

**The attrition and upward mobility of male assistant coaches in Division I athletics: The impact of race and career stage**

*Trevor D. Bopp, University of Florida*

*Michael Sagas (Advisor), University of Florida*

**Diversity  
Abstract 2009-175**

**May 30, 2009  
3:00 PM**

**Poster  
(Lexington/Carolina Prefunction)**

For the 2005-06 men's Division I athletic season, only 14.1%, 28.9%, and 18.6% of football, basketball, and outdoor track head coaches, respectively, were Black (DeHass, 2007). Similarly, 26.6%, 38.8%, and 17% of assistant coaches in those same sports respectively, were Black (DeHass, 2007). It seems then that as Black coaches ascend the coaching ladder, their opportunities dwindle. Super's theory of career development (1957) explains progression through a career in four stages: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Research has found support to suggest a relationship exists between an individual's career stage and occupational commitment and turnover intentions (e.g. Morrow & McElroy, 1987). Thus, in this study we examine the effects of career stage and race on Division I assistant coaches' head coaching and turnover intentions. More specifically, we seek to determine during which career stage the attrition and upward mobility of assistant coaches begins and ends, and to what extent, if at all, this may impact the underrepresentation of Black head coaches.

The first stage of career development, the exploration stage, can be characterized as a trial process. Through the process of acculturation, individuals learn and develop skills to help evaluate their potential in a particular occupation. Occupational mobility is high in this stage with less organizational commitment, resulting in a greater propensity for turnover. Also in this stage, Slocum and Cron (1985) identify one's immediate supervisor, or mentor, as a crucial proponent. Normally considered a positive, mentorship in the exploration stage could have an adverse effect on Black assistant coaches. With so few racially similar coaches having reached the upper echelons of intercollegiate athletics (DeHass, 2007; Lapchick, 2008), there is a scant number of racially similar individuals capable of offering understanding, direction, and advice. Consequently, the underrepresentation of Black head coaches could discourage the commitment of an assistant coach to the coaching field, while concurrently increasing the coach's turnover intentions.

The next stage of Super's career development is that of establishment; one he discusses as a process of stabilization. In this stage, individuals are apt to be more settled in their career and tend to focus on better positioning themselves for organizational advancement. As individuals begin to form stronger interpersonal relationships (i.e., emotional ties) with the organization, the career field, and in the community, their intentions for turnover are likely to decrease. These decreased turnover intentions might facilitate the underrepresentation of Division I Black coaches. In their study on team diversity, Brown et al. (2003) found the longer players were with a team, the more they tended to gravitate towards identification with their role as an athlete on that team and less with their minority status. If this holds true for Black assistant coaches, the more satisfied and identified a coach becomes with his institution, the less likely he might be to concern himself with the underrepresentation of Black coaches in intercollegiate athletic leadership roles. Thus increasing and/or facilitating possible discriminatory practices. In the maintenance stage, individuals are firmly entrenched in their career. There is little intent for turnover and satisfaction is gained through the intangibles of the organization and/or career (i.e., relationships and community), rather than from salary and promotions (Slocum & Cron, 1985). In this stage individuals are not looking to break new ground, but rather continue to complete their work to the point that it preserves their position in the organization. At this point in a coach's career, he has most likely been a head coach and failed or has relegated himself to life as an assistant.

As part of a larger study that mailed 1,000 questionnaires to the head and assistant coaches of 71 teams, participants in this study were 152 assistant coaches of Division I football, basketball, and track & field programs. Data was collected on race, career stage, head coaching intentions, and occupational turnover intentions. Career stage was operationalized by the tenure of the assistant coach. Those having coached for five years or less were placed in the exploration stage, those with 6-15 years of coaching experience in the establishment stage, and those coaching for more than 15 years were placed in the maintenance stage. Of the 152 assistant coaches, 20 (13%) were in the exploration stage, 63 (41.5%) in the establishment stage, and 69 (46.5%) in the maintenance stages of his career development. The self-identified racial make-up of the 152 respondents was 28% (n=42) Black and 72% (n=110) White. Results of a 2x3 multivariate analysis of variance indicated that head coaching intentions varied among Black and White coaches in the different career stages  $F(2, 151) = 4.629, p = .01$ . A more detailed examination of the interaction effect shows Black assistant coaches ( $M = 4.42, SD = 2.68$ ) had significantly lower head coaching intentions than White assistant coaches ( $M = 5.95, SD = 1.39$ ) in the maintenance stage of their career development. Significant main effects were also found for career stage on head coaching intentions  $F(2, 151) = 7.567, p = .001$ , and occupational turnover intentions  $F(2, 151) = 3.332, p = .04$ . Duncan's post hoc analysis revealed significant differences in the head coaching intentions of those

## 2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

coaches in the exploration ( $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) and maintenance stages ( $M = 5.57$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ), as well as the occupational turnover intentions of coaches in the exploration stage ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effects of race and career stage on the head coaching and turnover intentions of assistant coaches in Division I athletics. Results demonstrate that as Black assistant coaches advance in their career, their head coaching intentions decreased in the maintenance stage significantly more than their White counterparts. Career stage was also found to have a significant impact on the head coaching intentions, as head coaching intentions decreased from exploration to establishment and eventually the maintenance stage. Conversely, occupational turnover intentions significantly increased from the exploration to establishment stage, only to show a minimal decrease moving to the maintenance stage. These findings provide reason for future research on why Black assistant coaches might lose their desire to become head coaches as well as develop stronger intentions to turnover from a coaching career. As is, the findings of this study seem to show support for the possibility of access discrimination (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005) and the existence of a glass ceiling (Cunningham, 2003) for Black assistant coaches as compared to their White counterparts. The resultant limited opportunities of such discriminatory practices can negatively impact career satisfaction and affect towards the profession (Cunningham & Sagas, 2007). This study took a fine-grained approach by assessing racial differences by career stages that may explain the varying success rates of coaches. It is important for researchers and practitioners to understand career stage factors that affect career related outcomes of Black coaches so as to help create a discrimination free and equal opportunity environment.