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The Impact of Mentorship in Intercollegiate Athletics: Perspectives From Female Athletic Administrators at the Division II and Division III Levels

Jennifer L. O'Neill
Gonzaga University

Jimmy Smith
Gonzaga University

The number of women working in intercollegiate athletic administration has increased over the last several decades. With more women looking to pursue careers as sport leaders, there is a need to provide them with career development opportunities. Mentoring has been shown to increase career success as well as improve employee retention and productivity. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of mentor relationships on the careers of female athletic administrators at the NCAA Division II and Division III levels. Mentor Role Theory was utilized as a framework to explore the specific career-related and psychosocial mentor functions that the administrators perceived as important. The results reiterated previous findings that mentorship was important for career success and provided perspectives on the mentor functions viewed as valuable. The feedback also indicated a need for determining how to provide mentorship opportunities at these smaller Division II and Division III institutions. This information has potential benefits for athletic departments and sport organizations seeking to provide more professional development opportunities for women in athletic administration.

Keywords: Mentoring, Intercollegiate Athletics, Women, Athletic Administrators, Perspectives

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, the number of female intercollegiate student-athletes has grown substantially from only 16,000 to over 200,000 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The rise of female intercollegiate coaches and leaders, however, has not mirrored the rapid growth of female intercollegiate athlete participation. For example, as of 2016, only 40.2% of women's intercollegiate teams had a female head coach. The lack of female representation in collegiate athletic leadership positions has been the focus of several studies, including the potential causes for the gap in gender representation (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Bower & Hums, 2013; Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore, 2000), and career related barriers that contribute to the lack of women in those positions (Bower & Bennett, 2010; Knoppers, 1987; Schneider, Stier, Henry & Wilding, 2010).

Women do not make up an equal percentage of administrators and coaches, compared to their male counterparts, however, figures have risen in the last several decades. According to the 2017 report from the NCAA, from 1996 to 2016, the percentage of female athletic directors rose from 16% to 19.6% across all NCAA Divisions (NCAA, 2017). The percentage of female athletic administrators as a whole, however, has not seen a significant increase since 1996. Across all NCAA Divisions, the percentage of female associate athletic directors has dropped from 36.6% to 34.5% and the number of female assistant athletic directors has only risen from 31.4% to 32.7% (NCAA, 2017). There also continues to be discrepancies in the number of female administrators present at institutions across the NCAA Divisions. In 2016, women represented 10.5% of athletic directors at the Division I level whereas Division II has female athletic directors in 15.7% of their institutions and Division III has the highest at 29.3% (NCAA, 2017). There are many factors that differentiate divisional status across the NCAA (2019), including the number of sponsored sports, no financial aid offered to students based on their the percentage of games played in their division. "For sports other than football and basketball, Division I schools must play 100% of the minimum number of contests against Division I opponents" (NCAA, 2019, n.p.). Similar phrasing is also stated for Division II, but at a 50% rate. The differences in division status in the NCAA could mean that the work environment and development opportunities could vary differently in athletic departments across divisions. The differing percentage of female athletic directors at Division I, II and III institutions, warrants exploration of how athletic department structure might be impacting the career success of women working as athletic administrators. Therefore, there is a need to build upon the foundational understanding of career and personal development opportunities for females through mentorship as this concept may play a role in female athletic administrator development. Bower and Hums (2013) suggested that female athletic administrator face several career barriers from their male counterparts, where enhanced mentorship opportunities may overcome these barriers. The current research explored perceptions of mentorship among women in an athletic administrator role within Division II and Division III athletic departments.

Mentorship is a technique that has been used for employee development and there has been extensive research on the factors and outcomes of mentorship within a variety of settings. Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) defined mentorship 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). Previous research on mentoring found that mentor relationships benefit both the mentor and protégé, such as, higher job satisfaction and attitudes toward work (Fagenson-Eland, Marks & Amendola,

1997; Fagenson, 1988). Studies have also illustrated that mentoring led to more promotions and career success for protégés (Fagenson, 1988; Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and has been linked to higher productivity for employees and stronger commitment to their organization (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Russell & Adams, 1997). Other research has examined the impact that gender composition and a variety of relationship factors had on mentorship quality and outcomes (Bower, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990).

Mentorship of employees are shown in a variety of settings such as accounting firms (Viator, 1999), law firms (Hamilton & Brabbit, 2007), health care (Fox, 2010), and higher education (Johnson, 2015). The success of mentorship of employees warrants the exploration of its impact for women working in intercollegiate athletic administration. Recent research explored the impact of mentorship from the perception of female athletic directors and graduate assistants at Division I universities (Smith, Taylor & Hardin, 2016). By conducting semi-structured interviews, the authors wanted to gain perspective of mentorship among Division II and Division III athletic departments. Therefore, the current research explored the perceptions of mentorship from female intercollegiate athletic administrators in the areas of career and personal development among non-Division I athletic departments. The research questions for the current study are: 1) How do female athletic administrators at the Division II and Division III levels perceive mentoring in their career development? and 2) What characteristics of mentorship do female athletic administrators perceive important for their career and personal development? Given that gender composition and athletic department structures vary greatly across divisions, examination of the perception of mentorship at different institutional levels may contribute new perspectives to the current literature. It might also offer a comparison of the perspectives held by women working in different divisions of the NCAA. The data collected provided valuable information that could be used by athletic departments looking to ensure a positive and productive work environment for their employees and for young professionals, specifically women, looking to build a career within intercollegiate athletics.

Theoretical Framework

Within the development of Mentor Role Theory, Kram (1988) positioned that the characteristics of mentorship can be divided into two categories: career development and psychosocial support. According to Kram (1988), the most effective mentorship must be comprised of both career development and psychosocial support aspects and should aim to develop protégés in both areas. For Kram (1988), career development included exposure and visibility, coaching, sponsorship, protection, and the presentation of challenging assignments. Whereas the psychosocial functions included acceptance, counseling, friendship and being a role model. Since Mentor Role Theory was originally developed by Kram in the 1980's, it has become a staple framework in how mentorship is utilized among organizations. Ragins and Cotton (1999) utilized Kram's theory to expand the understanding of gender composition among the engineering, social work, and journalism fields. Similarly, Kram's Mentor Role Theory was framed by White, Schempp, McGullick, Berger, and Elliot (2017) to understand mentorship from a coaching protégé perspective. Within intercollegiate athletics, Kram's theory was applied between female athletic administrators and their coworkers to develop effective mentorship relationships among themselves and the generation of young professionals behind them (Smith, Taylor, & Hardin, 2016).

According to Mentor Role Theory, all of the listed functions are essential to effective mentorship and both career functions and psychosocial functions are important for proper protégé development. In her work, Kram (1988) stated that exposure and visibility function is the ability of the mentor to provide networking opportunities to their protégé within the field. In the area of intercollegiate athletics this function might translate to traveling to conferences or attending meetings as a mentor pair to provide protégé crucial opportunities to network with other professionals. The mentor provides sponsorship to the protégé by aiding in the building of their reputation through highlighting their work (Kram, 1988). Providing knowledge and skills through giving valuable feedback and sharing their personal experiences is also a function of the mentor relationship (Kram, 1988). Working together, the protégé is able to observe and learn important job skills necessary to make themselves valuable in the field (Kram, 1988). Kram (1988) also asserts that it is the role of the mentor to provide protection for their protégé by giving them reasonable amounts and types of work for their experience level while avoiding overloading the protégé more work than they may be able to handle early on in a career such as committee style assignments. The mentor relationship, however, should also provide the protégé with assignments that are challenging enough to stretch their current skill set and prepare them for more experienced roles in the future (Kram, 1988).

Beyond the career functions, the psychosocial functions of mentorship provide the personal development necessary for the protégé to develop as a well-rounded professional (Kram, 1988). The theory asserts that the mentor should be a role model for the protégé by modeling how tasks should be performed and in what manner an experienced professional behaves and exemplifies their values (Kram, 1988). The acceptance/confirmation function serves to provide the protégé with confidence as the mentor expresses encouragement and support to the protégé and creates a relationship of trust (Kram, 1988). The mentor should also counsel the protégé by advising them on how to face and professionally handle personal conflicts (Kram, 1988). Lastly, an effective mentor relationship should provide friendship to both parties and interactions should offer an occasional escape from work related duties for mentor and protégé (Kram, 1988).

The Mentor Role Theory by Kram (1988) gives a framework for understanding what creates effective and well-rounded mentor relationships **that not only benefit the individual participants, including newcomers and veteran individuals**, but the organization as a whole (Kram, 1988). Kram's theory is applicable to intercollegiate athletic departments as they have similar issues, hierarchies, productivity strategies and complexities that many other organizations have. A mentor relationship that provides many of these functions may produce more prepared and engaged female athletic administrators and could potentially provide an avenue for young female professionals to overcome some of the unique barriers they face in their field (Bower & Hums, 2013).

Literature Review

The career issues faced by women in various sport related positions have been examined extensively (LaVoi, 2016; Harvey, Voelker, Cope, & Dieffenbach, 2018; Bower & Bennett, 2010; Knoppers, 1987), however, few studies focused on the career barriers faced specifically by women working in intercollegiate athletic administrative positions. Bower and Hums (2013) addressed such barriers and career path statistics by surveying female athletic administrators within the NCAA (Division I, II, and III) as well as various National Association of

Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), junior college, and Canadian colleges. A total of 1833 surveys were sent to the athletic administrators and the researchers received 514 usable responses returned for return rate of 28%. The women who participated in the survey included assistant, associate and head athletic directors as well as senior women administrators. Over 72% of the women who responded had been intercollegiate student-athletes and had completed a master's degree by the time of the survey. The main objectives of the survey were to examine what women felt were the most enjoyable and least enjoyable parts of their jobs, what career barriers they experienced and the advice they would offer to other women pursuing a career in collegiate athletics. When asked about the most enjoyable aspects of their job, 274 women said they liked working with female student athletes, 156 women said being a role model and 114 women listed mentoring others. On the other side of the spectrum, overcoming gender stereotypes, not feeling respected by men in their department, unfair compensation, and extreme time commitment were listed as some of the least enjoyable job aspects for the respondents. Lastly, the survey results indicated that the lack of females in the profession, the lack of opportunity to network and subsequently a lack of mentoring for women were all significant barriers that needed to be addressed. Mentoring was a common theme found in the survey comments, indicating there was a perceived need for mentor relationships. Thus, it is valuable to examine the potential impact of mentor relationships for women working in intercollegiate athletics, especially in administrative positions. The study was able to reach a large number of female athletic administrators, however, the quantitative method of gathering data did not allow for detailed context or in-depth responses from the administrators.

Mentorship

Outside of the sport industry, mentorship has proven to be beneficial to individual participants and organizations as a whole (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008). A recent study performed by United Postal Service found that 70% of small businesses that receive mentoring survive more than five years – double the success rate of businesses that do not receive mentoring (Kerpen, 2018). In an exploration of Sun Microsystems employees, research discovered that an employee with a mentor is five times more likely to receive a pay raise or promotion than an employee without one (Kerpen, 2018). Many corporations have implemented mentorship programs to help them retain quality employees and develop a culture of high performance from their members (Allen, Eby & Lentz, 2006). In a multidisciplinary meta-analysis, Eby et al. (2008) found that mentoring relationships had strong correlations with positive protégé outcomes. The study explored the mentoring relationships in three different categories which included youth or school age setting, academic or college settings and adult workplace settings. The study investigated the outcomes of mentorship through an analysis of articles published from 1985 to 2006. Research that was unpublished, like manuscripts or dissertations, were not included in the search. Published articles that were considered had to meet certain criteria to be considered for the study including having to involve youth, academic or workplace mentorship and focusing on a traditional one-on-one mentorship method. After filtering research through the criteria, 116 articles were used for the meta-analysis. The study utilized a technique for meta-analysis by Hunter and Schmidt (1990) that required coding of data from the articles by the investigators and then determined the significance of the findings. The results were consistent with research studies before it which suggested that there are significant correlations between workplace mentorship, attitudes at work, and career outcomes. The findings

indicated that mentorship might have a stronger effect on the attitudes of protégés than direct workplace outcomes, but that attitude changes could impact overall career outcomes indirectly. Across multiple disciplines, mentorship was shown to have correlations to outcomes and attitudes and the potential benefits warrants exploration of its impact in collegiate athletic settings.

Mentorship Within College Athletics

Within the field of intercollegiate athletics, mentoring has been examined to understand the impact it has on young professionals in the field. A plethora of studies have been performed to investigate the mentorship functions and relationships between coaches and athletes (e.g., Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke & Salmela, 1998; Miller, Salmela & Kerr, 2002; Lough, 2001). Beyond coaches and athletes, more mentorship studies have illustrated the impact of mentorship for athletic administrators, including athletic directors as well as senior, associate, assistant athletic directors and senior woman administrators in college athletic departments (Schneider et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002; Young, 1990).

The impact mentor relationships have on the career development of women working in intercollegiate athletics has been studied recently from several angles. In a more recent study, Bower and Hums (2014) surveyed 514 female athletic administrators, including head, associate and assistant athletic directors, from NCAA Division I, Division II and NAIA institutions. Using Mentor Role Theory developed by Kram (1988) as a framework, survey questions were formatted to address the most important characteristics of mentorship in three specific areas; overall mentor characteristics, career functions and psychosocial functions. The results from the research indicated that mentorship was a valuable instrument for the female athletic administrators. The career functions of mentorship listed by participants included opportunities to create a social network and useful knowledge within their field. Many participants indicated that the networking opportunities provided by their mentor were catalysts for their careers as they provided exposure and helped them build a larger variety of contacts. In addition, they indicated that mentorship was most valuable for career development when protégés felt like their mentor was respected in their field and trustworthy. Finally, Bower and Hums (2014) stated that developing effective formal mentorship programs could be valuable for career development for women in the industry. Although former research showed that informal mentoring was more effective than formal mentoring (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), this article suggested that formal mentor programs could be useful for women in intercollegiate athletics. Several participants indicated that a formal mentor program would have helped initiate the mentor relationships that young professionals were looking for.

Other researchers investigated mentoring for women in collegiate athletics by examining the relationship from both mentor and protégé perspectives. Smith et al. (2016) interviewed female head athletic directors and graduate assistants from NCAA Division I universities. The semi-structured interviews were formatted using Two-step Flow theory developed by Lazarsfeld and Katz (1966). Lazarsfeld and Katz (1966) originally developed their theory as an interpersonal communication theory for mass communications that focused on the way information travels from the original source to the wider public (Smith et al., 2016). Two-step Flow theory was used by Smith et al. (2016) to describe how mentors are opinion leaders and use the information and networking they gain to pass information to protégés.

The interviews illuminated four themes pertinent to mentor relationships for women in collegiate athletics; (1) the importance of mentorship, (2) the value of quality mentorship, (3) the need for mentorship availability and, (4) a lack of female mentorship for women (Smith et al., 2016). All participants in the study stated that mentorship was critical for career development as it provided networking opportunities and valuable direction. The head athletic directors, who represented the mentor group in the study, indicated that they aimed to provide higher quality mentorship to their subordinates than they had when they entered the field. The mentor group also mentioned role modeling frequently, saying that women who had mentored them had also acted as role models which was vital in their development. The head athletic directors also stated that quality mentorship should provide a wider variety of experiences than a young employee might have without it. The availability of mentorship, however, was a concern for both groups who indicated that a lack of time was a barrier to finding and continuing mentor relationships with other women. Lastly, a lack of women represented in top positions within intercollegiate athletics was listed as a stressor for graduate assistants who stated they did not have women to look to as role models. Many did not even know of other women working within their athletic departments. With that in mind, many of the protégés suggested they would benefit from formal mentor programs at their institutions because they lacked the know-how to start a mentor relationship in a male saturated field. This research included valuable information on the perspectives of both mentor and protégés in intercollegiate athletics but did not delve into how formal mentor programs could be developed and why these mentorship programs may be beneficial to women in college athletics (Smith et al., 2016).

While Bower and Hums (2014) and Smith et al. (2016) examined mentor relationships on women working in intercollegiate athletics, more research needs to be done to get a full picture of the impact mentoring has on career and psychosocial success. Bower and Hums (2014) received completed surveys from 514 female athletic administrators but their results were mostly quantitative in nature and did not contain the detail that individual interviews would have provided. Conversely, Smith et al. (2016) gathered more in-depth information from interviews but were only able to reach women working in Division I institutions and did not use Mentor Role Theory to develop questions specifically aimed at the quality of mentorship. The results from both studies indicated a need for some form of formal mentorship, however, neither study was able to examine this sub-category of mentorship in any detail.

The purpose of the current study was to examine mentorship from the perspective of female athletic administrators at Division II and III institutions. The impact of mentorship within these gaps in previous research could have important implications for women working in intercollegiate athletics as administrators. Information on what characteristics make quality mentorship could be particularly useful for athletic departments at these levels who hope to provide better career development opportunities for women and create positive work environments for their employees. The discovered career benefits of mentoring within intercollegiate athletics could also be important for young professionals looking to gain experience or enter new positions. In addition, research results on the most beneficial characteristics of formal mentor relationships could provide important information for institutions looking to develop formal mentor programs within their athletic departments.

Methods

The current study investigated the perceptions of mentorship for women working in intercollegiate athletics at various stages of their career. The study included intercollegiate athletic administrators with job titles ranging from head athletic director to associate or assistant athletic director and senior woman administrator. Previous qualitative research only explored the perceptions of mentorship from head athletic directors at Division I institutions. The average number of female athletic administrators per school varies greatly across NCAA divisions. This significant difference in the structure of leadership at different divisional levels indicates that the perceptions and experiences with mentorship for women working in athletic administration could vary between divisions. The central focus of this study was to gain perspective on mentorship from those women working at NCAA Division II and III institutions.

Data Collection

To provide in-depth information and a well-rounded picture of the participants' experiences and perceptions, a qualitative study was performed. Data collection through semi-structured interviews allowed participants to expand on their answers to open-ended questions and gave the opportunity for the investigator to use direct quotations for the most detail. The semi-structured interview format also allowed the investigator to ask follow-up questions for clarification of original answers and probe for more information if necessary (Jones, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were performed on a sample of nine Division II and Division III athletic administrators. A convenience sampling method was used for close proximity and easy accessibility to research participants (Etikan et al., 2016). All participants were from the Division II Great Northwest Athletic Conference and the Division III Northwest Conference. Female athletic administrators of several levels including Athletic Directors, Associate and Assistant Athletic Directors as well as Senior Woman Administrators were invited to participate. This was done to provide perspectives of mentorship from several areas in the department as well as multiple levels of leadership from women at various stages in their careers.

The interview questions were structured to obtain work experiences and opinions regarding mentorship and working in intercollegiate athletics as a female. These categories of questions allowed exploration of their personal mentor related experiences and provided an understanding if mentorship was important to career development and which functions of mentorship were considered important for women working in athletic administration at the NCAA Division II and III levels. Following Kram's (1988) Mentor Role Theory, participants were asked if specific actions their mentors (past or present) performed were valuable to their career and which ones were the most important for their personal growth. Mentorship characteristics from Kram's Mentor Role Theory were not listed for participants within the interview questions. Any characteristic mentioned by a participant was done so at their discretion without prompting or suggestion of Kram's mentorship characteristics. Interview questions were written this way purposefully to elicit unbiased answers from participants about which mentorship characteristics were most important to them individually. The purpose of asking questions this way was to obtain a better understanding of what was on the forefront of the minds of female athletic administrators at this level. Participants were also asked about mentor programs available at their current institutions and if those programs were helpful in their workplace.

Participants

Research participants were initially contacted via email addresses found publicly on their institutions athletic department websites. The researchers went to each of the athletic department websites to collect the emails of female athletic administrators with more than two years of experience in college athletics. There were 42 female athletic administrators in the two divisions were emailed. Nine female athletic administrators participated in the current study which represented 21% of the population. Five participants were athletic administrators from the Division II Great Northwest Athletic Conference and four participants were athletic administrators from the Division III Northwest Conference. Years of experience of the participants ranged from three years to more than 30 years of experience in college athletics.

In the initial email, athletic administrators were informed about the study and invited to participate in an interview either in person or over the phone. Each interview was between 30 and 60 minutes in length and was recorded either in person or over the phone for transcription purposes. The series of question derived from Kram (1988) were asked of all participant in the same order, however, given the semi-structured interview procedure, probing questions were asked during each interview to provide additional information or clarity to a response to a question (Merriman & Tisdell, 2015). After transcription and necessary demographic information was catalogued, the identity of the participants was removed and coded (A1-A9) for confidentiality purposes.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using a deductive coding data analysis method, in which the data was grouped into themes which were pre-determined before the interviews (Benaquisto, 2008). Using this technique, data from the interviews were grouped into themes that were based on mentor characteristics themes outlined in Mentor Role Theory (Kram, 1988). The categories of mentorship defined by Kram (1988) as important to career development were exposure and visibility, coaching, sponsorship, protection and challenging assignments. The categories of mentorship shows importance to personal and career development were acceptance, friendship, counseling and role modeling. The data from the interviews were grouped into these themes based on how many respondents mentioned each theme as valuable to their success. Given that there are predetermined themes, counting themes to show validation of such themes by Kram (1988) was important to the data analysis. This process falls in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) justification for counting themes in three ways, (a) to recognize themes more definitively, (b) to verify hypothesis, and (c) to maintain the integrity of the analysis. "Counting can improve the rigor of analysis," (Leach & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 568), and in the case of the current research, counting themes enhanced the importance of the data analysis here with Kram's pre-existing themes established.

Results

The current study aimed to address the research questions: 1) How do female athletic administrators at the Division II and Division III levels perceive mentoring in their career development? and 2) What characteristics of mentorship do female athletic administrators perceive important for their career and personal development? Table 1 provides insight by the

participants based on Kram's (1988) Mentory Role Theory and career development. Each characteristic is accompanied by a quote from one participant that highlights the essence that characteristic.

In the category of career development characteristics, the most mentioned mentor characteristic was coaching. Eight (of the nine) participants indicated coaching was important to them. Participants suggested that coaching played a role in many ways, but often through feedback and words of encouragement about athletic administration. A9 stated that her mentor was always positive when it came to their mentor relationship.

(She) really instilled a lot of belief that I could do this. She kind of helped guide me through that process of kind of learning how to speak like an administrator or things that you're going to need to do. And um, and so she was really pivotal in that transition from coaching to administration.

The importance of exposure and visibility was mentioned by six (out of nine) of participants. Participants of the current study would offer further understanding into this characteristic networking with other administrators or the opportunity to work in multiple areas of the athletic department to build career experience. A4 was grateful for the opportunity for their her mentor to provide such great career experiences.

I think I've been very fortunate. The mentorship that I've received...I don't know that I could have asked for more because I feel like I've been given so much by them and I honestly feel like I'm very lucky. Like I don't know if people get this opportunity or exposure to mentors.

Through introductions to new people in college sport field and advocacy for building relationships, sponsorship was mentioned by five (out of nine) of participants. A6 was excited to have several mentors advocate for her in in many ways.

My mentors were amazing in my career, kind of huge support and advocate for me, when I moved to (a large Southern city), Jenny and Dave (pseudonyms) said, okay, you need to go meet Mary Smith (pseudonyms) in the Sun Belt Conference. And so, you know, that was my introduction to Mary and now Mary and I have a great relationship and she (too) has been a huge advocate for my career since then, so they've been really valuable at opening doors for me and helping me make connections.

Challenging assignments was mentioned by four (out of nine) participants. Comments from the participants on challenging assignments were broad form based on the position(s) they held, but were also more specific. A3 discussed a gender label related to college football.

I would say that at DIII part of the challenges are, well for example even at a small school like Gonzaga you don't have football. Once you add football in, that changes the dynamics because everyone knows that women don't know anything about football.

The least mentioned characteristic in this category was protection which was not mentioned.

Table 1
Career Development Characteristics Participant Responses

Mentorship Characteristic	Number of respondents	Quote
Coaching	8 (out of 9)	"[He] was one of the good ones who was really good about giving feedback after conference meetings... some of the good ones also can provide that feedback and when it's not a supervisor I think it's less threatening so it's helpful." A1
Exposure and Visibility	6 (out of 9)	"We have a great relationship and she has been a huge advocate for my career since then, so they've been really valuable at opening doors for me and helping me make connections." A8
Sponsorship	5 (out of 9)	"[She] would say in the introduction, 'you've got to meet my friend, she's awesome, this is what she's doing'... and [because of that] these people have a respect for you and it doesn't matter what your school name is or where it's located." A6
Challenging Assignments	4 (out of 9)	"He gave you enough information but didn't spoon feed you. He wasn't a micromanager and he would let you run with it... He trusted you until you gave him a reason not to." A7
Protection	0 (out of 9)	

Table 2 provides insight by the participants based on Kram's (1988) Mentory Role Theory and psychosocial development. Each characteristic in this table is also accompanied by a quote from one participant that highlights the essence that characteristic. Out of the personal development categories, counseling was mentioned by six (out of nine) participants. Counseling took several forms including opportunities for mentors to be listeners, but also to be there to answer a series of questions and provide more personal responses that would help build that relationship.

The relationship with someone that you can call on and say, Hey, help, what do you think about this? How do you feel about this? What does this look like for you? If you were in the scenario, what would you do? And just being able to bounce ideas and have those conversations I think are all super important (A3)

The other categories of friendship, acceptance and role modeling were all mentioned equally with five (out of nine) participants commenting that it was important to their development. Table 2 has one quote that represents each of these characteristics, but it was A9 that summed up all of these characteristics when responding to a follow up interview question related to how her mentors helped her professional development as well as her personal life.

We have a small department (DII), so you kind of naturally end up gravitating towards those people. They become your friends, not only are they your coworkers, but they're also now your friends and so they ended up help enhance your life and for me personally because I've also worked at two private Christian institutions and had faith development through some of these things as well, which I don't think is just on accident. I think that that's pretty intentional with mentors. We spent so much time in our jobs in athletics. We work weekends. We work late nights. We do all of those things. We get phone calls from coaches at odd hours. It's just kind of part of how it is. You ended up shaping who you are as a person, right? Your mission statement, the only word that keeps coming to my mind, and that's not what I'm looking for, your values, your values are who you are and if you can come to work everyday and live out your values through your work, your work is going to reflect who you are as a person outside of work, if that makes sense. Because every day you're coming in, you're experiencing work, yes, we're all doing the job and we're all doing the things that we're required to do but we're also getting to interact with other people who might not be like us. And so that's naturally affecting you whether you think about it or not, because when you leave you can process how someone handles this stressful situation or that stressful situation, which might be like, oh, maybe that's how I can handle that outside of the office or our coaches are building relationships with our student athletes. Maybe I can build a relationship with my child in that same way or no? So I think we're learning every day.

Table 2

Psychosocial Development Characteristics Participant Responses

Mentorship Characteristic	Number of respondents	Quote
Counseling	6 (out of 9)	"I've always looked at her as someone that really understands that kind of new age thinking of leadership and really looking at how to work with people. She has been really helpful, I think as someone away from my career that's been helpful to vent and learn and talk things out and figure out the best way to handle different scenarios." A5
Acceptance & Confirmation	5 (out of 9)	"I think it's more the intangible but their belief in me, really it was a genuine kind of 'you can do this' sort of attitude" A2
Friendship	5 (out of 9)	"I think athletics is one of those things where it's not so much a job, it's a lifestyle, so everything kind of blurs together between personal and not, but like I said those individuals have become close friends." A1
Role Modeling	5 (out of 9)	"I was just saying how pivotal she was in being a role model. Initially in terms of can I be a woman, and can I be a coach at the college level? If [she] can do it, I can do it. Like if you can see her, you can be her." A2

The current results show that participant's experienced many of Kram's (1988) career and psychological development characteristics, but it was unclear from these results how each participant progressed between characteristics. According to Kram (1988), characteristics from career development to psychological development may or may not coincide with each other and may result in a linear or non-linear path. Mentorship may not begin at the same stage in one individual's career over another, therefore, the noted characteristics should not be considered equal once a mentorship relationship begins. An evaluation of each individual's career and psychological development should be considered to better understand each individual's characteristic strengths and deficiencies. "Individuals and organizations will create conditions so that mentoring can help in the socialization of newcomers, as well as allow for creative expression of those with experience and wisdom to share" (p. 195). After such an evaluation, one or both individuals in the relationship may determine that they may need mentorship attention related to one or more characteristics.

The characteristics described by Kram (1988) are necessary functions with intentions to achieve a successful mentorship relationship, but variables in such a relationship that can vary to make it a success or a failure. Variables such as dedicated time, tolerance of one another, expectations by individuals in the relationship met or not met (e.g., promotion), and trust (among other variables depending on the organizational setting) can affect the relationship positively or negatively.

Discussion

The findings in this study support findings in previous research in regard to the impact of mentorship on career development of female athletic administrators. Previous research indicated that mentor relationships are important for the development of skills and career advancement opportunities for female athletic administrators (Smith et al., 2016; Bower & Hums, 2014). This study adds to the body of literature by reiterating the importance of mentorship for female athletic administrators at the Division II and III levels specifically. Of the women interviewed in this study, eight of them stated that throughout their career, a mentor or mentors were instrumental in their career and personal success. Furthermore, the administrator that did not have a mentor stated that it would have been beneficial but was not available to her. All of the respondents said they felt mentorship was an important component of successful careers for women working in intercollegiate athletics in general. This information reinforces the significance of mentor relationships in career paths for women working in intercollegiate athletic administration. It also indicates the importance of providing access to mentorship for women looking to pursue careers in athletic administration at similar levels. Coupled with information from previous research, these findings are beneficial to athletic departments because it indicates a need to provide access to mentorship at all levels of the NCAA.

All but two of the mentorship characteristics defined by Kram in Mentor Role Theory (1988) were mentioned as important by the majority of participants in this study. The career development characteristics coaching, exposure/visibility, and sponsorship and the psychosocial characteristics of role modeling, friendship, acceptance/confirmation, and counseling were all mentioned as important by more than half of the participants. Previous research by Bower and Hums (2014) identified exposure/visibility and coaching as the two most valued mentoring career characteristics and counseling, role modeling and acceptance/confirmation as the three

most valued mentoring psychosocial characteristics. The top five categories from the former study align directly with the most mentioned categories in this study.

All of the categories of mentorship defined by Kram in Mentor Role Theory (1988) were identified in this study by the female athletic administrators were considered valuable; except for one. While the other categories were each mentioned by 44% or more of the respondents, the category of *protection* was not mentioned in any interview. Within the protection function of mentorship, the mentor acts to shield the mentee from taking on too many responsibilities by assigning them projects that are within the scope of their abilities (Kram, 1988). None of the female athletic administrators in this study mentioned this as an important component of their mentor relationships. This finding potentially indicates that female athletic administrators at the Division II and III levels were not seeking this type of protection from their mentors or were hoping to be challenged and therefore did not identify the protection function as necessary. One participant said, "I had lots of mentor relationships which I still carry to this day. They were really helpful encouraging you to look farther out of your comfort zones." The functions of mentorship were not given to the respondents during the interview, therefore it is possible that protection was valuable to them but was failed to be mentioned. This finding is significant, however, as it indicates that the protection function of mentorship was not a category at the forefront of their thoughts as they pondered what mentorship meant to their career success.

Lastly, only 22% of the women interviewed in this study said their athletic department had any sort of mentorship program that included people in administration roles. A1 shared that bringing in a mentor program designed for cooperate workplaces was successful for her athletic department.

We wanted to create that kind of shared mentoring atmosphere here because we have some [staff] that are super experienced some that are really brand new to the profession and young in their careers, so we create mentor groups at the beginning of the year and they are expected to meet once a month. [The woman] who brought it in said she'd set it up in corporate settings and thought it might be cool to see how it worked with athletics.

Although some felt that a mentor program was beneficial to their department, 66% of the women whose athletic department did not have a mentorship program said that adding one would not be beneficial to those that worked there. Several women shared that all the administrators in their departments were seasoned employees, so a mentorship program did not feel necessary. A9 said, "The personnel that we have in the athletic department, are pretty well into or are some way established kind of in their career, so they have already built in some of the pieces." Other women shared that they did not feel it would be beneficial because their athletic department was too small to support any type of mentor program that included administrators. A6 said, "I mean we are pretty thin. At [this division], you know, you don't have a massive staff, so I don't know that it would be beneficial to our department." These findings indicate that while some female athletic administrators feel mentor programs are helpful in their departments, Division II and Division III athletic departments might face challenges with department size and types of personnel when it comes to facilitating mentor relationships.

Conclusion

The current research reviewed female administrator experiences related to mentorship within intercollegiate athletic departments. The athletic administrators interviewed provided further information about how mentor relationships are essential to career advancement and success in intercollegiate athletics. The 30-60 minutes interviews provided more in-depth information than previous studies that collected data through surveys by allowing for follow up questions and giving participants the chance to expand on why they held certain perceptions. The participant responses add to the body of academic research which is currently limited in the area of female athletic administrators in intercollegiate settings, specifically at the Division II and Division III levels. Additionally, this contribution builds the qualitative perspective of female athletic directors and their perceptions of mentorship. The breadth of mentor characteristics listed as valuable in the interviews illustrates that mentorship provides many benefits to women in this field.

The mentor characteristics identified as most valuable to the female athletic administrators in this study also align with previous research, indicating that exposure/visibility, coaching, counseling, role modeling and acceptance/confirmation might be especially essential to the development of young professionals in the field (Bower & Hums, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Lastly, only four out of the nine women interviewed felt that a mentorship program involving athletic administrators would be beneficial in their athletic department. This indicates that athletic departments at the Division II and Division III levels might have to find other ways to provide mentor opportunities in their offices. An example of this could be collaborating with other institutions to provide mentorship opportunities or simply helping entry level employees and interns attend conferences where networking might be more available. This study supports the idea that having a mentor who provides quality career and psychosocial support is beneficial and might lead to enhanced career success for women pursuing careers in intercollegiate athletics.

Practical Implications

The current research could prove useful to Division II and Division III athletic departments as it provides valuable insight about what mentorship characteristics were helpful to female athletic administrators at those levels. This information might also be helpful to organizations such as the NCAA and Women Leader's in College Sports who both aim to provide better opportunities for and increase the numbers of women working as athletic administrators (NCAA, 2016). Nevertheless, information related to Kram's (1988) mentorship characteristics could be utilized within athletic departments first from an educational perspective and then a practical perspective. Support mentorship groups could be formed within athletic departments and data from the current study could be utilized to generate further discussion within athletic departments to enhance mentorship opportunities for both male and female athletic administrators. Some of the participants in the current study did not feel that mentorship programs would work given the size of their athletic departments and the multiple responsibilities Division II and III athletic administrators endure (e.g., associate athletic director and cross country coach). However, for the current participants, and possibly many more Division II and III athletic administrators, if mentorship became more informal or organic rather than prescribed, it may be possible that mentorship may have a place among all levels of sport

management, especially intercollegiate athletic administration. Formal mentoring relationships are usually shorter in duration lasting from six months to one year. The formalization comes in the form of specific dates, times, and locations to meet as well as the possibility of a relationship contract being signed by those in relationship (Murray, 1991; Poldre, 1994). The shorter duration of a formal mentoring relationship may reduce the opportunity for the mentor to influence the protege's career and work attitudes. However, informal mentorship has its freedom within the relationship. Individuals meet as needed and are often seen as longer standing relationships lasting anywhere between three to six years (Kram, 1988).

Limitations and Future Research

While the results from the current study provide valuable information regarding mentorship in intercollegiate athletics, there were limitations that should be considered when moving forward with this type of research. The participants were athletic administrators at Division II and Division III universities in one geographic region of the United States. Given the geographic limitation of this study, future research should gather information from athletic administrators who work outside the studied region. Although the nine participants represented 21% of the total number of female athletic administrators across the two divisions, this study was limited by the small sample of interviews. The number of completed interviews in this research was in part limited by time constraints of the researcher. Future research projects should consider the benefit of collecting data from a larger group of female athletic administrators through interviews. Once a larger sample of participants are interviewed, expanding the ideas of mentorship from the current research could also benefit from a quantifiable study with a larger population utilizing a survey. Additionally, those interviewed for this study all worked in intercollegiate athletics for at least two years, many of them much longer. It would be beneficial for future research to also explore the opinions of women working as graduate assistants, in internship positions, or other entry level positions within an athletic department. Women beginning their career in intercollegiate athletics might have different views on mentor relationships and what factors are most beneficial to their career growth.

This study supported the idea that mentorship is valuable for the career success of women working as intercollegiate athletic administrators, but more research should be done to understand how mentor relationships can be fostered within athletic departments. More than half of the participants in this study felt that a formal mentor program involving administrators would not be beneficial to their athletic department, which was an unexpected finding in this study. Some indicated there are size and logistical challenges to starting mentor programs at the Division II and Division III levels. Future research should explore ways to implement mentorship within athletic departments amongst all staff members, including administrators at these levels. This study aimed to understand how mentorship impacted female athletic administrators, but many of the insights provided might have also applied to men pursuing careers in the same field. It would be beneficial for future research to explore the impact of mentor relationships for men working as athletic administrators as well.

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