

2014

## Administrator perceptions of intramural coed flag football modifications: a qualitative analysis

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ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF INTRAMURAL COED FLAG FOOTBALL  
MODIFICATIONS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Science

in

The Department of Kinesiology

by  
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B.A., Xavier University, 2009  
May 2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

Coed sport environments can be paradoxical settings where pre-existing gender biases influence participants' enjoyment and success. Furthermore, gendered messages and stereotypes as well as low expectations for females within coed sports can create participation barriers by reducing feelings of confidence and performance. Within Campus Recreation, intramural sport administrators have a significant role in determining participation opportunities and experiences. This investigation examined administrators' perspectives about coed intramural flag football gender modifications. Specifically, three research questions guided this study: (a) how do intramural administrators view coed flag football gender modifications?; (b) to what extent do intramural administrators perceive gender modifications to impact coed flag football environments?; and (c) what level of awareness do intramural administrators have about the gendered messages of coed flag football gender modifications? Qualitative interviews with variation sampling were used to obtain the perspectives of 12 intramural administrators from across the United States of America. Interpretative phenomenological analysis procedures were used to analyze all interview data. Administrators reported that coed gender modifications impacted perceptions about female ability, often by sending messages of inequity. Administrators also revealed that the modifications created competitive strategy that often diminished the integrity of the game and undermined perceptions of female ability. Findings also indicated that administrators were highly influenced by previously existing gender stereotypes, leading to an endorsement of the modifications. Endorsements were accompanied by questioning of the rules but reluctance to enact changes. These findings elucidate the necessity for administrators to scrutinize the existence and application of coed gender modifications. Furthermore, engaging participant feedback on the specific attributes of the coed

modifications is important to better understand the needs of female populations. Lastly, eliminating some or all components of the modifications may help diminish the gendered messages that currently exist within coed flag football.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The student environment in higher education is largely comprised of young adults who are in their formative years of independent decision-making (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Higher education provides opportunities for both in-class and out-of-class experiences that impact student development and learning (Kuh, 1995). Out-of-class experiences include a variety of activities such as living on-campus or participating in intramural sports. Students in higher education environments can benefit from diverse out-of-class experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Higher education administrative faculty and staff all have direct impact on experiences in and out of class (Kuh, 1996). There is greater knowledge about the impact of faculty and classroom instructors compared to staff members such as student affairs practitioners (Love, 1995). Furthermore, Kuh (1996) argues that higher education institutions should attempt to create seamless learning environments that are dependent on the efforts of all personnel within an institution.

### **Campus Recreation Participation**

Roughly 75% of college students utilize some type of campus recreation opportunity (Leaders in Collegiate Recreation [NIRSA], 2010). Campus recreation services include areas such as sport clubs, instructor-led group fitness, drop-in recreation, and intramural sports. The national trend in collegiate recreation reflects a disparity in female intramural sports participation compared to male participation. For example, NIRSA (2010) reported that males represented 70% of intramural participants. This disproportionate trend is also reflected by recent data at a large public university in the Southern United States (U.S.), which shows that 75% of intramural participants were male in 2011 and 72% in 2012 (M. Boyer, personal communication, January 13, 2013). This difference of female participation is noteworthy considering the amount of

females that participate in high school sports—according to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS, 2012), females make up about 42% of all high school athletes and the total number of female high school athletes has increased every year since the late 1980's.

### **Gender Appropriateness**

Personal beliefs about gender roles can impact sport and physical activity opportunities and experiences. Researchers note that perceptions of the gender appropriateness of an activity or task are related to perceptions of competence and confidence in obtaining successful outcomes (Lirgg, 1991; Solmon, Lee, Belcher, Harrison, & Wells, 2003). Segar, Hanlon, Jayaratne, and Richardson (2002) detail a variety of psychosocial limitations for females that create “significant and complex barriers to physical activity...” (p. 339). Culp (1998) found a similar result when assessing outdoor recreation opportunities, reporting that females “expressed frustration” with gender role barriers and felt less comfortable attempting to participate in activities due to perceived gender role stereotypes.

Gendered perceptions of sport and physical activity can negatively impact confidence levels of females; for example, when the activity is deemed more masculine than neutral, women indicate lower levels of confidence (Belcher, Lee, Solmon, & Harrison, 2003; Lirgg, George, Chase, & Ferguson, 1996). Furthermore, gender-typing an activity appears to hinder females' sport performance (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, & Fontayne, 2009). Complicating the matter further, Clifton and Gill (1994) argue that the gender appropriateness of specific tasks within a physical activity or sport is often evaluated as well. Thus, gender appropriateness appears to be a complex set of beliefs about the overall activity as well as different aspects within the activity.

It is important to note that the research cited above centers on areas such as physical education or sport and mainly focuses on class or team environments. Comparatively, there is a paucity of research focused on college campus recreation environments, especially regarding intramural sport settings. Therefore, there is a need for more inquiry into gender issues related to collegiate intramural participation (Artinger, et al., 2006). Furthermore, there is a lack of research centered on the role of the intramural administrator in the facilitation of the intramural sport environment. Ultimately, intramural administrators shape institutional participation opportunities by deciding what sports to include or exclude and, more significantly, impact participation parameters by deciding on the structure and rules for those sport offerings. It is possible that gender beliefs, whether explicit or implicit, can impact these critical decisions.

### **Coed Sports**

Wachs (2002) calls coed sports an “anomaly” in the context of modern sports history, arguing that sports originally provided a venue where males could illustrate “...the physical superiority of all men over women and hegemonic men over marginalized men” (p. 301). Because coed sports are by definition an environment where both genders are assimilated, it creates what Wachs refers to as a paradox between traditional views of gender and sport. As such, coed sports are a unique example of evolving gender conceptions and roles within contemporary organized sport, considering that coed opportunities provide a setting where females must participate in what is often a traditional masculine environment (Henry & Comeaux, 1999; Wachs, 2002).

Some sport environments, including football, are naturally characterized as masculine activities, largely because of how those activities incorporate expectations on competition, power, and strength (Belcher et al., 2003). This concept as it relates to rules or modifications is



noted by Lorber (1994), who contends that competition rules are influenced by assumptions related to athletic capacity or even basic physiology. Lorber argues from the perspective of how separate sport activities, such as gymnastics and figure skating, have separate rule expectations for men's and women's competition, which is applicable when considering a mixed sporting environment such as coed flag football. Wolkomir (2012) discusses how, even in supposedly gender neutral environments such as poker, female strategy and success is framed in masculine terms. For example, female poker players utilized strategy that "hides" their true skills by falsely conforming to masculine expectations and furthermore, this strategy is most successful when male opponents are unaware of the "camouflage" (p. 422). Coed flag football presents an excellent opportunity to investigate gender-related perceptions because it is a highly masculine sporting environment that facilitates a great deal of gendered beliefs and interactions.

**Flag football rule modifications.** Within collegiate recreation intramural programs, coed flag football is one of many activity offerings available to students. One of the common components of coed flag football is the existence of coed rule modifications. The standard national flag football rules, published bi-annually by NIRSA, the primary governing body of collegiate recreation, include coed modifications that indicate different point values for female and male touchdowns and regulations on males and females as ball carriers (NIRSA, 2013). Table One (below) outlines the most significant coed rule modifications, adapted from the NIRSA rulebook.

These rules are significantly embedded across the nation in the facilitation of collegiate campus recreation coed flag football programs. Of 24 institutions profiled, all 24 utilize the "open and closed play" rule as well as the touchdown value differences in their coed flag football program (see Table Two).

Table One		
Summary of Significant Coed Rule Modifications		
Rule Title	Standard Rule	Coed Modification
The Game	Teams are composed of seven players on the field at one time.	Teams are composed of eight players on the field at one time, with 4 men and 4 women. Teams with seven players shall be four men and three women or four women and three men.
Minimum Line Players	The offensive team must have at least four players on their scrimmage line at snap.	The offensive team must have at least five players on their scrimmage line at snap.
Male Runner	There are no gendered restrictions to an offensive individual advancing the ball through his/her own line of scrimmage.	An offensive male runner cannot advance the ball through his own scrimmage line.
Male to Male Completion	There are no gendered restrictions to the quarterback or the receiver.	During the offensive team's possession, there may not be two consecutive legal forward pass completions from a male passer to a male receiver. If a male passer completes a legal forward pass to a male receiver, the next legal forward pass completion must involve either a female passer or a female receiver for positive yards. Commonly referred to as the "open and closed play" rule.
Touchdown Value	A touchdown is valued at 6 points, with the opportunity for a try after of 1, 2, or 3 points.	A female touchdown is valued at 9 points while a male touchdown is valued at 6 points. On all touchdowns, teams have the opportunity for a try after of 1, 2, or 3 points.

This table was compiled by the researcher by referencing posted flag football rules on campus recreation websites. It was the intention of the researcher to profile four institutions per NIRSA region while taking institutional enrollment into consideration, to ensure that a range of large and small school enrollments was factored in the profile.

Table Two						
Existence of significant coed modifications						
Institution Type	NIRSA Region	Enrollment	No Male Runner Advancement	Open/Closed Plays	Touchdown Value	Notes
Public	Five	29,278	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Five	15,395	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Five	13,476	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Five	49,180	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Four	29,549	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Four	30,474	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Four	19,727	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Four	10,541*	yes	yes	yes	*Undergraduate
Public	Six	26,393	yes	yes	yes	
Private	Six	4,589*	yes	yes	yes	*Undergraduate
Public	Six	41,341	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Six	16,470	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Three	56,387*	yes	yes	yes	*Main Campus
Private	Three	24,966	yes	yes	yes	
Private	Three	6,650	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Three	14,235	yes	yes	yes	
Private	Two	7,432	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Two	21,557	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Two	50,000	yes	yes	yes	
Public	Two	31,087	yes	yes	yes	
Private	One	10,000	yes	yes	yes	
Public	One	37,631	no	yes	yes	
Private	One	15,803*	yes	yes	yes	*Undergraduate
Public	One	14,761	yes	yes	yes	*Main Campus

NIRSA divides the U.S. and Canada into six geographic regions, with anywhere from five to 14 states (depending on size) per region. Not all campus recreation departments post updated rules on their websites and some institutions were initially targeted but not included in this profile because they did not have rules uploaded to their website.

Overall, the institutions highlighted in Table Two mainly defer to the NIRSA national standards with only minor institution-specific modifications occurring in isolated cases. Clearly, these widespread modifications indicate an assumption that females may be inferior athletes and

less-skilled football players in comparison to male counterparts. The “open and closed play” rule is especially significant in that it mandates female involvement in a key aspect (passing or catching) of at least half the plays within a contest—while this does ensure some level of female participation and engagement within the activity, it also highlights the power inequity of the modifications, considering the masculine characterization of football.

Considering the role that administrators have in impacting the student experience in higher education (Kuh, 1996), it is relevant to explore the role of the intramural sports administrator in the context of gender appropriateness and coed intramural flag football. Intramural sport administrators can have a significant impact on the student experience in intramural sports through mechanisms such as establishing the activity offerings, implementing rules and modifications, teaching and training the employees working in the environment and officiating the games. Because their primary role is to facilitate these activities, a natural assumption is that these administrators have a great depth of experience and opinion regarding their role in the environment.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine campus recreation administrators’ perspectives about gender in coed flag football. Campus recreation administrators actively work in facilitating coed flag football environments, yet little is known about their beliefs about gender equity or inequity in this context. As such, the following research questions guided this investigation: (a) how do intramural administrators view coed flag football gender modifications?; (b) to what extent do intramural administrators perceive gender modifications to impact coed flag football environments?; and (c) what level of awareness do intramural administrators have about the gendered messages of coed flag football gender modifications?

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This project utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, which explored perceptions of the recorded experiences as well as actively interpreted the context and meanings of those perceptions (Smith & Osborne, 2003). IPA emphasizes two levels of interpretation: participants' interpretation of interviewers' questions and researchers' interpretation of the interview data. The multi-stage nature of interpretation was especially useful in gaining a layered understanding of administrators' perspectives about coed intramural flag football environments. It is noted that IPA has the ability to effectively resonate within theories of physical activity or sport because of its emphasis on the distinct perspective of the first person lived body (Allen-Collinson, 2009). As described by Ross and Shinew (2008): "Interviews lend themselves to mutual creation of knowledge and allow interpretive understandings of participants' meanings" (pp. 40-41).

### **Participants & Setting**

Qualitative inquiry is dependent on using what Patton (2002) terms "information-rich cases" that are drawn from a purposefully selected sample. In this study, all twelve participants ( $N = 12$ ) had significant involvement and experience as an employee in coed intramural flag football, which includes the administration of coed rule modifications, training and evaluating officials on rule modifications, and observing, playing, and officiating the coed games. Considering the IPA approach, it was important to have a sample of participants that were roughly similar in terms of experience and background (Smith & Osborne, 2003) within coed flag football. Participants, on average, had 8.5 years of experience of playing and/or working around coed flag football, with a median of seven years and standard deviation of 3.1. The most

experienced participant had 14 years of experience while the least experienced participant had five years. Additionally, interview subjects were of mixed gender, with six female interviewees and six male interviewees. All participants held undergraduate degrees while ten held master's degrees; two participants did not disclose their master's degree status but referenced coed flag football experience as a graduate assistant during their interview.

Although there were similarities in experiences, the pool of interviewees was drawn from different institutions across the U.S. by using the NIRSA regional breakdown. At least one subject from each of the six regions was interviewed and with all regions except one (Region Five), at least two subjects were interviewed. This type of purposeful sampling, termed maximum variation sampling by Patton (2002), was used to recruit participants from across the entire country, as opposed to just one or two regions. Because the initial sample size was still considerably large after maximum variation sampling, specific interview subjects were drawn using purposeful random sampling; this method created a greater depth of evidence with more comprehensive credibility, even though it is not a statistically representative sample (Patton, 2002). Subjects were recruited in various manners, as some were professional colleagues of the researcher while others were drawn at random.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, which allowed for the interviews to follow a specific route (see Appendix A) but still considered the opportunity to be flexible in the conversation (Patton, 2002). The benefit of this type of interview is noted by Dale (1996) who argues that interviews and phenomenological approaches allow for a deeper comprehension of the narrative or dialogue that constitutes the interpretation of the experience. Similarly,

Moustakas (1994) proposes that the general interview guide should contain broad questions in order to facilitate the gathering of “substantive descriptions” of the interviewees’ experiences.

In total, 12 phone interviews were held, lasting an average time of 37:06, with the shortest lasting 19:19 and the longest running 50:27. The median interview time was 36:49 and the standard deviation was 8:37. Interview questions covered topics on opinions for the existence of coed gender modifications, the success of those modifications in relation to the gender appropriateness of the activity, the perceived impact of the modifications on ability perception, and the role and need of the administrator in impacting the activity environment. All interview questions are attached in Appendix A. The questions allowed for a focus on the direct opinions and perceptions of the administrators, as shaped by their first-hand experiences and interpretations in working or playing within the coed flag football environment, including training officials, teaching modifications to participants, observing and/or officiating the games, and reviewing participant feedback. This data collection process allowed for interview subjects to offer interpretations of their experiences. The researcher also conducted one pilot interview with a current intramural administrator not involved in the study, in order to analyze the nature and flow of the interview guide before conducting further interviews.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher operated from a pragmatic paradigm, which allows one to “tactically [mix] methods as needed and appropriate (Patton, 2002, p. 69). This approach is especially apparent in the aspects of this project relating to data credibility where a post-positivist method (i.e., systematic and layered member checking) is utilized. The project used an IPA research design, which purports the subjective interpretation of both the researcher and the participant during data collection and data analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2003) and contrasts the rigid

assumptions of the post-positivist paradigm (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, the researcher and interview subjects had a wide variety of experience working and playing within other coed intramural environments, which likely impacted both levels of interpretation in IPA.

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher within a week after the actual interview was conducted. All subjects were given pseudonyms during this process. After transcription, each individual interview transcript was read multiple times by the researcher without making notes or comments on the data. This initial overview was done to obtain a greater familiarity with the overall collection of data. Moustakas (1994) terms this “horizontalizing” the data, which entails that each statement of the interview that relates to the topic is initially of identical value to the research process.

Because this project utilized an IPA approach, it was necessary to be highly engaged with the transcript data, in order to both understand and interpret its context and meaning (Smith & Osborne, 2003). After reading the interviews at least twice without making notes on the data, the researcher read the transcripts and highlighted all information that appeared to be germane to the research questions, with the intention of reducing the volume of data and setting the stage for a more systematic analysis. Each highlighted section was given an initial code to denote a category it fell under and in total, there were 23 initial categories.

After creating initial categories, the researcher examined their titles to continue the process of analysis. By focusing on category titles, the researcher was able to cluster certain categories together to create an initial set of themes. These themes were developed by looking at associations between categories, similar meanings in data associated with each category, and the overall relationship between the data clusters and the research questions. For example, the



researcher created the initial theme of “modifications are necessary and beneficial” by noting the association between such categories as “endorse modifications”, “modifications effective”, and “modifications necessary.” This process enabled the researcher to begin interpreting the meaning of the data while still utilizing the actual text (Smith & Osborne, 2003).

Once this was complete, the initial themes were isolated with their corresponding data, which allowed for more systematic ability to determine final themes, understand the strength of each respective theme, as well as to contrast the data within each initial theme to ensure against overlap or repetition. To identify the final themes, the researcher noted the richness of the data associated with each initial theme, interpreted the meaning and context of each initial theme, and analyzed the relationship between the themes. This process also included reducing or combining initial themes to create a more intuitive and straightforward argument. For example, the initial themes of “questioning value” and “benefits outweigh risk” were eventually combined to create the “questioning without change” sub-theme of the “superficial rationalization” argument. Because interpretation was a component of this analysis, once the final themes were determined, they were sent to the interview subjects for their review and feedback, if applicable.

### **Data Credibility**

After interviews, participants were given the opportunity to read the transcriptions of the interview, to ensure that all aspects of the conversation had been correctly recorded and the participant was satisfied with the nature of the answers. Additionally, a second round of member checks was conducted by sending each participant the list of final themes from the analysis, again for them to review and send feedback if desired. The value of member checks is especially noteworthy because of the emphasis placed on the participant to view both the data and the final themes that were developed from their interview (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally,

considering the subjective nature of qualitative research, ensuring that participants have the opportunity to respond to the raw data (interview transcripts) as well as the interpretation of the researcher (final themes) allows for an increase in project credibility (Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

## RESULTS

Three primary themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) Framing Female Ability; (b) Gaming the System; and (c) Superficial Rationalization. The first theme revolved around the manner in which female ability was perceived as a result of the gender modifications. The second theme highlighted how the gender modifications were perceived to impact gameplay in a negative manner and how competitive advantage was strongly linked to knowledge and playing experience with the modifications. The final theme revealed common perceptions about benefits of the modifications and emphasized administrators' willingness to question the modifications without changing them.

### **Framing Female Ability**

Administrators consistently remarked that the existence of gender modifications impacted perceptions of female ability by reinforcing inequitable messages. They noted that the application of the rules had a tendency to reinforce messages of the inequity in regards to the scoring modifications, creating a culture of “forced” participation where teams were required to “look out” for the females. Additionally, it was acknowledged that participants, especially those without experience in coed flag football, were more likely to perceive the modifications in a negative manner. Lastly, administrators discussed how the modifications impacted the importance of high ability females and integration of females into gameplay is a significant aspect of coed flag football success.

**Reinforcing inequity and forced participation.** Administrators were consistent in reporting that gender modifications created the perception that female ability and success within flag football was not as prominent when compared to male counterparts. This was noted not only within coed flag football but in general when considering coed sport modifications overall.

As Sarah stated, "...having gender specific modifications lends itself to the beliefs of a separation of ability in some way shape or form." In addition to the separation of ability, administrators specifically noted how the modifications in flag football created the sense that female participants were not as skilled in the sport, not as strong athletically, and that females simply need "extra help" in order to succeed. Said Jared, "I think it's saying that you're saying that they're just not as skilled from the get-go, maybe at that particular sport, or that skill. Yeah, I mean big time." Eric was similarly blunt, remarking that, "...you could read that the perception is that females aren't as good at flag football as men." This type of acknowledgment was common when discussing the ability perceptions created by the modifications, although administrators were quick to voice the opinion that they did not share those perceptions on a personal level.

Administrators also pointed out the inherent inequity of the rules when discussing the gender appropriateness of the activity. For example, Josh discussed how coed flag football was appropriate for females "in spite" of the modifications, saying that, "...if anything, it might hurt that gender perception and gender roles in terms of you know, points counting more and that sort of thing, making it look like females are not as capable as males." Amy also remarked that the modifications could be seen as "a little bit sexist..." and could have negative effects on perceptions of gender equality and sports. This was articulated in a broader sense by Michael, who declared: "...In terms of...pure gender equality, I don't necessarily think that it [the modifications] does a lot of good things for, the people that really look hard at it, as far as girls go and society goes." Anne also added:

Good, bad, or otherwise, anytime that you put more value on the performance of one group or one...you know, one sex, you're basically telling them...it's like you have to have the rules to place value on their ability to play. Because if the rules weren't placing value on that, their value isn't as significant as the other

group, say male or female at this point. Value of a females play isn't as significant...I think that's there, I think by having those gender modifications you are putting more value on what the females do because they need that extra help...

Opinions on the apparent overall inequity of the modifications were not completely isolated to flag football, as some administrators occasionally referenced other intramural coed sports where gender modifications produced similar messages about gender ability inequity.

These negative messages were more pronounced to first-time coed flag football participants according to the administrators. Because most first-time participants had little familiarity with coed flag football, Anne suggested: "I don't know that teams really come in with gender modification expectations period." This lack of expectation often caused the modifications to stand out in a negative way, especially in reference to the fairness of the activity. One common refrain, stated by Eric: "...students that aren't used to playing...say to me 'well, how is it fair that a female touchdown is worth more in coed flag football?'"

Administrators discussed how, to new participants, the modifications are "usually quite shocking" which caused "pushback" and, as Darren noted, "...the teams that aren't knowledgeable of flag football, or the people that don't know the game of flag football or have never played it, may look at that as a bias in the sport." Going further, Sarah made this statement:

I think for those freshman that come into play, or not even necessarily the freshmen, but those people who come into play, this being their first year...I think there is a steep learning curve for those teams and I think the initial thought on their side is "how is this fair?"

Administrators had much stronger opinions on the negativity about the scoring modifications in comparison to other aspects of the modifications, such as the open and closed plays. The scoring modifications were seen as more likely to create or reinforce perceptions of ability, as noted by Sarah:

With closed and open plays...I think doesn't necessarily lend itself so much to gender perspectives, in as much as the scoring does. So, saying that women's touchdowns are nine points compared to the six points—that lends itself to the perception that girls scoring is more rare...or tougher to do, you know? Like people could put whatever title on that that they wanted but I think that the scoring aspect of it leads more towards gender perceptions, rather than something like open and closed...

The negativity of these perceptions was apparent to administrators and some theorized that a specific number value for female touchdowns unmistakably framed female ability as inferior. Others noted that, because the score is directly tied to the outcome of the game, the female touchdowns were more likely to receive attention from activity participants than other components of the modifications. There were others that commented that the scoring modifications created the perception that female scoring was a less likely occurrence. For example, Molly noted:

...the amount the scores is worth, for women...has the perception that the women can't score as often or, you know by giving that extra incentive, it makes it seem that they, it's rare that they would score or it's...unlikely so as a result it's going to be worth more points...

When discussing the benefits of the modifications, many administrators used the term “force” to describe the impacts of the rules on female participants—for example, Eric said:

I think the modifications force them to be involved more, because a closed play where you have to involve a female in a legal forward pass to open the play up, I think that it, it does make it...more balanced by forcing teams to involve females in certain plays.

This terminology was generally used in describing positive impacts of the modifications, highlighting participants' views that females “needed help” engaging.

This concept of “looking out” for the females was seen as a key defense of the modifications because it was perceived to enhance the overall inclusiveness of the activity. As Darren stated:

...it forces, if you're talking, and I don't know if that's the right word, but it requires, I mean you obviously have to have both genders on the field then, and both genders equally involved at times in order to continue moving the ball down the field legally...

This ambiguity of “force” was noted by Jared, who, when considering forced female involvement, remarked “I don't think I have a great opinion on whether it's right or not but I think it's successful in making it [equitable participation] happen.” A more blunt perspective was offered by Josh, who stated: “more or less every other play you're going to have to have a female involved whether you like it or not. So I think that alone accomplishes the goal of participation pretty well.” This comment described a juxtaposition of the coed modification effects, in that administrators' believed that female involvement had to be “forced”, which was okay because it increased the overall success of coed flag football.

**High ability females.** The modifications in coed flag football were seen by administrators as a strategy that enhanced value for female participants and placed a premium on high ability females. High ability females were viewed as integral to competitive success, as Amy remarked: “...at a competitive level, really the girls are what is going to make or break a co-rec team...” This argument was made with reference to most coed sports but was even more significant with regards to flag football, as administrators cited how the gender modification rules, especially for scoring, catered to females with higher athletic and/or skill ability. For example, Darren discussed: “I think co-rec sports, you win and lose—the rules, you win and lose by the females you have on your team. If you have a great group of female participants, a lot of those rules are going to give that team such a significant advantage...” Furthermore, in discussion about competitive success in coed flag football, administrators strongly affirmed that the successful coed teams were the ones that fully integrated females into their gameplay. A common anecdote was how they believed that a team with average males and above-average

females would generally experience more competitive success than a team with above-average males and average females. As remarked by Eric:

...the really good coed teams, they—their females are the best in the coed division. I think I would put a team with average males and really athletic females up against a team with really athletic males and average females and I think the team with the better females would come out on top because of the gender modifications...

Although this phenomenon was generally seen as positive, some administrators also noted that the coed flag football modifications potentially skewed the activity and gave too much advantage to those strong females. Noted Lauren, “I think the modifications actually...you know, I think their intention was to, even out and like equal the playing field and I think it, in many cases, has gone the complete opposite where many coed games are female dominated now.” As Eric put it:

I would say, maybe in some regard, it does bias a little bit towards having stronger females, that they can—they’re going to have more of an impact on the game if they are the only ones that, in some ways can participate in a significant amount of the plays...

Although the emphasis on females was almost unanimously seen as positive, the modifications were perceived to create severally uneven values of ability.

### **Gaming the System**

Coed modifications often created a mismatch between the intent of the rules and practice and strategies were often applied in a manner that compromised the integrity of the game. The complexity of the coed modifications led many administrators to view it as a wholly unique sport and the successful teams were more likely to have insider knowledge and deeper understanding of the modification rules based on previous coed flag football experience. This insider knowledge was used to create a strategic approach to gameplay that “took advantage” of the rules. Aspects of this strategic approach included tactics that “technically” fell within the rules



but did not necessarily match the spirit of the gender modification rules and at times created artificial game play.

**Operating “within the rules”.** There was a strong sentiment regarding the concept of teams that take “advantage” of the rules. This was best argued by Anne, who stated that: “they see it as using something that’s structure or rules and working with it to their advantage.” Administrators referenced a common occurrence where a male quarterback would pass to a male receiver and the male receiver would kneel the ball at the opponents one-yard line (instead of running in for a touchdown) in order to run the subsequent play for a female and have an opportunity for nine points instead of six. This anecdote was discussed as an example of veteran teams understanding how to game the system. Anne, for example, stated frankly, “designing how they play the game or how they structure the game to work within that rule is just their way of winning.” A small number of administrators were also complimentary of teams that utilized this strategy, referencing how it was a great advantage to gain the extra points on a touchdown in that manner.

Other administrators were critical of this practice, questioning the impact it had on the integrity of the game and identifying a link between the strategic application of the rules and the negative implications of female ability and gender inequity. Although many admitted that this practice increased female involvement in the scoring, there were doubts, such as those expressed by Darren, about whether, “that’s the type of participation that we were—that I was hoping for in terms of having a rule like that.” This thought was reinforced by Michael, who stated:

...laying the ball down on the one, I don’t necessarily know if that’s how it’s meant to be played, if that’s what people envisioned when they created these rules, you know, running around in circles until you can hand the ball to a girl that’s catching up to you, I don’t know if that’s meant, you know, that’s how they wanted it to be played but I think that’s what, what you’re seeing now.

Others also noted that the nature of the activity was compromised by teams that applied the modifications in this manner. For example, Molly remarked:

...a lot of teams...players run down to the one yard line and put the ball down and make it dead just so that they can have a female score the next play, which kind of takes away from...the overall purpose of the game, which is to score when you have the opportunity to score.

Furthermore, instances of this strategy were viewed as creating a negative competitive environment, especially in the perspective of gender equity and inclusion. Claire said, “you want to encourage competition for the sake of competition, not this strategic ‘oh, only guard the girls when needed, only use the girls when needed.” Although the modifications clearly impacted strategy and gameplay, the application of this strategy had a tendency to occur in what was perceived as a negative manner.

**Knowledge and competitiveness.** Nearly all administrators agreed that coed flag football modifications were decidedly complex to understand. As Amy put it, “...you know it can be kind of confusing because of the rules...” Many discussed how they saw the activity as “unique” with some even characterizing it as a completely different, stand-alone sport. For example, Michael said, “I’ve come to view it [coed] as a completely different sport than men’s and women’s flag football...I view it as single gender flag football and I view it [coed] as, I guess multi-gender flag football.” Examples were cited of participants reporting confusion when first learning rules, even after a detailed explanation, and some administrators reported anecdotes of inexperienced teams having great frustration in their first games as they struggled to play within the confines of the modifications. Sarah noted, “...when you tell people about...coed rules for flag football, they are like ‘what?’ And it is...for new students coming in, that’s a learning curve of ‘yeah, this isn’t your traditional, this isn’t your traditional football, by any means...”

Considering the complex nature of the modifications, many administrators affirmed that the truly competitive teams were highly experienced in coed flag football and understood how to apply the rules to their advantage. Molly remarked:

I think over time, like usually upper classmen teams totally understand the strategies and the concepts associated with it and that's how—that's when they really capitalize and...those are usually the better teams because they understand how you, how to work within the rules of the, in the modifications that are in the rules.

Going further, administrators noted a clear relationship between experienced teams and competitive success, with Darren stating, "...the more competitive teams are probably the more knowledgeable teams."

Strategic application of the modifications was significantly contrasted between highly successful teams and less competitive ones. This juxtaposition magnified the complexities of the modifications, as administrators, such as Lauren, consistently noted that successful teams did not only use the rules to their advantage but also were more likely to fully integrate females into their team, such as by having a female quarterback at all times: "...the really smart teams will have a strictly female quarterback the entire game and never close a play." This full integration, however, was reported to be seen only in a small number of highly experienced teams, often those playing in regional or national tournaments. By contrast, many teams at the campus level were generally not as adept at utilizing the modifications and were perceived as more likely to apply the modifications in a negative manner. Despite the majority of teams exhibiting a lack of complete understanding at the campus level, administrators placed significant emphasis on the success of the limited number of highly competitive teams when considering their rationale for the modifications.

## **Superficial Rationalization**

Administrators' existing gender stereotypes about female ability were prevalent and powerful in creating perceptions that gender modifications were a necessity for successful gameplay. Despite some questioning of the value of gender modifications (especially the scoring), few administrators supported changing the existing rules. Additionally, administrators generally believed that the modifications were beneficial because they increased and enhanced female involvement.

**Impact of gender stereotypes.** Administrators consistently referenced how the coed flag football environment, with males and females participating together, created a greater likelihood for the existence and awareness of ability stereotypes. A common anecdote detailed how football was a “predominantly male sport” and that females usually do not have the opportunity to play in an organized fashion before reaching college; Anne remarked: “there’s not really opportunities for females to play football, so for most females out there, their first opportunity to play football is going to be here at intramurals...” Previously existing stereotypes were impactful, as administrators often referenced worries that males would “dominate” the game without the modifications in place. Josh noted, “I think there’s a lot of stereotype, a lot of judgment, perceptions that females aren’t going to be as good, I personally think that’s sometimes the case.” Claire added that her perspective was that: “...it’s unreasonable for me to expect boys to just naturally want to pass to girls.”

Additionally, administrators were quick to note that males have a higher level of physical ability than females and tied their rationale of the modifications to these existing stereotypes. Perhaps this was best articulated by Michael, who noted: “I think the coed modifications exist because of the common perception that the male is more athletic than the female.” Lauren

elaborated on this statement, discussing how she did not agree with the stereotypes, but admitted that they existed: “I think it comes down to stereotypes, ones that I don’t personally agree with, but in terms of athletic ability, height, speed, any number of factors you could pick when you’re looking at a competitive sporting environment.” Claire noted that the difference in physical ability was not just limited to football, saying: “I think with flag football, with any of the sports honestly, it’s very easy for guys to try to and dominate the game physically, because physically that’s where the biggest disparity happens.” It was also argued that these stereotypes are furthered by the males in the activity—Ryan stated, “some males do have that perception that women aren’t as athletic or can’t contribute as much as the, as another guy on the team...” As Josh put it: “...males who come out and participate would probably rely on other males a little bit more than they would females on their team.”

**Questioning without change.** Administrators indicated some uncertainty about the existence of the modifications, questioning the value of a rule that places such direct emphasis on female involvement. Claire pointed out the difficulty of this balance:

I feel that the purpose, the original intent behind coed intramural sports is awesome. I think that, I think—it gets skewed, at some point. We want to encourage female participation and we also want to encourage equality—everyone’s equal, women and men are on the same playing field, but then all of our coed rules are an adaptation to allow for a female advantage.

Other administrators noted that “it’s not perfect” when considering the modifications and that despite the original intent, there was concern about effectiveness. The concern and uncertainty was heightened in responses relating to the scoring modifications, which is where administrators consistently discussed how the scoring modifications were generally less likely to positively impact female involvement and engagement in the activity.

Despite concerns, most administrators did not indicate a strong desire to make changes to the modifications in their programs. Although all administrators articulated benefits of the modifications, there was also a level of reluctance and ambivalence towards understanding a true rationale for their existence. When discussing interactions with participants who question the modifications, Darren conveyed:

...my response to them all the time is “to increase female participation” but I don’t necessarily believe that answer a lot of the time, um, but that’s the line that was said to me and I continue to feed out...because again, at times it does increase that participation but at times it may not be needed to have some of those rules.

This reticence was partially due to the entrenched nature of the gender modification guidelines developed and supported by NIRSA. Many administrators referenced how NIRSA created the rules via a rules committee and because it was designed for collegiate campus recreation, it made sense to follow the guidelines by the book. Team and staff participation in NIRSA sponsored regional or national events was also identified as a major reason for not diverging from the gender modifications. Additionally, the prevalence and continuity of the NIRSA flag football rulebook was cited by administrators as a reason for not spending much time thinking about changing the modifications. As Darren stated:

I haven’t really thought about this topic to be honest...it’s one that, it’s this defined NIRSA flag football rulebook that we think is right and we should just use and I guess I’ve never and I have questions about certain things in there that, but we use it, I’ve never tried to alter, make significant modifications to the co-rec flag football rules.

Another administrator characterized the NIRSA rules as the “status quo” and noted that changing the rules would be, in some manner, a challenge to that status quo.

**Modifications are necessary and beneficial.** In general, administrators believed that the pros of gender modifications outweighed the cons. The underlying perspective was that removal

of the modifications would jeopardize the coed flag football experience for all participants, especially females. For example, Jared reported, "...I really think if we took away a lot of those modifications...I just don't think we would see the same experience, coming out of it....And I don't think we'd see females having a good time playing in those games, I just don't." Ryan noted that, "...if we didn't have the modifications there I'm not sure what, what the participation would be-look like. I think it would really hurt us." Generally, females' not having a "good time" playing was a common refrain, but administrators were more specific in citing that the game would become male-centric without the modifications. In addition to "continuous male passes", Molly remarked that females would be relegated to a diminished role in the game:

...a lot of females wouldn't get involved they just would stand on the line and be blockers, they most likely wouldn't go down the field because the likelihood of them getting a pass, it really depends, like I guess it depends on the team itself, but, for the most part, I don't think that they'd be involved.

The belief about the necessity of the modifications was expressed by Eric, who stated:

I think if we didn't have, if we didn't modify the rules to encourage female participation that the males might end up dominating the play of the game more, and I think, I think it's necessary to modify the rules in order to have a more balanced participation of males and females in a coed game.

Administrators also indicated that they generally liked the modifications and most endorsed the modifications, citing their effectiveness in promoting participation and involvement of females. They were particularly vocal when referencing the open and closed play rule, which was perceived as being effective in terms of promoting involvement and engagement. This endorsement came from multiple perspectives, such as when administrators noted a personal enjoyment with the rules based on previous playing experience, with Amy stating, "...so I happen to like the co-rec rules a lot and liked playing it, and liked working it..." Molly went further: "...it is a lot of our perception, you know, and maybe also based on being a participant

as well, which a lot of people that are administrators were participants at some point.” Others, such as Sarah, discussed the link between the modifications, inclusiveness, and enjoyment of participants: “...my perception is that it [the modifications] more so affects the participation level and the equality, inclusiveness, those types of things.” As Lauren put it: “...I’ve actually really enjoyed having the modifications because I know the teams receive it well and...I love seeing that the females are actually involved in the game, as opposed to just on the field because they need to be there.” Overall, every administrator indicated some benefit that participants derived from the modifications and 11 of 12 interviewees expressed a complete endorsement of the modifications.

Another perspective that administrators used to analyze the modifications came from the viewpoint of a competitively successful team. The connection between team success and positive perception was summarized Darren, who stated, “...I’ve never had one of those better teams that go and play in a regional tournament question why the rules are the way they are...but on campus I have.” Sarah related the concept of successful teams with a more positive and inclusive environment:

...there’s those that have played for, for now seasons and multiple years and they understand the strategic part of it, and they understand the rules, and they understand what needs to happen in certain situations, and I think from that perspective, that becomes a situation where those teams really do enjoy it, and it becomes that inclusive environment where teams are able to play and have fun and really enjoy the sport.

The superficial method of analysis was reinforced by comments from administrators who suggested that they had not thought about the coed gender modifications in great detail prior to the interview. For example, Lauren admitted:

I’ll be honest, I’ve never considered the co-rec modifications for flag football specifically, there are other such flag football type rules we may review related to mercy rule or to timing or other such things, for flag football we’ve always gone



with NIRSA co-rec modifications and I've never once even thought about it, whether that's on me or not, it just never crossed my mind.

Administrators cited some specific sources as reasons for endorsing the modifications. For example, administrators such as Amy approved of the modifications because they had not heard a high volume of complaints from participants: "I've had very few complaints about the gender modifications for co-rec flag football..." High levels of participation in coed flag football were also cited as evidence that the modifications were positively received by participants. This association, however, may be misleading, as administrators affirmed that most participants have no initial expectation for specific gender modifications in coed flag football; Molly went further, saying:

...they don't even know these modifications exist, you know the students aren't even aware that other schools have these modifications besides in the flag football tournament that we brought on, after I started and we used coed modifications and if we hadn't, they wouldn't have even known any differently, they would have just played, women still would have come and played, we have so many women on campus and they're all so active, so I'm sure they would have come out regardless of the actual rules of play.

The endorsement was also discussed in a reactionary sense, as administrators noted they would be more likely to consider changing the modifications if external rationales presented themselves. Josh's take was: "with our program specifically, we have not had nearly enough of that negative feedback from participants to really make a stop on the spot and question those policies." Ryan echoed with a similar statement: "I like our rules, I haven't really seen too much of an impact where we would move away from it all." The perception of administrators could be best described in terms of this statement from Sarah:

I think that with the success in participation, obviously if we're at good participation, we'd always love to see it be at even better participation, but I think that overall for the experience that I've had I can't off the top of my head think of anything specifically that would, that changing rules or things like that would necessarily benefit our program more so than what it's functioning at currently.

Anne was the rare administrator to cite that their program would be making changes to the modifications, discussing how she was planning to remove the scoring difference in future seasons, saying: "...I don't necessarily think that the point value should be there if the point of having differences [between males and females] is involvement in play..." This was the only example in the data where an administrator planned to take any direct action with the coed gender modifications as a result of negative student feedback. When prompted to discuss how they might alter the modifications, some administrators, such as Lauren, indicated that if they were to seriously consider making a change, the scoring modifications would be likely candidate:

If I were to legitimately sit down and really want to mix things up...the first thing I would probably do is take away the female nine point touchdown. I think I would leave the open and closed because it, for the most part, it kind of creates like a 50-50 male and female involvement experience the whole way down the field, for the most part.

Despite this willingness to question, administrators as a whole indicated that they believed the modifications were necessary and beneficial to the activity.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of campus recreation administrators who actively shaped coed flag football environments. Specifically, this study examined how administrators viewed gender modifications and highlighted the extent to which they perceived the modifications impacted coed flag football experiences. There is limited evidence about the level of awareness administrators have about the gendered messages associated with modifications. Using interviews and analysis, this study shed light on how the modifications impacted perceptions of female ability as well as how administrators analyzed the existence of the modifications.

### **Coed Flag Football is a Highly Unique Activity**

Sport environments such as football include certain pre-conceived notions about gender and masculinity when defining successful participation (Belcher et al., 2003). In this study, administrators frequently referred to football as a traditionally male sport which limited females' participation opportunities as youth. Furthermore, both Wachs (2002) and Henry and Comeaux (1999) note the paradox created by coed sports, in the sense that they create a setting that must assimilate female participants into a fairly traditional masculine sporting environment.

Administrators in this study reported the ambiguity of male and female assimilation, referencing how modifications are meant to create equality but often facilitate inequality.

The "paradox" that Wachs (2002) refers to was also apparent in the questioning nature of the participants in this study. Administrators conveyed a degree of uncertainty when discussing the original intent of the modifications, as well as their overall merits and effectiveness. Some administrators also demonstrated doubt in their ability to even explain the true rationale for all components of the modifications, illustrating the gendered complexity of the activity.

This complexity also may relate to all coed sports and not just flag football. For example, participants in this study referenced different philosophies for coed sports at their institutions, which suggests that external impacts, such as campus culture, participant feedback, or their own personal beliefs can significantly influence the overall participant experience in a coed sport. Kuh (1995) argues that the higher education environment for students is made up of experiences that take place both in-class and out-of-class. It follows that one aspect of these experiences would be participating in intramural sports through the campus recreation department. Kuh (1996) also notes that administrators, to include both faculty and staff, have a role in impacting that student experience. Campus recreation administrators can make a noteworthy impact on the experience through a variety of means, including determining what activities to offer, the implementation of rules (or modifications) that occur in those activities, and training the employees that facilitate those activities. Findings of this research underscore how campus recreation administrators are crucial facilitators in the delivery of out-of-class settings.

In addition to the coed sport setting, the results of this study indicate that the gender modifications significantly impact the uniqueness of the activity—participants discussed how the open and closed play would make teams incorporate different strategies into their gameplay and that inexperienced teams often had difficulty achieving competitive success, illuminating the distinctiveness of coed flag football. This study also saw administrators consistently note how ability stereotypes were common in the coed flag football environment, in part because it was a “predominantly male sport” as well as because of the physical disparity between males and females, which further illustrates the argument noted by Belcher et al. (2003).

## **Gendered Messages Regarding Ability and Equity**

When considering sport and physical activity participation, this study complements what Culp (1998) found regarding female barriers and comfort with participation due to stereotypes of gender roles. Culp's research examined constraints to adolescent girls' participation in outdoor programming and found that gender role stereotypes, among other factors, were a significant barrier towards a willingness to participate. Administrators in this study frequently discussed how the existence of coed modifications could indicate that females are not as able to participate as men and how the modifications create a sense of belief about the separation of ability. This argument was reinforced by administrators noting the relative appropriateness of coed flag football even in spite of the modifications.

According to Chalabaev et al. (2009), performance in sport for females can be obstructed by the gender-typing of the activity, while Clifton and Gill (1994) note that gender appropriateness can be broken down specifically to different actions within an activity. In this study, it was apparent that the modifications helped foment a gendered expectation for the activity. For example, the scoring modifications place a higher level of attention on female integration, which may cause females to feel a higher level of pressure for performance because scoring is directly connected to the outcome of the game. This gendered expectation may have an impact on participation rates, especially for females, as researchers have noted that perceptions of sport activities based on gender can have a detrimental effect on female confidence (Belcher et al., 2003; Lirgg, George, Chase, & Ferguson, 1996).

The modification concept of the open and closed play may also create a negative emphasis on female involvement because it "forced" the female to be involved, although most administrators viewed forcing females to be involved as a positive effect of the modifications.

Furthermore, the existence of the modifications may skew the relative value of each participant because they place such a premium on female involvement and high ability female athletes. This skewing of ability, although deemed beneficial for females, may not have an overall net positive effect on participants, especially female participants. For example, Anne remarked on her own personal experience playing: "...I use the example: we had a really good female quarterback. Well, that didn't really involve our other females that much more in the game..."

Although administrators conveyed that the modifications have an effect on messages of inequity, they also indicated that previously existing stereotypes were a large reason for their belief in the necessity of the modifications overall, which is similar to Lorber's (1994) argument on the assumptions behind the creation (and separation) of competition rules. Gender-typing the activity appeared to be a common administrator approach when considering the flag football modifications. This was evidenced by how some administrators detailed a belief that other coed sports do not need gender modifications. Despite that belief, most administrators indicated a complete endorsement of flag football modifications, which suggests that previously existing stereotypes are highly impactful and that administrators may be analyzing the modifications from a superficial perspective.

### **Modifications and Game Integrity**

An anecdote in this study was that flag football participants "took advantage" of the rules to improve their competitive standing. This was exemplified when administrators described a common occurrence in coed flag football where a male flag football player running for a breakaway touchdown would kneel the ball at the one yard line instead of running into the end zone for a touchdown, thus setting up an opportunity to try for a nine-point touchdown on the

next play. Administrators felt his strategy, although technically within the rules, suggested the modifications created an artificial playing context outside the spirit of the game.

Similarly, participants questioned if the strategy created by the modifications created a competitive environment that undermined gender equity and inclusion. By creating incentives for female participation, the modifications implicitly and explicitly highlighted the idea that the females “needed help” to achieve success. This relates to what Wolkomir (2012) suggests in her analysis of poker strategy and gender roles: even with a set of rules that may “level the playing field”, success in the activity is still characterized from a masculine perspective, or “the validation of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 423).

A limitation of this study is the lack of flag football player-participant feedback. Although many administrators played coed flag football and referenced their experiences when answering, this study has a narrow view about the comprehensive effects of the coed flag football modifications. Future studies would benefit from incorporating direct participant feedback into the analysis. Furthermore, this feedback should incorporate both male and female players and should specifically include a spectrum of competitive and recreational players. Another limitation to this study was the existence of NIRSA as the publisher of the rules modifications. Because the NIRSA rules committee establishes the gender modifications, they are used in regional and national tournaments. The result is that many administrators do not typically analyze or change the coed flag football modifications because higher level tournaments apply the rules. Future researchers may want to examine other coed sport offerings, such as basketball or soccer, to gain a deeper level of understanding about the role of gender modifications and their effects on ability perceptions and stereotypes. Because there is not a

defined national standard for coed modifications in basketball and soccer, the willingness to implement gender modifications may be different.

Findings suggest that administrators may need to engage in closer scrutiny about the nature and effects of coed flag football gender modifications. It may be beneficial to systematically seek out participant feedback in order to understand the needs and opinions of participants, especially females. As seen in this study, one administrator, after hearing negative feedback, elected to make changes to the scoring modification component of the rules.

Administrators should specifically focus on the existence of the scoring changes in the rules and review whether those align with overall participation and involvement goals. Administrators may also look to offer greater resources for new participants to learn the rules, as increasing the levels of knowledge and understanding for all participants could serve to lower the existence of negative perceptions and reactions to the existence of the modifications. Finally, considering the admittedly negative side effects of gender modifications, especially with regards to framing female ability, coed intramural flag football leagues may benefit from the elimination of coed modifications entirely.



## CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine the existence of coed gender modifications in intramural flag football through the perspective of the intramural administrators who facilitate those coed leagues. The emphasis of the analysis was to determine how intramural administrators believe the modifications affect the activity as well as their awareness about the existence of gendered messages that occur as a result of these gender modifications. Administrators clearly indicated that the existence of modifications influenced perceptions on the ability of female participants. They also noted that the modifications created a method of strategy where teams would superficially apply the modifications at the expense of the integrity of the game. Finally, administrators noted a deep belief in the existence of prior gender stereotypes, such that they made the modifications seem necessary. Although most administrators endorsed the modifications, many questioned them but showed a resistance to make a change.

An implication from this study is that gender modifications in coed sports have the potential to create negative emphasis on female ability. Administrators and practitioners should carefully consider all ramifications when attempting to create equitable environments for males and females to compete together in the same sport. Furthermore, structured gender-typing, such as rule modifications, may not be necessary at all depending on the activity, especially considering the negative effects that can occur as a result of pre-existing biases and gendered messages in an activity environment. Future studies would benefit from direct participant feedback, especially from participants who had participated in several different coed sports and had experience with and without modifications. Obtaining perspectives of females who refuse to play because of the gender modification rules is also warranted.

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## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. To get started, please tell me about your recent experiences around coed flag football.
2. How do you feel about coed intramural sports?
  - a. If they don't mention coed flag football, prompt them for their general feelings on coed flag football.
3. Can you give me an overview of the coed flag modifications that you use in your program?
4. What are your thoughts on coed sport gender modifications, in general?
5. Why are there coed gender modifications in flag football?

**PROMPT: Note down some overall themes from their answer to reference back**

6. Based on your experience, how successful are these modifications?

**PROMPT: Reference back to their answers from previous question.**

**Are they a success or not? Listen close to see exactly how they answer and NOTE.**

7. How do you think coed flag football would function if the modifications were not in place? **Follow-up:** Why?
8. Do you think those modifications create any perceptions about gender ability?
  - a. If yes, can you elaborate on what those perceptions might be?
  - b. If no, can you explain why not?
9. Prior to registering for a team, what type of expectations do you think coed participants have for gender modifications in coed flag football?
10. Would you characterize coed flag football as a gender appropriate activity for females?  
**Note: Clarify the term "gender appropriate" if necessary**
  - a. If yes, can you describe how the modifications impact the "gender appropriateness" of the activity?
  - b. If no, can you talk about what would make the activity more appropriate for females?
11. Overall, what makes a coed sport gender appropriate for both males and females?
12. Do you feel that it is your role as an administrator to facilitate a gender equitable environment in coed flag football? Why or why not?

13. The two most significant modifications are the increase in scoring for females and the closed/open play rule; can you talk about how each one of those modifications might impact gender perceptions?
14. Some people think these modifications create a negative stereotype about female ability but others argue that they create an equitable playing experience—what do you think?
15. Do you and/or your staff review and evaluate the coed sport modifications before each season of flag football?
  - a. If so, can you talk to me about how that evaluation goes and how you facilitate the discussion?
  - b. If not, why not?
16. What is your opinion about using coed sport modifications in other intramural sports?
17. Besides the coed modifications, is there anything you would do to make coed flag football more gender appropriate for females at your institution? If yes, what?
18. That is the end of my questions—do you have any thoughts on this subject that we haven't yet addressed?
  - a. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

**APPENDIX B IRB CERTIFICATION**

**Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight**



Unless clearly stated to the contrary, all applications for exemption from institutional review board (IRB) oversight of LSU research projects involving human subjects or animals conducted on the LSU campus, faculty or students, either physical or virtual, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. IRB criteria for the determination of projects may be exempted, and a consent form is not required.

**Application:** Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office by e-mail to the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of the committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/Compliance/Policies/Procedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard628409628/Item24237.html>

**A. Complete Application Includes All of the Following:**

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B-F (if applicable)
- (B) A chief protocol officer (if applicable) to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Part 1(A2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used
  - \* If this project is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all related materials.
  - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part D for more information.)
  - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all persons involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: <http://psych.sterling.edu/~mccoy/psych/phy>
  - (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement (<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrt/irb/628409628/Item674.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Zach Wood Title: Student  
 Dept: MAIA Phone: 225-580-4671 E-mail: z.wood@lsu.edu

2) Co-Investigator(s): (If applicable, include department, rank, phone number and e-mail for each. \* If applicable, please identify and indicate supervising professor in this space.)  
Dr. Alex Gera, K. 1001039, ggera@lsu.edu



3) Project Title: Can Resistant (Flag-Fr) (B) Gender Mediators A Quality Assessment

Study Exempted By:  
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
 Institutional Review Board  
 Louisiana State University  
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
 225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
 Exemption Expires: 4/23/2016

4) Proposal? (yes or no)  No If Yes, LSU Proposal Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Also, IF YES, either  
 This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant  
 OR  
 Other IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject population: Psychology Students: LSU Students, International Administrators from U.S. Universities  
 \*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used (check them off; this cannot be IRB#000).  
 pregnant women, the aged, other. Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature: Zach Wood Date: 4-7-2015 (Date of signature)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project design is later the subject of a lawsuit for which I am held liable without approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted, I shall understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. I will leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Department Office.



## **VITA**

Zacharias Wood was born and raised in Northern California and attended high school at Nevada Union High School in Grass Valley, California. Wood attended college at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science in August, 2009. After completing his degree, Wood accepted a Graduate Assistant position with the Department of Recreational Sports at Oregon State University. In summer of 2011, he accepted a Coordinator position with the Department of University Recreation at Louisiana State University. In fall of 2012, he began graduate study at Louisiana State University, eventually pursuing a thesis that examined the role of coed gender modifications in intramural flag football.