Examining the Mentoring Relationships of Women Working in Intercollegiate Athletic Administration

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Researchers have focused their attention on potential reasons for why there is a shortage of women in leadership positions within intercollegiate athletic administration and identified lack of mentoring and networking, old boys network, gender stereotyping in leadership, lack of mentoring and networks (support systems), work-family conflict, and equal pay/wage discrimination (Stier, Henry, Wilding, & Pederson, 2011; Wright, Eagleman, & Pederson, 2011). Other researchers have focused their attention on strategies to overcome these barriers within intercollegiate athletics through mentoring, networking, being confident, and balancing work and family (Bower & Bennett, 2010; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin (2004); Inglis, Danyuchuk, & Pastore, 1996; 2000; Rhodes, & Fletcher, 2013). However, one strategy that continues to emerge on a consistent basis within the literature, and is the specific focus of this study, is mentoring.

Researchers have consistently demonstrated the mentoring relationship provides substantial benefits in helping women advance within leadership positions within sports (Avery, Tonidandel, & Phillips, 2008; Bower, 2009; Bower & Hums, 2006; Lough, 2001; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). The mentoring relationship can also be a critical factor in recruiting and educating female intercollegiate athletic administrators. By serving as an expert who facilitates learning, a mentor has a definite influence on the female intercollegiate athletic administrator who aspires to advance (Bower, 2011).

Kram (1985) suggested that advancement to powerful positions in organizations may be at least partially based upon both career and psychosocial functions in developing effective mentoring relationships. Thus, examining the career and psychosocial functions of effective mentoring relationships is warranted. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the mentoring relationships of women working within intercollegiate athletic administration. More specifically, the mentor characteristics and the career and psychosocial benefits of having a mentor in intercollegiate athletic administration produced the following research questions: What mentoring characteristics were most often identified as important to the success of the female intercollegiate athletic administrator? What career functions of the mentor were most often identified as important to the success of the female intercollegiate athletic administrator? What psychosocial functions of the mentor were most often identified as important to the success of the female intercollegiate athletic administrator? 

Survey Monkey was used to send a total of 1834 (N=1834) Female Sport Manager Career Surveys (Hums & Bower, 2003; Hums & Sutton, 1999, 2000) to women working as athletic administrators. To gain a comprehensive picture of mentoring, women at NCAA Divisions I, II, II, as well as at NAIA schools, junior colleges, and Canadian colleges were included. The email addresses of the female intercollegiate athletic administrators were obtained from the National Directory of College Athletics. Surveys were sent out to the 1834 women working in intercollegiate athletic administration and after three weeks a follow up email was sent to all non-respondents. A total of 514 (N=514) usable surveys were returned for a return rate of 28.0%. For this descriptive data, frequencies were calculated for the quantitative data using SPSS 19.0. A three-step content–analytic procedure was then used to analyze the qualitative data.

Results provided insight on mentoring characteristics and functions that are most important to women working in intercollegiate athletic administration. First, protégés should consider a mentor who provides them with the opportunity to build a network. This is especially true for women who often lack the ability to develop informal networks. Second, when choosing a mentor, protégés should consider mentors who provide knowledge, offer feedback, and provide relevant information and the problem solving skills to succeed as an intercollegiate athletic administrator. Third, protégés need to consider a mentor who listens and provides advice and support. Counseling and acceptance and confirmation provide a sense of confidence and reaffirm protégés’ abilities to succeed. Fourth,
protégés may want to consider individuals they look up to, respect, have a positive attitude, and interact effectively with administrators, coaches and fans, as potential mentors.

This research provided a comprehensive view from a variety of institutions from two countries. Continuing to further the understanding of how effective mentoring relationships are essential to the advancement of women into leadership positions within intercollegiate athletic administration. The study identified many valuable characteristics, career and psychosocial functions, that were helpful in developing effective mentoring relationships with women in intercollegiate athletic administration. Having a mentor who can balance the career and psychosocial functions is beneficial and may lead to enhanced growth and learning for a woman’s career success and the development of satisfying dyadic relationships.