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Effective Mentoring Relationships with Women in Sport: Results of a Meta-Ethnography

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Abstract

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions within sport. One of the most critical aspects of advancing women in leadership positions within sport is the mentoring relationship. As the number of women entering sport increases, a growing number of professionals recognize the inherent benefits and challenges between the mentor and the protégé. This study was designed to identify themes based on key elements of an effective mentoring relationship helping women to advance within leadership positions in sport. A qualitative methodology, meta-ethnography, allowed the researcher to synthesize 15 qualitative studies about mentoring women within sport. These 15 studies were selected by using both content and methodological screening. Each study was read, coded, and analyzed for themes based on the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship. The findings of the study revealed 10 themes and seven implications for female protégés, potential mentors, and organizations to consider when mentoring women within sport.

Key Words: Women, sport, mentor, relationship, leadership

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Introduction

Of the United States work population, 70 million women were employed in 2006. In terms of leadership positions, females comprised of 38% of the management positions (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 2008). Women have come a long way but are still underrepresented in leadership positions within male-dominated occupations. The male-dominated occupation of particular interest to the researcher is the sport industry. The sport industry consists of many segments which include intercollegiate athletics, interscholastic athletics, academics (scholastic physical education and academia), recreational sport (campus recreation, health and fitness industry, facility and event management, leisure service management), business (sport related business, professional sport, sport communications), and diverse populations (international sport, sport for people with disabilities, African American women) (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007). The degree of underrepresentation of women within leadership positions within the sport industry has been well-documented in intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008), interscholastic athletics (Whisenant 2003; 2004), academics (Grappendorf, Smucker, & Pent, 2006), recreational sports (Bower & Hums, 2003), business (Lough, 2007), and diverse populations (Lapchick, 2008).

Often the road to leadership positions in the sport industry is difficult because of barriers. Some of these barriers include the need for women to prove themselves, lack of support, balancing work and family, old boys network, lack of training and career development (Lough, 2001; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). One of the most critical aspects of advancing women in leadership positions within sport is the mentoring relationship. As the number of women entering sport increases, a growing number of professionals recognize the inherent benefits and challenges between the mentor and the protégé. While the mentoring relationship is important in career development for both genders, it is particularly critical for women, especially those in male dominated professions such as the sport industry. Mentors may buffer the female manager from overt and covert discrimination, and help their female protégé circumvent structural, social, and cultural barriers to advancement in the organization (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Grappendorf, Burton, & Lilienthal, 2007; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Thus, a review of the mentoring literature is warranted.

There are an overwhelming amount of mentoring definitions that can be problematic in itself because of ungrounded theory and inconsistent definitions. Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) defined mentoring from multiple studies of the mentoring relationship, "a process in which a more experienced person serves as a role model, provides guidance and support to a developing novice, and sponsors that novice in his/her career progress" (p. 25). In addition, Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) developed a mentoring model identifying key elements of an effective mentoring relationship including: (a) mentor and protégé characteristics, (b) career functions, (c) psychosocial functions, and (d) outcomes of the mentoring relationship. For instance, the first key element of the model states "the mentor and protégé characteristics lead to mentor-protégé compatibility, which subsequently leads to a mentoring relationship (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 26). For example, Bower (2004) identified characteristics which positively influenced a mentor's and protégé's decision to develop a mentoring relationship with women in campus

recreation. The study reported the mentor and protégé were attracted to individuals they perceived as being more like themselves.

The second and third key elements of the model supports aspects of the mentoring functions developed by Kram (1983) to enhance an individual's growth and advancement. Kram's (1985) mentor-role theory established the ability of mentors to provide two broad categories of mentor functions. First, the career-related functions included sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Kram, 1985) and are often key elements of a successful mentoring relationship (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). The sponsorship function allows the mentor to help build the reputation of the woman by highlighting her potential. Exposure and visibility allows the mentor to help the woman build relationships for greater advancement opportunities. The mentor also provides knowledge, as well as productive feedback on appropriate skills needed to advance within segments of the sport industry. The mentor also protects the woman from taking on too many responsibilities. Finally, the mentor assigned challenging assignments to the woman in preparing her for greater responsibilities. For example, Bower (2008) examined advancement techniques used in preparing a female protégé for leadership position within the health and fitness industry. Results supported the need for career functions in providing the female protégé with "knowledge and skills, as well as productive feedback on an appropriate education, demonstrating research applications, a willingness to share information, developing leadership, organization, training, and business skills" (p. 44).

The psychosocial functions included role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1985), and are also key elements of a successful mentoring relationship (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). The mentor may help the woman to build an identity by observing the behaviors, attitudes, and values of the mentor. During acceptance and confirmation, the mentor helps the woman in building confidence by creating a mutual trust, confirming individual abilities, and lending encouragement and support. The mentor counsels the woman to investigate and solve personal conflicts that may detract them from an effective performance. Finally, a social interaction (friendship) between the mentor and protégé may allow the woman to share personal experiences and escape the pressures of work. For example, Young (1990) identified and analyzed mentoring and networking among selected male and female administrators employed by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions. The results of study illustrated "The mentor was viewed by the administrators as a role model. The mentor was generally regarded with respect, appreciation, loyalty, admiration, and friendship (p. 74).

The fourth key element is to identify mentoring outcomes of the mentoring relationship. The majority of research concerning mentoring outcomes focused on the benefits and barriers of the mentoring relationship (Bower, 2004; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). The research has clearly established a direct link between mentoring and the career benefits of increased salary, promotions, and job satisfaction with women within the sport industry (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Grappendorf, Burton, & Lilienthal, 2007). It has also been well documented that women face different barriers than men when it comes to initiating a mentoring relationship. Women seeking employment in predominately male-dominated professions face many barriers which

decrease the chances of obtaining leadership positions (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). Weaver and Chelladurai (2002) identified several barriers to mentoring including a shortage of mentors, apprehension in the initiation of the mentoring relationship, factors influencing the willingness to mentor, support of the mentoring relationship, and misperception of the mentoring relationship. Bower, Hums, and Keedy (2006) identified barriers to mentoring including the “old boys network,” lack of trained females, and discrimination.

Although research has examined the mentoring relationship among the mentor and female protégé within sport, (Bower, 2007a; Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Grappendorf, Burton, & Lilienthal, 2007), no study has attempted to develop a relationship between these studies or seek patterns between them. Thus, this study identified themes based on the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship with women in sport. The identification of these themes may provide insight on advancing women within leadership positions within sport.

Methodology

Demographics

The meta-ethnography identified 15 qualitative studies about mentoring women within the sport industry. Of the 15 studies demographics were analyzed as frequency data and included the following about mentors that were interviewed: (a) total number, (b) number of females to males, (c) average age and range, (d) average years and range of working in the sport industry, and (e) formal or informal mentoring relationships. The total number of mentors interviewed from within 13 of the studies was 133. The remaining two studies gathered mentors responses from open-ended questions from within a survey (n=480). Therefore, there was a total of N=613 participants interviewed from within 15 of the studies. These mentors came from several segments of the sport industry including intercollegiate athletics, interscholastic athletics, academia, recreational sport, and sport-related business. The majority of the mentors interviewed were female (n=593) in comparison to the males (n=20). On average the mentors were 48 years of age with a range of 36-65, worked within a particular sport segment for an average of 32 years with a range of 25-46. Of the mentors interviewed there were a total of 598 who participated in informal mentoring relationships as opposed to 15 who participated in formal mentoring programs.

Research Design

For this study, a meta-ethnography, counterpart to a meta-analysis, was the genre used to identify themes, patterns and connections representing and defining similarities and differences in the translation of interpretive research studies (either ethnographic, interactive, qualitative, naturalistic, hermeneutic, or phenomenological) into one another (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a seven phase approach to translate studies into one another which constituted the meta-ethnographic synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988). First, *identified the area of interest*. For this meta-ethnography the area of interest was identifying themes based on the key elements of a successful mentoring relationship which help women advance within leadership positions in sport. Second, *determined the topic* based on relevance. I identified key elements of a successful mentoring relationship with women in sport as the topic of relevance. Third, *collected and read* literature on mentoring women in sport (intercollegiate athletics, interscholastic athletics, academic, recreational sport, and sport-related business). Studies of the mentoring relationship of women in sport between the years 1990 and 2008 were collected and analyzed. After identifying the title, abstract, or reference, the refereed published articles were retrieved and reviewed for relevance. Through this process a total of 47 refereed articles (qualitative and quantitative) were collected that focused on mentoring women within sport.

Fourth, *determined how the studies were related*. Selected studies based on a content and methodological screening process determined relevancy that supported the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship which help women advance within leadership positions in sport. The content screen (Merriam, 1998) was used as a guide to select studies that (a) were focused on mentoring women in sport (intercollegiate athletics, interscholastic athletics, campus recreation, leisure service management, health and fitness, sport and physical activity academia), (b) provided enough information describing the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship with women in sport, and (c) were capable of identifying specific themes associated with understanding the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship with women in sport. A total of 37 articles were remaining following the content screening. The remaining 37 studies were evaluated using a methodological screening based on qualitative principles.

The methodological criteria consisted of evaluating the studies by answering the following questions: (a) Are there explicit research questions focused on the key elements of mentoring? (b) Are the data collection procedures clearly outlined? (c) Is there adequate presentation of findings to help determine themes for the key elements within the study? and (d) are the studies qualitative? Fifteen studies were selected for the final sample. Finally, a *peer debriefer* was asked to examine the select sample of studies to determine if all the studies met the content and methodological screening criteria. The *peer debriefer* was a researcher engrained in the literature specific to mentoring women within sport. The “peer debriefer” endorsed all 15 studies for the final analysis.

Fifth, the *studies were translated into each other* seeking similarities, differences, and unusual information. I read, coded, and analyzed each study using Ethnograph 5.0 software. The Ethnograph 5.0 software was used as a means of managing the text data (store, code, memo, link, search, link, retrieve, display, graphics). The constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used in coding the results of each interpretation of the mentoring analysis. The constant comparative analysis consisted of placing each research study interpretation into separate Ethnographic files. These Ethnographic files were compared to one another to find similarities and differences in the information presented. Sixth, *analyzed and synthesized the*

commonalities of the themes via Ethnograph 5.0 software. Finally, expressed the synthesis by *writing the results* of the analysis.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness is the quality of research that convinces others to pay attention to the researcher's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness of the study was established by using several methods focused on the credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated credibility involves whether or not research is believable and is worth the attention of other researchers. The primary technique used to ensure the credibility of the data was triangulation because of the multi-study approach including "multiple sources of data, multiple points in time" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 69), and through the use of a *peer debriefer*. The *peer debriefer* provided an additional level of confidence in the results. The second technique used to establish credibility was the use of the constant comparative analysis. This technique allowed me to know when the subject areas had been thoroughly analyzed.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated transferability is the ability of other researchers to understand and transfer the findings to another group of individuals. Transferability was established through triangulation of the data which helped to establish the thick description. The thick description is the foundation of analysis which makes interpretation possible. Thick description enables readers to transfer information to other settings and determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The thick description provided meaning to the participant quotes within each study in developing themes for each key element. The themes allowed the researcher to consider whether or not the findings could be generalized to a similar population.

Dependability

Dependability was established through peer debriefing and specially designed software. The peer debriefing of the transcripts was completed by an expert in the field of mentoring. Ethnograph 5.0, specially designed software, eased the management of the large volume of text-based data associated with a meta-ethnographic study.

Confirmability

Confirmability depends on the ability of the researcher to consider subjectivity within the context of the trustworthiness of the findings. I made every attempt to limit the bias and

premature conclusions through the use of the constant comparative analysis, peer debriefing, and rereading the data.

Results and Discussion

This study was designed to identify themes based on the key element of an effective mentoring relationship which help women to advance within leadership positions in the sport industry. I identified 10 themes based on the key elements of the mentoring model framework (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999) including mentoring and protégé characteristics, career functions, psychosocial functions, and outcomes of the mentoring relationship.

Element # 1 - Mentoring and Protégé Characteristics

An important aspect to understanding the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship is to have an understanding of what attracts mentors and protégés to each other. The mentor and protégé characteristics identified as most important for this meta-ethnography are discussed below.

Theme 1: Mentor Characteristics

The meta-ethnography identified role modeling, nurturing, displaying a personality, and being competent as mentoring characteristics important to develop an effective mentoring relationship. The mentors described throughout the analysis portrayed the mentor as a *role model* because they led by example, provided leadership to the organization, and served in any way possible within their particular sport segment. A mentor referring to coaches within intercollegiate athletics (coach) explained:

It is important [representation of women] so that there will be available role models and mentors thereby increasing visibility of women in the positions and making the dream of those individuals aspiring to become coaches and administrators a reality (Abney, 1991a, p. 14).

The mentors also displayed *nurturing characteristics* by providing care, support, and a positive outlook, taking both a personal and professional interest, and being sensitive to the needs of the protégé. A mentor working within intercollegiate athletics (athletic director) explained, “He was very supportive of developing women’s programs and creating change within the university” (Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000, p. 9).

The mentors’ display of *personality characteristics* included being sociable, having integrity, listening skills, and friendly. For example a mentor within sport and physical activity academia explained, “The mentor has to listen to the needs, questions, uncertainties, and fears the protégé has and the protégé needs to listen to the mentor” (Bower, 2007b, p. 18). Another example of a mentor within sport and physical activity academia included, “Be firm, fair, and friendly in addition to being consistent. Be honest with them [protégés] and direct with them [protégé], let them [protégé] also know the expectations (Miller & Noland, 2003, p. 87). A

mentor working within a sport organization described competency indicators as the following, “The mentor has to be out-going, to have excellent people skills, to possess inner confidence and intelligence” (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 47).

Finally, *competency indicators* included having experience, skills, and knowledge to mentor a protégé within sport. A mentor within the health and fitness industry explained, “[The mentor needs to be] knowledgeable about the every aspect of the field - business, health, people, skills, teamwork, education etc. (Bower, 2008, p. 46). A mentor within a sport organization commented on the importance of competency, “A good academic background or the solid education they had received, regardless of the discipline, which was crucial to their credibility and perceived competence” (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 50).

Theme 2: Protégé Characteristics

Mentors identified competency indicators and personality attributes as protégé characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship. The competency indicators included women who are *high performers* and who have the *knowledge* to excel in the field. For example, a mentor within sport and physical activity academia explained, “The young faculty should have knowledge of the field. . . she should also be critical of her work and strive to be a high performer” (Bower, 2008, p. 42). Another example within sport and physical activity academia, “Be committed to teaching, “know your stuff,” “be organized. . . being a good teacher requires a high degree of skill”(Miller & Noland, 2003, p. 88).

The personality attributes most often mentioned throughout the studies included the *willingness to be mentored*, the ability to be *people oriented*, and *integrity*. A mentor described her experience of wanting to be mentored when she was a protégé aspiring to be a coach within interscholastic athletics, “I just wanted the experience working with an experienced head coach. . . I wanted to listen to what she had to say, to understand [sport] better (Dodds, 2005, p. 361). Mentors also explained how being “people oriented” was an important attribute to a successful mentoring relationship. A mentor within campus recreation explained:

I think that being people oriented is an important attribute to be successful, period. . . you can have such a technical proficiency, but if that’s what you bring to the table apart from an interest in people and some people skills – success is extremely difficult. (Bower, 2004, p. 166).

Finally, the mentors described how important it was for the protégé to have integrity along with other personal attributes within a sport organization, “[The mentor] should possess strong motivation, to be thick skinned, to have personal integrity, to be enthusiastic and persevering, to be independent, self assured and to be a risk taker (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 51).

Element #2 - Career Functions

Researchers suggest advancement to powerful positions in organizations may be partially based upon the application of career functions in developing effective mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985). I identified career functions of exposure and visibility, coaching, and challenging assignments as important in the development of an effective mentoring relationship.

Theme 3: Exposure and visibility

The female protégés were introduced to the organization within several of the studies analyzed. Exposure and visibility provided the protégé with an opportunity to make connections and learn about the organization and its cultures within leadership positions as illustrated in the work by Dreher and Dougherty (1997). Mentors stressed the importance of providing the female protégés with opportunities to meet other people and highlight their skills in many different environments. A mentor within interscholastic athletics described exposure and visibility as a way to introduce the protégé to several individuals with different expertise within interscholastic athletics:

It is more of a network of people that have . . . contributed different things some people have been more the educators, the teachers, some have been more the friends, supporters; some have been more the political people in my life who knew what to do and how to do it (Dodds, 2005, p.. 359).

Another top-level administrator within a Division I intercollegiate athletic setting supported exposure and visibility, “The mentor introduced me to influential people with the idea that in doing so she had a stamp of approval and was no longer necessary for the woman to feel like she had “to continually prove herself” over and over again” (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 52).

Theme 4: Coaching

Coaching was extremely important to the success of women wanting to advance within leadership positions in sport. The results supported the research that coaching can lead to the enhancement of task-related aspects of the job women need to be aware of to facilitate the objective career success. When “coaching” provided the woman with success, the protégé enhanced her performance abilities, thus leading to career related outcomes (Allen, Poteet, Eby, & Lentz, 2004). For example, one study illustrated how the mentor provided coaching by helping the female protégé to learn valuable skills about research within sport and physical activity academia. The mentor stressed the importance of a new faculty member being a part of a research team, “Don’t try to start your career by yourself. . . get actively involved and learn by doing...I don’t believe that an individual can do substantive research alone anymore” (Miller & Noland, 2003, p. 86). Another good example is of a mentor within a sport organization:

A mentor is like a sounding board, they can give advice but the protégé is free to pick and choose what they do. The context does not have specific performance objectives. A coach is trying to direct a person to some end result, the person may choose how to get there,

but the coach is strategically assessing and monitoring the progress and giving advice for effectiveness and efficiency (Starcevich, 1999, p. 1).

Theme 5: Challenging assignments

The challenging tasks mentioned throughout the meta-ethnography were specifically targeted as useful for women wanting to advance within the sport industry. Challenging tasks revolve around making sure the female protégé had the opportunity to experience difficult tasks within specific segments of the sport industry. These results support Kram's (1983) work on assigning challenging assignments which have a direct impact on career advancement, and are critical in preparing young protégés to perform well on difficult tasks as they move forward. For example, a mentor within a sport organization explained the "hands on experience" she received from her mentor when she was a protégé:

I was given a variety work experiences in the coaching positions and administrative positions. . I was given responsibility for a specific area which required me to manage, solve, negotiate, or be as creative as possible dealing with a particular situation which had no apparent precedent to which I could refer (Strawbridge, 2000, p. 50).

Element #3 - Psychosocial Functions

The psychosocial functions are an important element to identify in developing an effective mentoring relationship. The psychosocial functions help address interpersonal aspects of the mentoring relationship and enhance the protégés sense of competence, self-efficacy, and professional and personal development. In addition, the psychosocial functions are dependent upon the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the emotional bond that underlie the relationship (Kram, 1983). I identified psychosocial functions of role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship in the development of an effective mentoring relationship.

Theme 6: Role modeling

The mentors within these studies were considered to be role models. Research on mentoring states that, "Women mentors are more likely to effectively conduct the psychosocial functions of mentoring in which relational connection and role modeling are essential" (Gilbert and Rossman, 1992, p. 237). The psychosocial function of role modeling was evident as a mentor from within leisure service management mentioned:

There is one woman I know who has really accomplished a lot in the field and is very well respected. When I see the kinds of things that she can do, it makes me realize that I can overcome the barriers if I really set my mind to it (Frisby & Brown, 1991, p. 303).

Another mentor explained the great impact mentoring had on their performance within intercollegiate athletics, "I saw how hard the coaches worked, how they were constantly upgrading their education. It really gave me a good role model (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998, p. 273).

Theme 7: Acceptance and confirmation

Acceptance and confirmation were highly related to the protégés satisfaction with the mentor. There was a deeper, more intense relationship which enhanced the quality of the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985). This deeper more intense relationship was an important aspect to the female protégé wanting the “nurturing” aspect of the relationship as well as the career benefits. For example, a mentor within sport and physical activity academia explained:

I met several critical people over the years who were quite influential. . . I think mentors are absolutely critical in people’s lives. . . but its probably in large part due to the several individuals who at critical points in my development, made a difference in giving me confidence to pursue this or even suggesting that I could pursue [teaching] (Grosshans, Poczwadowski, Trunnell, & Ransdell, 2003, p. 149).

Another woman within the health and fitness industry explained, “She [mentor] supported the need for friendships as well, “I am also empathetic and caring allowing her [the protégé] to talk about issues outside the workplace” (Bower, 2008, p. 18).

Theme 8: Friendship

The mentors valued friendship as a resource for the former protégé. These results supports Kram’s (1983) redefinition phase (mentoring relationship turns to a friendship) where the roles and responsibilities for the mentor and protégé change dramatically. For example, friendships developed between the mentors and protégés throughout many of the mentoring relationships. For example, “Working with this well-known coach was tremendous. He was like my mentor and I had tremendous respect for him. We developed a real strong personal relationship and became close friends. He was probably the most influential person in my career” (Bloom et al., 2000, p. 274). Another mentor provided support on women within intercollegiate athletics who valued the importance of friendship and support as effective characteristics of a mentoring relationship, “For the female administrator, having a mentor as a friend as well as to assist in pursuing a successful career can be extremely important” (Marshall, Adams, & Camerson, 1998, p. 1).

Element #4 - Outcomes of the Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring relationships are a critical career resource for women wanting to advance within organizations in the sport industry. The advancement of the protégé is dependent upon both positive and negative outcomes which take place during the mentoring relationship. The outcomes can be a direct result of the career and psychosocial functions. The mentors’ described two major themes for the mentoring outcomes which included professional development opportunities and barriers to mentoring.

Theme 9: Professional development opportunities

One outcome mentioned throughout the studies was providing women with professional development opportunities. Scanlon (1997) reported that professional development is the key in how young professionals become prepared or socialized to accept powerful leadership positions and the mentoring relationship is used frequently in organizations as an informal means of providing employees with guidance on how to develop within their profession. For example, many of the mentors enjoyed seeing the protégé put what she learned from the mentor into action really made the mentors feel good. The mentors wanted to make a difference in the lives of these young women and to see them learn and grow. A good illustration of the professional benefit outcome for the protégé is illustrated in sport and physical activity academia:

My mentor inspired me and gave me moral support and counsel. She helped me to achieve my dream. Not only did she teach me the technical skills of teaching, but she helped me learn the values and standards of the profession while developing my own professional identity (Schweitzer, 1993, p. 51).

Theme 10: Barriers to mentoring

The three main barriers identified by the mentors that may hinder the mentoring relationship included (a) lack of female leaders, (b) time commitment, and (c) vulnerability. First, there was a *lack of female mentors* within the different segments of the sport industry. The demand for female mentors creates a problem due to the shortage of women in the upper levels of the organization. When there is a shortage of women at upper levels of management, women in these positions are overburdened with women needing mentors (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). A mentor in coaching within intercollegiate athletics explained, “The best way of developing young coaches is working with a mentor. The problem is that there are not a lot [of women] to go around” (Bloom, et. al., 1998, p. 276).

The second barrier to mentoring is the *time commitment* involved with mentoring the female protégé. This barrier illustrated how mentoring takes a substantial amount of time from a mentor’s day. Far from viewing this as a major problem, mentors accepted it as part of “territory” as well as an investment of the job as being a mentor. A mentor within the campus recreation profession explained how difficult it was to be available to the protégés at all times and that it was important to choose protégés that have the potential:

The time investment [is] that you only have so much time and energy and you have to be selective in investing [is a disadvantage to mentoring] . . . we [professional staff] need to pick a core of kids that we really think has potential and we need to really invest in them and see who is going to surface to become our next leaders (Bower, 2004, p. 201).

The third barrier to mentoring described as a negative outcome was vulnerability. The mentors described how the young protégés were more likely to make mistakes. This could lead to negative exposure for the mentor. A mentor within sport and physical activity academia stressed the importance of allowing the protégé to realize it is okay to make mistakes, “I want you [protégé] to make mistakes. . . You’re [protégé] trying too hard not to make a mistake and

you're holding back. I want you to make a mistake (Grosshans, Poczwardowski, Trunnell, & Ransdell, 2003, p. 148).

Discussion

Many mentor and protégé characteristics were mentioned throughout the studies. However, there were two distinct similarities between the mentor and protégé characteristics. Both the mentor and protégé characteristics emphasized the need for competency indicators. The competency indicators are especially important to the mentor who seeks protégés that have higher advancement aspirations. Mentors are often faced with challenges within organizations regarding their own career advancement and may view choosing a weak protégé as an indicator of poor judgment (Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 2000; Bower, 2006). The female mentor simply tries to offset the risk associated with a low performing protégé by selecting one that is high performing. In addition the mentor may select a high ability protégé because of the potential in helping overcome the barriers associated with breaking the glass ceiling (Allen, et al., 2000).

The protégé characteristics most often spoke about was the willingness to be mentored. This finding may support the social exchange theory that suggests a protégé's motivation and *willingness* to learn are necessary to generate further development in the relationship. If a protégé lacks drive and/or is not open to learning, the relationship will not progress and thus will not be successful (Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, Relyea, & Beu, 2006). This theory may also relate to the mentor who needs to be motivated and willing to mentor in developing the female for advancement within leadership positions in sport.

Career and psychosocial functions were clearly linked to a female proteges' career success within several segments of the sport industry. These career and psychosocial functions provided opportunities for the protégé to develop skills and the support needed to advance within leadership positions. The key is providing the woman with the opportunity to be mentored by someone that has the necessary skills and nurturing behavior to help the protégé along. Blumberg and Pringle (1982) best described the role of opportunity for work outcome and career success in relation to career and psychosocial functions. Blumberg and Pringle state, "With an experienced mentor, the protégé is provided valuable advice, introduction to influential people, and the opportunity to develop managerial skills and philosophy of management. . . a set of interrelated factors that provide organizational newcomers with the conditions needed to acquire provide organizational newcomers with the conditions needed to acquire and display attributes related to role competence and effectiveness" (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982, p. 568).

Professional development and barriers were two outcomes of the mentoring relationship. The mentors stressed the importance of providing professional development opportunities for males and females to gain skills needed to excel and advance with the organization. The key to providing the professional development opportunities was to realize the needs of each individual person within the organization. The barriers to mentoring mentioned have clearly been supported in the sport literature (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). An underrepresentation of women within leadership positions leads to a dearth of potential female mentors. The shortage of female mentors provides an additional barrier of time constraints.

Women in the leadership positions need to spend their time advancing their own careers rather than helping others. In addition female mentors in leadership position are concerned about their reputation if a protégé makes a mistake. Essentially, the female mentor believes this has a negative impact on her ability as a leader.

Implications

The results of the meta-ethnography provided several implications focused on establishing a better understanding of the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship within leadership positions in sport. The seven implications suggest actions for female and male mentors and protégés, practitioners, and professional organizations in improving the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sport. These mentoring elements may also be important for women in other industries such as business, academia, and health professions.

Implication #1 – Consider Informal Mentoring

First, the majority of the mentors participated in informal mentoring programs. The results of the study suggest that female protégés with informal mentors benefited more in terms of career development and psychosocial functions than female protégés of formal mentors. Specifically, coaching, role modeling, counseling, and friendship function were not as apparent for the female protégé with formal mentors (Ragins, 1999). All of the psychosocial functions besides counseling were considered an essential theme in helping women advance within leadership positions in sport. In addition, informal mentors have been found to sponsor their protégés into upwardly mobile positions, give them challenging assignments, and buffer them from adverse forces within the organization (Kram, 1983), all of which are important variables for women wanting to advance within leadership positions in sport. Therefore, professional organizations within each sport segment may want to consider using their resources to train professionals to have the necessary skills to become an effective mentor as opposed to focusing on introducing formal mentoring programs. For example, professional organizations such as North American Society for Sport Managers (NASSM), the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS), the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), etc. may offer a workshop for professionals in their respected field. Mentors may highly recommend the workshop to young female protégés. In developing the workshops, organizational leaders, may want to address the skills and/or experiences needed to mentor women to advance within leadership positions in sport. For the entry-level protégé this could be detrimental if the mentor does not possess or is aware of the necessary career and psychosocial skills needed and the potential barriers to overcome in helping women to advance within their sport segment.

Implication #2 – Choose a Mentor Wisely

Second, the identification of mentor characteristics may be an important element to consider when helping women advance within leadership positions within sport. The social identity theory, the similarity-attraction paradigm, and the relational demography perspective theories all predict protégés choose mentors that are similar to them; they can identify with,

and/or are considered role-models. These theories may suggest female protégés should be encouraged to seek out same-sex or cross-gender mentoring relationships based on the identification of key functions important to them as a protégé. The identification of the key functions correlates well with the acceptance and confirmation theme which are highly related to the protégés satisfaction. If the female protégé identifies with the mentor because of similarities she may be more satisfied with the mentoring relationship. Organizations may want to consider developing an assessment tool to test personal characteristics of potential mentors. The assessment tool may not only help mentors and protégés to determine if the characteristics are appealing to them, but it may also discover deficient characteristics that need to be addressed.

Implication #3 – Consider Low Performer Protégés as well as High Performer Protégés

Third, the protégé characteristic most important to the mentor was women who were high performers. This finding supports the research which states that female mentors choose protégés most often based on ability, potential, and performance as opposed to the willingness to be mentored (Allen, Poteet, & Lentz, 2004). Female mentors may need to consider other female protégé prospects that may not be a high performer but one that is willing to ask for help. The lower performing protégé are usually the ones that need mentoring the most to help develop the skills needed to advance within leadership positions. Where the low performer lacks in skill may be made up with the desire to succeed. This market of people may be something that has been overlooked and could help with the representation of women in leadership positions.

Implication #4 – Introduce the Protégé to Key Players

Fourth, the career functions of exposure and visibility can be extremely important for the female wanting to advance within leadership positions in sport. Women and men in leadership positions need to consider allowing protégés to participate in important meetings, workshops, and conferences that will expose her to key players in a particular sport segment. For example, an associate professor cannot necessarily assume she will be hired as a chair of a sport and physical activity department. The assistant professor needs to be exposed to upper administration. For example, the chair may allow the woman to attend meetings with chairs of other departments, athletic directors and/or the vice president for the college. Allowing the associate professor to attend meetings may provide her with the opportunity to learn about the culture at higher levels of administration and allows the woman to have the opportunity to develop connections with key players involved with the hiring process in the future.

Implication #5 – Use Performance Evaluations as a Mentoring Tool

Fifth, the career function of coaching provided additional ideas for helping women advance within leadership positions in sport. Mentors need to consider using their structured performance evaluation and feedback process as a means for mentoring. A structured performance evaluation and feedback process may be used as not only a merit system but as a way to provide mentoring “coaching” to the earlier stages of the protégés career. The performance evaluation should be extensive and may include performance counseling, career

goal setting, and a professional development agenda. This type of planning allows the protégé to work towards leadership positions within sport geared specifically towards women.

Implication #6 – Consider Multiple Mentors

Sixth, another career function identified was challenging assignments. Each leader of a segment of the sport industry has the knowledge and skills to identify challenging assignments for the protégé. The key is to find challenging assignments that benefit the female to advance within leadership positions. A suggestion is to allow multiple mentors within the organization to offer their expertise by offering challenging assignments. The exposure to different individuals allows for informal mentoring from specialists of areas needed to advance in a leadership position. For example, a campus recreation director may allow a fitness coordinator to gain experience in a variety of recreational sports segments including facility management, intramurals, special event, and others. This allows the protégés to have mentoring from a variety of supervisors offering different challenging assignments. This process allows the protégé to learn acquisition of skills for career movement.

Implication #7 – Consider Female and Male Mentors

Seventh, a barrier that has long been an issue is the paucity of female role models in leadership positions within sport. Female protégés and organizations need to be aware that they can benefit from both female and male mentors. Helping women overcome fears is one step that may be helpful in recruiting female mentors. All of these fears were identified as outcomes during this meta-ethnography. More specifically, women must not be afraid to mentor others due to (a) fear of the negative of failure of the protégé, (b) time and energy required, and (c) fear of the protégés surpassing them. Thus, more women should be encouraged to mentor, distributing the number of protégés more equitable.

Not only do women in leadership positions within sport need to put their fears aside and step-up, female protégés may also need to consider cross-gender mentoring. Cross-gendered mentoring may be more beneficial to the female because male mentors hold a more crucial position within the organization. The male mentors' power in the organization offers advantages of career functions such as sponsoring their protégés in obtaining leadership positions, protecting them from barriers, and giving them needed exposure (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999; 2000). Consequently, the career function of sponsorship was not identified as important to mentoring women within leadership positions within sport. This may be due to the amount of female to male mentors that were identified throughout the studies. Thus, male mentors may help female protégés advance within sport organizations by introducing them to the "right" people, helping them to gain the support of fellow peers, and buffering them from biased decisions.

Conclusion

I identified themes based on the key elements of an effective mentoring relationship which help women to advance within leadership positions in the sport industry. Valuable information on the mentor and protégé characteristics, career and psychosocial functions, and outcomes provided recommendations on ways to mentor women to advance within leadership positions within sport. I hope the meta-ethnography inspires others to gain a deeper understanding of how successful mentoring relationships are essential to the advancement of women within leadership positions within sport.

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