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Exploring the Roles of Mentoring Relationship on Female Student-Athletes' Career Development

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Previous research has identified a mentoring relationship as one of the most critical supporting factors for women's career success. While the benefits of a mentoring relationship have been well-documented throughout various disciplines, female student-athletes' mentoring relationships and career development have not been fully examined. Considering the substantial number of female student-athletes in colleges, it is imperative to explore female student-athletes' career choice and development. The purpose of this study was to explore the roles of mentoring relationships on female student-athletes' career development and perceived barriers to mentoring relationships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven female student-athletes in a Division I school. The findings revealed female student-athletes engaged in irregular and informal mentoring relationships and received psychosocial supports from mentors in regard to their careers. The findings also indicated that female student-athletes identified a lack of time as the most significant barrier to mentoring relationships. Findings of this study add to the notion of broaden the understanding of female student-athletes' mentoring relationships and barriers to mentoring relationships. In addition, findings will be beneficial for advisors, counselors, and coaches to continue to engage in mentoring relationships with female student-athletes.

Keywords: career development, female student-athletes, mentoring, mentoring relationship

College student-athletes are a special population of students since they are simultaneously dealing with the dual role of being students and athletes. The substantially growing number of student-athletes combined with their unique status as collegiate athletes have prompted researchers to examine various issues related to student-athletes separating themselves from the general student population. The overall number of student-athletes in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has reached its peak in 2015 as more than 473,000 college athletes were competing in all Divisions (NCAA, 2015). Notably, the participation of female student-athletes has increased as well. Since the passage of Title IX legislation, the number of female student-athletes has been exponentially increasing (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). There were only 16,000 female student-athletes prior to the implement of the Title IX in 1968, but it increased to approximately 208,000 in 2014, which was a nearly equal number to male counterparts (“NCAA Student-Athlete Participation”, 2015).

Student-athletes as a whole have been extensively examined in the field of sport management, yet relatively little is known about female student-athletes’ career-related behaviors. Previous research primarily focused on female students’ career intentions and found a declining intention toward sport-related career paths (Harris & Lawrence, 2004) and differences in athletic identity and career maturity (Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013). Considering the growing number of female student-athletes throughout the nation and the special circumstance of balancing academics and athletics, it seems imperative to explore their career choice and development in order to help them successfully prepare for their future careers. While there could be a variety of factors influencing student-athletes’ career choice, planning, and development (Houle & Kluck, 2015; Tyrance et al., 2013), gender-specific approaches or perspectives are much needed when examining female student-athletes’ career paths due to the identified gender differences existing among student-athletes such as athletic identity, (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Strum, Feltz, & Gilson, 2011), career maturity (Tyrance et al., 2013), and career planning attitudes (Tyrance et al., 2013).

Mentoring has been identified as a critical element in general career path, success, and advancement in business fields for male and female employees, managers, and executives in organizations (Ragins & Scandura, 1997). Specifically, there is a substantial amount of research exploring women’s mentoring relationships and demonstrating the impacts on their career development or advancement within intercollegiate athletics (Avery, Tonidandel, & Phillips, 2008; Bower, 2009, 2011; Bower & Hums, 2014; Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002; Young, 1990). Most empirical studies focused on women working in intercollegiate athletics, such as senior women’s administrators (Hancock & Hums, 2016), associate and assistant athletic directors (Bower & Hums, 2014), and coaches (Avery et al., 2008; Bower, 2011), but no studies to date have extended the literature on women’s career and mentoring to female student-athlete. Given the fact that the majority of women working in intercollegiate athletics were student-athletes during their college years (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Morris, Arthur-Banning, & McDowell, 2014), and females have a potential to pursue their careers in the sport industry, the impact and the role of mentoring relationships for female student-athletes’ career paths needs to be further examined.

The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of mentoring relationships on female student-athletes' career choice and development. The following research questions guided this study: a) What characteristics of mentoring relationships contribute to female student-athletes' career development? b) What barriers are identified by female student-athletes to mentoring relationships? c) What strategies do female student-athletes utilize to cope with perceived barriers to mentoring relationships? The findings of this study provide significant contributions for both academicians and practitioners in intercollegiate athletics. The obtained knowledge about female student-athletes' mentoring relationships contribute to the body of literature on this population's career choice and development by filling the research gap between women's career and mentoring relationships in the context of intercollegiate athletics. In addition, having a better understanding of female student-athletes' mentoring relationships is beneficial for advisors, counselors, and coaches to continue to engage in mentoring relationships.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Several researchers have used the terms 'mentor' or 'mentoring' and provided different definitions (Allen, Poteer, & Burroughs, 1997; Ragins & Scandura, 1994; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). Ragins and Scandura (1994) defined a mentor as a person with more experience and knowledge and a protégé as a younger and less experienced person who needs help from senior employee for advancement. Similarly, according to Allen et al. (1997), a mentor refers to "an individual who has taken a personal interest in an individual and has guided, sponsored, or otherwise had a positive influence on their professional career development" (p. 2). On the other hand, in the context of intercollegiate athletics, Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) defined mentoring as "a process in which a more experienced person (i.e., the mentor) serves as a role model, provides guidance and support to a developing novice (i.e., the protégé), and sponsors that individual's career progress" (p. 25).

In the same manner with the abovementioned definitions of mentoring, Kram (1985) also mentioned that the act of mentoring refers to a mutual relationship between a more experienced person and a less experienced employee. Kram's (1985) mentor-role theory is one of the seminal models of mentoring, which claims that the career functions and the psychosocial functions are two primary roles of mentoring relationships in organizations. The career functions include sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and assigning challenging tasks. The psychosocial functions include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship. Both career and psychosocial mentoring functions are essential for successful mentoring relationships in career development. Utilizing both career and psychosocial functions of mentoring will be helpful and beneficial especially for entry-level women (Bower & Hums, 2014; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Career Functions of Mentoring Relationship. The career functions of mentoring are closely related to outcomes and career advancement including promotions, salary, status, and power (Kram, 1985). Within, the sponsorship function helps a protégé build a good reputation among people around the protégé by underlining his or her strengths and good works. Regarding the exposure and visibility function, a mentor introduces a protégé to other important people and helps them develop a good relationship, which may lead to an opportunity for a new career or advancement. The coaching function occurs when a mentor provides information, knowledge,

skills, and feedback to a protégé. In terms of the protection function, a mentor ensures and defends a protégé not to be in a bad situation for his or her career, such as protecting from getting a bad reputation. Lastly, a mentor helps a protégé effectively learn and develop essential skills by giving challenging tasks (Kram, 1985).

Psychosocial Functions of Mentoring Relationship. The role modeling function allows protégés to directly or indirectly learn, grow, and develop by looking at their mentors' more experienced behaviors. In terms of the acceptance and confirmation function, a mentor expresses support to a protégé, builds a mutual trust, and confirms abilities of a protégé to encourage and inspire. The counseling function is that a mentor helps a protégé solve problems or conflicts. Lastly, the friendship function is an informal interaction or relationship between a mentor and a protégé separating from the work.

Women's Mentoring Relationship in Intercollegiate Athletics

The role and benefit of mentoring relationships have been well-documented throughout various disciplines. Previous studies examined the influences of mentoring relationships for women working in intercollegiate athletics with supervisors, coaches, and peers. Mostly, existing literature demonstrate the positive influences and the benefits of mentoring relationships for women working in intercollegiate athletics in various contexts such as female coaches in women's teams (Avery et al., 2008; Bower, 2011; Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Morris, Arthur-Banning, & McDowell, 2014), athletic administrators (Bower & Hums, 2014; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002; Young, 1990), campus recreation (Bower & Hums, 2003; Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006), and international physical educators (Bower & Hums, 2009).

Mentoring Relationship of Female Coaches. Female coaches' mentoring relationship and its benefits for their career success or promotion have been highlighted in the literature. Theoretically based upon Kram's (1985) mentor-role model, Bower (2011) identified the career and the psychosocial functions of mentoring relationships for female coaches in women's basketball teams in Division I. According to Bower (2011), the career functions of mentoring relationships for female assistant coaches included attending professional conferences, providing networking opportunities, stressing the importance of specific personality indicators (e.g., confidence, assertiveness, patience, and the ability to motivate players), opportunities to learn day-to-day operations, and provide hands-on experience. The identified psychosocial functions of the mentoring relationship were role model effect, acting as a leader, communication ability, and nurturing protégé (Bower, 2011).

In a similar manner, Avery et al. (2008) examined the mentoring relationship of head coaches in NCAA Division I women's basketball teams and discovered significant effects of mentor-protégé gender similarity for female coaches in women's basketball teams. Protégés with the same gender of their mentors had significantly more career and psychosocial mentoring impacts than those with different gender of mentors (Avery et al., 2008). Interestingly, having a white male mentor had a positive impact on more career-related mentoring despite being with the different sex of mentors, which conflicted with previous research that discussed barriers for women to have a mentoring relationship with males (Bower et al., 2006; Kram, 1985; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002).

In a similar sense, Inglis et al. (2000) found women working in coaching and management professions perceived mentoring relationships in their workplace as a primary

supporting factor for maintaining the current positions and advancing to upper positions. Greenhill et al. (2009) also emphasized a positive function of mentoring relationship in order for female coaches to survive and thrive in the Australian athletic system. In a qualitative study on female assistant coaches in Division I, Morris et al. (2014) discovered female coaches believed a strong mentoring relationship with coaches had an enormous value, and it would eventually lead to their career progression and success in the future.

Mentoring Relationship of Women in Management Positions. While the benefits of mentoring relationship for female coaches have been highlighted in the context of intercollegiate athletics, the literature indicates women working in management positions such as athletic director, senior woman administrators, or physical educators also perceive mentoring relationship as a positive factor for their career success (Bower & Hums, 2009, 2013, 2014; Hancock & Hums, 2016). In a recent study, Hancock and Hums (2016) found that senior-level female administrators in Division I had a common perception that mentoring relationship with supervisors had a tremendous impact on their career progression and career development.

In addition, mentoring relationships with peer also appeared to play a significant role in providing good career advice and psychological support (Hancock & Hums, 2016). In a mixed-method study, Bower and Hums (2014) identified three significant characteristics of mentoring relationships by female athletic administrators for career success. Those characteristics included being supportive, hardworking, and knowledgeable. Notably, among psychosocial functions of mentoring, counseling appeared to be the most often mentioned variable to provide benefits to female athletic administrators, and role modeling and acceptance/confirmation functions followed (Bower & Hums, 2014). Bower and Hums (2013) also found female administrators perceive mentoring as one of the most enjoyable aspects of the job and a significant factor for their continued success at work.

Whereas most previous research focused on women working in intercollegiate athletics as a protégé, Bower and Hums (2009, 2013) illustrated a significant role of female administrators as a mentor to other females including junior female administrators and female student-athletes. In 2013, Bower and Hums discovered female administrators perceive mentoring female student-athletes as one of the most enjoyable aspect of their job. In 2009, Bower and Hums further found female administrators are willing to mentor other women due to a sense of responsibility to give back to them primarily derived from the past experiences as a protégé.

Barriers to Women's Mentoring Relationships

As much as the roles and benefits of having a mentoring relationship have been highlighted in the context of intercollegiate athletics for women, the lack of mentoring relationships has been identified as one of the critical barriers for women's successful career development or advancement to upper positions in sport organizations (Bower & Hums, 2009; Ragins, 1989). With acknowledging the importance of potential barriers to mentoring relationships, researchers examined the reasons why females are having fewer opportunities to have mentoring relationships. According to Ragins (1989), there could be two reasons why there is a gender difference in barriers to mentoring: women may not seek mentoring relationships as actively as men because they often do not recognize the importance and potential benefits of mentoring relationships; and mentors, especially males, may not select female protégés because males tend to feel more comfortable developing a personal relationship with another male.

Other researchers found cross-gender mentoring relationships as a crucial barrier to initiate mentoring relationships (Bower et al., 2006; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). In a phenomenological research, Bower et al. (2006) examined directors' individual and organizational reasons for mentoring women and perceived barriers to mentoring within campus recreation industry. As a result, the lack of acceptance and opportunities to mentoring was the first inhibiting factor for women. Secondly, the style of male mentors, which was more likely to be authoritarian, was another barrier for women's mentoring relationship. An authoritarian style of mentoring is characterized by competitiveness, assertiveness, and hierarchical control but women are more closely related to nurturing and sensitive characteristics (Bower et al., 2006).

Consistent with Bower et al. (2006), Weaver and Chelladurai (2002) found more female athletic administrators than males expressed a high level of barriers to initiate a mentoring relationship, and this difficulty was derived from the required cross-gender mentorship in intercollegiate athletics while women often wish to have a female mentor. This aspect also reflects one of the significant barriers, 'fear of sexual connotations', to initiating and maintaining a cross-gender mentoring relationship suggested by Weaver and Chelladurai (1999). Females are often self-conscious and restricted from starting mentoring relationship due to a perception that such a close relationship might lead to sexual connections (Kram, 1985; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). On the other hand, Ragins and Cotton (1991) found five primary barriers for young women to mentoring relationships: lack of access to potential mentors, fear of rejection by potential mentors, unwillingness of potential mentors, fear of disapproval of other people, and fear of sexual misinterpretation by potential mentors and other people.

As reviewed above, researchers have examined and consistently demonstrated a significant impact of mentoring relationships for women's career development and success in the context of intercollegiate athletics. Moreover, the extant literature indicates there could be various potential barriers for women's mentoring relationships. However, there is a still scarce of study on female student-athletes' mentoring relationships regarding their career development. Considering the substantial potentials that mentoring relationships could provide female student-athletes with great benefits to their career development, it is imperative to explore various facets of female student-athletes' mentoring relationships including characteristics of mentoring relationship, mentor's gender, and barrier to mentoring relationship.

Methodology

Research Design

The relational nature of the construct under study fits well with qualitative methodology. Qualitative research is most appropriate when seeking answers to questions which stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Considering the exploratory nature of this study, the researchers employed a qualitative approach to identify new meanings about social phenomenon. Particularly, the researchers used phenomenology design to explore female student-athletes' mentoring relationship experiences. Phenomenology is defined as generating a social interaction as well as delivering the meanings, and it is most appropriate qualitative research design as it helps view and understand an individual's shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), in this case, female student-athletes' mentoring relationships. The researchers also adopted the perspective of epidemiology as a conceptual framework to analyze the data, specifically, constructionism. Constructionism allows the researchers to

compose subjective meanings of data (Crotty, 1998), which is significant to infuse the stance of the researchers. Constructionism could be useful in phenomenology study because it unfolds the stories of female student-athletes and creates the shared meanings for lived experiences of shared phenomenon, which is a mentoring relationship in this study.

Participants and Setting

Out of 16 target population, the participants of this study were seven ($n = 7$) female student-athletes who were enrolled full-time at a large Division I university located in the Rocky Mountain region of United States. The participants consisted of junior and senior female student-athletes, who were more likely to have experiences of mentoring relationships during their school years. A total of four juniors and three seniors participated in the study, and the age range was 20 to 22. In terms of the racial profile of the participants, all seven participants were identified as white. The participants played different kinds of sports including swimming, soccer, track and field, and softball. Further, they studied for various different majors including English literature, theater education, finance, journalism and media studies, and sport science. The career aspirations of the participants included two sport-related careers (e.g. college team coach, athletic staff) and five non-sport-related careers (e.g. English teacher, doctor, theater teacher).

Procedures and Data Collection

To examine the roles of mentoring relationship on female student-athletes' career choice and development, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique to collect data since this study aimed to investigate a specific population. Purposive sampling assumes that a researcher has a purpose in mind, and it is efficient to reach opinions of targeted samples (Bryman, 2008). The target population included junior and senior female student-athletes for two reasons: a) to ensure that the participants had enough mentoring relationship experiences during the college years to unfold their stories, and b) the participants had clearer career plans to share their perceptions on regarding the role of mentoring on their career development. The researchers obtained a total of 16 female student athletes' email addresses from the athletic department at the school after receiving the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Of the 16 female student-athletes, seven ($n = 7$) responded to participate in the interview for a response rate of 44%. These participants represent a meaningful sampling to ensure that they are qualified to provide the significant aspects of mentoring relationship as satisfying the qualifications to the purposive sampling of this study by representing a similar although not accurate racial demographic of the institution's female student-athlete population (Creswell, 2013). The researchers were content that saturation of the data were fulfilled with seven in-depth interviews as no additional information or theme was uncovered (Merriam, 2009).

Prior to the interviews, the researchers contacted the participants via emails and distributed the consent form indicating that participation was voluntary. After the participants agreed to provide the required information according to the interview protocol (see appendix A), the researchers proceeded with the data-gathering phase. The participants were also able to familiarize themselves with the interview questionnaire, the details of the interview procedures, and the overall concept of the research. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data about female student-athletes' experiences of mentoring relationships based upon the

aforementioned research questions. Semi-structured interviews are not typically used in phenomenology study, but since the focus of the study was on rather specific experiences of mentoring relationships of female student-athletes, semi-structured interviews deemed an appropriate approach to capture and explore the meanings of the lived experiences of female student-athletes.

Each interview took approximately 30 to 40 minutes, and follow-up questions were asked in order to grasp deeper and broader understanding of their mentoring relationship experiences when needed. The interviews were conducted on campus such as cafeteria and empty classrooms, away from other student-athlete shared space (e.g., lounge, locker room). After the interviews, the primary researcher's contact information was provided to the participants, in case they had any concerns or questions regarding the interviews and the study. Information gathered during the interview process was only available to the researchers and all data remained confidential. Additionally, data will only be reported in the aggregate to further mask the identity of any particular respondent.

Interview Guide

The researchers developed the interview questionnaire based upon the purpose of the study and each of the three research questions. The interview questionnaire included three major sections: Background information, mentoring relationship experiences, and barriers to mentoring relationship. First, questions on background information included participants' majors, sports, and career goals (See Appendix A). Secondly, the interview questionnaire included a set of open-ended questions asking about participants' experiences with their mentors and the characteristics of the mentors. For example, the questions included "Tell me about your mentor(s) and how the mentoring relationship(s) started" and "How does the mentoring relationship help you shape your career path and develop your career plans?" Lastly, the interview questionnaire also included questions about participants' perceptions of barriers to initiate or maintain mentoring relationships. For example, "If you have one any barriers that you have confronted in your mentoring relationship, please describe it."

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved four phases. First, the researchers independently transcribed the interviews and organized the data. Second, each researcher read and reread the verbatim transcription of the data from the interviews for the organization of the data by labeling the transcript with a pseudonym. Third, each research classified and categorized the data into groups based on emerging themes and sub-themes. The researchers used an inductive reasoning to organize emerging themes and recurring patterns into categories named by the researchers rather than being placed into the pre-existing categories or dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Lastly, after identifying themes and sub-themes, the researchers went through rereading, comparing, and coding the transcript based on the constant comparative analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The researchers ensured the objectivity of the analysis by not making any premature or personal decision and by using constant comparative analysis and peer debriefing. Constant comparative analysis is useful for the explanation of similarities and differences between case studies and it is used for qualitative research to support findings (Charmaz, 2014). Credibility

was also established by using constant comparative analysis and by reading and rereading the data to develop themes. In addition, the researchers ensured dependability or reliability of the findings via rereading the verbatim transcription and discussing on categories and themes.

Results

Overall, the researchers identified several emerging themes of female student-athletes' mentoring relationship experiences based upon the primary focuses of this study including characteristics of mentoring relationships, barriers to mentoring relationships, and coping with barriers. Three major characteristics of mentoring relationships emerged. First, all seven female student-athletes in this study described their mentoring relationships as informal and irregular. Second, five of seven female student-athletes in this study indicated that the gender of their mentors was not significant in their mentoring relationships. Third, all seven female student-athletes received the psychosocial benefits from their mentors including counseling, friendship, and acceptance and confirmation. Moreover, in regard to perceived barriers to mentoring relationships, all seven female student-athletes identified a lack of time as the most significant barrier to their mentoring relationships. None of the female student-athletes reported a desire to overcome the barrier of time management or had any strategies to cope with it.

Characteristics of Mentoring Relationships or Mentors

Informal and irregular mentoring relationship. First, the interview data revealed that all seven female student-athletes in this study were involved in individual, informal, and irregular mentoring relationships with their coaches or peers rather than formal or organized regular mentoring relationships. Further, there was no school-based mentoring program offered to student-athletes at the institution where the data were collected. Although the school does not provide any venue for regular or formal mentoring relationships, the participants in this study were still trying to engage in mentoring relationships rather individually. For example, Jessica said:

When I was a freshman, my school provided academic supporting counseling to check my class schedule and to talk about assignments and test. However, now I am a senior. I don't have any regular mentoring relationship from school. Instead, I am experiencing a mentoring relationship from my coaches. I can talk my coaches after training. They are helping me to improve my skills and solve some of my problems.

On the other hand, some of the female student-athletes were also involved in peer-mentoring relationships in addition to their coaches, athletic directors, advisors, or counselors. For instance, Susan said both her teammates and her coaches were helping her. She described her mentoring relationship:

My teammates and I are supporting each other. When I have a problem, they try to help me a lot. Also, I am willing to help my teammates as well. We shared our feeling and experience and gave feedback each other. It is an important part for me; I can take a step forward. Also, my coach is highly supporting me and gives me positive encouragement.

In addition, Miranda shared her experience of peer mentorship and indicated no regular mentoring program in her school:

I had a one mentor who is a graduate student. She was my senior and she knew me well. It means that I can share many things with her. I don't have a regular mentoring program in my school. I just asked her to be my mentor. Since I needed her advice and shared her thoughts, I wanted to develop my career more specifically. Also, our mentoring is not a regular meeting. It is an individual style.

In a similar sense, Bella also talked her story with coaches and teammates:

Sometimes, I can get some advices from my coaches. Umm. Let me think. Usually, I share my concerns and worries with my teammate. They are familiar with me. Umm. We share lots of things such as daily life, school, and future. I was so happy when I shared my feelings with my teammates. They are awesome!

Gender of mentors. The gender of the mentor was not a significant factor or a barrier for female student-athletes' mentoring relationships. Specifically, five of 7 female student-athletes in this study indicated that they communicated well with their coaches and received feedback and advices about their sports regardless of the gender of their mentors. For example, Lauren shared:

Gender is not so important for me. I had a chance to have female coaches; however, I almost had all male coaches my entire athlete life. It does not matter. When I have a problem, I can talk with my male coaches to solve my problem. They give me a great deal of positive encouragement. Through this process, I can trust myself and improve my skill more effectively. They support me for individual growth.

Jessica also described her experience in regard to having a mentoring relationship with an opposite gender of coach:

I think that gender is just a minor part for student-athletes. We have met lots of male coaches from my early athlete life. My male coaches have given me high encouragement and advice. Without their help and advice, I could not develop personally and professionally. Since, these coaches had some experience like me. They could understand me well. We can share many experiences easily.

Similarly, Bella mentioned: "Gender? Umm. He or she, it doesn't matter for me. My male coaches are trustful and supportive. Also, my previous female coach was nice and gave me good advice. So, gender is not so important matter".

Psychosocial functions of mentoring relationship. Lastly, all seven female student-athletes indicated they were receiving psychosocial supports from their mentors through the mentoring relationships. Further, the researchers found female student-athletes in this study mostly received the psychosocial benefits from their mentors, which included counseling,

friendship, and acceptance and confirmation. The career-related function was not identified in this study nor was the role modeling of psychosocial function.

The first identified theme was acceptance and confirmation that a mentor expresses support to a protégé and confirms abilities of a protégé to encourage. Acceptance and confirmation function is closely associated with the protégés' satisfaction in the relationships as they often seek the nurturing effect from the mentors (Bower, 2009). For example, Lauren said:

Through mentoring, I can trust myself more than before, I can control myself easily. My mentor shares her experience and gives me feedback and skills. Also, she is highly supportive of me to enhance my skills.

Similarly, in describing her relationship with her mentor, Susan also stated:

Let me think. I meet them every day. Although it is a not regular meeting. They have like super high support and super high expectations. Umm...they give a lot of constructive feedback. They are really encouraging me and supporting me.

Lucy also shared, "Through the mentoring relationship, I can feel supportive, encouraging. Umm. She always inspires me with confidence. You know? I can have self-confidence and I can trust more in my own abilities now."

The second theme was counseling that a mentor helps a protégé solve problems or conflicts. For example, Miranda shared her experience with her female mentor:

Meeting with her, I can feel that she cares a lot, and she supports me always. This feeling makes me endure my difficulties in my life. I hope to be a better athlete and hope to achieve my dream. When I met her, she provided me high encouragement. Also, she gave me useful guidance on professional athlete's part and increased my self-esteem.

The last identified theme was the friendship function of a mentoring relationship which refers to an informal interaction or relationship between a mentor and a protégé separating from the work (Kram, 1985). Miranda described her mentoring relationship:

When I have a problem, I talked with my mentors. My mentor is so friendly. I can express my feeling straightforwardly. It is very helpful. Umm, I think that my mentor and I have a strong relationship with trust. Sometimes, I shamed that I shared my mistakes and my weaknesses as well. After listening my story, my mentor gives me feedback and shared his story as well. It is really nice! Through sharing stories, I can trust my mentor more.

Bella similarly mentioned that:

My teammates are my mentors. They have similar experiences and they can understand me well. We encourage each other and no.1 supporters. I am proud of my mentors because they are my life! If they were not my teammates, I could not endure some tough situations.

Barriers to Mentoring Relationship

Time management. All seven female student-athletes shared their ideas that time access was one of the most difficult parts of their mentoring relationships. The participants mentioned that they were too busy to initiate or have a mentoring relationship. This barrier was primarily derived from their busy daily schedules, as female student-athletes have to balance the time among practices, meetings, and classes. For example, Jessica talked about the difficulties she has been facing with having a mentoring relationship:

I am pretty busy and I am taking time out of my busy schedule to get mentoring from my mentor. I need to study and I need to practice every day. I wanted to set up a mentoring schedule a week ago. But, sometimes my training schedule changed because of games. So, it is not easy to reschedule.

Mary also described:

I hope to meet my mentor regularly. However, it is difficult to schedule my mentoring. My schedule is not flexible according to my team's training schedule. I had a scheduled meeting with my mentor, but I could not meet with my mentor because of the change of my training schedule. I told my mentor I was sorry. Our schedule changes a lot according to external situations.

Finally, Lucy explained:

I am an athlete and a student, and this means that I have a lot of responsibility in my life. Umm. As you know, mentoring is helpful for me to solve my problems and get some feedbacks. However, actually, it is not so easy to set up a schedule because of my duties and my time.

Coping with Barriers to Mentoring Relationship

Self-reflection. Our data show busy schedule or time management was a significant barrier to all seven female student-athletes' mentoring relationships. However, six of seven female student-athletes in this study were not aware of the importance of overcoming the existing barriers to mentoring relationships, or they were not aware of the importance of it to a mentoring relationship. All seven participants in this study had not thought about how to overcome the current barriers or were not able to come up with an effective way to cope with the barriers. Only one female student-athlete in this study discussed the potential way to solve the barrier to mentoring relationship regarding the time management. Susan suggested "I think that it is useful to do self-reflection yourself. You can control your time. Self-reflection is useful".

Career Choice Relate to Major or Sport

In addition to the issues of mentoring relationships, the researchers were able to learn about their career choice and paths. Four of seven female student-athletes indicated that they decided their career paths when they were high school students. For example, Miranda recalled

her time in high school and said “When I was a high school student, I chose my career. I want to be a doctor someday. Since then, I decided my major for my future career”. Based on the predetermined career paths, these female student-athletes decided their majors, which had nothing to do with the sports they chose to play. Female student-athletes in this study believed that they could achieve their career goals by choosing appropriate majors. While the majority of the female student-athletes ($n = 6$) expressed that they would pursue their careers which were not related to their sport experiences, one female student-athlete mentioned that her sport experience was related to her career plan and very useful for deciding her career path. Mary shared:

I want to go to graduate school to study more. Sport gives me chance to think about body and health. Through the experience of student-athlete, it is very useful for me how to reach my goal. I think that sport is related to my passion. I learned from sport that I am doing it, one way or another.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the roles of mentoring relationship of female student-athletes, specifically focusing on their career development. The researchers of this study also sought to identify perceived or real barriers to the current mentoring relationships or initiation of mentoring relationships. The results of this study delivered several emerging themes of female student-athletes’ mentoring relationships regarding the characteristics of mentoring relationships, perceived barrier to their mentoring relationships, and career paths.

Characteristics of Mentoring Relationships

It is essential to identify common characteristics of mentoring relationships or mentors in order to obtain a general sense of mentoring experiences (Bower, 2009). Based on the research questions and interview protocol, the results revealed three main characteristics of mentoring relationships for female student-athletes in this study. First, female student-athletes in this study perceived their mentoring relationships as informal and irregular. Although there is no school-based mentoring program offered for female student-athletes in this study, the majority of them indicated they make a constant effort to engage in any type of mentoring relationship including peer mentorship. This phenomenon is still consistent with Kram’s (1985) mentor-role theory that protégé often receive more psychosocial benefits from the mentoring relationships than the career-related functions of mentoring relationship when involved in informal mentoring relationships, which leads to the second characteristic of mentoring relationship in this study.

Second, three psychosocial functions were identified including counseling, friendship, and acceptance and confirmation. The career-related function of mentoring relationships was not identified in this study. This may be due to the fact that there are still limited numbers of women possessing leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics who are more likely to offer mentorship to female student-athletes. Previous research discovered women working in intercollegiate athletics such as Associate Athletic Director, Assistant Athletic Director, and Senior Women Administrator are willing to involve in mentoring relationships with female student-athletes to help them succeed in their career paths (Bower & Hums, 2013). Since more than 85 percent of women working in intercollegiate athletics used to be a student-athlete in college (Bower & Hums, 2013; Grappendorf et al., 2004), they often would like to mentor

female student-athletes to help develop their career mainly because of a sense of responsibility to give back from the past experiences as a protégé (Bower & Hums, 2009).

The psychosocial function of mentoring is essential for an effective mentoring relationship as it requires emotional connections between mentors and protégés, which will eventually lead to both personal and professional development of protégés (Bower, 2009; Kram, 1983). Specifically, all female student-athletes in this study emphasized the counseling function of their mentors, which supports previous research that the counseling function of mentoring is the most significant and frequently mentioned psychosocial function for women in intercollegiate athletics (Bower, 2011; Bower & Hums, 2014). In addition, the friendship function was identified in this study, which supports the notion that the friendship function tends to be found more in informal mentoring relationships rather than formal relationships (Ragins, 1999). Previous research also showed friendships are often developed over time between mentors and protégés (Bower & Hums, 2008; Kram, 1983; 1985). In Kram's (1985) mentor-role theory, the mentoring relationship turns to a friendship during "the redefinition phase". In the current study, friendship function was clearly identified and it may be due to the data collected from juniors and seniors, which probably allow them have enough time to build a strong mentoring relationship.

On the other hand, the psychosocial function of role modeling was not identified in this study, which has been widely appeared in other research within the domain of intercollegiate athletics (Bower, 2009, 2011; Bower & Hums, 2013, 2014; Carter & Hart, 2010). Two possible explanations for this could be derived from female student-athletes' various career paths and irregular mentoring relationships. First, female student-athletes might not be on the same career trajectory with their mentors, and this is not an ideal condition for role-modeling to occur. For example, Susan mentioned that her coach gave her a lot of supports and encouraging words, which could be linked to psychosocial benefits, but it may not necessarily lead to a role-modeling procedure. Second, all the female student-athletes were engaged in irregular mentoring relationships, which was less likely to allow them to spend long enough time to establish a deep relationship with their mentors.

The third characteristic of female student-athletes' mentoring relationship in this study was the gender of mentors as a non-significant factor for the effectiveness of mentorship. This is not consistent with previous research as gender of mentors and cross-gender mentoring relationships have been highlighted in the literature on women's mentoring relationships. Several previous studies identified gender of mentors as a significant barrier for their mentoring relationships (Avery et al., 2008; Bower et al., 2006; Ragins & Cottons, 1991; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). Regardless of the gender of their mentors, the female student athletes communicated well with their coaches and received feedback and advices, which were mostly related to their sports. Lauren and Jessica's comments were especially worthwhile discussing with the findings of Avery et al. (2008) which pertains to Kram's (1985) functions of mentoring relationships. Avery et al. (2008) found that the female protégé with different sex of mentors tended to receive significantly less psychosocial mentoring impacts than those with the same sex of mentors. However, the female student-athletes in this study did not indicate any perceived barriers for having male mentors and were able to obtain some psychosocial benefits from their male mentors. This finding could provide an insightful information for intercollegiate athletic teams and potential mentors of coaches, especially considering the recent situation that more than half of coaches of women's athletic teams were men and the proportion of women has been gradually decreasing in last three decades (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Barriers to Mentoring Relationship

Our findings indicated that female student-athletes in this study identified a lack of time or time management as the most significant barrier to mentoring relationship. They mentioned that they were too busy to initiate or have a mentoring relationship. This barrier was primarily derived from their busy daily schedules, as female student-athletes have to balance the time among practices, meetings, and classes. Regular-scheduled mentoring is a crucial aspect of effective mentoring relationships (Bower, 2009). However, it is not so easy to set a schedule a month in advance due to the unpredictable nature of school demands and in-season travel plans. The lack of time was also identified as an organizational factor inhibiting mentoring relationships in many parts of intercollegiate athletics for women since it is often beyond an individual ability to control (Bower & Hums, 2009). To sum up, female student-athletes are faced with time access problems in mentoring relationships. It is widely known that most student-athletes have a difficulty dealing with both roles of students and athletes. However, this finding has not been thoroughly examined or taken into deep considerations by researchers. Thus, practitioners such as advisors and mentoring program developers have to consider this issue more seriously when designing or organizing a formal mentoring program, otherwise mentoring relationships are hardly effective and efficient.

It is imperative for female student-athletes to have a better quality of mentoring relationships. However, it seemed that the female student-athletes in this study were not aware of the importance of overcoming the existing barriers to mentoring relationships, or they were not aware of the importance of mentoring relationship. The majority of the participants had not thought about how to overcome the current barriers or were not able to come up with an effective way to cope with the barriers. The ability to cope with perceived barriers has been highlighted in the literature of psychology and education, especially related to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and coping efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). However, no study to date has been conducted to examine coping efficacy of barriers to mentoring relationships. Thus, this finding suggests that future research should further examine and incorporate the concept of coping-efficacy into the investigation of perceived barriers to mentoring relationships.

Practical Implications

In addition to the main focus of this study based on three research questions, the female student-athletes in this study indicated their career goals are closely related to their majors not the sports they play. Student-athletes' career choice and planning have been highlighted in the literature and previous studies consistently found student-athletes are becoming less interested in pursuing sport-related career paths (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; Tyrance et al., 2013). Only 3.43 percent of student-athletes keep playing their sports after graduation (NCAA, 2015). This is also supported by previous studies that found a decline of student-athletes' expectations to play sports professionally after graduation (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; Tyrance et al., 2013). Student-athletes often plan and pursue their careers in associated with their academic endeavors as they realize the lack of opportunities to become a professional athlete (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004). This could be a significant aspect regarding female student-athletes' career development and people involved in mentoring relationships with them because it would be misleading to assume that the majority of student-athletes would pursue their career paths with their athletics rather than academics or majors. In order to provide

more proper and effective mentoring services, female student-athletes' mentors and female student-athletes themselves should be aware of this information. One potential weakness to conduct relevant research on female student-athletes' mentoring relationships associated with their career paths would be the fact that the extant literature found no significant gender difference existing in pursuing professional careers. Having a better understanding of potential factors particularly influencing female student-athletes' career choice and inclination would be needed in order to capture female student-athletes' most needs in their career aspirations and to provide more effective mentorships. Thus, mentors, advisors, and career counselors need to understand this current situation for female student-athletes and provide more effective and proper mentorships to fill the gap between their careers and sports.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study identified several significant facets of female student-athletes' mentoring relationships, the study had a few limitations that should be taken into considerations. First of all, focusing solely on female student-athletes in a Division I school is limited to some extent. Extending this study to Division II or III schools will provide unique perspectives and insights about female student-athletes' mentoring relationships and their careers since student-athletes' career aspirations and goals vary depending on the levels of the sports they play (Tyrance et al., 2013). Secondly, this study focused only on juniors and seniors due to the specific purpose of the study which to explore past experiences of mentoring relationships for female student-athletes. However, future research should extend from this study and investigate expectations of incoming female student-athletes for mentoring relationships and compare the potential differences between their expectations and what is actually happening.

The lack of racial diversity in the sample might also limit the generalizability of the findings beyond White female student-athletes. Although White females comprise over half of the student population (61%) at the institution, exploring female student-athletes of other races would have yielded different aspects or experiences of their mentoring relationships. Therefore, in future research, investigating female student-athletes with a reflection of racial demographics of an institution would make the results more generalizable. Furthermore, exploring mentoring experiences of racial minority female student-athletes might provide valuable insights regarding a larger issue of campus racial climate or racial diversity in student-athlete population and athletic hiring practices.

Lastly, while it is indispensable to examine student-athletes' perspectives, future studies should investigate the functions of mentoring relationships as well as perceived barriers from the mentors' lens. Further understanding of mentors' perceptions on mentoring relationships is needed to see if there is any discrepancy between what student-athletes anticipate or desire to achieve and what mentors intend to provide during their mentoring relationships. Regarding that there are still many schools and intercollegiate athletics without any organized mentoring programs, understanding perspectives from both mentors and protégés will be necessary to develop a new and effective mentoring program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the roles of mentoring relationship for female student-athletes, specially focusing on their career choice and development. Exploring mentoring

relationship experiences provided a broader and a deeper understanding of the current situation of mentoring relationships for female student-athletes in a Division I school. The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge in sport management, especially to fill the research gap between women's career and mentoring relationships in the context of intercollegiate athletics. The study revealed that female student-athletes are more likely to receive psychosocial benefits from their mentors yet having a mentoring relationship with someone who can provide both psychosocial and career functions of mentoring relationships is highly desired for female student-athletes' successful career preparation and development.

In terms of practical standpoint, the findings of this study revealed valuable information about female student-athletes' mentoring relationship characteristics, psychosocial functions, and perceived barriers. This information will be useful for many practitioners as they can have a broader and a deeper understanding of the current situation of mentoring relationships for female student-athletes in a Division I school. Furthermore, the findings of this study will also provide female student-athletes themselves with intellectual and practical insights to be aware or understand potential benefits of mentoring relationships. Lauren said, "Through the mentoring, I can trust myself more than before. It is important for me to believe in myself and I can move on. I think that it is useful for student-athletes. I can improve my weakness and have high support from my mentor".

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Primary Information provided to the Interviewee

- Consent form to participation
- Synopsis of the study
- Confidentiality of data collected
- No compensation provided
- Contact information of the primary researchers

Background Information

- 1) Please tell me about yourself.
 - a. Tell me about your educational background including your major and why you chose.
 - b. Tell me about your sport. Why and how did you choose that sport?
 - c. Please share your experience with that sport.
- 2) Tell me about your career goals and aspirations.
 - a. When did you start thinking about your current career plans?
 - b. At the beginning, what aspects of that career specifically attracted you?
 - c. Tell me how is your major or sport related to your career plans.

Mentoring Relationship Experiences

RQ1. What characteristics of mentoring relationship are identified as it pertains to female student-athletes' career development?

- 3) Tell me about your experiences of mentoring relationship.
 - a. What kinds of mentoring relationship do you have it in your school? If your school doesn't have a mentoring relationship, tell me other experiences of mentoring relationship.
 - b. Tell me about your mentor(s) and how the mentoring relationship(s) started.
 - c. What benefits have you received from the mentoring relationship?
 - d. What do you wish to get from the mentoring relationship in the future?

- 4) Tell me how your mentoring relationship affects your career development.
 - a. How does the mentoring relationship help you shape your career path and develop your career plans? Please share your experience.
 - b. What roles or functions of mentoring relationship are most important to your career development?
 - c. Please also tell me why it is important for you.

Barriers to Mentoring Relationship

RQ2. What factors are identified as a barrier to mentoring relationship for female student-athletes?

- 5) Describe any barriers that you have confronted in your mentoring relationship.
- 6) Tell me what other potential barriers could be in the mentoring relationship.

RQ3. What factors are identified as a barrier to initiate the mentoring relationship for female student-athletes?

- 7) If any, describe any barriers that you had to initiate the mentoring relationship.
- 8) Tell me what other factors could impede to initiate a mentoring relationship.

RQ4. What strategies do female student-athletes utilize to cope with those perceived barriers to mentoring relationship?

- 9) Please share your experience how you overcame the barriers to mentoring relationship.
- 10) What could be an appropriate coping strategy to deal with those barriers?