions about the school and the students were assessed beforehand. The study points out how teachers are also put at an

advantage if they are made aware of what is going on with students and parents as well as community issues as a whole (Djonko-Moore, 2015). As well as teachers, coaches in these situations will deal with a lot more external issues, like family and money, than will coaches in wealthier areas. Regardless of these factors, though, the coach plays a critical role in shaping the organization. The life skills hockey program also considers the time coaches spend with athletes critical, especially nurturing positive relationships and implementing strategies to teach those values to their athletes (Camiré & Bernard, 2013).

These studies show how sport almost requires more community involvement in low-income situations because of lack of parent attentiveness as well as the crucial roles of other adults in the development of the athlete. A significant indicator of trust is participation in community sport (Brown, Hoye & Nicholson, 2014), and the interviews conducted in this study assume trust between players, coaches, and administrators at the schools involved here. There must be respect and potential for impact for the goals to be taken seriously by these high school athletes.

### **Availability of Sport**

Women are one segment of the population who does not have equal access to sport. This comes because of the general lack of representation of women's sport across all platforms. Women's sports are underrepresented in the media, and the coverage is rarely focused solely on the athletic performance (Fink, 2014). Sport is also less financially lucrative for women than their male counterparts, with the 2019 Women's World Cup prize money totaling \$30 million while the 2018 Men's World Cup had \$400 million (Mather, 2019). However, this inequality is not limited to sport alone. Coakley



(2009) wrote that women from young ages are expected to help at home, and therefore are not afforded the same freedoms as their male counterparts. Even married women with children feel the constraints of being the family's housekeeper, cook, chauffeur, and school parent as a roadblock to sport participation. In a study done by Ceron-Anaya (2018) on gender hierarchies in women's golf in Mexico, even wealthy business-women who were successful at golf felt the inequalities of their position. When asked if women were discriminated against solely because they were women, the participants affirmed this belief and continued they were discriminated, "in golf, in work, everywhere" (p. 2). One facet of the current study examines if the female student-athletes will have fewer long-term goals regarding their athletic participation than the male students because of the lack of attention and foreseeable opportunities.

Outside of gender biases, it may be believed sport is equally available across communities. However, this is not usually the case. While Sylwester and Brady (2004) pointed out people believe sport is free from the inequalities of money and power, formally organized sports are often based around the preferences of those with economic and cultural capital. Research has shown football, basketball, and track are seen as the only exceptions to the social class discrepancy (Coakley, 2009). Even with these exceptions, the most affluent schools, the top quarter in each state, are winning 40 percent of the state championships across ten different sports (Sylwester & Brady, 2004). This is because of the economic capital these families have to put into private lessons, nicer equipment, and additional sporting camps (Sylwester & Brady, 2004). Another study by Wilson (2002) confirms those with higher capital, whether it be economic or

cultural, are most likely to be generally involved in sport. Many of these capital-rich people are also “highbrow omnivores,” or they are participating in a wider variety of sport with a greater volume (Widdop, Cutts & Jarvie, 2016). This group of people is participating in all types of sport, from traditional “highbrow” activities such as water and racquet sports, to popularized sports. They also have the economic capital to consume all the sporting items (Widdop, Cutts & Jarvie, 2016). Young people from upper-income households are afforded the luxury of not taking sport too seriously because of their wide variety of options and other future possibilities. They do not view sport as their only way to economic, cultural, or social success as those who believe sport to be the key to social mobility (Coakley, 2009). These differences also are why this research is focused on athletes within Title 1 schools, to see if the coaches and administrators take sport seriously because of its potential to offer opportunities to the students they would maybe not gain on their own.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Sylwester and Brady (2004) wrote, “Sports are supposed to be one place in American life where ability trumps all” (p. 10). This lends to the point that many Americans want to believe everyone is getting a fair chance at competition and social mobility. Much of the research shows the socioeconomic status affects sport participation more than abilities. However, the current study seeks to delve further into that assumption and challenge this often-assumed belief. Much of the cited literature is focused on areas such as minority populations or in countries outside of the United States. Spreitzer and Snyder (1990) argued there was too much association between race

and socioeconomic status in regard to sport, and, because of this truth, there appears to be holes in the available literature equally studying athletes affected by poverty, no matter their demographics.

Some studies were left out of this review due to their more detailed nature regarding specific nonprofits or programs impacting specific localized areas. For programs that were designed to address a community's individual needs, it was difficult to see how their findings would be applicable to other areas.

After considering the available literature, the current study uses Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of capital as a framework. Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form), which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (p. 241). He wrote about both material types of capital, such as economic, and immaterial forms of capital, including culture or social capital. Economic capital is directly convertible into money, while cultural capital can be institutionalized into educational qualifications. Finally, social capital is made of social connections people have to those around them and in different circles. These forms can be exchanged for each other in various forms (p. 242). For example, people regularly exchange their financial capital (cash) for additional cultural capital (college). Having a college degree creates greater social capital because of the network a student can create with professors, other students, or internships. Part of the current study will view how all three forms of capital affect high school athletics at

high-poverty schools in the present situations as well as how accumulating any of those three types of capital affects the long-term view of athletic participation.

The current study seeks to explore the views of administrators and coaches at Title I schools and their athletic goals for girls' sport. Given the findings of previous research revolving around the viewpoint of women in sport, the positive long and short-term impact of sport in school involvement, and the need for factors outside of the school's radius to often create successful athletes, the current research will investigate how coaches perceive their female athletes, what the importance of participation is, and what struggles they face at a Title I high school that other coaches may not have to consider.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This section details the process of gathering participants, performing interviews, analyzing data, and the procedures observed throughout the research. It also outlines the research questions and the approaches chosen to review the data and discuss the findings. Transparency in data collection and the research process is necessary for the structure and confidentiality of the study.

#### **Qualitative Study**

The current study used a qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of high school coaches with respect to the purpose of high school girls' sports in Title I schools. Qualitative research involves attempting to understand institutions and behaviors by getting to know the people involved, as well as their rituals, symbols, values, beliefs, and emotions (Nachimas and Nachimas, 1992 as cited in Skinner, Edwards, & Corbett, 2015). The current study used interviews, which sought to understand how coaches and administrators set goals for their female athletes. Skinner, Edwards, and Corbett identify interviews as useful when "interpersonal contact is important and when opportunities for follow-up of interested comments are desired" (2015, p. 54). Without much initial literature on this specific topic, there needed to be the opportunity for the subjects to explain their personal experiences and goals. Emotions and beliefs of the coaches were documented more so than wins and losses or individual athletic success. However, each was able to identify their main goals and purpose behind their coaching strategies. Individual personalities and backgrounds were also documented throughout the

interviews, and it was taken into account how these experiences might also impact their athletes. The study consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews with coaches from various Title I high schools in Blount and Knox Counties in Tennessee. Semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to stay on the relevant topic with questions while allowing both the interviewer and the interviewee time to elaborate or discuss subjects that may come up (2015).

Quantitative methodology was frequently used through the reviewed literature because of the use of surveys, academic data, and face-to-face questionnaires. These were used for things like comparing grades to sport participation, sport interests based on social class and race, and economic impacts on athletics. Although those were beneficial to make the statistical correlations between sport and different variables, this study sought out to look for the “why” behind the responses.

Qualitative study also allowed for understanding of capital. The semi-structured interviews showed what types of capital are on the minds of the coaches who are currently using sport to positively impact the students. Studying Title I schools did indicate poverty and a high minority percentage and demographic, but this study was not exclusively about those groups. Each student, no matter their demographic, has some form of capital, and sport and the people in the sport community is affecting that capital. Also, a qualitative study better revealed how the coaches are affecting the different forms of capital in both a short- and long-term setting for their athletes.

## **Constructivism**

Asking “why” is important because this study will be based around a constructivist approach. According to Skinner, Edwards, and Corbett, constructivism emphasizes “the importance of the participant’s view; to take into account the setting or context in which the participants expressed those views; and to look at the meanings that people assigned to different issues” (2015, p. 9). This approach will be beneficial because of the importance of the context of the communities surrounding the high schools. Sparkes and Smith (2014) refers to constructivism as a paradigm where participants tell the researchers what is important and reasonable to study. The coaches will be able to dictate what factors are crucial for female athletes and how they set goals. Athletics is usually not just wins and losses for people, as shown in the literature review. People use sport for life skills, future employment, education opportunities, and a means to occupy their children, among other things. Some see sport as a waste of time, no matter how frequently a team wins. The constructivist approach allows for each observer to develop their own truth with sport, because sport means so many different things to different people. The lived experiences and backgrounds of coaches and athletic departments affect how they manage the high school athletes around them in the present day, so one part of how they set goals, short- and long-term, for their students is based on personal experience. After comparing initial goals based on demographic factors, the research focuses on how these goals were formed from the background and opinions of those who form them. Every coach was able to explain how factors such as gender, training, coaching history, and other personal identifiers affect their coaching strategies.

## **Research Questions**

There are two questions that guided this study and the interview process. The research is focused on the experiences of coaches at Title I high school, and these questions attempt to find the overarching themes that dictate how coaches deal with a wide variety of females playing sport in that community.

- (1) What do coaches perceive to be the purpose of female sport participation at the high school level?
- (2) As coaches at Title I high schools, what additional pressures are there in low-income communities?

## **Institutional Review Board Application**

This study was submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) expedited review in April 2019. The participant recruitment and data collection began after approval was received in May 2019 (see Appendix D).

## **Participants**

Eligible Title I was schools were located through a website ([www.usa.com](http://www.usa.com)) provided by the University of Tennessee College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. All of the participants were contacted through the emails listed on the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association's (TSSAA) website, which lists every sport available at each school and contact information for the coaches. Eight of the interviews were scheduled from emails sent to every coach at 10 different high schools in two East Tennessee counties (see Appendix A). The last two interviews were set up as a



result of one coach setting up two other interviews at her school, which were scheduled for the next day.

Every participant was given a copy of the informed consent before the interview, and everyone signed a copy before the interviews began (see Appendix B). All interviews were confidential, and there was no confirmation or denial of other coaches participating when asked during an interview. Coaches were all given a copy of the transcript of their interview and the opportunity to remove their interview from the analysis and research.

Six different schools in two different East Tennessee counties were represented; the only commonality was the Title I designation. Everyone interviewed was currently a coach of a female sport. A few participants were also coaches of the corresponding male sport, and one was also a vice principal. Some coaches just finished their first year coaching while others had coached for over 25 years. Out of 10 coaches, six were male and four were female. All were white. Some had coached at various levels, from elementary school to training professionals. The sports represented were volleyball, track and field, cross country, tennis, soccer, and softball. Every coach only coached one sport, but some coached both the male and female teams.

### **Interview Guide**

A general interview guide was presented to each participant before each interview (see Appendix C). It was used as flexible conduct for the interview; some questions were skipped and others were added during the course of each conference. Not all coaches reviewed the questions beforehand. The interviews began with a set of biographical questions covering the length of coaching, what sports and genders were coached, and

why they started and continued to coach. The next section was about the landscape of coaching; how coaching had changed, what could be improved, and how it is different for females. Afterwards, topics relevant to female sport participation were discussed, and the questions varied from girls' sport in the community to short- and long-term goals for female athletes. The final section was about perspectives on female athlete participation and coaching responsibilities. The coaches talked about the different views of male versus female sport and how it plays out in the school, fundraising efforts for girls' teams, and what additional roles these coaches take on for their athletes. Each coach was given an opportunity to give additional thoughts and comments regarding any of the previous sections or something they would like to add.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Solely the primary investigator collected data, and all communications regarding interviews occurred only between the primary investigator and the participant. Interviews were solicited until the point of saturation. Saturation in this study was achieved when participants were not providing any new relevant data not already brought up in previous interviews. Every participant was asked to read and sign a consent form, and all did so. The interviews were conducted in person. All interviews besides one were conducted at the classroom or office of the coach at their respective high school; the one that was not was conducted at a Starbucks of the coach's choosing. This allowed for each participant to be in their most comfortable setting, and some referenced the schools or facilities during the interview. Being in the school allowed for a fuller picture of each school and some of the realities faced by low-income schools. The location allowed for some fields,

locker rooms, offices, or lack of such facilities to be viewed, and it gave additional perspective to the interview.

Each participant agreed to the audio recording of the interview, and they were all aware of the recording and questions beforehand. They were also all told each question was voluntary and any could be passed or skipped. The interviews lasted between 26 minutes and an hour and three minutes. All names and other identifiable information were deleted from the data once coded. All interviews were audio recorded, but the data was transferred to the primary investigator's University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Google Drive account, and only accessed through a password-protected personal computer. Transcription was done by listening to the interviews and typing out the audio recording in separate word document for each interview. The password-protected website Temi was used to transcribe five of the interviews, and each of these transcriptions were double-checked by listening to the interviews and reading through them. Errors were fixed and the interviews were put into word documents. Each participant was then emailed their transcription and given the opportunity to check it or withdraw their answers. No one changed any part of his or her interview. All data was deleted from the audio recording application and Temi upon completion of transcription and member checking. All data, transcripts, and recordings are and will be kept only on the Google Drive account, and it will all be deleted after three years.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The initial step in analysis was taking notes during the transcriptions of the interviews, adding them to the notes I had made during the interviews of recurring

themes. After this initial review, additional readings of each interview were conducted to increase familiarity with the data. The data were then analyzed with open coding, which is a method of noting all ideas and concepts that come up within the responses, no matter how they relate (Given, 2008). The practice of coding based on answering the study's specific research questions was not used for fear of missing new potential themes; open coding allowed for patterns not previously thought of to emerge. The interviews were performed until redundancy, and only one interview had more than a few distinctly different themes appear than the other nine.

Once all of the codes were determined, the process of making connections between responses and noting the codes of significance began. This focused coding allowed for the research to be broken down into salient concepts, while not being constricted to a linear format, always staying open to potential new ideas (Given, 2008). The research process was also inductive, which is where the data was gathered to build up concepts rather than deductively testing various research questions. This allowed for the interviews to show how particular answers work up to general themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants had similar answers to many questions, which added up to create a larger concept about coaching, working at a Title I school, or being a part of a low-income community.

Though both the open coding and inductive approach processes are based on the data collected, it is not possible to completely remove the thoughts of the researcher. The initial theoretical framework also shapes the themes and coded induced from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the processes of open and inductive coding, a selective

process was used to find causal relationships, contradictory and confirmatory data, and illustrative concepts for the analysis (Skinner, Edwards, & Corbett, 2015). The codes selected from this process then became the foundation of the final themes discussed in the findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

The 10 interviews covered a wide variety of schools, from rural to urban and a mix of racial identities. The coaches came from two different East Tennessee counties, and six different high schools were represented. Below, I discuss four primary themes that emerged from the interview data and were prominent across the schools, regardless of specific demographics. These evolved to (a) a lack of funding, (b) general athletic participation by females, (c) benefits of participating in sport, and (d) the commitment to the program as a whole. Participants in general did not have the luxury of only being focused on their students as athletes; there were always circumstances dictating almost every coach take on an additional role for their players.

#### **Financial Challenges**

All of the coaches interviewed were also teachers or administrators at the schools they coached at, which meant they were taking on double duty for their students. One coach said, “You have to pay to coach.” Many of the participants not only were providing resources for their classrooms, but were also taking on additional costs as a coach. Each high school is designated Title I for a reason, and the coaches are often picking up the financial slack for their students to continue to participate. Some mentioned paying for athletes’ physicals, buying equipment and food for their students, as well as the cost of fundraising efforts and making up for athletes’ fees. The common refrain of not coaching for the money echoed throughout almost every interview. In reference to choosing to

coach volleyball over other options, one coach stated, “I could have made a lot more doing a lot of other things, but I’ve always enjoyed doing it and I just keep doing it.”

While the financial reality of coaching was commonly brought up, it was never with bitterness. It appeared every person knew what they were getting into, and this is just a fact of helping kids and continuing the sport. The reward of coaching was seeing kids achieve their goals, a coach explained, and he continued that it’s “certainly not the money.” It was an overarching sense of altruism from the coaches for the sake of their athletes and school, rather than a bigger paycheck. Coaches were willing to take on the costs to promote the welfare of their teams and students. One coach just stated it as a fact when he told me, “Coaches are underpaid.” It also bleeds into fundraising, because many of the kids are trying to fundraise with families and in communities that do not have the additional support to give. Only one coach mentioned he did not have to take on additional fundraising and was able to rely on the athletes and parents to provide for the team.

### ***Indirect costs***

Along with the direct financial costs of coaching at a Title I high school, there are many indirect ways these coaches are paying for their athletes to compete. Not only are they spending after school, nights, and weekends with their team, these coaches are the ones at the school during the summer for tryouts and conditioning workouts. One coach just finished mowing the field before the interview, and he elaborated on how he had been there since 2 p.m. on a summer day getting the field ready, working on practice plans, and talking to athletes and their parents. Another coach said that even though most

of her girls have not played the sport before trying out for the team, she takes on additional responsibilities to still get them to a high playing level. She said, “And so it kind of falls on us to teach them what they should be eating, what they should be drinking, how they should be working out, you know, all those things. So that way, when they do get the chance to play in college, they have the tools that they need.”

Many coaches also referenced how there is no formal training for teachers who begin coaching besides watching TSSAA-required videos. They use drills from their playing days or friends who are coaches as well, but the administration side is time-consuming and difficult to learn. Ordering uniforms, concussion training, and scheduling referees were all mentioned as requirements throughout the season, but there is little training for how to accomplish these items. Parents and players often do not realize how much a coach takes on to continue their sport, especially at schools where there is not additional funding for additional maintenance or administrative staff.

### ***Funding disparity between schools***

Even within all these similarities between a variety of schools, there was still an obvious funding gap, even between all Title I schools. Even in a less-populous county, there was an evident disparity between the two Title I high schools. The coaches at both schools both considered themselves as part of the county community, but they often spoke of problems within their specific school. One coach referenced how another school that is actually designated Title I had the luxury of renting buses for all of their meets when her team cannot afford buses or vans for transportation. It is difficult to be the Title I school in the district, especially when dealing with issues like that. She continued and



said when trying to discuss these issues with an assistant superintendent and hearing him talk about what other schools did, “you clearly don’t understand who I’m with.”

Some coaches at the better off schools interviewed had high parental involvement in volunteering for duties like concession stand and transportation, while other coaches talked about the unavailability of parents. Two schools’ coaches in a similar area of Knoxville particularly talked about how parents have to usually choose work over attending practice or games. “...afterschool sports are not as important as, you know, getting those extra couple of hours and getting that money and paying bills, and, you know, all that kind of stuff.” Another coach referenced how their households might not even have cars, and without funds to rent a van, it hurt participation.

The levels of fundraising opportunities, parental involvement, and accessibility to outside sport were obviously different. While almost all of the coaches did mention dealing with students’ home lives, parents they have never seen, or covering additional expenses, some coaches were dealing with a majority of students in that category while others only had a few on their team. One coach mentioned how even when he was coaching a boys’ team, one parent showed up and let everyone know their son was a senior and had plenty of spirit, but what the people in the stand did not know was, “It was the first time I had seen her in two years.”

### ***Outside athletic opportunities***

Fortunately, no matter the actual level of involvement by the parent, all the coaches try to make sport accessible for their students, no matter the actual level of ability or financial need. However, these students are often still falling behind their non-

Title I counterparts because sports available outside of school are not often so cost-friendly. When asked about outside athletic opportunity, one coach just said those options were expensive and “that’s just not a reality.” Another coach pointed out how hard it was for her girls to play against more affluent schools because their whole team is able to specialize in the sport. She continued to say, “But then when you take that team and you put it up against my team where I have two girls that play competitive year-round volleyball, um, it’s very disheartening sometimes.”

These outside options also hurt high school sport as a whole because of the dwindling amount of multi-sport athletes. Almost every coach spoke about losing their best players to one sport, because even the clubs will scholarship for excellent players. A couple coaches worried high school sport will grow to be obsolete in the future, and one even went so far as to say only the poor kids will be playing for the high school in the future.

They also expressed concern not necessarily for their jobs or their high school, but if whether the for-profit club teams are developing a well-rounded individual. One coach said, “I don’t feel like their intentions are always the best.” Most of the coaches, even the one who also coached a club team, believed there was benefit in athletes developing different skills, but they felt like they were fighting a losing battle. One particularly mourned the exclusion of the travel teams, and he said that sometimes not everyone is going to be the best player. Girls who want to try out a sport for the first time or matured later will lose out on the opportunities. “You’re not going to be a good soccer player, but I’ll teach you how to be a better person. You’ll be in the best shape of your life...” The

worry appeared to be losing the intangible aspects of high school athletics, not necessarily the things that lead to college scholarships or sponsorship opportunities.

However, no coaches deny their athletes who want to play year-round, because they know they are getting better players on their team from the additional practice and outside coaching. The coaches do not ever diminish the sense of competition for the sake of feeling good equity among schools, even if the competition might not be as fierce.

### **Female Athletic Participation**

Another theme to come through all the coaching interviews, regardless of sport or financial ability, was the feeling that the female athletes work harder and tried to be smarter as a competitor than their male counterparts. It was almost as if all the coaches were describing a collective chip on the shoulder of these high school girls to prove they deserve all the same amenities as their male counterparts. Some coaches felt the boys had a greater sense of entitlement to playing sport. One coach said he knew he had a champion on his hands when a girl “realizes that they can hold themselves to that high expectation [that boys have].” Another talked about how his boys do not carry their same doubts about their abilities as his girls do on the track.

Most of the coaches spoke about the emotions of high school females and how sometimes the team dynamics can get in the way of competition. Some felt like the females were unable to put away issues or relationships within the team for the greater purpose of competition. This is why one coach brought up the need for higher emotional intelligence and to be in tune with what is happening with the team in girls’ sport. No matter the dynamics of the team, in general, the coaches saw sport as a way for females

to find belonging and a place to really plug into the school. One coach said, “I think that sports are not the only way to plug in, but I think it’s a primary way in a great way.”

Dealing with female athletes is also different based on if the coach is a man or a woman. Most of the coaches that I contacted and interviewed were males. Six out of the ten interviews were men, and one of the women was an assistant coach to a male head coach for the girls’ track team. Some made note of the gender difference, either saying a lot of girls prefer male head coaches or that additional training for males coaching females would be beneficial. However, both male and female coaches made comments about girls being more emotional and having to help them with boy problems. Almost every male coach, when asked how it is different coaching males and females, responded by saying they do not treat either one differently. Yet, most of them then referenced treating the girls different in some way later on in the interview.

The coaches did not want to be biased, but there are both real and perceived differences for female athletes, especially for those aged 14-18 years old. One female coach in particular talked about having to deal with a lot of body image issues. These issues come out in the weight room because girls believe “being strong is seen as a masculine thing.”

While male coaches did bring up girls talking about grades or family issues, it was also brought up they need to be more careful when dealing with the girls. One coach specifically brought up the “Me Too” movement and said, “twenty years ago you may have been able to get away with a comment. Nowadays, you’re not going to get away with that same comment.” Another coach also mentioned how if one coach is caught

messing around with one of the female students, it ruins the reputation for the rest of the male coaches. There is a certain level of being cautious men must expect when coaching female, especially at the school-aged level. Some of the female coaches talked about gender dynamics in the context of not wanting their athletes to be confused that as another female; they are still their coach, and not a friend. No matter the gender, there were dynamics to be aware of when dealing with high schools students. They did note this did not happen with the boys.

### **Benefits of Participation**

Every coach saw benefit in both the short- and long-term views of female sport participation. Some coaches referenced their athletes who had signed to play at various colleges, while one said her proudest accomplishment was her team being called the most respectful in class. Another focus, especially in the schools with the most financial need, was a goal of lifelong health and fitness. One tennis coach said, “I want you to remain active and engaged in, in a community that, that you have similar interests with and that, just like be healthy, be active, go do something.” This coach also spoke about how it is the coach’s responsibility to instill this in them; the families in the community are not promoting long-term physical wellness.

Also in these schools, there was a feeling that sport was the best activity they could be doing with their free time. One coach mentioned that as a student, “I mean, what else are you gonna do with your time?” Another talked about with parents often at work after school, sports are encouraged so they do not have so much time home alone. Or, they are using sport as a way to avoid other responsibilities, like babysitting or working.

It also gives the coaches a way to ensure their athletes are focusing on their grades and keeping up with their academic standards. There is a TSSAA minimum grade point average, but many of the coaches mentioned taking it a step further to ensure success in the classroom.

For the long-term perspective, almost every coach was much more concerned with graduating a well-rounded, respectful, and confident individual than having the most Division I athletes or state titles. One coach also quoted, “I can’t be what I don’t see.” She wanted greater athletic exposure for her girls than the traditionally-urban sports she listed of football, basketball, and track. She also used her platform to help girls understand things like sports metaphors and references that may come up in future college or job situations. These coaches were thinking, or were forced to think in a much more long-term vision for their athletes because of the lack of luxury in many of their students’ lives.

### ***Positive reflection of the school***

Overall, the role of sport at these high schools was seen as the school’s reflection to the community at-large. One coach said that while her school often is looked down upon, “...sports is a place where we make the news for good things.” This positive view of athletic participation was prevalent through all the coaches; there was an innate belief throughout all of the interviews sport creates a better and more well-rounded individual, no matter the level of skill. One coach said that while it did take away attention from a lot of other teams that may be doing well throughout the year, “the positive vibe about a school, it starts in the fall with, with the success of the football team and then can go into

other places.” At one school, the girls’ teams were traditionally known to be better than the boys’, and coaches reflected on how this created a wider expectation of female sport participation because of the positive coverage the girls’ teams brought to the school. Two coaches felt like the high school sports brought a smaller-town feel to a bigger city like Knoxville, because of the opportunity to rally around that specific high school. “[High School A] does hold that, like, community sense. You are a [High School A] person.” Others also referenced how sport was what kept many alumni connected to the high school, whether it was showing up to events or checking on the team in the local papers.

### **Commitment to the Team**

Whether it be buying the whole team dinner to make sure the kids eat after a cross country meet or opening up their office for girls during lunch, all of these coaches displayed an exceptional commitment to their program. Quite a few mentioned they see their athletes more than their parents do, and definitely more than anyone else at the school, especially during the season. One coach said at every preseason meeting, he promises the parents, “I’m going to treat your daughter like they’re mine.” Coaches spoke about giving their athletes the tools to apply for college or have confidence in other areas of life. A cross country coach said, “I would like if they’re not running in college, I would like for them to believe they can go to college regardless.” One talked about how you have to be a parent to some of your athletes, but he said, “that’s a part of my responsibility. I don’t shy away from that.” Another one elaborated on everything that goes on during practice and the skills they are hoping to develop in their athletes besides just winning and getting faster. The athletes might not always realize what is happening

or what the coaches are hoping to accomplish, but he still said, “it might not seem important now, but maybe it will be important later.”

### ***Program building***

Quite a few coaches also showed this greater commitment by referencing how they are building up the teams they coach, and there is a longer-term perspective than just one season. One in her first year talked about how she spent a lot of time recruiting new kids to play tennis; another one mentioned how in his first year, there were eight girls on the track team and now, four years later, there were 27 girls on the team. A soccer coach explained how in the last three years, he created a new locker room, improved the field, and his next goal was to get lights on their field. One coach saw high school sport as an important responsibility because not all kids have that opportunity to play outside of school, like the kids she referenced from more affluent schools who are attending soccer camps or playing club ball.

The sense of opportunity was a common theme throughout all the interviews. Sport was not a luxury or an expectation, but a chance for many kids to learn, grow, be healthy, and have additional role models as they finish out their childhood years. The participants of the study took on reality, and they are focused on keeping competitive teams. Some of the teams were very successful; some had barely any wins. Many coaches explained the opportunity there is to teach in a loss, but it did not diminish the desire to win. When one coach talked about her team being runner-up in state qualifiers, she said, “I hope that will foster in them the desire to just take initiative and work hard every single day.”



However, just because the coaches are not looking for financial gain or have the luxury of cutting students who may have never played before, it does not mean they are handing out participation trophies or diminishing the thrill of victory. Even though these coaches are dealing with a lot of additional factors, all of them are still aiming for the highest goal in their sport. They do not want to short-change their athletes because of resources or even pity. One coach said that every year “I tell them that the first goal is to win a state championship if possible.” He continued on to say he also pushes them to set more difficult personal goals if he feels like they are not challenging themselves enough. It seems they believe they can have both a winning and a well-rounded attitude. Coaches who do not have this same mindset might not be willing to be a parent figure, or spend their own money, or provide for the athletes in ways not explicitly instructed.

### ***Reason for coaching***

Many of the coaches did not intend on coaching when they began their teaching career, but started out filling a need the school had and then staying with it because of the love of the kids and the opportunity to interact with them in a different way that enables growth and maturity. These coaches have the innate belief that sport is teaching and helping them in more ways than the students may imagine. One coach said when someone sees your sport on a college application, “that says a lot about who you are as a person.” Coaches are finding ways to positively reinforce these lessons from sport to echo through the rest of their lives. One coach, when reflecting back on his two decades of coaching and the athletes he had the opportunity to impact, said “that’s something you

can hang your hat on... You have to follow the core values that the team has that you've developed over 20 years of coaching.”

One of the benefits listed by many of the coaches was the opportunity to get to know students outside of the classroom. Along with having students who would not typically be in their class, coaches said personalities were able to come out more on both sides. The opportunity to let loose and have fun while still having expectations for athletes was a positive for many teachers when they began coaching. These coaches cared about their athletes outside of the classroom. One coach talked about catching up with a former athlete at her college graduation party, which he was invited to because of the relationship he built during her high school years. Some coaches spoke about former players staying connected to the team, continuing to come to events, and two even mentioned their former athletes are now assistant coaches for them.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

The findings from the 10 interviews revealed answers to the original research questions as well as brought up new themes. The purpose of looking at forms of capital throughout the athletic department proved to be fruitful; many coaches had long-term goals outside of athletics for their students. Bourdieu (2008) describes capital as what make society, “something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle” (p. 280). This shows the purpose behind sport for many of the research participants. They did not see the participation in athletics as hoping a college scout would happen to be at a player’s best game, but instead they were using practice, goals, and character preparation to create more confident and contributing women. Coaches did not use lack of financial capital or facilities as excuses for their team or accomplishments. Both rural and urban communities were represented, but the differences between the two settings did not appear much in the interviews. The themes of economic disparity and long-term perspective for the team, whether they were signing seniors to Division I schools or teaching their athletes the sport for the first time, set the tone for most of the interviews. These topics were all under the overarching reality of coaching female sport in an area often dominated by male sports, especially football.

#### **Sport as a Means of Developing Capital**

The opportunity of growing capital was appealing to most coaches, even if athletes did not recognize that was happening. Bourdieu (2008) wrote that cultural capital could be obtained unconsciously, which is what many of the coaches felt was happening

with their athletes. Coaches appeared to have their athletes focus on winning, getting more in shape, and setting goals for their specific sport, not explicitly speaking to their athletes of how creating these positive habits will benefit them in the long run. Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, and Wilkinson (2015) concluded sport participation benefits the academic attainment of students, but they also pointed out how the gender gap in athletic participation has grown over the last three decades because of how much higher the boys' sport participation rate is getting. The coaches largely did not acknowledge the gap between participation rates, except one who noted it as a reason why there are weaker girls' teams because of the lack of competition for starting spots or playing time.

The coaches did speak about the benefits of sport, though. However, it is a hard balance of wanting as many girls as possible playing sport while wanting to keep a competitive edge. By nature of the game, there are only so many spots on a team, so it is not possible for every girl in the school to be a part of the athletic department. Another study noted how sport programs were a factor for students to achieve in school (Reis, Colbert, & Hébert, 2004). From the various research mentioned, it shows sport helps create an environment of growing social and cultural capital and succeeding in future situations, which was one of the major long-term goals listed by most of the coaches in this study.

Both for coaches with successful and unsuccessful teams, the desire for additional capital pushed them to make the most of the team they had at the time. The references to college attendance, job opportunities, and classroom etiquette showed the commitment to sport as a cultural gateway. Educational, social, and cultural capital all build on one

another, and the out-of-classroom experiences of cultural capital help build educational capital (Bass, 2014). Coaches frequently noted the ties of the potential capital of sport to the various other types, especially educational, during interviews. The ability to make impactful relationships outside of the classroom benefits the athletes inside of the classroom, as well as in future classrooms. Bass (2014) further discusses how children born into low-income families are behind in capital building because of the lack of initial capital to build onto. Therefore, these children will need benefactors or mentors to help them be able to build capital on their own, since they do not receive much from their family. This is where coaches come in at these low-income schools. The students are not receiving a capital-push through superior schooling, like Bass suggests, but are receiving additional mentorship and social capital through being a member of an organization. The coaches frequently mentioned feeling this responsibility, having mentioned helping with college applications, giving life-long health tips, and making sure their students are doing their best in their current classrooms. They all wanted to use sport as a springboard to college, whether the girls became collegiate athletes or not.

The accumulative nature of capital allows for coaches to have a wide impact on their athletes' lives, as well as creates an environment where female sport creates even more cultural and social capital in the future. It appeared that these additional opportunities are what kept coaches motivated to stay coaching, no matter the win-loss record year to year, and they felt they had a larger responsibility to stay motivated in this way than those at their higher-income counterparts.

## **Female vs. Male Coaches**

In both the recruitment and the interviews, white males dominated the coaching landscape, no matter that it was girls' sport and at schools with varying racial demographics. Six out of the 10 interviews conducted were men, and overall, 60% of the coaches contacted over 11 schools were male coaches of female sports. This statistic rings true at the collegiate level as well. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport reported that women only held 40.8 percent of heading coaching jobs for women's teams at all division levels (2019). It continued to report that women have never held the majority of coaching position for women's teams since the passage of Title IX (2019).

Another study revealed during a survey of sport management undergraduate students, it was believed men could handle the responsibilities of being a men's or women's basketball coach, but women could only coach women (Menaker & Walker, 2013). This is a contrary perception to what the interviews of this research indicated. Three of the four women interviewed coached both the girls' and boys' teams, and within the interviews, a couple indicated how men needed additional training to coach girls. Topics such as body issues and team dynamics were listed by both men and women coaches as unique to the girls' teams. One coach talked about the emotional intelligence needed to coach girls over boys. Overall, the coaches felt more was needed to coach girls, which is contrary to the idea that women are not able to deal with coaching men.

Menaker and Walker's (2013) study also showed those surveyed, men and women, believed women to be too emotional to be as effective coaching leaders as men. However, with the additional emotional intelligence the coaches in this research

mentioned needing, it would seem like being more in tune with emotions would be a benefit. No matter the necessary skills, homologous reproduction still limits how many women are being hired for roles, coaching or not, that men have traditionally dominated, especially because it is often men doing the hiring in these situations (Forsyth, Jones, Duval, & Bambridge, 2019).

While trying to build capital as a current and future student, professional, and athlete, the relative lack of women coaches is not giving girls' the idea of pursuing a coaching dream of their own. The lack of women coaches throughout all levels of coaching on both the men's and women's sides could be from a lack of social capital. A historic lack of female coaches means there is not existing capital for future women to build upon; there is not a social club already available for them to join as up-and-coming female coaches looking to move upward in the coaching world.

The benefits of social capital means those with it are more likely to be accomplished in the professional arena of their social membership (Bass, 2014). One female coach said, "I can't be what I don't see." While she was making reference to the girls on her team not seeing sport like volleyball or softball before high school, it is also applicable to the idea of coaching. If these girls are never interacting with a woman coach, they are not seeing themselves, as a woman, as being a coach in the future. Since the women have never been the majority of coaching even women's sport over the last four decades, there is not much hope for the future to be different. More than a token woman coach is needed to make a true change at this level.

## **Lack of Financial Capital**

At the end of his chapter on capital and its basic forms, Bourdieu (2008) concluded “economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital...” (p. 288). This was also at the root of most of the interviews. Coaches were battling against poorer facilities, participants unable to get to events, lack of finances to buy necessary equipment, and athletes unable to pay self-funded athletic fees to participate. In general, females with higher socio-economic status are more likely to play sport (Troutman & Dufur, 2007). This could be because of the additional responsibilities some participants of this study mentioned, like having an after-school job or babysitting siblings, takes precedence over sport for families who cannot afford it all. The lack of personal financial capital not only affects the athlete as an individual, but also the team as a whole.

Being a school in a low-income community also means a general lack of resources compared to the wealthier areas. Bass (2014) pointed out that it takes money to make money, but it also takes money to build capital of all types. Students in middle- or upper-class areas may take for granted the ability to get to their events or even the fact their school is able to host events. Two coaches mentioned their schools being unsuitable to host events in all settings, whether it be because of the condition of the track or the lack of lighting for a field. However, the coaches being aware of the reality of their community and understanding where their students come from is actually helpful in them staying at the school and reducing mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Sport is not the only aspect of the school affected by a smaller budget though, as several coaches made references to the school facilities as a whole, not just their athletic ones. There is also the



intangible lack of finances, which is how much the coach is taking on at Title I schools compared to others. Athletes that have the luxury of paying for club sports and private coaches, or schools that can afford coaches specifically for nutrition or conditioning have advantages because their personnel resources are spread less thin. Schools in wealthier areas have won trophies twice as often as the schools in less-wealthy areas (Sylwester & Brady, 2004).

### **No Excuses**

Despite the financial challenges, the participants of this research did not choose to point to the financial discrepancy as an excuse for their performances. While it may appear there are reasons for coaches to excuse poorer performance due to the lack of funds or early adoption of sport, none of the participants used these as an excuse for losing. Coaches did mention when they were in particularly tough district, and sometimes particularly wealthy public or certain private schools were mentioned by name to give an example of players their athletes were up against. Even with research showing the bottom quarter of schools ranked by affluence are winning only 16 percent of the championships, these coaches are choosing to strive for the best for their athletes (Sylwester & Brady, 2004).

These teams are being successful as well. It is not impossible for a low-income school to succeed at sport, though it is not often the fairy tale portrayed by the media. The idea of the “ghetto kid gone good” is prevalent in wanting to compare how a successful athlete or team defeats the odds of their poorer facilities or upbringing (Reid-Brinkley, 2012). However, Title I high schools come in all shapes and sizes, all races, all types of

communities, and these coaches did not want their athletes stereotyped into the reputation their high school might have in the larger East Tennessee community. These coaches seemed to recognize the reality around them without using it as a narrative for their team. This cannot be extrapolated to all Title I coaches, though, as the research showing the high rates of mobility and attrition proves the lack of acceptance and need for change for teachers at high poverty schools (Djonko-Moore, 2015). These coaches putting their personal desires aside to be the sponsor for their athletes to achieve capital, so they already know about the lack of financial capital and want to move past it.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation was the time of year for coaches. The end of the spring semester seemed to have a lot of competition interference, and more coaches might have participated during a season with less athletic competitions going on. Specifically, no basketball coaches participated, which was one sport most frequently referenced as the “main” girls’ sport and attractive to the most specialized athletes. It was also the end of the school year, so there were additional teaching responsibilities.

Secondly, all of these coaches are in the same geographical region. Although there were different types of low-income addressed, such as rural versus urban poverty, all of the schools are ultimately still in the East Tennessee region. The effects of poverty and belief in female sport participation might differ based on region. This geographical region also made most of the coaches feel like they were competing with football and its popularity. The dominance of its attention in the media, with boosters, and general fan

support left many of the coaches feeling like their sport was left behind, especially as females.

Finally, there were no interviews of coaches that were not white. Coaches of varying races were contacted, but the only interviews that actually occurred were all with white coaches. Black or Hispanic participants would have brought additional perspectives to the narrative, especially because there were athletes of varying races and nationalities on some of the teams being coached.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The reality of females in sport is a difficult one, and they are often in the minority for attendance, participation, funds raised, and support. Coaches in this study continued to reference the growth of specialization and year-round, single sport athletes, and how this trend has made high school sport a more crucial time for athletes. These facts create a difficult place for low-income females to have the traditional success of collegiate scholarship, but this not the end game for all athletic benefit. Almost every coach had a greater sense of purpose for their athletes than money or accolades. Coaches also expressed that the leaders who are committed to the team and players bring a difference sense of importance to their athletes; it may be related to job readiness, character benefits, or friendships. They did not aim to minimize winning or the spirit of competition, but instead to acclimate to the community's needs and bring the greatest benefit to the athletes. However, coaches that agreed to participate and help in this study probably have a greater sense of duty to the promotion of female and nonrevenue sport at their high school and throughout the region. In general, the coaches had positive outlooks for their teams, no matter the skill level, and were committed to creating the best representatives of their school possible.

In areas where coaches reported girls feeling a chip on their shoulder for not having the same expectation of participation, they also saw them working hard, listening carefully, and enjoying the fruit of victory. Just because their athletes are female did not mean any of these coaches took winning any less seriously or saw less of a future for

their athletes. Similar beliefs would be helpful in various communities and support bases, especially as female sport continues to grow in size and competition levels.

The possibility of helping athletes develop capital is often an undefined goal of these coaches. With most of their athletes and schools starting out with minimal financial capital, the coaches take on the added responsibility of ensuring their athletes are gaining social, cultural, and educational capital. Few excuses are accepted, and success is still expected at all levels of competition. Even though the current study focused on female sport participation, the majority of participants were still men. This poses an interesting position as high school girls' have additional facets to their athletic abilities that need to be dealt with, and the coach is often taking this on as well. Overall, the role of coaching is a much wider net for these participants at Title I high schools, but they all understood their position in the athletes' lives and had the goal of positively impacting female sport for both the current generation as they move into new roles and the upcoming athletes.

### **Future Research**

This study did not compare and contrast with the wealthier schools in the area directly. Many coaches made reference to the facilities and treatment of their own school in comparison to those in higher-income areas, but that is based on perception by the coaches at Title I schools. Therefore, it would be beneficial to also interview coaches at non-Title I schools to further investigate the disparity many coaches spoke about and how it may affect teams and performance.

Another future option could be looking at the lack of exploration of sporting options outside of school that were not exceptionally competitive for girls. Seeing

continued research showing the positive outcomes of participation combined with the lack of options for girls who may not be good enough to make the team or do not want to be super competitive shows a big gap in opportunity. Not one coach mentioned an out-of-school activity that did not cost a lot or was only for the most competitive athletes, and usually they were both. Not many students are participating in outside athletic opportunities that are not also on the high school team. Many coaches made reference to wanting to build a life-long desire for fitness, but this would only apply to the athletes who are already good enough to make the high school team to begin with, not girls who need help getting into fitness at all.

A related direction for future research would be looking at how the highly competitive, for-profit athletic clubs are changing the face of high school sports. Almost every coach mentioned their teams being threatened by the growing number of athletes in these programs offered outside of the school, and no coach fully supported them due to cost or time constraints for the athletes. Future research could look at how these clubs could be taking low-income students out of sport, or if they are making sport programs within the high school obsolete.

Future research could look into how the female participants perceive their own sport participation. A quantitative study could compare and contrast the feelings of the athletes with what their coaches believe and hope is happening through sport participation.

Finally, it would also be interesting to see how coaches respond to the feel-good stories of low-income sports teams succeeding against adversity. The research showing

high levels of attrition for these schools and lower levels of athletic success display how it is not easy to stay consistent in these situations. The ideals of helping inner-city youth or the poor mountain kids win against all odds is usually not the long-term reality for these coaches, but additional research could delve into how these narratives affect coaches or trust of outsiders to their community.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix A**

### **Recruitment Letter**

Hello,

This letter is inviting you to participate in a study titled Coaches' and Administrators' Perceptions of Girls' Sport at Title I High Schools. It is open to administrators and coaches of girls' sport at Title I High Schools, and participation is voluntary. Katie Boggs, a master's student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies, will conduct the study.

Approximately 20 people will participate, and your participation would involve one 30-60 minute audio- or video-recorded interview. The study will center on how coaches and administrators set goals for and view female athletic participation, comparing and contrasting short- and long-term perspectives with male participation. All information about the participants will be removed from the data and your identity will remain confidential. The interview would be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you, and can be done either in person or over the computer through Zoom video conference software. A list of questions will be provided before the interview upon request. Each interview will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be provided to the participant for review.

Please contact Katie Boggs if you are interested in participating in this study.

Thank you,

Katie Boggs  
865-771-9161  
kboggs4@vols.utk.edu

## Appendix B

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### Consent for Research Participation

**Research Study Title:** Coaches' and Administrators' Perceptions of Girls' Sport in Title I High Schools

**Researcher(s):** Katie Boggs, University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Dr. Adam Love, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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***Why am I being asked to be in this research study?***

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a coach or administrator at a Title I High School.

***What is this research study about?***

The purpose of the research study is to understand the purpose and goals of girls' high school athletic participation from the perspective of coaches and administrators.

***How long will I be in the research study?***

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

***What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?***

If you agree to be in this study, you participate in an interview with me for approximately 30-60 minutes. This interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. These interviews will be audio- or video-recorded.

***What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?***

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study at a later time. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

***What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?***

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you may contact me, and all information will be discarded. I will alert all participants before the data is de-identified and the participant data cannot be withdrawn moving forward.

***Are there any possible risks to me?***

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your confidentiality. These procedures are described later in this form.

***Are there any benefits to being in this research study?***

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about how to further improve short- and long-term benefits of girls' athletic participation. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

***Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?***

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by keeping all audio files on my password-protected computer, where the transcripts will also be stored. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

***What will happen to my information after this study is over?***

We will not keep your information to use for future research or other purpose. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

***What else do I need to know?***

If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

***Who can answer my questions about this research study?***

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, [Katie Boggs at kboggs4@vols.utk.edu](mailto:kboggs4@vols.utk.edu) or 865-771-9161, or my faculty advisor, [Dr. Adam Love, at alove1@utk.edu](mailto:alove1@utk.edu).

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
1534 White Avenue  
Blount Hall, Room 408  
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529  
Phone: 865-974-7697  
Email: [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu)



***STATEMENT OF CONSENT***

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

I will conduct one interview per coach or administrator, with each one lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Each interview will begin with a brief overview of the study, and explain the purpose of understanding the perception of female athletic participation and its affects in low-income communities. The exact wording and order of the questions will be flexible, and additional questions may be asked based on the flow of the interview. When interviewing an administrator, the coach title will be replaced with “administrator”.

Before starting with questions, I will remind the participant of the voluntary nature of the interview and let them know they can refuse to answer any questions. I will then ask permission to record the interview and take a few notes. The participant will then have the opportunity to ask for questions or clarification on anything.

Once I have received confirmation to begin the interview, I will start with biographical questions such as:

- How long have you been coaching?
- Where have you coached?
- What sports have you coaches?
- Have you only coached girls or have you coached boys as well?
- Why did you want to start coaching?
- Why do you continue to coach?

After these questions have been answered, I will move onto the landscape of coaching, both past and present. These questions would include:

- How has coaching changed during your tenure?
- What could be done to continue to improve coaching?
- How is coaching different for female athletes?

Once I have grasped their views on coaching, I will transition to female sport participation. The questions could be as follows:

- How would you describe girls’ high school sport currently?
- How would you describe the role of girls’ sports in this community?
- What would some of your short-term goals be for female athletes participating in high school sport?
- What do you believe the long-term implications of female high school sport participation are?
- What do you perceive to be the biggest difference between boys and girls sports at this school?

Finally, I will begin to ask questions about female sport in the community and their responsibility as a coach. These will be questions such as:

- How does the community view high school sports?
- What does the community support look like for athletics and how does it differ by gender?
- Outside of school, are there athletic opportunities for girls here?
- What does parental involvement look like in girls' sports in this community?
- What does fundraising look like for female athletic teams?
- What do you consider to be your responsibilities as a coach?
- Are there any additional responsibilities coaches have in this community?

These questions will be the general outline of the interview. Other clarifying or follow up questions may be asked, or some may be omitted, based on participants' previous answers. Once I have reached the point of redundancy, I will ask if the participant has any final thoughts or comments, then conclude the interview.

## Appendix D

### IRB Study Approval Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

April 30, 2019

Katie Boggs,  
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Kinesiology

Re: UTK IRB-19-05150-XP  
Study Title: Coaches' and Administrators' Perceptions of Girls' Sport in Title I High Schools

Dear Katie Boggs:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), categories (6) and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (version 1.3 ) as submitted, including:  
Informed Consent - Version 1.1  
Recruitment Letter - Version 2.0  
Interview Guide - Version 2.1  
The above listed documents have been dated and stamped IRB approved. Approval of this study will be valid from 04/30/2019 to 04/29/2020.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement  
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529  
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

**BIG ORANGE. BIG IDEAS.**

Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System

*Colleen P. Gilrane*

Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.  
Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement  
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529  
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

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**BIG ORANGE. BIG IDEAS.**

Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System 

## VITA

Katie Shelgren Boggs is originally from Maryville, Tennessee, the daughter of Yvonne and Jerry Shelgren. She is the youngest child. Her older sister Sabrina Manis is married to Jimmy Manis, and they gave Katie her wonderful nephew, Solomon, and niece, Lydia. After graduating from Maryville High School, Katie attended the University of South Carolina. As a Gamecock, Katie was a part of the Honors College, a Cooper Scholar, and a recipient of the Dobson Award. She graduated with Leadership Distinction in May 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Katie is now in her final semester of graduate work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While at Tennessee, Katie has been active in the Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport Studies department. She was a Graduation Teaching Assistant for the Physical Education Activity Program. She also served as the Master's student representative in both the Graduate Student Senate and the Graduate Student Advisory Board for the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. Finally, she was very active in Partners in Sports, being awarded the Joy T. DeSensi Professionalism Award, as well as working events such as the College Football National Championship, USA Cycling National Championship, and the annual golf tournament.

Outside of school, Katie also met her husband, Will, at the University of South Carolina, and they were married in August 2015. Shortly after their wedding, they embarked on a one-year global trip studying human trafficking and the organizations working against this travesty. From this trip, they now run a nonprofit, Raising a Voice, which has missionaries in Kenya and Argentina working in anti-sexual exploitation.

Raising a Voice is opening a coffee shop, office, and missionary training program in Fall 2019 on East Magnolia Avenue in Knoxville, which Katie will take over upon completion of her graduate work. She is currently helping set up a sport program with Raising a Voice in Kenya, and she hopes to continue using sport as community development and as an anti-trafficking measure moving forward.