Mentoring relationships in sport from the protégé's perspective

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Abstract

This study explored mentoring relationships in sport from the perspective of the protégé. The project was guided by contemporary mentoring theories as framed by Kram's Mentor Role Theory (Kram, 1985). A convenience sample of 230 volleyball coaches was recruited for this study. Data were collected using the Coaches Mentor Role Instrument (*CMRI*) (Schempp, McCullick, Berger, White, & Elliott, 2014). Quantitative methods indicated significant mentor role differences based on continuation of relationship, participation in a formal mentor programme, and gender. The participants perceived their mentors as most effective in the roles of *acceptor, friend, role model* and *challenger*.

Keywords: Sport, mentoring, relationships, mentor roles, volleyball

Introduction

While the value of mentoring relationships for sport coaches may be indisputable, according to a number of authors "there is a lack of research on this topic combined with a lack of formalized structured mentoring programmes for coaches around the world" (Bloom, 2013, p. 483; McQuade, Davis, & Nash, 2015). To better understand the impact of mentoring in sport coaching and contribute to the literature, this study examined mentoring relationships of volleyball coaches. The purpose of this study was to identify the most effective functions and roles in mentoring relationships among volleyball coaches. Additionally, the study investigated the differences in the effectiveness of roles performed by mentors as influenced by the study participants: a) relationship continuation, b) mentor programme participation, and c) gender.

Mentoring dyads have been defined as developmental relationships in which a mentor, usually a senior colleague, provides support to a junior employee with the purpose of enhancing the protégé's career growth and advancement (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015). Based on this premise, several studies have found a strong positive correlation between mentoring and protégé's work-related satisfaction and success (Baker, Hocevar, &

Johnson, 2003; Campbell & Campbell, 2000; Galbraith, 2001; Hurst & Koplin-Baucum, 2003; Van Gyn & Ricks, 1997). Mentoring has been established as an effective organizational strategy for developing new members in a profession and serves a valuable role in protégés' progression, retention, and future mentoring ability (Allen & Poteet, 1999). In addition to the benefits for protégés, mentors have reported heightened levels of personal gratification, refinement of managerial skills, and overall learning (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Rollins, Rutherford, & Nickell, 2014).

Following the seminal work by Kram (1985), early studies on mentoring emerged from business and medical settings where researchers found that mentoring relationships resulted in several benefits for protégés (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Among the strongest findings were that mentoring relationships led to increased job satisfaction, career mobility, increased opportunities, and career satisfaction (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Scandura, 1992). Organizations were increasingly looking to utilize the potential of mentoring to promote improvement within their workforce along with their growing interest in the benefits of employee development and planning efforts (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). A study of 200 full-time working adults reported positive correlations between supervisors' mentoring behaviours and their protégés' communication and job satisfaction, as well as organizational commitment (Madlock & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2010).

As in the fields of business and nursing, mentoring programmes in education began to emerge in the early 1980s to satisfy a need for a more standardized programme for training and supervising teachers (Bloom, 2013; Stroble & Cooper, 1988). Research on teacher mentoring programmes has demonstrated that providing such opportunities were effective in promoting benefits and gratification for both teachers (Erdem & Özen, 2003; Izadinia, 2015) and students (Campbell & Campbell, 2000; Erdem & Özen, 2003; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002; Shojai, Davis, & Root, 2014; Van Gyn & Ricks, 1997). Like business and medicine, research in education indicated higher levels of teacher retention for those involved in mentoring programmes (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Korstjens, & Volman, 2014; Ganser, 2005; Yayli, 2008). Specifically, Kent, Green & Feldman (2012) reported that beginning teachers most valued the psychosocial support offered by a mentoring relationship and that this was a determining factor in their intention to remain in the profession. Similarly, students at the collegiate level reported greater success, satisfaction, and retention as an outcome of mentoring (Hastings, Griesen, Hoover, Creswell, & Dlugosh, 2015; Hurte, 2002; Leung Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003; Pidcock, Fischer, & Munsch, 2001; Young & Cates, 2005).

Sport coaching, as a profession, has also begun to embrace the inherent positive outcomes of mentoring programmes. A comprehensive review of the literature on mentoring in sport coaching conducted by Jones, Harris, and Miles (2009) recognized mentoring as an untapped resource in coach education and the progression of coaches. Jones et al. (2009) found that although many definitions exist for the definition of mentoring, common words such as support, guide, and facilitate are often used in the description of the term. Cushion (2006) offered a more inclusive definition when he stated that mentoring is the process of learning from more experienced coaches. Thus far, studies have revealed that coaches actively seek advice—through interactions, observations and conversations—of more experienced coaches

to learn about their role, develop understanding and share meanings of the professional culture (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004; McCullick, Elliott, & Schempp, 2016).

In a coach-based study, researchers reported mentor functions were significant variables in a working relationship of a soccer coaching staff, finding that assistant coaches perceived head coaches as mentors providing both career-related and psychosocial functions (Narcotta, Petersen, & Johnson, 2009). A study of basketball coaches found they scored their mentors high on both career development and psychosocial support functions (Schempp, Elliott, McCullick, & LaPlaca, 2016). Further, coaches reported that the longer the mentoring relationship, the greater the effectiveness. Similarly, an investigation of high-performance coaches by Erickson, Côté, and Fraser-Thomas (2007) concluded that mentoring should be offered to new coaches as they enter the profession to ensure their success and development. A longitudinal study of 115 university students enrolled in their third year of a sport coaching degree also found mentoring to have benefits for aspiring coaches. Specifically, it was found that mentoring increased the participants' commitment to enhancing their effectiveness as a coach (Nash, 2003).

In male-dominated fields such as coaching, males and females have an equal need for a mentor (Noe, 1988). Due to the shortage of potential females in high power positions in many organizations, the likelihood of a cross-gender mentorship was greatly increased(Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Thus, the most frequently observed cross-gender mentoring pair was that of a male mentor and a female mentee (O'Neill, Horton, & Crosby, 1999). There were gender differences that must be known and addressed for cross-gender working relationships to be successful (DeBoer, 2004). "These complexities must be managed effectively if individuals and organizations are to reap the benefits that positive cross-gender alliances have to offer" (Kram, 1985). Access to female role models in positions of decision making and leadership was particularly important for females, which made mentoring of female coaches a priority for research (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). The rise in the percentage of male coaches created an interesting developmental dynamic on the coaching staffs of many women's teams.

Mentoring, or the provision of developmental support and guidance, to assistant coaches was an important component of being a head coach (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998). Research indicates it can elevate salaries, increase promotions, and improve performance for mentees (Allen et al., 2004; Tonidandel, Avery, & Phillips, 2007; Underhill, 2006). Cross-gender dyads, however, often function less effectively than those containing demographically similar pairs (Ragins, 1997). The influx of men into the coaching ranks of women's sports significantly increased the likelihood of cross-gender pairings. Unfortunately, this could impact women adversely because at least some research suggests mentoring had a disproportionately larger effect on career success for women than for men (Lockwood, 2006; Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002; Tharenou, 2005). Thus, despite appearing equally likely to hire assistants of either sex (Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006), male coaches may provide less mentoring to their female assistants who appear to need it more.

Much of the research on sport coaches mentoring presented the positive aspects of the interaction, although Cushion, Armour, and Jones (2003) suggested that without proper

guidance and direction, mentoring relationships would simply reproduce the "existing culture, power relations, and importantly, existing coaching practice" (p. 223). To avoid this potentially negative situation, consideration for formal and organized mentorship programmes designed for sport coaches have been suggested by some scholars (Bloom et al., 1998; Cushion, 2006; Jenkins, 2013; Nash, 2003). Although not prevalent in the United States, formalized mentoring programmes for coaches have been created in countries such as Canada and Australia and are starting to take a stronghold in the United Kingdom (Bloom, 2013). Understanding the nature of the mentoring dyad could help in the development of more meaningful coaching education programmes.

Methodology

Instrument

The *Coach Mentor Role Instrument* (*CMRI)* (2014) was chosen as the data collection instrument for this study to address the research questions in this investigation. The *CRMI* is a modification of the popular *Mentor Role Instrument* (*MRI*). The *MRI* is a reliable and valid measure of mentoring based on Kram's (1985) mentor role theory. The *MRI* has been used in coaching research to assess the roles played by mentor coaches and to investigate mentor roles in athletic administrator mentoring (Narcotta et al., 2009; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). The *CMRI* has been used to study basketball coach mentoring (Schempp et al., 2016).

The *CMRI* is a five-point Likert scale consisting of 30 items. Each item received a score ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The item "I don't know" received the same score of 3 as the item "neutral" since a score of 6 or 0 would skew the total score and misrepresent the result. The 30 items' scores were added together to provide a total score and a higher total score indicates a more positive evaluation of all 10 dimensions present in the measure. The instrument assesses mentor roles included in two functions: a) *Career Development Support* and b) *Psychosocial Support*. The specific roles assess by the *CMRI* are summarized in Table 1. In addition to the mentor functions and roles, the questionnaire was modified to collect data on: a) relationship continuation, b) mentor programme participation, and c) gender.

Participants

A convenience sample of volleyball coaches was recruited in person at the 2012 American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) National Convention in Louisville, KY, December 12-16 and online through website posts and email communication. Forty-three coaches participated in this study while attending AVCA Convention. The AVCA provided the research team full access to the coaches while at the AVCA Convention by providing a booth in the AVCA Marketplace area along with all other vendors at the event. The booth was in a high traffic area on the convention floor near the entrance/exit allowing for maximum exposure to attendees. Each potential participant was approached by a researcher and asked to complete an Informed Consent form prior to completing the Coaches Mentor Role Instrument (CMRI) (Schempp et al., 2014). Once permission was granted, the participant sat at a designated table away from the pedestrian traffic and completed the consent form and CMRI.

The AVCA also employed website posts and email communication to recruit participants for the study, although the researchers did not have access to AVCA members' private information at any time. Members of the AVCA were provided a link via email inviting them to complete an online version of the informed consent and CMRI on the survey website, www.qualtrics.com. Over 200 AVCA members responded to the request for participation in the study, which received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Over 250 AVCA Members attempted to submit the CMRI, either in person at the convention or online using the Qualtrics website, while 230 of these answered all items on the questionnaire. Of the final 230, 120 were female and 109 males, with one undetermined. As for coaching level, 86 were NCAA coaches, 15 non-NCAA college coaches, 30 club level coaches, and 70 high school coaches, with 29 undetermined. Participants' education levels included 5 earned Doctorate Degrees, 127 Masters Degrees, 92 Bachelor's Degrees, and 6 High School Diplomas. The mean for coaching experience was 10.51 years and 184 participants reported that they have had more than one influential mentor relationship in their career.

Function	
	Role definition
Career Functions	
	Sponsor displays public support for protégé (e.g., actively nominating protégé for promotions)
	Coach offers guidance by suggesting career goals and strategies for obtaining goals, information to increase protégé's professional knowledge.
	Protector minimizes damage done to protégé's reputation caused by the protégé's mistakes.
	C*hallenger* training tasks and performance feedback intended to develop the protégé's skill and knowledge necessary for taking on difficult assignments later in career.
	Promoter creates work assignments requiring protégé to communicate and work alongside high-ranking professional members.
Psychosocial Support Functions	
	Friend interactions intended to support and encourage; builds openness and trust.
	Role Model exhibition of values, attitudes and behaviours necessary to perform professional tasks.
	C*ounsellor* helps with personal problems, anxieties and fears that may impact productivity at work.
	Acceptor provides a sense of mutual support.
	Socializer comfortable engaging in activities outside the work setting.

Table 1: CMRI Functions and Roles based on Kram's (1985) Mentor Functions Theory

Data Collection

Participants completed an informed consent form and completed the 30-item *CMRI,* which usually took less than 15 minutes. After the convention, an email was sent to all AVCA members requesting they participate using the on-line survey.

Each participant was assigned a number to maintain anonymity during this study. Instrument administration in person was monitored by one of the researchers who was available to answer any questions and ensure that each participant provided their responses without discussion among other coaches who may have been present. Online participants were only identified by Internet protocol address and no names were submitted.

Data Analysis

At the completion of data collection, the researchers calculated composites for each of the 10 roles, comprised the sum of three corresponding items. For example, items 6, 16, and 25 represent the *friend* role and their sum could range between 3 and 15. The means of the composites, and the mean scores for each of the two functions were then analysed in relation to the independent variables. To analyse differences between the dependent and independent variables, *t*-tests, ANOVA, and post-hoc analyses were used to identify the effective roles and functions performed by mentors as perceived by their protégés.

Results

Descriptive statistical analyses were used to identify the functions and roles the mentors performed most effectively (Table 2). Means and standard deviations were calculated for the two mentor functions, 10 mentor roles and each mentor role composite. The results indicated that *friend* was the highest rated role and *protector* was rated as the lowest role. Descriptive tests also revealed that *psychosocial functions* were rated higher than the *career development functions*.

Function	*M*	*SD*	Role	*M*	*SD*
Career	57.38	10.52	Challenger	12.50	2.55
Psychosocial	63.54	8.10	Acceptor	13.37	1.72
			Sponsor	11.75	2.78
			Friend	14.00	1.58
			Coach	11.95	2.30
			Role Model	13.00	1.93
			Promoter	11.43	2.71
			Counsellor	12.47	2.07
			Protector	9.76	2.51
			Social	10.71	3.22

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of mentor functions and roles (n=230)
Note. M = sample mean; *SD*= standard deviation

Relationship Continuation

To estimate differences in mentor functions and roles based on the continuation of a mentoring relationship, the researchers compared the responses of mentees currently in a mentoring relationship and those no longer involved with their mentor. For coaches whose relationship continued, significantly higher scores on all mentor roles except *career protector* and *career challenger* were reported (Table 3).

	Yes		No		*t*-value
Role	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*(p < .05)*
Sponsor	11.96	2.78	10.65	2.53	2.66
Coach	12.19	2.25	10.68	2.19	3.77
Promoter	11.61	2.70	10.49	2.62	2.34
Acceptor	13.53	1.69	12.51	1.68	3.36
Friend	14.23	1.37	12.76	1.99	5.53
Role Model	13.12	1.84	12.38	2.27	2.16
Counsellor	12.73	1.93	11.14	2.29	4.45
Social	10.94	3.23	9.54	2.98	2.44

Table 3*: Descriptive statistics of mentor roles and relationship continuation (n=230)*
Note. M = sample mean; *SD*= standard deviation

Mentor Programme Participation

A second inferential analysis considered the influence of AVCA Coaches Mentoring Programme participation on perceptions mentor role effectiveness. Participants in the mentoring programme (M = 8.87, SD = 2.83) reported significantly lower scores than non-participants (M = 10.01, SD = 2.32) on the *career protector* role t (227) = -2.97, p = .003. AVCA Coaches Mentoring Programme participants (M = 9.94, SD = 3.27) also reported significantly lower scores than non-participants (M = 10.93, SD = 3.18) on the *psychosocial social* role, t (227) = -1.972, p = .05.

Gender

The final research question considered differences due to gender on the perceptions of mentor role function and role effectiveness. Only one significant difference was found. Female coaches (M = 12.28, SD = 1.98) reported significantly higher scores on *career coach* role effectiveness than did the male coaches (M = 11.56, SD = 2.57), t (227) = 2.40, p = .017.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to identify the most and least effective functions and roles in mentoring relationships among volleyball coaches. Additionally, this study investigated the differences in the effectiveness of roles performed by mentors as influenced by the study participants': a) relationship continuation, b) mentor programme participation, and c) gender.

The results indicated that the participants in this study believed their mentors performed the *psychosocial support* functions better than the *career support* functions. But this difference

was slight and did not appear to be practically significant. In other words, both functions were highly rated and the difference in ratings was minor. This finding was similar to the study of basketball coaches by Schempp, et al. (2016), as they too found no practical differences between career support and psychosocial mentor functions—with both functions being highly rated by the protégés. In Weaver and Chelladurai's (2002) examination of mentor relationships of mid-level administrators in college athletic departments, their findings relative to mentor function perceptions were the same—both functions rated highly effective with no significant difference between them.

In contrast, a study of the mentoring of assistant coaches in college women's soccer by Narcotta, et al. (2009) found that the *career support* function was rated significantly more effective than the *psychosocial support* function. The male coaches in the study rated both mentor functions high, but did not indicate one being superior to the other. The investigators believed these gender differences were due to the women coaches being in a male-dominated profession, and thus were in greater need of career advice and support.

Given the current findings and previous research, it was concluded that both the *psychosocial support* and *career support* functions of mentors were perceived to be effective factors in the mentoring relationship, but one function was not significantly more effective than the other. This would suggest that for individuals with an interest in coach mentoring (i.e., protégés, mentors, administrators), attention be given to providing relevant and pertinent information to protégés in terms of both their career navigation and the necessary psychosocial support to aid in their professional development.

While the *psychosocial* and *career support* functions were perceived to be performed by mentors to essentially the same effectiveness standards, the results of this study found significant differences in the effectiveness of the specific roles mentors performed. The mentor roles rated most effective by the participants in this study were: a) *friend,* b) *acceptor*, c) *role model*, d*) challenger* and e) *counsellor*. In a study of college soccer coaches, the top most effective mentor roles were similar to the findings in this study: a) *acceptor*, b) *friend*, c) *sponsor*, and d) *challenger* (Narcotta et al., 2009). Basketball coaches similarly rated their mentors most effective on a) *acceptor*, b) *friend*, c) *role model* and d) *challenger* (Schempp et al., 2016). This was nearly identical to mentor roles ratings by athletic administrators: a) *friend*, b) *acceptor*, c) *role model*, and d) *challenger* (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002).

The findings of this study and previous research appear to provide conclusive consistency regarding protégés' perceptions of the most effective roles played by their mentors. Out of the eleven possible mentor roles, there were four mentor roles that were regularly rated as most effective by coaches in three different sports as well as athletic administrators (in no special order): a) *acceptor,* b) *friend,* c) *role model* and d) *challenger*.

Seeing one's mentor as a *friend* and *acceptor* with a high degree of effectiveness is perhaps a reflection on the quality of these mentoring relationships. These findings also suggest that the effectiveness of these relationships is dependent more on a deep personal connection between mentor and protégé rather than a strictly formal, professional relationship. A relationship characterized by friendship and acceptance has the potential to have a deeper

level of meaning and the potential to last significantly longer than one lacking those characteristics. It was also found that the longer the relationship lasted, the greater the perception of mentor effectiveness in almost all categories.

The personal nature of the mentoring relationship did not, however, appear to diminish professionalism or protégé development. The high effectiveness ratings of *role model* and *challenger* indicate that the mentors in these relationships were perceived to be well skilled in preparing protégés to meet their most severe and difficult future professional assignments. It may be speculated that when these coaches faced their greatest challenges their mentors' lessons proved potent.

In comparing mentor role effectiveness across coaching levels, the role of *sponsor* was most effective for college level coaches. The support from a mentor in the *sponsor* role can assist an aspiring coach to attain desired positions and promote career advancement. A mentor who is effective in the role of *sponsor* creates opportunities for advancement for the protégé and serves as a measure of the mentor's credibility and influence within the organization (Kram, 1985).

Research has shown that informally formed mentoring relationships have a significantly greater effect on *career development* and *psychosocial support* than formal mentoring relationships (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Castro, Scandura, & Williams, 2004; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Underhill, 2006). Members of the AVCA Coaches Mentoring programme, who had less than one year to create a relationship, rated their mentors significantly lower on the *protector* role than did coaches with longer mentoring relationships. It appears that in a longer relationship, a mentor becomes more effective at shielding the protégé from any potential damaging interactions or activities. Formal mentoring programmes, like the AVCA programme, pair complete strangers and hope they can develop a deep understanding of each other in a short period of time (Blake-Beard, O'Neill, & McGowan, 2007). Kram (1983) identified four phases of mentoring relationships: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Experiencing all four phases may span eight or more years in an informally formed relationship. Formal mentoring programmes often cannot provide enough time for their participants to experience all four phases of the relationship.

Commitment to and length of the mentoring relationship has been shown as an important aspect of any relationship and protégés have been shown to be most satisfied when they believe their mentor is committed to the relationship (Allen & Eby, 2008; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Poteat, Shockley, & Allen, 2015; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In this study, coaches that reported a relationship that continues to the time of data collection indicated a sustained level of commitment and rated their mentors significantly higher on eight of ten possible roles than those whose relationship no longer existed. Protégés that enjoyed a continuing relationship may have had the tendency to rate their mentors higher purely based on the current and recent nature of the interaction with the mentor. The findings of this study, along with previous research, provide a strong argument for longer rather than shorter mentoring relationships.

While females may receive less effective mentoring in male-dominated environments, volleyball coaching is not considered male-dominated (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). According to a report by Acosta and Carpenter (2004), male and female coaches have nearly equal representation in NCAA women's volleyball, which creates similar numbers of role models for females to choose from when considering a mentor. While female protégés in this study rated their mentors significantly higher on the *career coach* role than male protégés, gender was not significant in the mentor rating for the remaining nine roles. The data seemed to indicate that females were receiving similar, if not better, mentoring than their male counterparts as it related to the roles mentors play in the relationship among volleyball coaches. These findings do not necessarily represent all coaching groups, especially in other countries such as Great Britain (Norman, 2012). Although same sex and cross-gender dyads can create barriers within the relationship (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002), this study did not examine the gender makeup of the mentor-protégé dyads.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore mentoring relationships in sport from the perspective of the protégé. The findings of this study supported previous, but limited, research findings on the effectiveness of mentor roles and functions. The results revealed that the participants' mentors were perceived by their protégés as effective in both the roles and functions they undertook in their mentoring relationship. The roles of *acceptor, friend, role model* and *challenger* were specifically identified as being highly effective, and the function of *psychosocial support* was more effective than the *career support* function. Further, the study found the effectiveness of the mentors increased with the duration of the relationship.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify the most and least effective functions and roles in mentoring relationships among volleyball coaches. Additionally, this study investigated the differences in the effectiveness of roles performed by mentors as influenced by the study participants': a) relationship continuation, b) mentor programme participation, and c) gender.

Mentoring is a natural and necessary relationship between mentor and protégé to ensure the future success of a profession or trade. More than simply passing on information or skills, mentoring has evolved into a deep relationship where mentors serve various roles, both career and psychosocial, for the protégé. The results of this study have identified several important roles mentors should perform for greatest effectiveness: acceptor, friend, role model and challenger. Mentors taking on the vital role of mentoring a protégé are advised to become proficient in career and psychosocial functions, paying attention to the four roles mentioned previously. This can be attained by attending a class, reading books or research papers, attending a trade convention or learning from colleagues. Conversely, protégés in search of a mentor should identify their preferred mentor roles prior to entering a mentoring relationship. While both functions, career and psychosocial, have been shown to be highly rated by protégés, individual protégés should decide which roles are most important to them and utilize that information in their search for a mentor that exemplifies those roles. From the findings of this study and previous research, organizations and those responsible for creating and offering

mentoring programmes may do well to consider instructing mentors in a range of mentor skills with attention to developing protégé friendships, establishing relationships of mutual support, and preparing protégés for challenging professional tasks and assignments to be encountered in the future.

Informal mentoring relationships involve a pair of willing individuals who have entered the dyad due to personal choice and an existing rapport. Formal mentoring programmes, like the AVCA mentoring programme, match mentors and protégés with very little input by either party, resulting in a much less effective mentoring relationship as indicated by lower mentor ratings. For formal mentoring programmes to produce effective mentoring relationships, administrators are advised to allow for greater amounts of input from mentors and protégés, especially on the following roles: acceptor, friend, role model and challenger. While formal mentoring relationships may never be as effective or highly rated as informal relationships, the gap between the level of mentor ratings may be reduced if administrators allow for participant input when matching mentors and protégés. Those in a current and long term committed relationship rated their mentor significantly higher than those in the AVCA formal mentoring programme. This finding suggests that formal mentoring programmes might be more effective if participants commit to relationships longer than the current single season length. Deep, committed relationships do not emerge quickly and one year may not be long enough to develop the four stages of relationships as described by Kram: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition (Kram, 1983). Formal mentoring programme administrators are advised to schedule expanded timetables for mentors and protégés to develop these stages and enjoy more effective mentoring relationships.

Future Research

The researchers in this study investigated the protégé's perceptions of their mentors and found that protégés perceived their mentors to be effective in the roles and functions they performed. Given the potential for professional development, and the promising findings of this study and others, it appears future research will provide important insights and benefits for those concerned with mentor relationships and programmes.

If mentoring is intended for professional development, it would be constructive to study the long-term success and career satisfaction of protégés. What activities, roles or functions did the mentor provide that assisted in a satisfying and successful career for the protégé? Do people who receive and/or provide mentoring enjoy a more successful and satisfying career? This investigation, like others, found that a longer mentoring relationship increased protégés' perceptions of mentor effectiveness. What elements need to be present for a continued mentoring relationship? Is there an ideal length for a mentoring relationship? Do mentors and protégés engaged in a longer relationship derive greater benefits, and if so, what benefits?

Gender equality is an issue in many professions and the promotion and preparation of females in sport coaching is a topic worthy of future research, especially in sports where the participants are female. Understanding successful mentoring relationships involving female mentors and protégés, specifically within a sports coaching context, will help us understand how to provide female sport coaches with the best mentoring experience possible.

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