Mentoring Women within International Sport

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Abstract

Aim of Paper and Theoretical Background

Researchers have well documented the fact women are underrepresented within leadership positions within sport in North America [1][2][3][4][5]. However, this under-representation is not limited to North America. Women are becoming more and more involved in leadership positions on an international level, but are still underrepresented within all leadership positions in sport [6][7][8][9][10][11].

Often the lack of progress for women has been attributed to the glass ceiling [12][13]. The U. S. Department of Labor [14] defined the glass ceiling as "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization and reaching their full potential" (p. 1). Wirth [15], of the German International Labor Office, further defined the glass ceiling as invisible but very effectively preventing women from climbing to the top of the career ladder.

Pfister, Doll-Tepper, & Radtke [13] indicated "the glass ceiling could be one of the reasons why women do not aspire to leadership at all" (p. 28). What can be done to help women overcome these barriers?

One strategy that has received a considerable amount of credit for helping women break gender-related barriers is mentoring [16][17][18].

Mentoring reflects a relationship between an experienced productive supervisor and a less-experienced employee. Mentoring relationships are important to female protégés by helping them overcome barriers [16][17].

In today's turbulent sport environment, developing mentoring relationships for women can be a key strategy for enhancing individual growth and learning. Thus, the purpose of this study was to discover reasons for mentoring women within international sport. The study focused on the following within international sport, (a) individual reasons for mentoring women, (b) organizational factors which inhibit or facilitate the ability to mentor women, (c) protégé characteristics which attract mentors to women protégés, and (d) outcomes associated with mentoring women.

Methodology

A phenomenological research design was chosen to discover reasons for mentoring women within international sport.

Participants were chosen based on their influence on policy, research, and study with regard to women within international sport and were confirmed as being mentors by other members of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) (N=5).

A modified phenomenological three-interview series technique [19] was used to find the meaning of the lived experiences of these women within international physical education departments.

The first part of the interview (13 questions) examined the personal life history of the mentor as a protégé.

The second part of the interview (26 questions) was a personal narrative of the mentor as mentor.

Finally, the third part of the interview (6 questions), conceptualized the protégé and mentoring experiences by reflecting on the mentoring experience.

Wolcott's [20] four phases of analyzing and interpreting were used to reduce the interview data.

Organization of the data included recording each interview and using verbatim transcription, labeling each transcript with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality, journaling the data and notes, and using the qualitative software HyperResearcher 2.6 to discuss themes.

HyperResearcher 2.6 allowed the researchers to code and categorize the data. The constant comparative method of analysis was used throughout this stage [21], which involved comparing all transcripts and coding them. A code was any phrase or statement that stood out in describing the mentoring phenomenon for the research study. The information from the transcripts was coded into categories and compared with previous information.

HyperResearcher 2.6 helped the researchers cluster the categories as themes began to emerge, and the final stage identified preliminary words to describe the emergent themes.

Discussion/Implications

The current study broadened the previous literature on mentoring research by contributing a rich base of information regarding factors influencing a mentors' decision to mentor a woman in sport within an international setting.

The results supported the notion that a protégé's experience leads to an individual's decision to mentor in the future.

The results also established one of the reasons these women were successful were because of mentoring.

Thus, other women in leadership positions should take notice of the mentoring described in this study and attempt to apply the concepts in helping young women to excel within sport globally.

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