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## Research Notes: Pioneer Women Athletic Trainers: Their Oppression and Resistance as Viewed from a Feminist Perspective

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## RESEARCH NOTES

# *Pioneer Women Athletic Trainers: Their Oppression and Resistance as Viewed from a Feminist Perspective*



**M**arcia Kay Anderson, Director of the Athletic Training Program has just completed a study which describes the experiences of the first women to enter the male-dominated profession of athletic training. Women in athletic training generally represent a silent minority and little is known about their early experiences, the barriers presented to them, and their strategies of resistance.

Thirteen Caucasian women were interviewed by Professor Anderson. The participants were identified in the 1989 National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) Membership Directory as being certified as athletic trainers between January 1, 1970 and December 31, 1974. Their ages ranged from 38 to 56.

The study attempted to show that women athletic trainers were oppressed, and as a result developed strategies to survive in that oppressive environment. Findings from Professor Anderson's study showed that because athletic training is a male domain, women were excluded from access to programs, facilities, equipment, budgets, high risk sports, and supervision readily accessible to men. Anderson also found that other professionals (e.g. coaches, administrators, male athletic trainers) did not understand the role of women athletic trainers and failed to support them. Women trainers were expected to have a heavier workload and faced problems such as the old boys' network and homophobia. The female trainers often used significant others as the main coping strategy to survive in the oppressive environment.

In Professor Anderson's study, feminism and oppression theory were used to discuss the participants' experiences. The participants' descriptions revealed the

prevalence of sexism and homophobia within physical education and athletic environments. This oppression kept them silent, isolated, fearful, and powerless. Consequently, the participants in this study did not share an identity as a subordinate or oppressed group. As Professor Anderson concludes, educating ourselves about sexism and homophobia, and developing a collective identity as women to initiate an environment conducive to developing mentoring relationships and supportive networks is a critical next step in changing the conditions of oppression within the athletic environment.