

Similarity on Sports Sidelines: How Mentor–Protégé Sex Similarity Affects Mentoring

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Abstract This study examined the effects of mentor–protégé similarity (sex and attitudinal) and relationship duration on the quantity of mentoring (psychosocial and career) received. Survey data collected from 97 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I women’s basketball head coaches in the USA indicated both types of similarity were associated with the receipt of more psychosocial and career mentoring as assistant coaches. Those who had White male mentors also reported receiving more career mentoring than those with sex dissimilar mentors. Finally, the effects of sex similarity were significantly weaker in longer than in shorter mentoring relationships.

Keywords Mentoring · Sex differences · Coaches · Similarity

Introduction

In 1972, over 90% of the coaches of women’s college sports teams in the USA were women. Fast-forward 34 years to 2006 and one finds the proportion of women-led teams to be less than 43% (Acosta and Carpenter 2006). So what happened to cause such a dramatic change? Most notably, the passage of Title IX in 1972 established legislation increasing the funding received by women’s sports pro-

grams, which made coaching opportunities therein a more appealing career option for men. Although the trend has slowed somewhat of late, male involvement continues to grow. In fact, men filled 143 of the 270, or 53% of new head coaching positions in women’s sports between 2002 and 2004 (Acosta and Carpenter 2004).

Accordingly, researchers have devoted a considerable amount of attention to understanding this phenomenon. For instance, Knoppers (1987) discussed how organizational structures have been constructed over time to perpetuate the reproduction of male coaches in collegiate athletics. In fact, even collegiate female athletes appear to have been socialized to emulate male more than female coaches (Whitaker and Molstad 1988). Kane and Stangl (1991) subsequently investigated how female coaches have been tokenized and marginalized in their efforts to enter men’s athletics since the passage of Title IX. Although this body of work has identified numerous factors relating to the decline of female coaches, there remains a great deal to learn about why the proportion of female coaches continues to decline.

The rise in the percentage of male coaches has 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 is an important component of being a head coach (Bloom et al. 1998). Research indicates it can elevate salaries, increase promotions, and improve performance for protégés (Allen et al. 2004; Tonidandel et al. 2007; Underhill 2006). Diversified dyads (e.g., male mentor—female protégé), 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 increases the likelihood of cross-sex dyads. Unfortunately, this could impact women adversely because

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at least some research suggests mentoring has a disproportionately larger effect on career success for women than for men (Lockwood 2006; Noe et al. 2002; Tharenou 2005). Thus, despite appearing equally likely to hire assistants of either sex (Sagas et al. 2006), male coaches may provide less mentoring to their female assistants who appear to need it more.

Although research in academic and business settings has explored the impact of sex dissimilarity in mentoring dyads (e.g., Ragins and McFarlin 1990; Turban et al. 2002), studies in sport settings are far more rare. In fact, Sagas et al. (2005) recently reporting finding “no research related to the relational demography perspective with regard to the decline of female coaches” (p. 104). In the one study we found directly assessing sex and mentoring, male and female athletic administrators were equally likely to have been mentored (Weaver and Chelladurai 2002). Looking more specifically at the issue of sex dissimilarity between head and assistant coaches, Sagas et al. (2005) found it had no significant effect on support received from the former or the head coaching aspirations of the latter. Given the (a) inconsistent findings in the organizational literature, (b) lack of inquiry in sports settings, and (c) potential adverse impact on women aspiring to be head coaches, research investigating the impact of sex similarity in coaching mentoring relationships certainly seems warranted.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to address this void. We do so using survey data from US coaches by extending Byrne’s (1961) similarity-attraction paradigm to examine the effects of sex and attitudinal similarity in head coach—assistant coach mentoring dyads on the quantity of psychosocial and career related mentoring received. Additionally, we seek to replicate the finding of Turban et al. (2002) that the effects of sex similarity in mentoring are weaker in longer-lasting relationships in a sport setting, as opposed to the academic setting (i.e., professor mentors and graduate student protégés) used in their research. In doing so, we answer their call for future research to “replicate and extend our study using different types of developmental relationships” (p. 259). Finally, we further examine Ragins’ (1997) power perspective, which suggests protégés might receive greater career development functions from male than from female mentors because the former tend to have disproportionately more organizational power than the latter. This study is important because, by extending research on diversified mentoring to sport settings, our results may shed light on another potential reason for the dwindling percentage of female head coaches. In the next section, we discuss the similarity-attraction paradigm to build our theoretical rationale prior to introducing the research hypotheses.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Similarity-Attraction Paradigm

Byrne (1961) is typically credited with developing the notion that interpersonal similarity facilitates attraction. When making an acquaintance, people tend to seek information about the other’s personality, values, preferences, likes, and dislikes. This knowledge is used to classify strangers along a continuum ranging from highly dissimilar to highly similar. In the absence of definitive information, individuals often use readily available cues, such as sex, to surmise unknown information about others (Tajfel and Turner 1986). For instance, individuals tend to perceive unfamiliar same-sex others to be more similar to themselves than those belonging to the opposite sex (Wakimoto and Fujihara 2004). Higher perceptions of similarity (whether accurate or not) produce greater attraction and liking (Klohn and Shanhong 2003).

The tendency for interpersonal similarity to result in higher attraction and liking has significant implications for mentoring relationships. Demographic and perceived similarity typically predict mentors’ liking for their protégés (Ensher and Murphy 1997; Lankau et al. 2005). Mentors who like their protégés provide more role-modeling functions of mentoring (i.e., demonstrating effective behavior) and tend to produce more satisfied protégés (Ensher and Murphy 1997; Lankau et al. 2005). Thus, those in diversified mentoring relationships may receive less mentoring functions, thereby placing them at a relative disadvantage to those in homogenous mentoring relationships.

Mentor–Protégé Sex Similarity

Based on the similarity-attraction hypothesis, we expect sex similarity to affect the amount and type of mentoring received by protégés. In particular, the greater identification between participants of same-sex dyads is likely to result in more psychosocial mentoring (Ragins 1997). Not surprisingly, several studies have reported this finding (Ensher et al. 2002; Feldman et al. 1999; Koberg et al. 1998; Ragins and McFarlin 1990; Turban et al. 2002). However, a number of studies have not detected a significant effect of sex similarity on psychosocial mentoring (Allen and Eby 2004; Ensher and Murphy 1997; Lankau et al. 2005; McGuire 1999; Sosik and Godshalk 2000; Ragins and Cotton 1999). Consequently, the nature of this relationship is somewhat uncertain and may benefit from further analysis (Ensher et al. 2002).

The similarity-attraction paradigm also suggests same-sex mentors would be more likely to provide more career development functions for their protégés than cross-sex mentors. However, the relationship between similarity and

career mentoring may be more complex. According to Ragins' (1997) power perspective, White men tend to be associated with more power in organizations than minorities and women. Due to this increased power, White male mentors are often better positioned to assist in the sponsorship and career development of their protégés. Some research suggests mentors may act in accordance with this discrepancy, as one recent study found male mentors to provide significantly more career mentoring than female mentors and the reverse to be true for psychosocial mentoring (Allen and Eby 2004).

Although having a White male mentor has not always resulted in more career development (e.g., Feldman et al. 1999; Ragins and Cotton 1999), other studies have provided support for the power perspective (e.g. Allen and Eby 2004; McGuire 1999; Sosik and Godshalk 2000). Moreover, having a White male mentor has been associated with higher levels of compensation for female protégés (Dreher and Cox 1996; Ragins and Cotton 1999; Wallace 2001). Accordingly, though sex similarity may facilitate the provision of career mentoring, having White male mentors may prove beneficial as well.

Mentor–Protégé Attitude Similarity

In addition to sex similarity, researchers have assessed the impact of attitudinal similarity on career development and psychosocial mentoring. For instance, Burke et al. (1994) found perceived similarity related positively to both types of mentoring. Others subsequently replicated this finding in different settings (Ensher et al. 2002; Ensher and Murphy 1997; Turban et al. 2002). In addition, protégés indicating that their mentoring experience was a negative one commonly report that they and their mentor were attitudinally dissimilar (Eby et al. 2000). Hence, it appears attitudinal similarity plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

Despite the somewhat mixed results described above, both sex and attitudinal similarity are likely to increase a mentor's identification with, and liking for, the protégé (Ensher and Murphy 1997; Ragins 1997). Mentors who identify with and like their protégés are more likely to provide the counseling and personal support functions that comprise psychosocial mentoring. This positive affect, however, is unlikely to unilaterally enhance career development because White males continue to hold considerably more power than their female and majority counterparts in most organizations (cf. Ragins 1997). They are likely, therefore, to provide more career development mentoring to protégés irrespective of sex similarity.

Hypothesis 1. Mentor-protégé similarity (sex and attitudinal) will be positively related to the quantity of psychosocial mentoring received.

Hypothesis 2. Mentor-protégé similarity will be positively related to the quantity of career development mentoring received. However, the strength of this effect will depend on whether the mentor was a white male. Specifically, protégés of highly similar or White male mentors will receive more career development functions than protégés of dissimilar, female, and minority mentors.

Relationship Duration

In addition to similarity, another factor likely to influence the efficacy of mentoring relationships is their duration. Most studies examining time have focused on the simple effects of the relationship's duration and typically reported that longer relationships tend to provide more mentoring functions (Allen and Eby 2004; Burke 1984; Burke and McKeen 1997; Fagenson-Eland et al. 1997). More recently, however, researchers have explored more complex effects. For instance, extending the framework established by Harrison and his colleagues (Harrison et al. 1998, 2002), Turban et al. (2002) hypothesized the effects of attitudinal and demographic similarities would reverse over time. In particular, they expected demographic similarity would be more predictive of mentoring functions than attitudinal similarity in short term relationships and the opposite would be true in longer lasting dyads. Using a graduate student sample, their results supported this pattern for sex similarity. The extent to which this effect applies to non-academic samples, however, remains uncertain.

Hypothesis 3. The length of the relationship will moderate the effect of mentor-protégé similarity on mentoring functions received. Specifically, the effect of sex similarity relative to that of attitudinal similarity will diminish as the relationship lengthens.

In sum, this paper hypothesizes that (1) mentor-protégé similarity (sex and attitudinal) will relate to psychosocial mentoring, (2) mentor-protégé similarity will relate to career mentoring received for those without White male mentors, and (3) the effect of sex similarity relative to that of attitudinal similarity will become smaller as relationships become longer.

Method

Participants

Division I collegiate women's basketball head coaches served as the participants for this study. Because each was contacted initially via email, some coaches were deemed

unreachable due to undeliverable emails or the inability to locate an email address. Of the 312 coaches that were contacted, 127 (40.7%) responded. Given the high status and time demands of being a head coach, this response rate is quite good and is consistent with response rates obtained by other researchers using similar samples (e.g., Sagas and Cunningham 2004; Wright et al. 1995).

Thirty-three coaches indicated they had never been assistant coaches and thus, did not complete the survey. Of the 94 coaches that responded to our questionnaire, four did not provide demographic information (4%), 27 were male (29%), 63 were female (67%), 79 were Caucasian (84%), nine were African American (10%), one was Hispanic, and one Native American. The characteristics of our participants are very similar to those of women's Division I college basketball coaches as a whole. The percentage of female coaches in Division I in 2004 was 69.9% (Acosta and Carpenter 2004), which is similar to the 67% observed in our sample. Additionally, 12.2% of our respondents were ethnic minorities, which is consistent with the 12.7% figure recently reported for women's Division I college basketball (DeHass 2003).

Procedure

Coaches were contacted initially via e-mail asking them to participate in a study on mentoring in college basketball. The email directed participants to a web site that presented our questionnaire. The on-line questionnaire asked current head coaches to reflect back on their most significant assistant coaching experience as it relates to mentoring and respond to questions related to that experience. Reminder emails were sent at 2-week intervals for the next month.

Measures

Sex Similarity

Participants were asked to indicate the sex and race of their former head coach (mentor), as well as their own. We used this information to create a sex similarity variable by coding each dyad as either similar (1) or dissimilar (0) in terms of sex.

Attitudinal Similarity

We created four items to assess respondents' perceptions of attitudinal similarity with his or her mentor. Examples include, "The head coach and I tended to see things in much the same way," and "The head coach was similar to me in terms of our general approach to coaching." These items are similar to those used in previous studies (e.g., Ensher et al. 2002; Turban et al. 2002), and the responses to the items proved to be highly consistent ($\alpha=0.94$).

Mentor Functions

Ragins and McFarlin's (1990) mentor role instrument (MRI) was used to assess mentor functions. The MRI consists of 15 items assessing career development mentoring and 18 items measuring psychosocial mentor functions. The original items were adapted for the present study by replacing the phrase "my mentor" with "my head coach" (for example, "My mentor thought highly of me" was changed to "My head coach thought highly of me"). Questions were rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree"). Responses to both the psychosocial ($\alpha=0.95$) and career development ($\alpha=0.97$) scales proved to be high in internal consistency.

Mentorship Duration

Participants were asked to indicate the year they began and ended their tenure working with this particular head coach. The number of years the protégé spent as an assistant coach to the mentor was used to measure mentorship duration.

Retrospective Recall

Because participants were asked to retrospectively recall aspects of their mentoring relationship, they might forget details about their mentoring experience over time or otherwise cognitively distort their recollections of the mentoring received. To minimize the potential impact this retrospective reporting may have had, we included the number of years since the mentoring relationship as a covariate in all of the analyses.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables are found in Table 1. Three participants were deemed to be extreme outliers on one variable (e.g. more than 3 standard deviations from the mean). These participants were removed from the analyses involving the particular variable for which they had an abnormal response. Otherwise, they were retained in the other analyses.

The first hypothesis, which predicted sex similarity would be positively related to the amount of psychosocial mentoring received, was tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). After controlling for the effects of mentor and protégé sex and race and retrospective recall, the effect of sex similarity on psychosocial mentoring was significant and in the predicted direction [$F(1,82)=4.50$, $p=0.04$, $\eta^2=0.05$]. Participants in same-sex mentoring dyads reported receiving more psychosocial mentoring (mean=4.40, SD=1.49, $N=55$) than those in cross-sex dyads (mean=3.66,

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and correlations of study variables.

		Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Mentor gender ^a	1.62	0.49	–									
2	Protégé gender ^a	1.7	0.46	0.14	–								
3	Mentor race ^b	0.89	0.31	–0.13	0.15	–							
4	Protégé race ^b	0.88	0.33	–0.08	–0.1	0.3	–						
5	Mentor is white male ^c	0.36	0.48	–.96*	–0.12	0.26	0.14	–					
6	Dyad sex similarity ^d	0.61	0.49	.37*	0.17	0.08	–0.09	–0.36*	–				
7	Dyad attitude similarity	4.24	1.64	–0.02	0.31*	0.22*	0.02	0	0.23*	–			
8	Psychosocial mentoring	4.08	1.48	–0.03	0.21	0.21*	0.05	0.02	0.24*	0.71*	–		
9	Career development mentoring	4.97	1.58	0.08	0.24*	0.2	–0.01	–0.05	0.22*	0.62*	0.80*	–	
10	Relationship duration	3.98	2.87	–0.14	0.04	0.07	0.08	0.12	0.05	0.22*	0.26*	0.18	
11	Years since mentoring relationship	9.20	6.77	0.03	–0.10	0.02	0.15	–0.05	0.20	–0.12	0.00	–0.11	–0.27*

^a 0=male 1=female^b 0=minority 1=Caucasian^c 0=no 1=yes^d 0=different 1=same* $p < 0.05$

SD=1.56, $N=35$). Hypothesis 1b predicted attitude similarity would be positively related to the amount of psychosocial mentoring received. Using multiple regression, attitude similarity was a significant predictor of the amount of psychosocial mentoring received, even after controlling for the effects of mentor and protégé sex and race and retrospective recall ($\beta=.69$, $p<0.001$, $\Delta R^2=0.47$). Consequently, greater similarity of both types tended to result in more psychosocial mentoring, supporting the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 predicted mentor–protégé sex similarity would interact with having a White male mentor to impact the amount of career mentoring received. As predicted, the negative effects on career development mentoring of having a dissimilar mentor appeared to be attenuated when the mentor was a white male. Despite the sex dissimilarity, the 20 female participants who had a white male mentor reported similar levels of career development mentoring compared to the 12 male participants with white male mentors (mean=4.90, SD=1.56, and mean=4.98, SD=1.51). In contrast, when mentors were not white males, protégés of a different sex reported substantially less career development mentoring (mean=4.06, SD=1.49, $N=15$) than same-sex protégés (mean=5.39, SD=1.50, $N=43$). To test whether these differences were statistically significant, a factorial ANCOVA was conducted controlling for retrospective recall and using mentor–protégé sex similarity as one independent variable and a dichotomous variable indicating whether the mentor was or was not a white male as the second independent variable. The main effect for having a white male mentor was not statistically significant [$F(1,84)=0.35$, $p=0.55$, $\eta^2<0.01$]. Both the main effect for

sex similarity [$F(1,84)=3.79$, $p=0.06$, $\eta^2=0.04$] and the interaction between sex similarity and having a white male mentor [$F(1,84)=3.06$, $p=0.08$, $\eta^2=0.03$] approached conventional levels of significance. Although not statistically significant, these effects are still noteworthy given the small sample size in some of the cells, the magnitude of the effect sizes, and the pattern of results in the predicted direction. The same interaction effect was also tested between attitude similarity and having a white male mentor on career development mentoring, but this effect was not significant ($\beta=0.07$, $p=0.79$, $\Delta R^2<0.01$). Thus, partial support for Hypothesis 2 was obtained for the effects of sex similarity but not for attitude similarity.

The final hypothesis was concerned with the moderating effect of the length of the mentoring relationship. Specifically, Hypothesis 3 predicted the effects of demographic similarity on mentor functions received would decrease as the duration of the relationship increased. As with the previous analyses, mentor and protégé sex and race were controlled for along with retrospective recall. The results of the complete regression equation can be found in Tables 2 and 3 for psychosocial and career mentoring respectively. The moderating effects of relationship length on the effects of sex similarity on psychosocial mentoring ($\beta=0.32$, $p=0.02$, $\Delta R^2=0.06$) and career mentoring ($\beta=0.30$, $p=0.02$, $\Delta R^2=0.06$) were statistically significant. As predicted, the negative impact of sex-dissimilar mentorship on psychosocial and career development mentoring was attenuated in longer-lasting relationships (see Figs. 1 and 2).

To further examine the impact of relationship duration and similarity on mentoring received, we examined the relative importance of sex similarity and attitudinal simi-

Table 2 Multiple regression results examining the effects of sex similarity and relationship duration on the amount of psychosocial mentoring received.

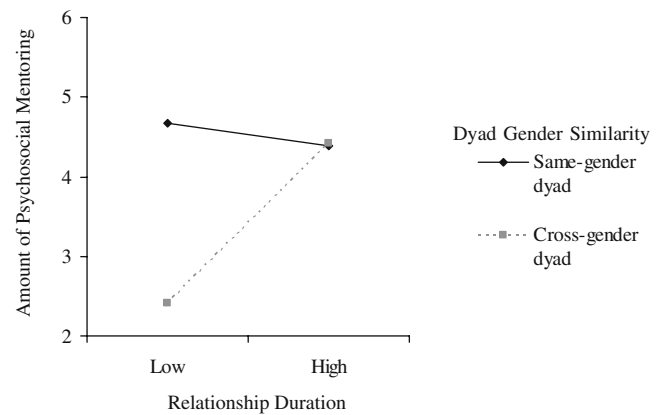
	β	β	β
Step 1			
Years since mentoring relationship	0.04	0.04	0.01
Mentor gender	−0.03	−0.11	−0.09
Protégé gender	0.22	0.20	0.15
Mentor race	0.18	0.14	0.15
Protégé race	0.02	0.02	0.03
Step 2			
Relationship duration		0.13	−0.06
Sex similarity		0.26*	0.25*
Step 3			
Relationship duration $\times$ sex similarity			0.32*
R^2	0.10	0.18*	0.24*
ΔR^2		0.09*	0.06*

* $p < 0.05$

larity for both low and high duration mentoring relationship. To evaluate the relative importance of these two types of similarity we used Johnson's (2000) relative weight procedure. This procedure allows one to compare the relative contribution of independent variables to a dependent variable even in the context of multicollinearity. The relative importance of both similarity variables was determined for both long and short mentoring relationships, while also taking into account the contribution of the control variables. Relative weights are expressed as a percentage of R^2 with higher values indicating a more important predictor. For short relationships, the relative weight for sex similarity was 18.3% while the relative weight for attitudinal similarity was 74.5% when predicting psychosocial mentoring. For longer duration relationships,

Table 3 Multiple regression results examining the effects of sex similarity and relationship duration on the amount of career mentoring received.

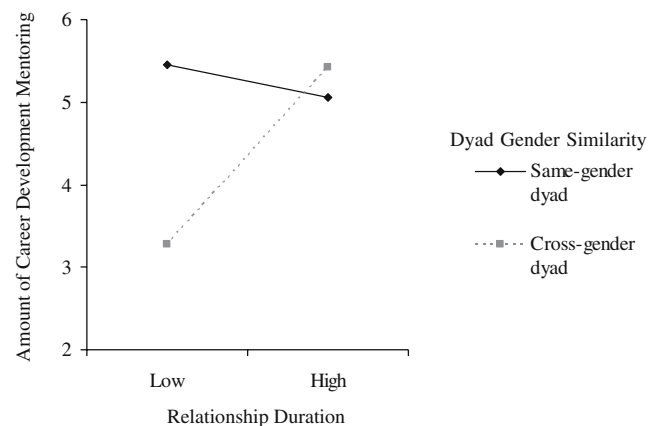
	β	β	β
Step 1			
Years since mentoring relationship	−0.07	−0.10	−0.12
Mentor gender	0.05	−0.03	−0.01
Protégé gender	0.24*	0.22	0.17
Mentor race	0.20	0.17	0.18
Protégé race	−0.03	−0.02	−0.01
Step 2			
Relationship duration		0.06	−0.13
Sex similarity		0.23	0.22
Step 3			
Relationship duration $\times$ sex similarity			0.30*
R^2	0.12	0.17*	0.23*
ΔR^2		0.05	0.06*

* $p < 0.05$ **Fig. 1** Interaction between mentor–protégé sex similarity and relationship duration on the amount of psychosocial mentoring received.

the relative weights were 0.2 and 81.2% for sex similarity and attitudinal similarity respectively. An analogous pattern was observed for career mentoring. The relative weight of sex similarity decreased from 18.1 to 1.5% and the relative weight of attitudinal similarity increased from 66.9 to 73.0% as the duration of the mentoring relationship increased. Attitude similarity appears to be an important determinant of mentoring received across relationships of differing lengths, but the importance of sex similarity declines dramatically over the same time frame, thus providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of sex in mentoring relationships among coaches. Building on the similarity-attraction paradigm, we anticipated that greater similarity between head (mentors) and assistant coaches (protégés) would correspond in more mentoring. An exception to this tendency involved White male head coaches, who were expected to provide as much career

**Fig. 2** Interaction between mentor–protégé sex similarity and relationship duration on the amount of career mentoring received.

mentoring as a same-sex mentor. Furthermore, extending research by Harrison and his colleagues (Harrison et al. 1998, 2002) led us to propose the effects of attitudinal similarity would be relatively more important than those of sex similarity in longer-lasting mentoring dyads. Our results provided some measure of support for all of these expectations and we explain the implications of these findings below.

Implications

Theoretical

Despite a number of studies examining sex similarity in mentoring, the results have been inconsistent. Moreover, none of these studies have examined these relationships in a sports context. Thus, there is uncertainty, both in general and in sports settings in particular, how sex similarity between a mentor and protégé affects mentoring relationships. Our results suggest protégés with sex dissimilar mentors receive significantly less psychosocial and career mentoring than those with same-sex mentors. This finding is consistent with the similarity-attraction hypothesis, which proposes less attraction and liking in dissimilar than in similar dyads and thus, less mentoring.

An important caveat to the above finding, however, is that having a White male mentor may offset the deleterious effect of dissimilarity, at least with respect to career mentoring. Ten years ago, Ragins (1997) proposed the power perspective, which asserts that the commonly observed power imbalance favoring white men in US corporations makes them more capable of providing career support to protégés than less powerful women and minority mentors. Accordingly, we anticipated the effects of sex dissimilarity on career mentoring might be conditional, depending on the mentor's race and sex. Consistent with this notion, sex dissimilarity corresponded in lower levels of career mentoring *unless* the dissimilar mentor was a White man. Hence, our results suggest the power perspective is applicable even in a traditionally female setting, such as women's college basketball.

A third theoretical implication involves the roles of surface- (e.g., sex) and deep-level (e.g., attitude) similarity over time. Although our design was not longitudinal, our results were consistent with the proposition of Harrison et al. (1998) that deep-level similarity becomes more important than surface-level similarity over time. First, the effects of sex dissimilarity on mentoring became significantly weaker as the relationship duration increased. Second, the difference in the relative importance of the two types of similarity was considerably larger in longer-lasting dyads. Together, these findings suggest those from prior research on sex and attitudinal similarity amongst

graduate students and faculty (Turban et al. 2002) extend to mentoring in collegiate athletics as well.

Practical

Equally important are the practical implications of our findings. As mentioned at the onset of this article, Sagas et al. (2006) recently found men did not engage in homosocial reproduction in sports by hiring more male than female assistants. Nonetheless, female assistants to male head coaches are apt to receive less mentoring (particularly psychosocial) than those who assist female head coaches. Psychosocial mentoring has been linked to a number of key career outcomes such as compensation, promotions, career satisfaction, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and satisfaction with one's mentor (Allen et al. 2004). Though Tharenou (2005) found psychosocial support to be less important to women's career advancement than career mentoring, research in sports settings suggests psychosocial support is indeed important to female coaches. For instance, Myers et al. (2005) found social support was a stronger predictor of women's than men's coaching self-efficacy. Thus, our finding, in conjunction with those of Allen et al. (2004), suggests dynamics associated with cross-sex mentoring could impede women's career development nonetheless.

This potential drawback regarding psychosocial mentoring may be offset somewhat if the mentor is a White man. Female protégés with White male mentors reported receiving a comparable quantity of career mentoring as White men with White male mentors. To the extent career mentoring is more impactful to women than psychosocial mentoring, White males' propensity to provide women relatively high levels of the former may counter their tendency to provide women relatively low levels of the latter. Future research including measures of career success is needed to investigate this possibility.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the impact of sex similarity lessens significantly as the relationship lengthens. Simultaneously, attitudinal similarity becomes a relatively more important determinant of the amount of mentoring provided. Thus, in the short term, female assistants with male mentors may find themselves receiving less mentoring than a male assistant in the same situation. Nevertheless, over the long term, this mentoring shortfall is unlikely to persist if the female assistant and her male head coach see eye to eye (i.e., are attitudinally similar).

Limitations, Future Research Directions, and Conclusions

As with any study, there are limitations to be acknowledged. First, our data are self-reported, which makes common method variance (CMV) a potential confound.

Although interactions are unlikely to be caused by CMV and recent authors (e.g., Spector 2006) have raised considerable doubt concerning the magnitude of its impact, future research should incorporate multiple data sources when possible. Second, because our target population is small, our sample size was relatively small. Accordingly, we probably lacked the requisite statistical power for some of our interactions, which produced fairly considerable effect sizes (e.g., $\eta^2=0.04$), to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Third, although we have attempted to minimize the potential impact of retrospective recall by controlling for time since the mentoring relationship, we cannot entirely rule out retrospective bias. Nevertheless, retrospective reports have been shown to be accurate in situations when confidentiality is ensured and reliable and valid instruments are used (Miller et al. 1997). The present study possesses both of these characteristics lending additional support for the appropriateness of our retrospective reports. Finally, we focused on a limited set of similarity variables. The choice of these variables was driven by the strong theoretical foundation of these variables in the mentoring literature. However, future research should be encouraged to define similarity in more innovative ways moving beyond sex and attitudinal similarity. For instance, mentor–protégé similarity in educational institutions attended or network ties (e.g., played for the same coach) may have a considerable impact on the amount of mentoring provided.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study makes several important contributions to the literature. By extending organizational research on similarity (sex and attitudinal) and mentoring to a sports setting, we were able to uncover another factor that may aid in explaining the relative decline in female representation on sidelines in women's college sports. This is important because “very little is known of the impact that comparative demographic characteristics have on group members in the context of women's team coaching” (Sagas et al. 2005, p. 104). Our findings also indicate potential positives and negatives associated with female assistants working for male head coaches. Finally, our findings echo and extend those of prior research (Harrison et al. 1998, 2002; Turban et al. 2002) showing the effects of sex similarity in sports dyads to be short-lived relative to those of attitudinal similarity.

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