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The Role of Mentoring for Women in Upper Management in the National Basketball Association (NBA)

Manuela Picariello

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, mpicarie@utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Manuela Picariello entitled "The Role of Mentoring for Women in Upper Management in the National Basketball Association (NBA)." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Kinesiology and Sport Studies.

Steven Waller, Sylvia Trendafilova, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

James Bemiller, Pamela S. Angelle

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Role of Mentoring for Women in Upper Management in the National
Basketball Association (NBA)

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Manuela Picariello
May 2017

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Dedication

To Maria Rosa Zigarelli and Felicita Maiellano, my amazing grandmothers: your strength and tenacity through the challenges of life set the example and empowered me as a woman. You taught me that nothing is impossible to a woman with a willing heart.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the second time on this journey. They say you will never forget the first time, I can say that the second time is unforgettable too. This experience enriched me on so many levels, professionally and personally. The life lessons of these years in Knoxville will be with me forever.

This journey would have never been possible without my advisors. My success and my well-being was on your agenda since the very first moment. I will never have enough words to describe my gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Sylvia Trendafilova. Everything started with a conference in Madrid in 2011. You took a chance on me and changed my life. Along the way you taught me how to be a good scholar, but more importantly you cared about me as a person. Eventually, I found a great mentor and a great friend.

Dr. Steven Waller, your vision of the world and your passion for social justice inspired me to embrace my path as a scholar. You helped me understand the importance and the dignity of our job. Your guidance, your personal support, and your positive attitude made the difference.

To my committee members: Dr. Pamela Angelle, I am grateful for your professional insights and your personal support. You made me a better scholar.

Prof. James Bemiller, thank you for your guidance and support.

To my parents, Cristina and Flavio, and to my sister, Erika, thank you for being my wonderful “team”, no matter what the latitude or the distance. Mom and Dad you taught me to never settle for less than my best. Erika, you hold me accountable to keep up with your intelligence. The unconditional love I received from all of you is the foundation for any achievement in my life.

To Valéria, thanks for your unconditional support through my comprehensive exams and the last part of my journey. The Italian “DNA” helped us bonding, mostly the experience of growing up under the guidance of amazing grandmothers.

You are a remarkable person and I am grateful I met you.

To my friends for life: Marialuce and Gaia. No matter how far, I know that we can always count on each other.

Abstract

Despite years of progress by women in the workforce, climbing the corporate ladder is still a very daunting task for most women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Evans, 2010; McKinsey Report, 2013), and occupational segregation still exists (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Research studies have reported that mentoring in general is critical to upward mobility (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008). To date there has not been a study with a focus on mentoring and female executives in professional sport. In the 2014 Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC), Lapchick reported the lowest grade, "F" (any position in which women comprise less than 22 % of the available jobs), for NBA teams regarding the presence of women in such positions as CEO/ president and vice president. The purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) to understand how female upper managers in the NBA describe mentoring; and (2) to understand what role mentoring plays in their leadership development.

Individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted. The interview protocol consisted of a pool of 6 questions developed from the review of literature but modified to fit the specific objectives of this study. The study sample consisted of 10 female managers working in the NBA. The cycle of data reduction and verification was a continuous process, enabling six dominant themes to emerge. The themes for RQ1 included (a) *professional and personal development*, (b) *the organic process of mentorship*, and (c) *organizational environment*. The themes for RQ2 included (a) *career functions*, (b) *psychosocial support*, and (c) *the power of organizational socialization*. Another theme emerged from both RQ1 and RQ2: *gender of the mentor*. Based on the results of this study, a new conceptual model is proposed. The findings of this research have practical implications (e.g., develop human

resources through mentoring, promote natural mentorship opportunities within the organization, identify the most beneficial mentor) for women who are interested in pursuing a career in the sport industry and for organizations that want to be able to nurture their talents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite years of progress by women in the workforce, climbing the corporate ladder is still a very daunting task for most women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Evans, 2010; McKinsey Report, 2013), and occupational segregation still exists (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Women still earn less money than men in the same job positions (US Bureau of Labor, 2009b). Research studies have shown that no matter the industry they are working in, women tend to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women occupy 40.0% of all managerial positions, yet only 6% of the Fortune 500's top executives are female, and just 2% of those firms have women CEOs (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Internationally, almost the same low numbers exist: women represent 47.0% of the working population in France, yet only 17.2% of executive managers are females and, moreover, earn less, on average 32.0%, than their male colleagues (Evans, 2010). Eagly and Carli (2007) also showed that men ascend to supervisory and administrative positions more quickly than women, even in settings that are culturally feminine, such as nursing, elementary education, and social work.

The sport industry is no exception. The underrepresentation of women leadership in sport emerges at all levels both in the United States (U.S.) and internationally (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Geeraert, Alm, & Groll, 2014; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Smith & Wrynn, 2013). In intercollegiate athletics—even though 57.0% of the students on campus in 2014 were females—women represented only 36.2% of the athletics administrative staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). According to Smith and Wrynn (2013), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has never elected a female President; and in the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), men are still dominating. Therefore, there is a concern for women underrepresentation in traditionally male-dominated professions, particularly within upper management ranks

(Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women face more challenges than men in occupational mobility (Gabriel, 2003). Some researchers argue that barriers that prevent women from achieving upward mobility into senior and executive management are cultural, structural and organizational (Acker, 2012; Johns, 2013; Oakley, 2000). More specifically, according to Acker (2012), particular designs of job procedures, job activities, job divisions, and promotions can contribute to the creation of barriers for women and minorities.

In day-to-day work, these barriers are problems in terms of effectiveness for organizations by limiting the pool of talent for promotions based on personal characteristics that are irrelevant to the job position (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). The need for diverse top management has been underscored in the literature, as scholars have indicated that “women and minorities may shift corporate boards toward broader perspectives that take into account the welfare of employees, communities, and the environment” (Eagly, 2016, p. 212). Including females on boards seems to improve the governance, particularly the implementation of corporate strategy, conflict of interest rules, and code of conduct (Geeraert et al., 2014). Previous studies have also shown that board gender diversity and innovation have a positive relationship (McMahon, 2010). The evidence of so few women in leadership positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Evans, 2010; Geeraert et al., 2014; Henry & Robinson, 2010; McKinsey Report, 2013; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Smith & Wrynn, 2013) requires actions to be taken. Several studies on women leadership among different industries have suggested mentoring as a professional development opportunity to support women in their careers (Bower, 2012; Bower & Hums, 2009; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Hoover, 2006; Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008; McDonald & Westphal, 2013; Schira, 2007; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Tolar,

2012; Waller, Wozencroft, Trendafilova, & Hobart, 2015). Research studies have reported that mentoring in general is critical to upward mobility (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008). Since men are promoted more quickly than women and women lack access to professional networks more than men (Barsh & Yee, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007), mentoring seems to be a valuable tool to help women advance through their mentors' career support (Tharenou, 2005; Wallace, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

While researchers have examined the mentoring perceptions of women working at different levels in intercollegiate athletics (Bower, 2009, 2012; Bower & Hums, 2009, 2013, 2014), to date there has not been a study with a focus on mentoring and female executives in professional sport. Scholars have suggested that the academic body of knowledge would benefit from studies on how mentoring can influence career paths since little research has examined such a relationship (Allen et al., 2004). Moreover, research on mentoring in sport remains scarce (Carter & Hart, 2010); therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill the gap. This research will be placed in the literature as an exploration of descriptions of mentoring from top female managers in the professional sport industry and, more specifically, as a development in the understanding the impact of mentoring on the career mobility of women working in the executive level management of the National Basketball Association (NBA) teams. This study will contribute to the debate about women in leadership roles in sport organizations. The aim is to investigate the relationship between women leadership and mentoring in professional sport and shed light on women's career advancement in a male-dominated context.

Significance Statement. The lack of focus on female executives in the literature represents an important issue, as studies on mentoring in recent years have focused mostly on protégés (Allen et al., 2008) in business and academic environments; however, the majority was usually male (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006; Smith, Howard, & Harrington, 2005). Since 89.9% of the total previous research on mentoring has been exclusively quantitative, this study will also add to the literature by answering the call of Allen et al. (2008) on conducting qualitative research on mentoring in order to help us understand the role of mentoring and contemporary careers. The possible benefits of this study include practical implications for developing an effective mentoring relationship for women who want to pursue a career in the sport industry.

Research Questions

This study looks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do female upper level managers in the NBA describe mentoring?
2. What role does mentoring play in their development for leadership in the NBA?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Women's participation in the labor force is significantly higher today than it was in the past. In 2011, the number of women employed in the U.S. represented 47% (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2011). Despite years of progress by women in the workforce, climbing the corporate ladder is still a daunting task for most women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Evans, 2010; McKinsey Report, 2013), and occupational segregation still exists (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Women still earn less money than men in the same job positions (US Bureau of Labour, 2009b). Research studies have shown that no matter the industry they are working in, women tend to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). According to the Eurofound Report (2013), the gender gap in earnings and job prospects (job security, career progression, contract quality) is also active internationally, specifically among member states of the European Union. In Europe, the gap remains evident in terms of labor market access, employment patterns, and working conditions (Eurofound, 2013; Evans, 2010).

Regarding positions in management within the U.S., numbers clearly show the underrepresentation of women in the highest ranks. Women occupy 40.0% of all managerial positions, yet only 6% of the Fortune 500's top executives are female, and just 2% of those firms have women CEOs (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Even fewer are the women of color, representing only 1% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 firms (Catalyst, 2001). According to Lalanne and Seabright (2016), even when firms are fully supporting women, they provide women with fewer connections than those that support men. Internationally, almost the same low numbers exist: women represent 47.0 % of the working population in France, yet only 17.2% of executive managers are female and, moreover, earn less, on average 32.0%, than their male colleagues (Evans, 2010). Eagly and Carli (2007) also showed that men ascend to supervisory and

administrative positions more quickly than women, even in settings that are culturally feminine, such as nursing, elementary education, and social work.

Women within Sports Organizations

The sports industry is no exception. The underrepresentation of women leadership in sport is evident at all levels both in the U.S. and internationally (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Geeraert et al., 2014; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Smith & Wrynn, 2013). In their national longitudinal study of women in collegiate sports, Acosta and Carpenter (2014) found similar low numbers regarding women in leadership positions. For 37 years, the researchers collected their data using questionnaires mailed to the Senior Woman Administrator at every National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member school with a women's athletics program. The number of institutions was slightly less than 1,100 in 2014. Now, intercollegiate athletics employs almost 14,000 women, including coaches, assistant coaches, sports information directors, athletic trainers, athletics administrators, and strength and conditioning coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). However, data reveal that female athletic directors are only 239, making 22.3% of all athletic directors in the NCAA (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In addition, Acosta and Carpenter (2014) underscored that even though Division I has the largest administrative staff, it has the fewest female athletic directors at 37. It is also interesting to notice that even though 57.0% of the students on campus in 2014 were female, women represented only 36.2% of the athletics administrative staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

The leadership representation of women in the sport governance structure is certainly no better at the international level (Geeraert et al., 2014; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Smith & Wrynn, 2013). In their report, Smith and Wrynn (2013) analyzed the representation of women in the international Olympic organizations—specifically, the types and

extent of opportunities provided for women in administrative and leadership roles within these structures. According to Smith and Wrynn (2013), in 2005, the International Olympic Committee established a 20.0% threshold goal for the inclusion of women in National Olympic Committees, National Governing Bodies and International Federations. For the first time, the IOC has recently reached the 20.0% because 22 of the 106 members of the IOC (20.8%) are now women (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). The report also showed that, since the last Olympiad, for the first time, there are three female members of the 15-member IOC Executive Committee (20.0%) and one female vice president of the IOC Executive Committee (25.0%). However, there has never been a female IOC President. Also, 204 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) remain largely dominated by men. In fact, 174 (85.3%) have all-male leadership teams, and only 29 (14.1%) have male/female leadership teams. Just one NOC (0.5%), Zambia, has an all-female leadership team (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). The same composition was found in the IOC Commissions, where women accounted only for 19.0% of all job positions (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). Smith and Wrynn (2013) found the worst scenario in International Federations (IFs) with only two female presidents. Specifically, the Federation Equestrian International (FEI) and the International Triathlon Union have 10 of the 28 executive boards with zero or one female member (Smith & Wrynn, 2013).

It is interesting to notice that the lowest numbers of women occur in groups in charge of organizing Olympic teams in their respective countries and in groups accountable for running the major operations of the IOC. More specifically, the commissions with the fewest female representation are also the most significant for the Olympic Movement, such as TV Rights and New Media, Audit, Ethics, Radio and Television, and Marketing. There are only three women (4.9%), and none of them are chairs (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). Women are also underrepresented in the Paralympic Movement. Although the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has set a

higher standard for gender equity in its leadership structures, it has yet to reach the 30.0% threshold goal for the inclusion of women (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). Female members of the IPC represent 20.0% of its composition, only 10.9% of National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) have female presidents, and just 24.0% of female leaders act as primary contact for the NPCs (Smith & Wrynn, 2013). Despite the effort towards gender equity within their structures, even the U.S. Olympic Committee—exceeding the IOC threshold with more than one-third being female board members—is still well below a balance in leadership positions, particularly in the National Governing Bodies where only six of 58 leaders are women (Smith & Wrynn, 2013).

Barriers to Career Mobility for Women

There is a concern for women underrepresentation in traditionally male-dominated professions, particularly within upper management ranks (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, women face more challenges than men in occupational mobility (Gabriel, 2003), explaining why having more women in decision-making roles can help to have women's needs taken into account (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Occupational mobility, an important part of a worker's career path, is defined as "a change in tasks performed on the job" (Sicherman & Galor, 1990, p. 187). Sicherman and Galor (1990) investigated the role and significance of occupational mobility of individuals' careers in the labor market. An individual's career mobility is a function of education level, abilities, and job experience (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). According to Sickerman and Galor (1990), an individual's career path can be dictated by either intrafirm career mobility, which is subject to the employer's decision, or interfirm career mobility, which is determined by the individual when choosing to quit to maximize earnings. The rate of career mobility is inversely proportional to the time spent in the labor market (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). In general, career mobility is

related to everything one does from the time he or she enters the organization until retirement (Waller et al., 2015). From that moment on, three steps will define an individual's career mobility: demotion, lateral move, and promotion (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). Gabriel (2003) investigated occupational mobility among full-time workers and found that differences by gender are particularly notable and affect all job positions from low-level to top-level. Gabriel (2003) found that female managers and professionals are significantly more likely to experience downward occupational mobility than their male colleagues.

Some researchers argue that barriers that prevent women from achieving upward mobility into senior and executive management are cultural, structural and organizational (Acker, 2012; Johns, 2013; Oakley, 2000). Thus, to better understand these barriers requires examining the organizations, where inequalities are created and re-created. Specifically, Acker (2006) argues that inequalities within organization can be seen

As systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations (p. 443).

Also, Acker (2012) found that the concept of "gendered substructures" may help to explain why gender inequalities still survive within organizations. The most common gendered substructures within organizations are: (a) organizing processes, (b) organizational culture, (c) interactions on the job, and (d) gendered identities (Acker, 2012).

According to Acker (2012), how job procedures, job activities, job divisions, and promotions are designed can contribute to the creation of barriers for women and minorities. Men are promoted more quickly than women with equivalent qualifications (Eagly & Carli,

2007). Additionally, women as leaders or potential leaders can experience prejudice to an extent that affects “women’s ability to gain authority and exercise influence and would produce discrimination when it is translated into personnel decisions within organizations and political structures” (Carli & Eagly, 2001, p. 631). Also, organizational culture (images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and values) can enhance beliefs about gender equality or inequality (Acker, 2012). The way people interact on the job between colleagues and between individuals of a different power level may also reinforce equality or inequality (Acker, 2012). Socialization in the workplace is very important as it is a process that allows the individual to obtain knowledge and skills necessary to perform in his or her role (Chow, 2002). More specifically, organizational socialization is the process by which an individual learns the proper knowledge to become an organizational member (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Having a successful socialization in the workplace is important because it can increase job performance, organizational commitment, and retention (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007).

Finally, Acker (2012) highlights that gender identities are developed and can evolve based on work processes. Women may face issues with leadership style more than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, female managers may struggle with masculine qualities that people think leaders need to succeed and to be perceived as more competent (Burke & Collins, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Marlow & Swail, 2014; Quaterman, Dupress, & Willis, 2006).

Thus, many aspects of ongoing organizational practices (e.g., wage decisions’ involving cultural assumptions about gender differences) can be influenced by gendered substructures which, in turn, can become barriers for achieving equality within organizations (Acker, 2012). According to Weyer (2007), elements of the social structures can also be seen as the causes for the existence of these invisible barriers keeping women from advancing in their careers.

Inequalities between men and women are rooted in how society portrays men to be more socially significant and more competent (Carli & Eagly, 2001). For example, women are still more likely to interrupt their careers to handle work/family trade-offs, thus causing them to lack time to engage in the social networking that is essential to career advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Barriers to Career Mobility for Women in the Sport Industry. The same dynamics described above can be seen particularly in the sport industry, another traditionally male-dominated industry (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Smith & Wrynn, 2013). It is believed that in this field women have not been progressing up the career ladder like their male counterparts (Burton, 2015; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Moore, Parkhouse, & Konrad, 2010). The career immobility for women in sport organizations is often noted as a result of such factors as gender bias and gender stereotypes (Bower & Hums, 2013; Bradbury, van Sterkenburg, & Mignon, 2014; Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004), limitation of power (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002), limited experience in critical management areas (i.e., finance, budgeting, fundraising) (Grappendorf, Pent, Burton, & Henderson, 2008; Grappendorf et al., 2004), conflicts between family and work (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Goodman, Mensch, Jay, French, Mitchell, & Firtz, 2010; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Kamphoff, 2010), lack of professional networks (Bower & Hums, 2013; Hoffman, 2011; Lough, 2001; Schull, Shaw, & Kihl, 2013; Whiteside & Hardin, 2012), and lack of mentoring relationships (Bower & Hums, 2013, 2014; Hancock & Hums, 2016). Nevertheless, in a 2015 study conducted by Harris, Grappendorf, Aicher, and Veraldo of female sport management students, several reported that although being aware of and concerned about gender stereotypes and gender discrimination, difficulty in networking, long work hours, and low salary in the sport industry, they were still

excited about their future careers. Quite often young women enter the industry with excitement and commitment to pursue their careers only to later find many barriers on their way up the ladder of the organizations (Harris et al., 2015).

Glass and Concrete Ceiling, Glass Wall, Glass Border, and the Labyrinth. Women face more challenges to advance in their careers than men (Gabriel, 2003). Hymowitz and Schellhardt of the *Wall Street Journal* (“The Corporate Woman”, 1986) described this phenomenon as “glass ceiling,” which the U.S. Department of Labor’s Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) has defined as an invisible but impenetrable barrier “between women and the executive suite, preventing them from reaching the highest levels of the business world regardless of their accomplishments and merits” (p. iii). Even more challenging than the traditional “glass ceiling” is the “concrete ceiling” or “Black/Brown Ceiling,” an impermeable barrier that keeps women and people of color, namely Black and Hispanic women, effectively locked out of the corridors of power in organizations across industries and professions because of race, gender, and stereotypes (Catalyst, 2001; Sepand, 2015; Tomlinson, 2001).

In addition to the glass ceiling, scholars have also suggested the existence of “glass walls,” barriers that prevent people from moving laterally within an organization (Cunningham, 2011). According to Powell and Butterfield (2015), glass walls further explain the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women “because middle-level and lower-level female managers are concentrated in staff functions with limited opportunities for advancement, they are less likely than male managers to attain top management positions” (p. 316). Another metaphor is the “glass border,” a barrier that prevents women from promotion due to their lack of international experience (Broughton & Miller, 2009). Thus, glass ceiling and its variations became metaphors

for prejudice and discrimination against women and minorities (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Powell & Butterfield, 2015; Wilson, 2014).

However, some scholars have questioned the glass ceiling metaphor because it implies that the barriers are present only on the way to reach the top of the organizations, whereas these barriers may appear at the entry into the organization because walls are all around (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Consistent with this statement, Swan (2015) argued that at the beginning of a career, starting with how internships are assigned, inequalities can be reproduced and structured by class, gender and race. This is why in a 2007 study Eagly and Carli suggested that a better metaphor for the workplace challenges that women confront is the “labyrinth”. This metaphor presumes that routes to the top leadership exist but are not simple. They “require persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 3). According to Eagly and Carli (2007), using this metaphor gives hope that obstacles can be overcome. The glass ceiling does exist and has a negative impact on the career mobility of female managers in the sport industry, too. The career path of female managers usually includes lower-level administrative roles (Massengale & Lough, 2010). The majority of administrators in the sport industry are still male (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), suggesting the perpetuation of a glass ceiling (Lumpkin, Dodd, McPherson, 2014).

From an organizational point of view, “glass ceiling,” “glass wall,” “glass border,” and “the labyrinth” are problems in terms of effectiveness by limiting the pool of talent for promotions within the organization based on personal characteristics that are irrelevant to the job position (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Previous studies have supported that “women and minorities may shift corporate boards toward broader perspectives that take into account the welfare of employees, communities, and the environment” (Eagly, 2016, p. 212). Including

females on boards seems to improve the governance, particularly the implementation of corporate strategy, conflict of interest rules, and code of conduct (Geeraert et al., 2014). Previous studies have also shown that board gender diversity and innovation have a positive relationship (McMahon, 2010). Today women are better equipped than in the past to respond to contemporary corporate requirements (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Evans, 2010). According to Evans (2010), women have: (a) a greater degree of emotional and cultural intelligence, (b) an ability to empower others and share leadership, (c) a greater attention paid to customer service and employee welfare, and (d) a more considerate and caring leadership style. In her review of academic research on workplace diversity and firm performance relationship in 2010, McMahon suggested that “having a diverse top management team is the most powerful way to signal the support for diversity” (p. 40).

Mentoring as a Key Strategy in Upward Mobility for Women. Because internships may be assigned based on gender, women’s careers immediately start uphill soon after graduation (Swan, 2015). According to Swan (2015), the entry into the labor market, usually through unpaid internships, can be more challenging for women than white males. Although discrimination is prohibited by law, being a woman still may play a negative role in the recruitment process (Hytti, 2015), especially in male-dominated environments (Joseph & Anderson, 2015). Hytti (2015) argued that organizations’ gender practices impacting women’s careers are more complex and multifaceted than before. Challenges for women start immediately at the entry level of male-dominated industries, where a female applicant is seen as not well equipped or competent to perform the job as her male counterpart (Heilman, Manzi, & Braun, 2015). Men are more likely than women to conform to the ideal abstract worker (Acker, 2012) and successful manager (Schein, 2001). The sport environment is even more challenging because of the concept of

masculinity that is clearly embedded within it (Anderson, 2009), and this concept represents a major obstacle to women to be accepted in a male dominated culture (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Leadership in sport is often portrayed in masculine terms (Knoppers, 2011). Thus, being tough and having experience as a former athlete helps men to be perceived as competent and qualified to work in the sport industry (Hovden, 2000; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008). Therefore, any discussion of women's leadership experiences in sport must take into account gender as an organizational process (Burton, 2015).

More recent studies have found that having a critical mass of women in leadership positions is important for making a noticeable impact (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Joecks, Pull & Vetter, 2013; Konrad, Kramer, & Erkut, 2008). In particular, having three or more women on corporate boards rather than having a single representative increases the likelihood of changing the dynamics of corporate governance (Konrad et al., 2008). The evidence of so few women in leadership positions requires actions to be taken (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Evans, 2010; McKinsey Report, 2013; Geeraert et al., 2014; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Smith & Wrynn, 2013). Leaders are fundamental within organizations because they influence others toward achieving goals; however, leaders are not born but more than likely developed (Schira, 2007). According to Schira (2007), most of the time leaders are developed when another person notices their potential and works with them to develop that potential—even if leaders do not see themselves as such initially. Thus, a possible solution for women to ascend in organizations run mostly by men is getting more job opportunities and high-profile assignments to show their potential and be perceived as competent, while receiving full career support from the top management. As scholars have

indicated “top management support is a clear indicator that the organization values women and their contributions” (Spoor & Hoye, 2014, p. 421).

Mentoring

Mentoring is defined as a relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced, supports the less experienced “to navigate in the adult world and the world of work” (Kram, 1985, p. 2). More specifically, it is a relationship that can inspire mutual growth, learning, and development (Ragins & Kram, 2007); and it appears similar to the role model-observer relationship (Eby, Rhodes & Allen, 2007). Based on previous work (Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Ragins & Scandura, 1994; Scandura & Ragins, 1993), Scandura and Williams (2001) defined mentoring as:

A one to one relationship between a more experienced and senior person (mentor) and a new entrant or less experienced person (his/her protégé) in the organizational setup. The mentor need not to be the supervisor or department head and not necessarily from the same department. A mentor can generally be defined as an influential individual in your work environment who has advanced work experience and knowledge and who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career. (p. 349)

Higgins and Kram (2001), based on previous work (Kram, 1985; Thomas, 1990, 1993) and the new challenges in the contemporary career paths, have defined mentoring using the concept of developmental network. They define the developmental network as:

The set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé's career by providing developmental assistance ... By developmental assistance, [they] mean two types of support studied by mentoring scholars: (1) career support, such as exposure and visibility, sponsorship, and protection, and (2) psychosocial support,

such as friendship, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, and sharing beyond work.
(p. 268)

Van Emmerik, Baugh, and Euwema (2005) defined mentoring as the relationship between a protégé and a mentor. They further extrapolate the definition of protégé in the following manner:

The person who is guided and supported by a mentor or coach. A mentor is an influential individual with a higher ranking in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge so he/she can give you support, guidance, and advice for your development. Moreover, the mentor can be internal or external to the organization, but is not the immediate supervisor; and is generally recognized as an expert in their field.
(p. 314)

Additionally, Van Emmerick, Baugh and Euwema (2005) suggested that “the mentor relations are long term and focus on general objectives of development” (p. 314). Similarly, Day and Allen (2004) defined mentoring as the relationship between two employees, with one more experienced than the other. They further offered that a mentor is:

An experienced employee who serves as a role model, provides support, direction and feedback regarding career plans and interpersonal development. A mentor is also someone who is in a position of power, who looks out for you, gives you advice and/or brings your accomplishments to the attention of people who have power in the company.
(p. 77)

For the purpose of this study, mentoring will be defined as a relationship between two individuals with different levels of experience and different level of ranking in the work setting. The more experienced and powerful individual is committed to providing guidance and support that may lead to upward mobility for the less experienced one. The more experienced individual,

or mentor, may or may not be a direct supervisor from the same department/unit and/or may be outside the organization. He/she should be competent and hard working. The support provided by the mentor includes: (a) career support (e.g., exposure and visibility, sponsorship, and protection) and (b) psychosocial support (e.g., role-modeling, friendship, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, and sharing beyond work). The less experienced individual, or protégé, is a high performer with a high knowledge of her/his field and a desire to be mentored. The less experienced may have a set of more experienced and powerful individuals with an active interest in and action for advancing his/her career by providing support (Bower, 2009; Bower & Hums, 2014; Day & Allen, 2004; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Scandura & Williams, 2001; Van Emmerik et al., 2005).

Outcomes of Mentoring. Different outcomes are associated with mentoring. Regarding outcomes for protégés, in a meta-analysis of empirical research on the career benefits associated with mentoring, Allen et al. (2004) found that mentored groups have greater career outcomes, such as compensation, the number of promotions, job and career satisfaction, than those who have not been mentored. Research has shown positive outcomes for mentors also. In their study Allen, Lentz and Day (2006) suggested that mentors would report a better salary, a higher number of promotions, and a greater perception of career success than would non-mentors. It is important to notice that mentoring relationships are all different (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Mentoring is also seen as a tool for enabling organizational socialization in the workplace (Chow, 2002; Orpen, 1995). The social support provided by mentoring can especially help employees adapt to the work environment (Orpen, 1995). Organizational socialization and mentoring are both seen as tactics for employees to adjust to and develop within an organization (Allen, Eby, Chao & Bauer, 2017). In addition to this, organizations that use strategic mentoring

may improve their business performance, retain their best employees, and achieve a diverse culture (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a).

However, the outcomes of a mentoring relationship are not always positive, and these can depend on the characteristics of mentors and protégés. As noted by Scandura (1998), personality and demographics may contribute to dysfunction within mentoring relationships. For instance, if the mentor has a dominant personality and protégé is submissive, the relationship may be characterized by the tyrannical behavior of the mentor (Scandura, 1998).

Different Types of Mentoring. Mentoring relationships also vary by type. The literature recognizes two categories: formal and informal relationships (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Essentially, formal relationships develop through a program where mentors are assigned to protégés, whereas informal relationships develop spontaneously, due to the similarity of goals and interests, and evolve over time in the form of counseling, coaching, and advising (Chao et al., 1992; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Research has reported more positive job and career attitudes by protégés with informal mentors than protégés with formal mentors (Allen et al., 2008; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Sosik, Lee, & Bouquillon, 2006). Other positive outcomes are associated with informal mentoring: more career development functions and support, greater satisfaction with mentors, and a better compensation (Chao et al., 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Informally mentored protégés also reported more psychosocial functions such as friendship, social support, role-modeling, and acceptance (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and higher levels of organizational socialization (Chao et al., 1992). On the other hand, formal mentoring relationships are perceived to restrict the development of trust, emotional closeness, and the provision of psychosocial functions not only because both parties are aware that the relationship is short-term but especially because the protégés perceive that the

relationship is a result of the mentor's commitment to the organization rather than his/her belief in the protégé's potential (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Mentoring Women. Tharenou (2005) argued that career support from a female mentor in particular, not simply the presence of any mentor, most helps women to advance. Furthermore, Tharenou stated that “perhaps ... women protégés gain [more] from being sponsored, challenged and coached by someone like themselves who has incurred the particular difficulties women can face” (p. 101). However, having few females in leadership positions, especially in a male-dominated industry, often makes finding a woman as a guide difficult (Bower, 2012). This is relevant because gender composition may also have an impact on mentoring relationships. For instance, the role-modeling aspect is less useful in cross-gender relationships than in same-gender relationships (Kram, 1985) and may hide more potential challenges for women (Blake-Beard, 2001).

It is harder to achieve mutual identification because of the gender differences and lack of natural attraction (Blake-Beard, 2001; Kram, 1985). Some studies have shown potential concerns about misinterpretations in cross-gender mentoring relationships that may lead to malicious gossip (Noe, 1988) or concerns about the risk of sexual harassment claims (Hopkins et al. 2008; Tolar, 2012). Due to the lack of women in leadership positions, cross-gender mentoring relationships are more likely to happen (Hopkins et al., 2008). In particular, male mentors can help advance women's careers by using their authority to push workplace culture toward gender equality and by becoming allies in the workplace (Valerio & Sawyer, 2016). Scholars have suggested cultivating both female and male mentors (Bower, 2012; Hopkins et al., 2008) and establishing a network of diverse mentors (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Moreover, women who want to work in male-dominated industries and climb the ladder within the organizations need to gain

sponsorship and legitimacy through the support of powerful, connected, and visible mentors (Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff, 2010). Having a mentor can increase their chances to be seen as valid candidates (Noe, 1988). When looking for a mentor, the focus should be on the most beneficial guidance to succeed in an organization (Bower, 2012). Additionally, women may also prefer to find mentors who understand the need to balance work and family (Hoover, 2006). Thus, given that they have more challenges to face in career mobility, the mentoring relationship is principally seen as providing women with an opportunity to develop professionally (Tharenou, 2005; Van Anders, 2004). Professional development can be seen as a holistic concept that encompasses work and an individual's personal life (Sinclair, 2009).

Mentoring Women in the Sport Industry. The role of mentoring in the sport industry as a tool for facilitating career advancement for women has gathered attention among researchers (Bower, 2009; Bower & Hums 2009, 2014; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999, 2002). However, such barriers as availability, proximity, networking, stereotyping, sexual connotation, and tokenism still prevent mentoring relationships from blossoming in the sport industry (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). Women, in particular, face more challenges in establishing a mentoring relationship in this industry (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). Career advancement for women in sport organizations is hindered by gender-specific barriers; women still have to fight the stereotype that they lack the proper skills and comply less with the “ideal leader” to get leadership position jobs (Bower & Hums, 2013; Pfister & Radtke, 2009).

In her meta-ethnography of 15 qualitative studies about mentoring women within the sport industry, Bower (2009) identified key elements of an effective mentoring relationship that can help women advance to leadership positions in sport. An effective mentoring relationship includes a competent mentor who not only works hard and serves as a role model but also has a

personal and professional interest in developing the protégé's potential and, in that sense, must be supportive (Bower 2009; Bower & Hums, 2014). On the other hand, the protégé is portrayed as a high performer who wishes to be mentored. In terms of career advancement, Bower (2009) reported that the opportunities to meet people, demonstrate potential, be coached, and receive challenging tasks make the difference in an effective mentoring relationship. Equally important for female protégés were the psychosocial functions, the idea of the mentor's nurturing behavior through friendship, acceptance, and role-modeling (Bower, 2009; Bower & Hums, 2009). Bower (2009) also suggested that informal mentoring guarantees more benefits for female protégés than formal mentoring. Although a mentoring relationship is an opportunity to develop professionally, the lack of female leaders, the time commitment, and the concerns about the protégés' performances are all barriers that prevent women from getting more mentoring chances (Bower, 2009). According to Bower and Hums (2013), "the more female leaders in the field, the more opportunities exist to create a support system that enhances mentoring relationships and networks that can lead to success" (p. 12).

In conclusion, the current literature suggests that despite having similar qualifications and a similar commitment to the sport, women often do not reach the same leadership positions in sport organizations compared to men (Pfister & Radtke, 2009). Research has also reported that mentoring is critical to the upward mobility of women (Allen et al., 2008; Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008). Assessing the need for female leadership through mentoring can be a strategic managerial tool used by sport organizations to fill the gender gap in this industry.

Theoretical Framework

Kram's (1985) mentor role theory provided the theoretical framework that guided this research. Specifically, Kram's mentor role theory provided insight on specific functions that may

be experienced by the participants in terms of mentoring. Several studies in the academic and business context have supported Kram's (1985) theory, particularly supporting and/or expanding Kram's two-function model (Paglis et al., 2006; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). However, the NBA is a different context. Thus, it was important to examine perceptions from female executives in a male-dominated professional sport context (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015). Kram's work also provided context to the experiences and stages of the mentoring relationships that are capable of enhancing leadership development for female executives. Functions of leadership development can be served through mentoring as well (Day, 2001).

In the theory that originated from Kram's (1983) empirical work, two key categories were identified concerning the ways in which mentors help protégés: (a) career development and (b) psychological support (see Table 1). Career mentoring functions may include sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection and challenging assignments (Kram, 1983). These functions are usually related to aspects of the relationship that can help the protégé "learn the ropes" (Kram, 1985, p. 22) of the organization and give him or her proper tools for career advancement. Kram highlights that the type of career functions provided to the protégé depends also on the mentor's position and influence in the organization. Sponsorship is defined by Kram as one of the most frequent career function observed in the mentoring relationship and usually involves promoting the protégé as the best candidate whenever opportunities for advancement arise in the organization. This function is important because it helps individuals in building a reputation and receiving recognition for their competence and performance, which in turn may help them climb the organizational ladder (Kram, 1985). Furthermore, this function benefits both mentor and protégé: the recipient obtains a promotion, and the mentor increases his or her credibility by sponsoring someone who advances and performs well. Exposure and visibility is

obtained when the mentor decides to give responsibility to the protégé to demonstrate his or her competence and performance. In particular, this function helps the protégé to be “visible” to key figures in the organization and to “expose” him or her to future opportunities (Kram, 1985, p. 27).

Table 1. Mentoring Functions (Kram, 1983)

<i>Career Functions</i>	<i>Psychosocial Functions</i>
Sponsorship	Role modeling
Exposure-and-Visibility	Acceptance-and-confirmation
Coaching	Counseling
Protection	Friendship
Challenging assignments	

Coaching involves training the protégé in adopting “specific strategies for accomplishing work objectives, for achieving recognition, and for achieving career aspirations” (Kram, 1985, p. 28). This function is important in all career stages because the information and advice gained is essential to career advancement (Kram, 1985). Part of the career functions in mentoring also includes protection. This function is important when visibility is not in the best interest of the protégé—especially in controversial situations—in order to reduce unnecessary risks that can threaten his or her reputation. It is important to use protection in a balanced way. Kram (1985) affirms that achieving a balanced use of protection is more difficult in cross-gender mentoring relationships.

Challenging assignments is the last function that pertains to the career development area in Kram’s (1985) mentor role theory. It consists of assigning challenging work to the protégé along with technical training and ongoing feedback. The aim is to enable him or her to develop a sense of competency and accomplishment. This function is critical in helping the protégé to be

prepared to perform well on difficult tasks and be equipped with high skills. While the first four functions are inherent avenues for advancement, the last one is focused more on preparing the protégé for greater responsibility and authority (Kram, 1985).

Kram's (1985) mentor role theory also identified psychosocial mentoring functions (see Table 1). The psychosocial support from the mentor may include role-modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1983). These functions are usually related to aspects of the relationship that "enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity and effectiveness" and affect the protégé on a more personal level (Kram, 1985, p. 32). Role-modeling is defined by Kram as one of the most frequent psychosocial functions observed in the mentoring relationship and usually involves an identification process that is both conscious and unconscious; the mentor may be unaware of being a desirable example, and the protégé may be unaware of the power of the identification process. The conscious aspect of the modeling process occurs around business tasks as the protégé learns different approaches, attitudes, and values from his or her mentor. However, due to gender and racial differences, there are cases in which the identification process may be more complex. Learning through observation occurs when the protégé respects and admires the mentor (Kram, 1985).

Acceptance and confirmation gives both mentor and protégé a sense of support and encouragement. Moreover, this function enables a tolerance for differences and allows self-differentiation in the relationship. The protégé feels free to explore "who he wants to become in the organizational world" without spending "more energy trying to please and win acceptance" from the mentor (Kram, 1985, p. 35). Personal concerns in the mentoring relationship are addressed with counseling. This function provides a forum in which the protégé talks openly about concerns and fears that are detracting him or her from productivity in the workplace.

Counseling can be beneficial in the relationship at any time in the career. The last function among psychosocial mentoring functions is friendship. When the social interaction between mentor and protégé is perceived as enjoyable both in and outside work settings, then friendship ensues and both individuals are pleased in sharing personal experiences (Kram, 1985).

Mentoring relations that can provide both career and psychosocial functions are more likely to be supportive and effective. These aspects of the mentoring relationship are not completely separated; thus, any interaction can combine different elements (Kram, 1985). The emphasis placed on fulfilling each of these functions may vary by mentoring relationship. Several factors influence the types and extent of the functions provided in a relationship. Kram (1985) stated that “individuals’ important needs will affect what functions are sought out and offered,” that “the interpersonal skills...influence how the relationship gets started, how it unfolds over time, and the range of possible functions,” and lastly that “the organizational context shapes the range of functions...the extent to which individuals are encouraged to participate in mentoring activities” (p. 40). Kram’s (1985) work also highlighted the evolutionary process of developmental relationships. In 1983 she described four predictable phases of a mentoring relationship (see Table 2).

Initiation is the beginning of the relationship and may last from six to twelve months. The protégé admires and respects the mentor for his or her competence and the ability to give support and guidance. The protégé is seen as “someone with potential, someone who is ‘coachable’, and someone who is enjoyable to work with” (Kram, 1985, p. 51). Both parties perceive positive expectations and gain beneficial experiences interacting with each other. Cultivation is the core phase of the mentoring relationship. It may last from two to five years. In this phase, the individuals repeatedly test against reality the positive expectations perceived during the initiation

phase. Usually career functions are the first ones that emerge in the relationship as the mentor provides coaching, challenging assignments, exposure and visibility, protection, and sponsorship. When the emotional bond deepens, then psychosocial functions emerge (e.g., role-modeling and acceptance and confirmation). If intimacy increases, then opportunities for meaningful interactions increase as well, such as counseling and friendship.

Table 2. Phases of the Mentor Relationship (Kram, 1983)

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Initiation	A period of six months to a year during which time the relationship gets started and begins to have importance for both managers
Cultivation	A period of two to five years during which time the range of career and psychosocial functions provided expand to a maximum
Separation	A period of six months to two years after a significant change in the structural role relationship and/or in the emotional experience of the relationship.
Redefinition	An indefinite period after the separation phase, during which time the relationship is ended or takes on significantly different characteristics, making it a more peerlike friendship.

The separation phase happens when a structural or emotional separation occurs. During separation, significant changes take place in terms of career and psychosocial functions. Usually, the protégé ends up working more autonomously, and the mentor is less influential on his or her career. This phase can be seen as critical in terms of development because the protégé now needs to demonstrate crucial job skills without supervision. At the same time, the mentor can demonstrate his or her competence in developing talent within the organization (Kram, 1985). The relationship then evolves into a redefinition phase as it either takes on a new dimension or it is terminated. When the mentoring relationship is no longer necessary in its previous form, then it takes on a new form, which “they may continue as distant friendships or gradually fade into positive memories” (Kram, 1985, p. 63). Though Kram’s (1983, 1985) research is over 35 years

old, for scholars interested in understanding the functions and roles in the workplace, her work is still relevant and significant. Kram's (1985) mentor role theory has provided the basis for much of the research conducted on the topic and has received empirical support in later studies (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

The research design was qualitative because the purpose of this study was to examine the participants' descriptions on mentorship in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of mentoring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research seeks to uncover meanings and allows the researcher to gain understanding of a specific issue. Additionally, since qualitative research aims to “promote description, understanding, and meaning primarily through non-numerical analysis” (Andrew, Pedersen & McEvoy, 2011, p. 46), this study's research questions focused on the “how of human interactions”(Agee, 2009). Qualitative research also involves obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the ideas and views of a person (Schilling, 2006). Qualitative studies have been recommended for areas where there is little previous research and for empowering individuals to share their stories, as is the case of the female executives of this study (Creswell, 2013). Conducting qualitative studies allows the opportunity to capture and examine “what people say from the place where they say it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

This research study utilized interviews. The interview process allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding and a different point of view, which in turn makes possible to articulate multiple perspectives and meanings on mentoring (Andrew et al., 2011). The decision to collect verbal data is determined by the specific aim to analyze participants' experiences and knowledge (Flick, 2014). Moreover, the researcher is interested in understanding the lived experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). According to Seidman (2013), “at the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth” (p. 9). Interviews are forms of talk in which “parties are engaged in asking and answering questions” (Roulston, 2010, p. 10). Regarding the

research published in mentoring, according to Allen et. al.(2008), with almost 90% being exclusively quantitative, mentoring scholarship can benefit from more qualitative research to help us understand the role of mentoring and contemporary careers.

Bower (2007) investigated individual reasons for mentoring and organizational factors inhibiting or facilitating mentoring. Bower (2007) utilized a phenomenological research design to examine the mentoring relationship between 1st-year faculty and five physical education department chairs. Specifically, the author collected data primarily through in-depth interviews. Pfister and Radtke (2009) chose a qualitative approach to explore female leaders' perspectives in German sports organizations. The use of interviews assisted the researchers in raising issues that were important to the questions of the study (Pfister & Radtke, 2009). The interview process enabled researchers to “compare the statements of the different respondents and thus to be able to identify similarities and differences between them and search for patterns and ideal types. In addition, this kind of interview gives the informants the opportunity of raising their own questions and giving their own evaluations and explanations” (Pfister & Radtke, 2009, p. 233).

The benefits associated with the use of a qualitative approach for this study are two. First, using a qualitative methodology provides in-depth information on the mentoring relationship for women working in a male-dominated industry. These female leaders' perspectives on mentoring will provide additional ways to mentor women aspiring to work as executives in the sport industry. Second, the richness of data coming from interviews helps clarify the role of mentoring in contemporary careers for females.

Positionality Statement. I wanted to interview female upper level managers because I wanted to allow them to share their mentoring experiences with detailed descriptions. A good researcher should be a good listener, so I let my participants talk and share their thoughts without letting my 17 years of experience in women’s sport as player and lately as a coach to influence their answers. Also, my experience, as a journalist and a founder of a women’s basketball magazine in Italy that allows the female athletes and coaches voices to be heard, helped me to be familiar with the interviewing process. This interest in women’s sport careers is what motivated me to want to learn more about female upper level managers in the NBA as it is considered a male-dominated environment. However, to ensure that no biases from my past experience would influence the process, I consulted multiple times with my committee to create and develop interview questions that are as open as possible to let personal stories emerge.

Participants. The 2014 Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC) was the starting point in identifying participants for this study. The Racial and Gender Report Card is an assessment of hiring practices of women and people of color in most of the leading professional and amateur sports and sporting organizations in the United States. The report considers the composition—assessed by racial and gender makeup—of players, coaches, and front office/athletic department employees in the U.S. leading sport organizations, including the NBA (Tidesport.org). In this document, Lapchick (2014) reported the lowest grade, “F” (any position in which women comprise less than 22% of the available jobs), for NBA teams regarding the presence of women in such positions as CEO/ president and vice president. After reviewing the RGRC, the researcher viewed all NBA teams’ official websites (30) and all available media guides to identify other potential participants. For the purpose of this study, a “female upper manager” is defined as a woman who has risen to a top management or leadership position within her team.

Inclusion criteria were specific: (a) still working in the organization, (b) a minimum of 5 years in the current position, and (c) contact information publicly available. Initial contact with the participants was through LinkedIn, Facebook, and the contact numbers available on the organizations' official websites. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is defined by Atkinson and Flint (2001) as:

A technique for finding research subjects. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on [...] Snowball sampling can be placed within a wider set of link-tracing methodologies that seek to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (p. 1).

After consulting the RGRC, the teams' official websites, the media guides, and using snowball sampling, the pool of potential participants consisted of 92 female managers. Twenty-two accepted the LinkedIn invitation, and 14 indicated interest in conducting an interview. The researcher interviewed female upper managers in the NBA until the saturation point was reached—that is, until new interviews no longer yielded additional information. A similar approach regarding saturation was used when exploring gender and leadership in the sport context (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008). The resulting sample consisted of 10 female managers working in the NBA. Saturation was reached after interviewing 8 participants. However, 2 additional interviews were conducted to ensure higher level of details of results.

Data Collection. Individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted. Open-ended questions allow interviewees to share stories with detailed descriptions on topics deemed important by the interviewer (Roulston, 2010). In-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions have been utilized by other scholars “to explore in depth the perceptions and thoughts of each senior female leader” (Roebuck & Smith, 2013, p. 49). Also, other studies that aimed to investigate perceptions from female leaders in sport have used semi-structured interviews (Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Pfister & Radtke, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to be prepared, but at the same time allow flexibility such as changing the order of the questions to follow the answers given in order for the interviewees to share in a conversational way their stories of experiences, their perspectives, and topics (Flick, 2014; Kvale, 2008; Schwandt, 2015). Follow-up questions were asked based on the participants’ responses.

After receiving the approval from the Institutional Review Board of the researcher’s university, a cover letter was sent to 14 executive female leaders who agreed to participate in the study. The researcher requested a confidential, 30 to 45 minute audio-recorded interview about the interviewees’ experiences and perceptions on mentoring in their careers. After the informed consent from each participant was obtained, the interview was scheduled and conducted. Interviews took place via Skype and were audio-recorded with two different devices to avoid possible equipment failure (Easton, McCormish & Greenberg, 2000). According to Silverman (1998), the recording allows the researcher to remember such matters “as pauses, overlaps, in-breaths” (p. 61). Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to discontinue the interview, or withdraw from the study, at any time.

The interview protocol consisted of a pool of 6 questions developed from the review of literature but modified to fit the specific objectives of this study. The protocol was reviewed by the researcher’s advisors for content validity. Each interview began with the question, “Could we begin today with you telling me the story of how you got to this place in your career?” and finished with the open-ended question, “Is there something else you would like to add that you think is related to our discussion but I did not address?” Demographic information and career path questions were also asked. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A. The interview protocol was pilot tested with 5 female managers in a university setting who were in a job position for at least 5 years and have been mentored. The researcher interviewed them and audio-recorded their responses, which lasted from 25 to 40 minutes. The aim was to evaluate whether the interview questions were clear enough and able to elicit answers to the study’s research questions. Participants of the pilot study confirmed that they understood what had been asked, that the questions were clear, and the duration of the interview was appropriate. Table 3 provides a summary of how the research questions were addressed by the qualitative data collection tools and Figure 1 provides a flow chart of the overall research design.

Table 3. Research Questions in Relation to Data Collection Tools

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Interview Question</i>
1. How do female upper managers in the NBA describe mentoring?	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. What role does mentoring play in their development for leadership in the NBA?	Questions 3, 5

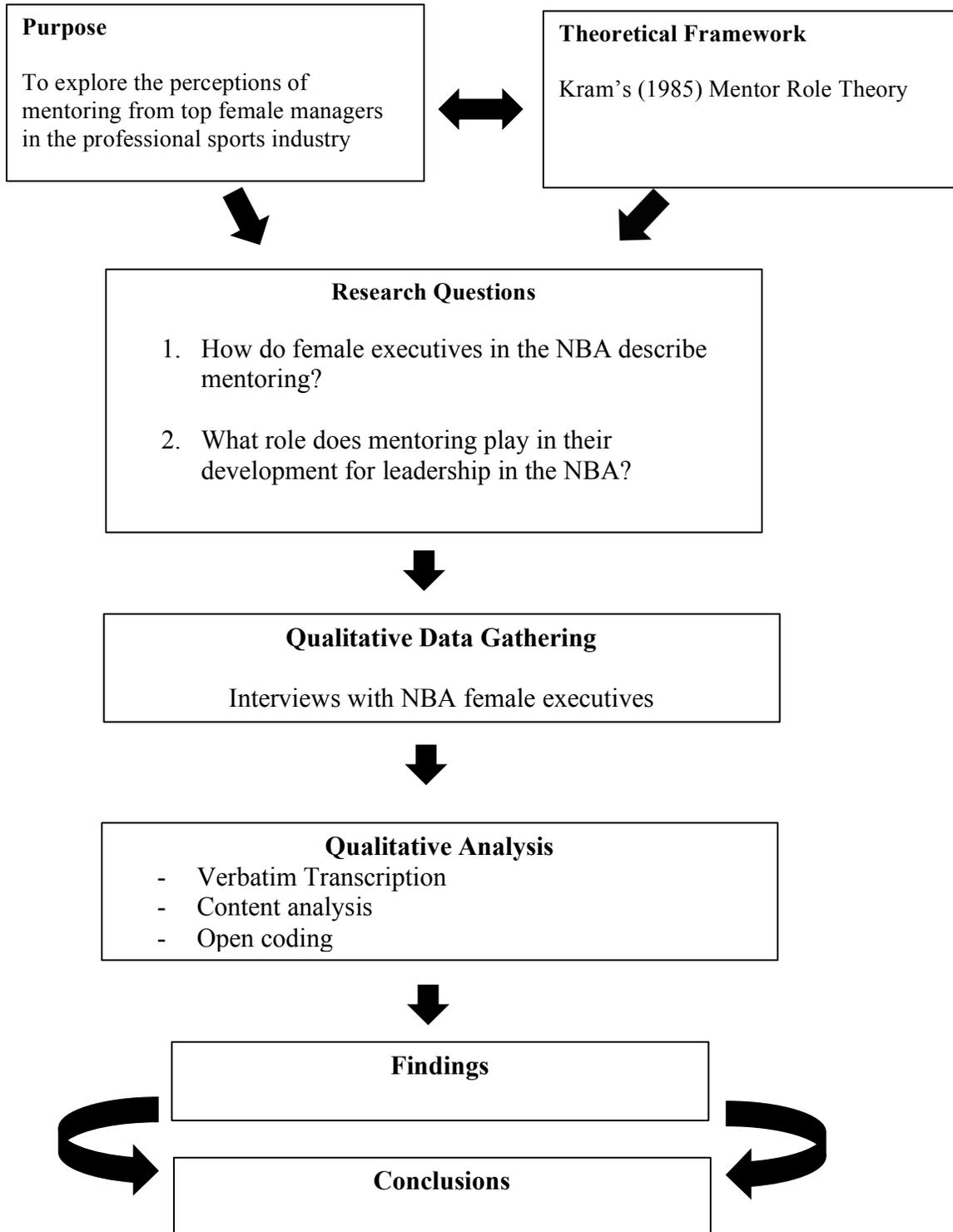


Figure 1. Research Design

Data Analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were sent to the participants for member-checking (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011). The final document containing transcriptions from the interviews was read by the researcher to get a general sense of the message contained in it and to identify the key issues related to mentoring and leadership. Then, the researcher re-read the document to begin to code and categorize data. Content analysis is defined as a “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). A constant comparative data analysis method was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and the transcribed interviews were coded. Coding was line-by-line to break down, understand, and develop categories (Flick, 2014). Then, grounded theory method was used to analyze the interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), using *emergent* codes that surfaced from the reading and analysis of the data. For the second research question, a list of a priori codes based on the theoretical framework were used.

The cycle of data reduction and verification was a continuous process, enabling six dominant themes to emerge. The themes for RQ1 included: (a) *professional and personal development*, (b) *the organic process of mentorship*, and (c) *organizational environment*. The themes for RQ2 included: (a) *career functions*, (b) *psychosocial support*, and (c) *the power of organizational socialization*. Another theme emerged from both RQ1 and RQ2: *gender of the mentor*.

Chapter 4: Results

The primary focus of this study was to explore perceptions of mentoring from top female managers in the professional sport industry. More specifically, the study was designed to understand the role of mentoring on the career mobility of women working in the executive level management of NBA's teams. In order to accomplish this, two primary questions guided the study: (a) How do female executives in the NBA describe mentoring? and (b) What role does mentoring play in development for leadership in the NBA?

Ten female upper level managers working for NBA teams for at least 5 years were interviewed. Due to the sensitive nature of the responses and the essential nature of confidentiality, no background stories or any other identifying information on the participants are disclosed. The subsequent sections outline the findings.

Research Question #1

How Do Female Upper Managers in the NBA Describe Mentoring?

Data collected were analyzed for emerging themes regarding factors of identifying mentors, insights, perceptions, and experiences of mentoring during the participant professional careers. A code map was developed for transparency of analysis (see Table 5 for the coding system used to identify themes). As a result of the analysis, three themes emerged describing the mentoring perceptions and experiences of female executives working in the NBA (see Table 5). The themes included: (a) *professional and personal development*, (b) *the organic process of mentorship*, and (c) *organizational environment*. Below, each theme is presented along with supporting quotes. Table 4 presents a brief summary of each participant and the gender of their mentors.

Table 4. Female Upper Managers and Mentors

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Mentors</i>
1	All female
2	2 male and 2 female
3	3 female
4	All male
5	1 male and 1 female
6	1 male and 2 female
7	2 male and 1 female
8	All male
9	3 male
10	2 male and 1 female

Theme 1: Professional and Personal Development. Participants in this study expressed perceptions about the professional and personal supportive nature of mentoring. For these female executives—some of them with experience both as a mentee and a mentor— the role of mentors is extremely important in terms of career, especially for women. A sub-theme that emerged from the data was professional support.

Professional support. A frequently referenced topic when discussing mentoring of female upper managers was the role of the mentor in teaching specific job tasks. Participants identified the importance of establishing the foundation for how to perform a job task as a part of their mentoring experience. Participant 2 experienced this component with her mentor:

He really taught me. He really kind of laid the foundation and laid the basis for... this is how I track my budget, this is how I do this, this is the process I use for this. So he kind of really laid a lot of the fundamentals, and just what's proper business etiquette, how you work with different types of people.

Table 5. Code Map for Research Question #1

<i>Iteration</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Themes</i>
3			Professional and personal development The organic process of mentorship Organizational environment
2		Professional support Emotional support Genuine attraction Individual needs Work/family balance Avoid labels	
1	Coaching/teaching on the job Advice/feedback Opportunities to grow professionally Career guidance Availability and committment Instilling confidence Safe and comfortable environment/relationship Genuine interest/care Open and honest conversations Genuine connection/attraction Specific characteristics Proactive Driven/passionate Natural/organic process Access to mentoring Individual's needs Work/family balance Avoid labels		

Participant 5 considered the role of her boss as a teacher as well:

What I really learned from him was just relationship building. The ability to engage people; it impacts me on a daily basis with my profession, and with my growth, with my management style.

Along with teaching specific job tasks, other components were taught by her mentor as

Participant 10 said:

My next boss really helped me say, okay, you're competent, and you're very good at what you do; now what are the other things that are not measured, right, that are maybe perceived that will help you become even more successful, so how I carry myself as a professional woman, how I speak in meetings, how I present my product, my presentations etc.

In conjunction with teaching, mentors were often sharing ideas and feedback with their mentees. Getting feedback can help the protégé to understand if she or he is on the right or wrong route, and to be able to correct her/his actions. Participant 4 reflected on her experience both as a mentee and mentor:

In every sense of the word I wanted to learn more, and I think there's a number of people, and myself and we're always open to sharing and giving feedback, and especially somebody who's willing to take honest feedback. I think every single one of the people I've worked with, or I've worked for has been very honest, provided feedback, given guidance, has told me if something was the right route, or wrong route.

Participant 7 highlighted the idea of sharing feedback on her daily routine: “Before you're making that big decision, just weighing out one or two more opinions with other people. That's

just my...every day check-ins.” The importance of getting the proper knowledge and the capacity of the mentor to be a coach were noted by Participant 9:

If you're gonna mentor somebody, you have to identify what their strengths are, and you have to coach to that, and you have to give them opportunities and ideas and resources for them to be able to exhibit their talents in those unique spaces.

Another important aspect of professional support highlighted by participants were the opportunities and challenges that the mentors provided for them for professional growth. The challenges associated with inexperience when you start your career were especially noted by Participant 5 when she reflected on the opportunities her mentor gave her:

She allowed me to just really shadow her. So, even if I wasn't qualified, or didn't really understand the project, or was maybe too young, or too inexperienced, she would let me listen. And she also gave me projects that would challenge me. So there were lots of times that I would...it would take me a week to do a project, where it would take her 20 minutes, but she allowed me that...those stumbling blocks, and opportunities.

Similarly, Participant 6 recalled, “She got me face to face with the executives. She helped me host women in, women in sports events out of games, to network and grow my confidence in that area”. This leads to the need of giving chances even when mentees are not completely ready as participants shared. Challenging them and see what they are capable of is considered by Participant 9 as part of the learning process:

If I know there's a talented person who is motivated to do well, I'd be more likely to put them in a challenging situation. I don't believe in necessarily waiting until the absolute right moment to promote somebody. Sometimes you just gotta promote them, or you gotta give them a chance to see what they can do.

Participant 8 confirmed this approach as she experienced herself: “He believed in something about me and he took a chance and he put me ahead of everybody else in a position that, umm, ultimately led me to be very successful in that capacity at the company.” Mentors also provided career guidance with the big picture in mind. Career guidance often involves assisting protégés who are trying to choose a career. Participant 2 stated:

I had a new boss come in and he said, "You know, marketing is a very, very different path than partnerships or sponsorships, so which one do you like better? Which one do you think you would like to pursue?" And I thought about it, and I felt like marketing would be a little bit broader [...] I decided that I'm just not a very good sales person, so I thought I'd just go into marketing.

When asked about the key aspects of a successful mentoring relationship, female upper managers indicated availability and commitment. Having easy access and relying on their mentors made them feel professionally supported. Moreover, meeting regularly - even after the mentor left the organization - helped them to grow professionally as Participant 2 described:

She said, "You know, I will still meet with you, and bring your work, bring your questions. I will still meet with you, and I will continue to teach you and help you grow, and I know that they're going to hire someone that will come in above you, but I will help you until you get to that point."

Another aspect of a successful mentorship was being comfortable when asking feedback from their mentors as Participant 3 shared:

I would just say that the open door policy and the willingness to communicate and not look down on you, or to look at you as an equal and give you the time to come in and ask

questions or just talk if you needed help, or whatever the case. I would just say they made you feel comfortable and I think that's key when you're new to a company.

Participant 9 reinforced the importance of availability: “So those two people really...I mean I could call them and ask them anything. I could sit down and they would tell me.” In addition to that, the commitment to the relationship was perceived as a key. Related to this, Participant 5 said:

It's great to have a formalized plan and process, but at the end of the day, the hard work and the success of the program will become dependent on how much both the mentor and the mentee commit to the program, and are engaged and invested in the program.

On the importance of commitment, Participant 8 added:

I think that the biggest challenge comes in, in the follow-up and making sure that whoever is part of the process is really committed to having that follow-up and again.

Emotional support. Executives discussed how often mentors provided a boost in confidence, specifically in a sense of worthiness that made them feel personally valued. Instilling confidence is crucial for mentee's personal and professional development because it helps them to be more effective in their professional role. Participants shared their feelings on the importance of having a mentor who believed in them and was supportive. Participant 3 said:

I kind of feel like she's a big reason for my success, just learning from her and her believing in me, and giving me the confidence to tackle any challenge ahead of me. [...] She's just been a great person to learn from, and very supportive, and really makes you feel valued, and I think having a boss that you feel that way about and have that positive relationship with can only resolve in great things for you.

Similarly, Participant 5 added:

I feel like she keeps me top of mind when an opportunity comes up because she knows the quality of my work and believes in me.

Participants felt that mentors had a big role in instilling confidence, as Participant 6 shared:

She did a really good job of instilling confidence in myself very quickly, umm, and, she quickly took me under her wing and would meet with me consistently and talk through my successes.

Similarly, Participant 7 recalled her mentoring experience and her mentors' role in providing emotional support:

I think confidence, first and foremost. I had a lot of positive feedback from all three of them.

As well as Participant 8:

He gave me a tremendous amount of confidence to believe that I was on par and in some cases excelling over a lot of colleagues that I was working with in this space.

All executives discussed the importance of providing a safe and comfortable environment/relationship in order to grow professionally. Important elements to establishing this satisfying environment include giving and receiving trust and respect, providing mentees with room to share their concerns, allowing them to disagree, avoiding the use of power to force their decisions, and looking out for them when necessary. Participant 1 mentioned how the lack of internal mentorship forced her to find a safe environment to discuss her concerns in an outside network:

So, we were able to show our emotion to each other and go to work with just that subjective mindset, objective mindset rather.

Participant 2 described how in difficult moments she would reach out to her mentor to share concerns and ask for advice:

She's a good sounding board for, "Hey, I'm having a rough time at work right now, what opportunities are out there? Do you know of any positions that are available? Or I think you should stick it out, it sounds like you're on in a good place right now." You know, just kind of being an advocate for me and helping me navigate as I've had several different bosses come in.

According to Participant 3, creating a safe relationship also means not feeling intimidated to reach out to your boss:

A lot of people are intimidated, like, oh my gosh, I don't want to go to my boss and ask, they'll think I'm stupid, or I'm asking a dumb question, you know. It was just more of a comfort level I think.

Similarly, Participant 9 added:

So, giving them the comfort to say, you know, it's okay to disagree. It's okay to say, "I'm not comfortable with that."

Regarding a safe environment and the role of mentors, Participant 8 pointed out:

I think, just that I came in with his recommendation gave me some immunity because there were certainly a lot more senior people that I was working with that couldn't understand why he would have given me that chance.

Participants recognized that a genuine interest/care can be a fundamental ingredient for a successful mentorship. Participants felt their mentors were effective because they were really engaged and active in mentees' personal and professional development. In some instances, female managers felt mentors were willing to put aside their interests in order to help their

mentees succeed. Mentors were not acting because they were forced by the organization to mentor someone, but because they truly wanted the best for their mentees. Participant 3 stated, “I mean, we don't work in the same industry, but, ya, I just think they genuinely cared, and wanted to help other people succeed,” while Participant 5 said, “He really just invested in helping me learn, and engaging me and teaching me.” Likewise, Participant 10 added, “He took a very keen interest in my career early on because I didn't have any previous mentors or connections, so it worked out really well for me.”

Furthermore, Participant 8 indicated how her boss demonstrated care for her:

I think there were some challenges around supporting women financially in this field, and he cut through a lot of this bullshit for me and made me understand that it wasn't about me personally, but that as a company, and as an industry, we had a long way to go, and his sort of investing, and having tougher conversations around making sure I was compensated as fairly as he could, given our budget and circumstances.

Executives expressed appreciation for having open and honest conversations about life and career with their mentors and/or mentees. Participant 1 recalled a conversation with a young woman who had worked for the company for 9 years:

She did not see the growth that she was looking for. She was under a lot of stress and frustration, and I coached them very sincerely about, from a woman to a woman, a professional to a professional, despite the fact that I'm wearing the hat of a leader in this company, the best step for you is to leave this company, and find your success somewhere else where you're not pigeonholed and stereotyped because you've been here since you were an intern. So, those conversations happened. I was able to take off my

executive, vice president hat, and put on that human, female executive person and say these are the discussions that are going to help you grow.

Being honest and open are characteristics highly considered for the parts involved in a mentoring relationship. As Participant 6 stated:

[She was] not biased I would say. So she was a good sounding board even though she was our senior vice president of human resources. Umm, and, she was genuine I would say and able to provide like real life examples when I was making decisions.

Describing her mentor, Participant 10 pointed out: “She was able to be very open and honest because she had been through that.” Participant 8 believed her interest in having honest and open conversations is something she got from her mentors:

And I think they cared about me more as a person than they did about my career which became an ancillary part of who I was and what I wanted to do. I think they wanted me to be successful, but they were also ready to enable...and they certainly helped me along that path, but I think the fact that they were most interested in just my personal development was a huge driver in them being able to have some dialogue around helping me in my career.

Theme 2: The Organic Process of Mentorship. When asked about how organizations should implement a mentoring program, all female managers touched on the fact that mentoring relationship should be a natural and organic process, one that should not be forced through formal mentoring programs, especially when they consider only skills and resume to create mentor-mentee match.

Genuine Attraction. Participants shared that while the organizations should provide some formal ice-breaker activities/events, these should be seen as only “planting a seed,” (Participant 3). In developing a mentorship, Participant 8 pointed out:

If you want to really invest in a relationship, and you have to A) find somebody that's gonna be committed as well, and put in the time...and I think, to be honest with you, the most impactful mentorships that I have now and I pursue are the ones that just happen organically.

Similarly, Participant 10 highlighted:

Um, I think a successful mentoring relationship really has to be authentic, and it probably has to develop naturally. Sometimes, I think that companies try to assign mentors and I think that's fine early in your career, but I think as your career develops, a lot of the things that you have to address as a professional, particularly as a woman, are very emotional and have a personal nature, and if that's not an authentic relationship, then I don't think that it succeeds over time.

All executives agreed on the importance of having a good working personal relationship as the first step to initiate any kind of mentorship. Participant 8 highlighted the idea as follows:

If you're going to mentor or lead, or manage someone, I think it's important that you know that you have a good, working personal relationship with them, and that there's that level of investment, so that you can have some very candid and authentic conversations born out of mutual respect and I think that's the best baseline for mentoring and training and managing.

Similarly, Participant 7 added, “So it's maintaining that same type of effort you put into client relationships, but taking it one step further, and really of making people a part your life.”

Moreover, executives recognized that having something in common, such as personality type and/or personal background, can help boost the connection and make it more genuine as

Participant 2 expressed:

Just because I'm female, and vice president, that doesn't mean that I'm gonna relate to a female who's an entry-level position in a department that I know nothing about. I think it is about personalities. I don't think you can just pick someone and say, "Oh, I want them to be my mentor." I think there's really gotta be a genuine attraction, if you will. I think it's important.

In agreement, Participant 3 added:

I think, in most cases, where you might have a relationship with someone on your staff, and they may just kind of warm up to you, for whatever reason. Your personalities may mesh, and they say, oh my gosh. I'll have someone come in and just ask me my opinion.

Furthemore, Participant 5 elaborated:

I think that's where you sort of have to dig into people's backgrounds and personalities and try to find a good fit. Just like when you're hiring somebody, you look at their résumé. You look at their former experience. You speak to references, and you sort of try to find a good fit in that way.

Having a commonality, in fact, may lead to a good fit, as Participant 6 said:

I think that they should, one thing I've seen really successful is finding something that they have in common with the person they're mentoring, umm, so it doesn't need to be some broad, generic type of relationship, but you need to find things to connect on.

While a genuine connection helps start a mentorship, executives also described several characteristics regarding mentors and mentees that make it a long-lasting relationship. The

results also indicated that both parties need to be proactive in providing and seeking mentorship. A strong work ethic, capacity to deliver, and a drive or passion are key factors for potential mentees to be spotted more easily by leaders in the organization. Participants highlighted that a successful mentorship is a two-way street, beneficial to both mentors and mentees. According to the participants in this study, the satisfaction of these characteristics may guarantee a long-lasting relationship. Another aspect highlighted from some participants is that having an appropriate experience gap between the mentor and the mentee can help the mentee to get the proper knowledge. Also important is having a mentor with an influential status.

On being proactive from the mentors' perspective, Participant 9 said:

I think going out of your way to make sure you provide mentoring opportunities for women, or other people you deem as high potential. If you're looking to develop...maybe the ranks of women are underrepresented and you're higher management rank, so you wanna cultivate that, I think it's an excellent way to do that because it clearly... I think when you get to know the talented people that work for you, you're more apt to be a cheerleader for them, and you're more apt to feel valued as the employee, etc.

Regarding mentee's proactiveness, Participant 5 commented, "So I really tried hard to show quality work, and volunteer for projects, and opportunities to be in front of him or impress him or whatever the case may be."

On a mentorship's being beneficial for both parties, Participant 10 said:

So, it needs to be a two-way street. I think that just because you want a mentor doesn't mean that you get a mentor. And I think that there should be a criteria as it relates to...what's the word I'm looking for...either skill set or value to the organization.

On looking for a potential mentee, Participant 8 shared:

People that have very core characteristics, like a positive attitude, strong work ethic, and passion for what they wanna do, and someone who has the natural desire to learn and grow, and be open to different styles of leadership and management. Like, I look at those things as far more important and impactful than somebody that's got a perfect resume.

Participant 4 added, “And, there's people too that I have identified that I'm like, hey, let's have coffee. I will start it and see if there's a connection, if they see it, but they have to want to get better.”

Individual needs. The results provided an interesting mix of perceptions toward access to mentoring opportunities. The difficulties of finding a mentor that can provide guidance and is willing to committ to the mentoring relationship within the organization were especially noted by Participant 1. She discussed how the lack of mentoring has been a huge obstacle for her:

It was the biggest obstacle. Um, because there wasn't mentorship. There wasn't, um, strategic vision, in terms of how it related to the role that I played. I brought to them the innovative ideas, progressive thoughts, and, so in that environment, I can't say there was anybody there.

On the other hand, some participants shared that they were not actively seeking out mentorship within or outside of the organization because they felt they did not need it or they felt it was sufficient to have a sponsor. Participant 4 reflected on her experience:

I'm more of a, I wouldn't say a lone wolf, but I would say I don't seek help and therefore, I don't think I give...I think I give, maybe my personality type doesn't look like it. I'm not the type of person who you feel like you should be helping.

Participant 8 added:

I think when I look back on my career I didn't focus on a mentor and I have a sponsor that was checking in on how I was progressing and that I could use as a referral or as a reference or someone that was going to be supporting me or in my corner to try to help advance my career.

On mentoring opportunities within the organization, Participant 10 added, “So you have to, kind of, work your way up into a mentorship program, versus it being a guarantee that everyone gets to participate in 'cause I think that, that waters it down”, whereas Participant 6 said, “I think everybody should have access to whoever they feel like would benefit them.”

All executives acknowledged that an effective mentorship simply depends on individual needs. Among many other things, it depends on the career stage, personality type and ambitions. Thus, each individual may have different needs which explains why the mentees must be aware of what they need or want to become before seeking out mentors. Participant 5 pointed out:

I think, especially for a lot of young women, they don't know what they're looking for in a mentor, and at the end of the day, the women who are being mentors are busy, and they don't necessarily know or have time to hone a particular skill for you, or understand what exactly you're looking for. So, it's really important, I think, that...why I think some of my past mentorship relationships have failed, is when I didn't sort of set the expectation for my mentor, didn't really give them the opportunity to understand what I was looking for, or what I needed, how I was looking to improve.

At the same time, participants recognized the responsibility they have for knowing the needs of the people they manage. Participant 1 said, “I need to know the needs of my people, and how they react to different situations.” Participant 4 reflected on what lesson she learned from leaders she looked up to: “It's about being selfless. It's not about you, it's about your team. It's about your

people, and I think that's what I feel like I've taken from it most, and I'm willing to literally give everything to what it takes to succeed, and keep things pushing through". She went on:

If an individual needs a more formalized mentor and having it more structured because that's the way in which they do things, then that's great. There is other people who don't and they need somebody to throw things off of, but it's not so structured or formalized, I think there's two different ways of doing it. I've never been a formalized mentor person, personally, but I've had people reach out to me and ask... especially on LinkedIn similar to yourself, I have people reach out, people who introduce me to people, and you know, I'm like, hey, let's have an initial conversation, and let's go from there.

Each individual should be mentored differently based on his/her own needs. Participant 6 described, "I think each person is gonna need to be mentored differently whether they're male or female." Similarly, Participant 8 commented:

But, I also think that it's just making sure that you're coaching them to their strengths, so, like, everybody is different and I don't think that there's a specific way to have a conversation with everybody. It's all unique, and I have to approach it as that.

Theme 3: Organizational Environment. The organizational environment is important for the development of mentoring relationships. Creating mentorship opportunities without the support of an organizational culture that enhances beliefs about gender equality could be challenging.

Work/family balance. Executives recognized that the industry is a tough environment for work/family balance issues as Participant 1 stated:

I also believe that if it's a leader with significant authority in the company saying this, that it's true, you're giving them the commission to do it, and a lot of them thank me, and say, "Wow, I needed to hear it from somebody that is important in the organization to know

that I'm not going to be violating the unwritten code because I'm going home and spending time with my child at 6 o'clock."

Similarly, Participant 9 added:

I think there's a lot of stereotypes and limitations that are put on different genders and different, like, just based on, stereotypes, I think. You know, "well she has a family, she probably isn't gonna want this job because it involves travel."

Another aspect of the organizational environment is related to being a mother and a leader. The difficulties of keeping a leadership position in a highly competitive environment while being a mother were touched on by the majority of participants. For example, Participant 4 shared:

There's so many aspects of, to truly grow, that you sacrifice, and I think that's with anybody, man or woman that you're sacrificing time, and family and all of those things. But for some reason, that gain for maybe a male in this role doesn't seem as high, but for us it is because, you know, you wanna be a mother. They say that if you're a mother with children, which I am, I like that I get to be like, hey, you can have both, and I don't think there's a lot of examples of that in our industry, but that's for me... I think that's one of the things I hope that I'm doing to add to that aspect of leadership or somebody growing in this industry.

This leads to the need of having more women leaders that are also mothers, as Participant 1 added:

I remember sitting in a luncheon and looking at an executive at one of the other teams and thinking "wow, she managed to actually get to where she is, with young children, with the dynamics of being a wife, and managing a house, and yet she's got it. She's doing it." It keeps giving you the inspiration to not give up.

A frequently referenced topic when discussing the organizational environment was the very demanding and competitive nature of the professional sport industry, as Participant 10 explained:

So, it's already a hard career path anyway. When you layer in nights and weekends, there are tons of very smart women, early on in their career, where once you get to a point where you also have kids, then those nights and weekends start to add up. The career opportunities the farther you get up the career ladder, the less and less opportunities there are 'cause there's just not that many other positions, and a lot of things come into play where it starts getting attractive to leave the industry and do other things, and if you don't have a lot of women anyway, any one that leaves the industry, changes the percentage for other people to look up to or for them to know it's possible, changes that drastically.

Avoid labels. The female managers in this study were very clear about avoiding labels for themselves and for any type of mentoring program being implemented in their organizations.

When asked about mentoring strategies for women in leadership in large organizations, they indicated their willingness to not be targeted as the only population in need of mentoring.

Participants highlighted clearly their perspective on the subject as Participant 6 said: “I think the goal is for everybody to be perceived and treated the exact same, male or female, and, so that's why I think mentoring should be the exact same way.” Additionally, Participant 4 pointed out:

I've never had, for me personally, I've never had the conversation about being a woman and how to excel as a woman in this industry. Ya, again, I don't put myself in a category feeling that, that is a barrier.

Another aspect of avoiding to be confined in labels or categories, was the pride some participants expressed in achieving success in a male dominated environment, as Participant 9 shared: “I feel like it was a benefit that I worked in mostly male dominated businesses, so the fact that I was a

woman was an advantage, especially because I feel like I was competent, so I had more opportunities.”

Similarly, Participant 8 elaborated:

It has made me have to be, in some cases, smarter and more prepared, and more aggressive than my male counterparts that might have an easier time getting to have a seat at the table [...] Now, is it always fair? No. Do you let it eat you up every night? No. You have to know that this is what you came into. This is what you signed on for. You can inspire change, absolutely, but that it's a slow-moving cultural shift that I think we are slowly starting to become more aware of, but I don't think that you should ever use the "minority card," or the "woman card" as a crutch for not getting where you need to be financially or visibly within a company. I think that makes you just have to fight that much harder, and if you don't have that fight in you, then this isn't what you should sign on for.

At the same time, participants acknowledged the challenges they face and suggested having a women's working group within the organization: a formal setting to meet and share experiences/solutions with other women, as Participant 6 commented:

So, while I think there's an overall mentor opportunity where women can connect with males or females. I think what I've found really cool and what I've seen a lot of other companies do is they create these women leadership councils and women events that focus on some of the struggles or issues that women are facing in their industry.

Similarly, Participant 7 added:

I think what I'm looking for and the advice I would give sports organizations for women specifically moving forward, is something here for us 'cause the day-to-day micro-

aggressions that we experience are in this building. If we're not sharing that experience in a formal setting, it's gonna take a young woman sticking her neck out to really identify and find and hone in on those relationships.

Research Question #2

What Role Does Mentoring Play in their Development for Leadership in the NBA?

The second research question of this study was focused on the role mentoring plays in their leadership development. To answer this question, collected data were analyzed for “a priori codes” derived from Kram’s (1985) mentor role theory regarding which specific functions of mentoring influenced the leadership development of female upper managers. Since a pre – set of codes was used, it was not necessary to build a code map. Moreover, due to the nature of the category organizational socialization no initial codes were developed. As a result of the analysis, three themes emerged describing the role that mentoring in leadership development has for female upper managers in the NBA. The themes included: (a) *career functions*, (b) *psychosocial support*, and (c) *the power of organizational socialization*. Below, each theme is presented with illustrative quotes.

Theme 1: Career Functions. The “a priori codes” derived from Kram’s (1985) mentor role theory for this theme were sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Career functions focus on transferring the knowledge from a more experienced individual to a less experienced one. The aim is to enhance learning and preparing for career advancement.

Sponsorship: “...involves actively nominating an individual for desirable lateral moves and promotions” (Kram, 1985, p. 25).

Exposure and visibility: “...involves assigning responsibilities that allow a lower-level

manager to develop relationships with key figures in the organization who may judge his or her potential for further advancement” (Kram, 1985, p. 27).

Coaching: “...like an athletic coach [...] suggests specific strategies for accomplishing work objectives, for achieving recognition, and for achieving career aspirations” (Kram, 1985, p. 28).

Protection: “...involves taking credit and blame in controversial situations, as well as intervening in situations where the junior colleague is ill-equipped to achieve satisfactory resolution” (Kram, 1985, p. 29).

Challenging Assignments: “...enables the junior manager to develop specific competencies and to experience a sense of accomplishment in a professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 31).

The results of this study show that the most cited function in leadership development by far was coaching, followed almost equally by sponsorship, exposure and visibility, challenging assignment, and protection. While learning new tasks and how to perform successfully on the job, participants shared that it is very important to rely on someone who is able to tell you what you can improve. For example, Participant 9 described the importance of receiving feedback for professional improvement:

Sometimes it's really hard for people to tell you that, you know, you have certain things that you're doing in a certain way that are holding back your career, so you have to really be open to that. Seek it out, and not be afraid, or demeaned by that feedback. If you really wanna get better, you really have to let yourself out there, and say, "what could I be doing? What am I doing to...?" You know... "What's holding me back?" and you gotta hear, sometimes, things that are hard to hear, you know.

Similarly, Participant 5 commented:

I think mentors should provide career advice. So, is it a good company to work for; are you going to be working for good people? They teach you how to negotiate in an interview which women statistically are worse at asking for money, asking for the extra benefits, asking for the title change, whatever the case may be.

Sponsorship and exposure and visibility were the second most cited functions by the participants in this study. When asked about what mentors should provide, female executives talked about getting more direct exposure to the key figures in the organization. For example, Participant 8 commented: "...you have to give them opportunities and ideas and resources for them to be able to exhibit their talents in those unique spaces, and I think that's the best thing that you could possibly do."

Another aspect of career functions was sponsorship. Influential mentors may be in different boards and can tell other members that the mentee is the best candidate for the job. For example, Participant 8, commented on the importance of sponsorship: "I think a lot of time it can be, even more important, to have a sponsor who's a man, and who does have a high seat at the big table."

Participants felt that being challenged by the mentor has a positive effect on their career and is something that should be encouraged. The assignment of challenging work allows the mentee to develop a sense of competence and accomplishment that are crucial for professional development as Participant 7 commented:

I definitely think the third one is just challenging. Are you good? Are you happy? Are you fulfilled in what you're doing? Is there anything I can help you with that you're not doing now, that you might want to do? So, kind of being that connection moving forward

if that person is stuck, and if they see potential for them doing more.

On the role of protection in mentoring, Participant 5 shared: “Ya, and just making sure that, like, that they're not feeling any discouragement. That they understand that they're supported, and somebody is looking out for them and pushing them forward in their career.”

Theme 2: Psychosocial Support. The “p priori codes” derived from Kram’s (1985) mentor role theory for the theme of psychosocial support were role-modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship. Psychosocial support becomes evident through mutual trust and increasing intimacy. This type of support has an impact on a personal level. The interactions between the mentor and the mentee are crucial in building a sense of competence and self-worth.

Role-Modeling: “A senior colleague’s attitudes, values, and behavior provide a model for the junior colleague to emulate” (Kram, 1985, p. 33).

Acceptance and Confirmation: “...basic trust that encourages the young adult to take risks and to venture into unfamiliar ways of relating to the world of work” (Kram, 1985, p. 35).

Counseling: “...an individual finds a room in which to talk openly about anxieties, fears, and ambivalence that detract from productive work” (Kram, 1985, p. 36).

Friendship: “...social interactions that results in mutual liking and understanding and enjoyable informal exchanges about work and outside work experiences” (Kram, 1985, p. 38).

The results of this study illustrate that the most cited function in leadership development within this theme was counseling, followed by acceptance and confirmation, and role modeling. No one among the participants mentioned friendship. Figure 2 provides a summary of frequency and specific functions mentioned.

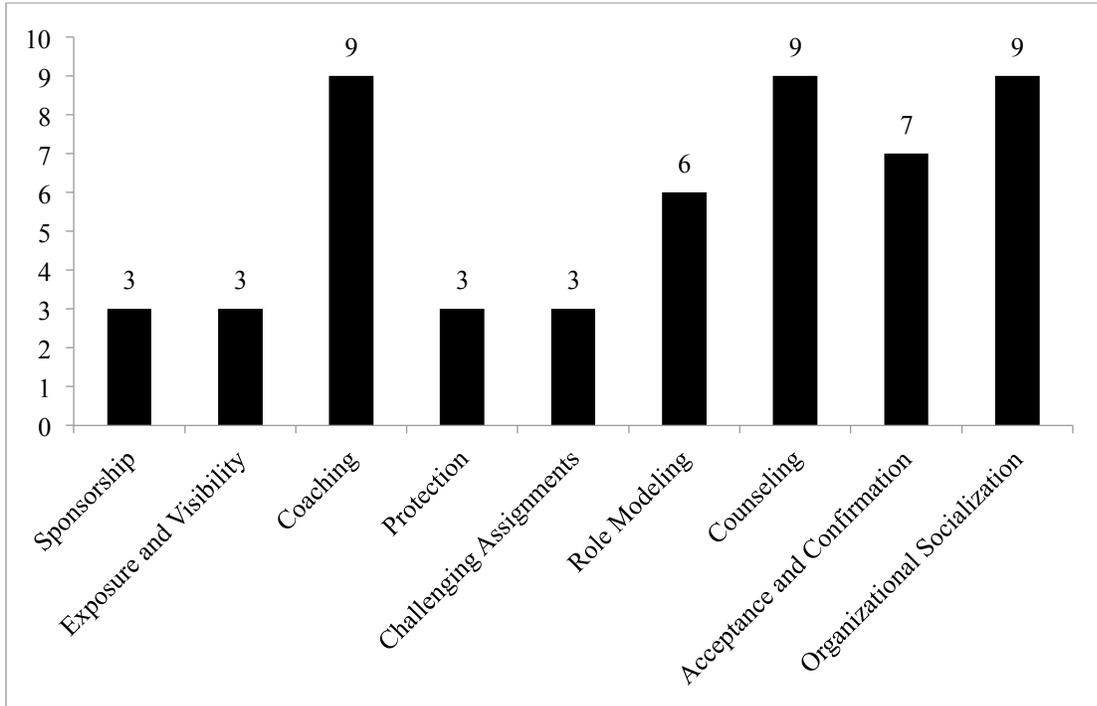


Figure 2. Frequency of Specific Functions Mentioned by Female Upper Level Managers in the NBA.

Through counseling, mentees can talk openly about their concerns, and the mentor can help resolve problems through personal experience, feedback, and active listening. Some participants, recalling their role as mentors, shared that they were not only interested in the professional aspects. Acknowledging the importance of what is going on in their personal lives, they made room to let their mentees open up on personal aspects as Participant 2 described:

I think sometimes we're better managers in the sense that I know my direct reports. I can tell you right now whose wife is pregnant, who's planning their wedding, who's buying a house, because just naturally it seems that guys and girls come to me, but just the feeling that there's more to me than just work.

Similarly, Participant 1 added:

Are they a husband? Are they a father? Are they a son to a sick parent? Are they taking a long commute to get to work? [...] What is happening outside of work that is stopping you? What are the things that are pulling at you that are creating distractions in your life that don't allow you to give us 100%?

Other participants touched on the fact that sometimes mentors need to give their mentees the opportunity to disagree. Acceptance and confirmation allow the mentee to be assertive in the mentoring relationship and in the organization as well. More importantly, it gives the mentee a sense of self from the positive regard conveyed by the mentor. For example, Participant 9 described her experience in allowing young women to disagree:

In my personal experience of being a mentor to some women, is it's just because they are young, and they don't know how to handle certain things?... It's not because they are women, you know? So, I mean, they don't have the confidence, or maybe they are new to the company, so they might not have the confidence to say, "you know what, I don't agree with that," because they worry about their job [...] So, giving them the comfort to say, you know, it's okay to disagree. It's okay to say, "I'm not comfortable with that."

Another aspect of the psychosocial support was role-modeling. Participants described looking up to their female mentors and thinking of emulating them. Being able to work with successful female executives was a strong message for other women as one participant shared:

Because you see another female succeeding, so you know it's possible, and you wanna learn how they did it because it is that different path, or different obstacles as a female junior staffer looking to climb the corporate ladder. It's just, there is. There are different things that you are challenged with versus a male.

On the peculiarity of the role model function, Participant 5 stated: “So a mentor is somebody who can really be a mirror to you, and help you see the things that maybe you couldn't see yourself.”

Theme 3: The Power of Organizational Socialization. Data analysis identified a third theme that is linked to many different perspectives and approaches that men and women bring into the workplace. Thus, relationships between men and women in the organizational context are complex and can be influenced by social stereotypes, attitudes, and relational patterns that belong to the larger society (Acker, 2012). The connectivity between men and women in the workplace came up as a barrier for mentoring. Thus, it becomes evident that organizational socialization plays a crucial role. Both men and women are the leaders wanting to advance organizations and develop future leaders. Therefore, in order to move forward, both need to speak the same language and understand the different perspectives and embrace them. Those differences must be communicated properly. Mostly, these findings indicated a need for a mentoring education on the power of organizational socialization and on supporting each other to move forward, as Participant 1 highlighted:

It's about being a woman in an environment that is dominated by men, and how sometimes we would laugh when we would talk about our interactions with our male colleagues, and how similar their personality styles were, even though they were completely different people in completely different companies. How they would not fully engage, and they would just try to rush through the problem and give you a solution. If you had a problem, they half-listened, and didn't know what to say, and how do you keep your emotions out of the workplace because men don't view that as being very businesslike?

Additionally, Participant 2 discussed her experience with interactions in the workplace:

Um, I think that with men, and I'm currently experiencing this right now, I have a new senior vice president, and he's a little bit older than I am, but right away he was able to come in, and make relationships with a lot of my male coworkers. It was just natural. They can talk about movie quotes, or they talk about sports stats or their favorite football team or all of these things. It's harder... I can tell sometimes there's an uncomfortableness or an awkwardness, you know. It's kinda like, where is the line between male and female relationships, and what is appropriate to ask about and what's not? Almost that fear of like...well, sometimes I feel like he doesn't want to tease me or joke with me because he doesn't know how I'll react, so one of the ways that I've really gotten around that is that I've started teasing or joking with him on certain areas just to let him know it's okay to joke around with me. I have a sense of humor too.

Furthermore, regarding the connectivity between men and women in the workplace, Participant 4 pointed out:

And you have to break down the barriers of the gender gap between relationships and friendships. For me, that's where the challenge usually comes. There's society's stigma between the connectivity between a man and a woman even in the professional setting, and it creates a barrier of opportunity for mentorship, even though it shouldn't.

In relation to the possible challenging nature of cross-gender interactions, Participant 3 reflected on her experience with female mentors: "It was just more of a comfort level I think, and it could have been something to do with, they're female, and like I felt more comfortable. That's interesting to think about now that I'm talking about it." Additionally, Participant 9 commented:

You just have to be respectful, and say, "I don't appreciate when you say that because, assuming, I can't do my job as well in sports because I'm a woman, versus, I'm a guy. Oh, you wouldn't know that 'cause you're..." You know... Then say excuse me, that's offensive.

Participant 1 described her challenging interactions with male counterparts:

You know, I think that as I say the men need to be educated, they also have to know... I think that it is almost a fear by some men, to actually have the tough conversations with women. They tend to avoid us, until it gets explosive. So, as opposed to having those, um, I wouldn't say conflicts...those challenging dialogues about what they're thinking and feeling and what I'm thinking, or us women are thinking, and being able to be, whether it is coming to an agreement, or agree to disagree.

However, participants were aware of the critical role played by men in the organizations, so having them on their side is paramount. On the importance of men as women's allies in the organization, Participant 8 stated: " [Men]...can really start to influence and elicit change in the culture, and I think the more men that advocate for women, the more we can get a foothold within an organization." Participant 7 elaborated on the need to let men become aware of gender bias:

You've gotta speak the language as well because we are, for a lack of a better term, in a male-dominated industry, and I have no problem with that, but it's not enough to just say "I need this from you." You've gotta meet them halfway and say, "Here's how you can help me." And that crucial nuance is something that I want young women here to understand. Like, these men are your friends, and they will get you where you need to go.

These women also are, but you're probably gonna have to do more work over here with these men, so how do you begin that?

More importantly, from a strategic point of view, Participant 7 posited:

...the third tenant is allyship. I think that's where I said I would love for men to be a part of it. I think it would be great to spotlight men in our organization or outside of our organization who have made it a priority to mentor women, or who maybe understand our challenges because I've had, as I mentioned, my two mentors are men. I value that, and I think we need them on our side, and we need to be able to express what we're feeling in a way that is both emotional but presented in a way that they will understand.

Theme: Gender of the Mentor. While analyzing the data, another interesting aspect emerged from the interviews: gender is somehow a factor of differentiation. Depending on the gender of the mentor, the whole experience included different shades and emphases. Further yielding of the data found that female managers who had only male mentors more often reported receiving guidance on establishing relationships, being aware of power structures, and thinking on a bigger scale for their career. Male mentors were giving insights on how to build professional networks, be aware of organizational politics, and to take further steps into their career. For example, Participant 2 discussed how her mentor taught the fundamentals of relationship building:

So he kind of really laid a lot of the fundamentals, and just what's proper business etiquette, how you work with different types of people. He oversaw a wide range of people, and different personalities, and they had different roles, and so really learned from him how to... he's a good manager, and how to deal with that sort of thing.

Additionally, Participant 5 shared: "I really learned from him, it was just relationship building. The ability to engage people." On learning about power structures, Participant 7 said:

[As] a result of knowing the three of them [mentors], I have become a little bit... I don't want to say demanding, because that's not really a word I would use to describe myself, but, aware of the power structures around me. And, all three of them have, kind of, pointed out to me, that in order to get to where I want to be, I've gotta make that decision. I've gotta ask for it.

Reflecting on being able to think on a bigger scale, Participant 9 suggested: “He really helped teach me... My involvement has helped open doors for me outside of, like, on boards...I'm on a couple boards...and helped me really see what I could do on a bigger scale.”

Participants who were exposed only to same-gender mentoring relationships were more likely to have both professional and personal identification with their mentors, as Participant 2 said:

A little bit more of our relationship became, how do you do this? How do you balance this? How do you have a family, and how do you still manage to do all of these things and still run such a great program? So, some of our conversations are kind of based around, we're women, let's stick together.

On the levels of insight and guidance from a female mentor, Participant 10 commented: “No matter how great of a boss or a mentor a man is, they just cannot provide the same level of insight as a female boss or mentor who has been through that scenario before.”

Another difference was the focus that mentors seemed to bring due to their gender. Data analysis revealed the tendency of women to pay attention to both the professional and personal life, as Participant 1 explained a woman's perspective:

If it was a woman, they're saying, what is happening outside of work that is stopping you? What are the things that are pulling at you that are creating distractions in your life

that don't allow you to give us 100%?

Furthermore, Participant 10 shared:

[She made] me understand that it's not just your success and your competence at work.

It's also your success and your competence and your well-being as a human being, on top of your work that she really helped me develop.

Some female managers believed that mentorship is no different if you are a man or a woman.

Cross-gender mentorships are welcome, but having both female and male mentors is perceived as an advantage. On cross-mentorship, Participant 4 commented: "If a guy that is in my team right now wanted to be in my role, I would hope that they would come to me, and want me to mentor them, right. I mentor men. I mentor women. It's no different."

Similarly, Participant 9 posited:

A mentor relationship is one that is open to... you gotta be open to constructive criticism.

You've gotta have mutual respect. You've gotta talk about things in a safe environment, and I think that's the same, no matter if you're a woman or a man, you know.

Additionally, Participant 6 said: "I think they'll provide a different perspective. I think anybody that you're mentored by will provide a different perspective, and I don't think you should limit yourself to just one." Moreover, Participant 8 shared, "I don't limit it to women. I think that it's important that women also seek mentorship with a man, and with somebody that has a lot of influence and decision making power within a company."

Conceptual Model

Since mentoring relationships are all different (Ragins & Kram, 2007) and not all relationships provide the full range of functions (Kram, 1985), it would be valuable to develop a dynamic model that could be adapted to specific populations. Drawing from the literature review

on mentoring and this study's results, a new conceptual model is proposed. This model—based on the work of Kram (1985) and Rolfe (2007)—considers the process of obtaining a mentor who can be helpful to career advancement for men, women, and minorities based on their individual needs. The model is different from Kram's (1985) work as the individual needs are the core of the newly proposed model. The conceptual model, consists of five circles that answer four questions: (a) "Where am I now?", (b) "Where do I want to be?", (c) "How do I get there?", and (d) "How am I doing?". The circle of individual needs answers the question, "Where am I now?" Figure 4 indicates how these specific needs are based not only on the mentee's class, gender, race, current ranking, and years of experience in the job position within an organization but also his/her personality, career and life goals. Based on the assessment of these needs, a second question is addressed in the first circle of the model "Where do I want to be?"

The third question, "How do I get there?," requires a shift to the next two circles in Figure 3 to begin the development process, both professional and personal. Because the mentorship may influence leadership development, it is important to find a mentor with characteristics matching the mentee's needs and who is able to provide the nurturing functions of professional and personal developments, as both levels, not just one, are crucial to outcomes. During the mentorship, it is always beneficial to assess "How am I doing?" because individual needs may change over time. As individual needs change, adjustment occurs. Some specific functions – such as teaching/coaching, advices/feedback, opportunities and challenges, open and honest conversations, genuine interest, instilling confidence, and safe and comfortable environment - may be more beneficial than others. The continuous assessment of needs and its consequent adjustments influence the success of the mentorship over time.

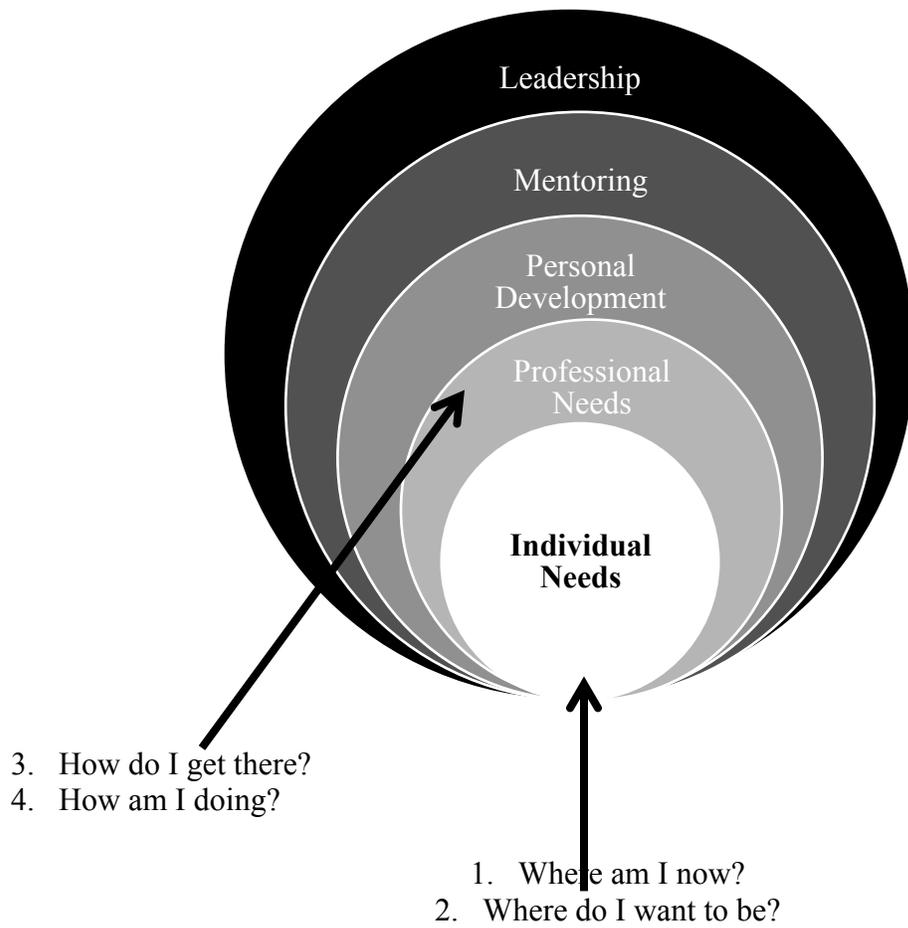


Figure 3. Mentoring Model

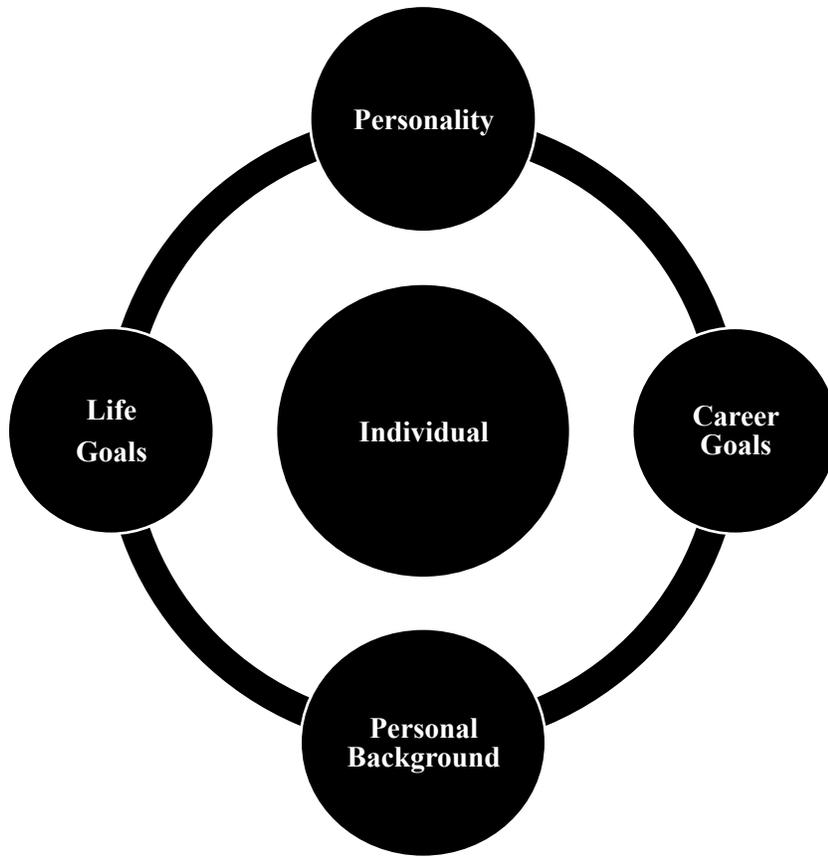


Figure 4. Details for Individual Needs

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to interview female executives working in the NBA in order to learn their experiences on mentoring and how mentoring has influenced their leadership development. This chapter provides a discussion of the connection between the results and previous literature on the topic. Overall, female upper managers perceived mentoring to be strategic in upward mobility for women. This supports findings of previous studies that mentoring is a professional development opportunity to support women in their careers (Bower, 2012; Bower & Hums, 2009; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Hoover, 2006; Hopkins et al., 2008; McDonald & Westphal, 2013; Schira, 2007; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Tolar, 2012; Waller et al., 2015). Participants described getting job opportunities through their mentor's network, which is consistent with Tharenou's (2005) work suggesting mentoring as a tool to help women advance in their career.

Participants' mentorship experience in this study can be divided into two categories: professional and personal development. According to participants, professional development is related to specific aspects of professional growth such as teaching/coaching, sharing advice/feedback with mentors, and receiving opportunities and challenges to develop competency. Additionally, participants described mentors as accessible and committed to helping them grow professionally. Personal development, meanwhile, was related to a more personal level. The aspects that participants used to describe personal development included instilling confidence, providing a safe and comfortable environment that enabled mentor and mentee to have open and honest conversations about life and career, and having a genuine interest in their development. Kram's (1985) two components of mentoring—career development and psychosocial support—correspond to these overall themes of professional and personal development. Furthermore,

participants did not perceive professional and personal development as distinct, as interactions with their mentors incorporated elements of both levels, especially with female mentors. This observation is consistent with Kram's (1985) work and Sinclair's (2009) findings that professional development can be seen as holistic concept that encompasses both work and personal life.

All executives in this study discussed how having a genuine connection between mentor and mentee is crucial for starting a successful mentorship. Having a commonality, such as personality, background and/or culture, is paramount and can help the relationship to develop spontaneously. When asked about setting a formal mentoring program with mentors assigned by the organization, executives felt that to be successful mentoring should not be forced; indeed, they agreed that mentorship should happen and develop naturally. Participants described their best and current mentorships as ones that developed spontaneously, casually, and have existed over time in the form of counseling, coaching, and advising (Payne & Huffman, 2005). This confirms findings from previous studies on informal mentoring relationship (Bower, 2009; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and the fact that informal mentoring relationships are perceived as more beneficial (Allen et al., 2008; Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000; Sosik et al., 2006). Participants suggested that, organizations may provide icebreaker events/activities as opportunities to let potential mentors and mentees meet or, as Participant 3 described, "to plant a seed."

At the same time, executives highly discouraged any formal mentor-mentee matching that did not take into account personality and background. These two elements are key factors to a successful, long-term mentorship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Scandura, 1998). The emphasis placed on personality could be explained by the fact that individuals' personalities play a positive

role in team composition and performance (Bell, 2007; Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite, & Brown, 2013) and in the organizational socialization process (Fang, Duffy & Shaw, 2011).

When discussing mentor-mentee matching, participants identified some characteristics that may help to establish a sense of partnership and predict a long-lasting relationship. Participants agreed that both parties involved need to be proactive in providing and seeking mentorship. A strong work ethic, a capacity to deliver, and a drive or passion for one's goals are key factors for allowing potential mentees to be identified more easily. These characteristics confirm Bower's (2009) key elements of an effective mentoring relationship: competency indicators and personality attributes. Executives highlighted that a successful mentorship is indeed a two-way street, beneficial to both mentors and mentees (Allen et al., 2004, 2006). Other two aspects highlighted by participants are the need for an appropriate experience gap and the influential status of the mentor (Ramaswami et al., 2010). The appropriate experience gap means that the mentee is able to learn from the mentor and the influential status is relevant in providing opportunities in career advancement.

Participants reported mixed perceptions about accessing mentorship opportunities. Results showed that some participants found difficulties in obtaining formal mentorship and felt that the lack of mentorship was detrimental to their careers, a finding that is supported by the literature as well (Bower & Hums, 2013, 2014; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). However, other executives stated that they were not actively seeking mentorship and did not feel that the absence of mentorship was detrimental to their careers. One explanation for this finding could be that they were receiving alternative forms of mentoring - such as peer support and exchanging information about their work with colleagues - that helped to navigate the corporate world (Kram, 1985). Another explanation could be that these participants were in

different phases of their career and thus had different professional and personal needs (Kram, 1985).

Regarding professional and personal growth, executives seemed to acknowledge that an effective mentorship depends solely on individual needs. In order to build a supportive mentorship, mentees must first consider what they need and then seek the most beneficial mentor (Bower, 2009; Kram, 1985). At the same time, in order to be impactful, mentors need to be available and capable of providing the professional and personal development aspects to match those needs.

The context in which the executives worked seemed to play a role in mentoring women and helping them to overcome their challenges at work. With respect to work/life balance and motherhood, executives mentioned that the industry is a tough environment. Participants acknowledged that there are very few executives in the industry who are mothers. Professional sport is a very demanding industry that requires many nights and weekends and long working hours and provides few opportunities available for personal time while trying to climb the ladder. Additionally, the industry seems to preserve some sex segregation for how the work is organized (Acker, 2012). For women, balancing work and personal expectations is difficult. Understandably, these aspects play into meeting the mentees' needs. Having a mentor who understands the need for balance between work and family can be of a high value (Hoover, 2006).

Moreover, this finding could explain why personal identification was even more relevant in the same gender mentorship experiences. It supports the idea that being mentored by a woman who has faced similar challenges in terms of work/life balance and motherhood leads to more valuable perspectives (Tharenou, 2005). Influential mentors who value a proper work/life

balance may also use their authority to create programs that facilitate reentry into a career path following a hiatus from work, or they may also design some Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA) policies that have both the organizational needs and the needs of the employees in mind (Kram, 1985; Valerio, 2009). Overall, organizations can help to create a climate of diversity and inclusion (Acker, 2012), especially when the aim of professional development encompasses work and an individual's personal life (Sinclair, 2009).

Even though participants expressed the beneficial role of mentoring in their career, several of them were very uncertain about the adoption of a formal mentoring program only for women. Their concern was about how their male counterparts may have welcome and interpret a one-sided type of incentive in the organization. One explanation for this concern could be the fact that having a women's program within an organization may reinforce the idea that women are not as well equipped or competent to perform the job as their male counterparts (Heilman et al, 2015).

Participants shared that mentoring is very important and women need to be supported, but some expressed that women should never use the "woman card" to receive this support. They should be careful on how they establish the conversation within the organization. One explanation for this could be the nature of the industry, within which the concept of masculinity is clearly embedded (Anderson, 2009). For example, Participant 7 underscored the difference between "I am a woman. I need to be supported here" and a more assertive statement such as "Here's how you can help me." Overall, this finding aligns with Blake-Beard's (2001) work on the potential challenges of a formal mentoring program for women. As for the participants in this study, a formal mentoring program for female upper managers might convey that women are deficient in leadership skills and thus need specific opportunities to fill this gap (Blake-Beards,

2001). This concern seems to apply to the participants in this study, as several highlighted their desire to be perceived and treated as equal.

While discussing possible solutions that would help women within organizations, some participants introduced the idea of a women council/working group, a formal setting in which women could share their experiences and challenges and could socialize with each other. This approach is consistent with Kram's (1985) finding on the significant effects of variations in work design on newcomers. These working groups can help women to learn more about career advancement strategies, organizational politics, and success in the workplace and at the same time, organizations may benefit from the relationship-building capability of their female managers (Valerio, 2009).

Coaching was the most important function of mentoring that participants mentioned. The explanation may rely on the pivotal role coaching plays into growing professionally. The first goal of mentoring is to pass the specific knowledge from a more experienced person to a less experienced person in the organization (Scandura & Williams, 2001). This is crucial especially when employees are new on the job and need to adjust to the work environment (Allen et al., 2017).

The second most cited function was counseling. An explanation for this could be found in the literature on how gender influences the received mentoring functions. Women can be more empathic, emotionally expressive, and nurturing; and they are also perceived as more socially interactive and development-oriented than men (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Furthermore, the focus women place on relationships and development may lead them more than men to a holistic approach to the professional development of individuals in the workplace (Sinclair, 2009).

According to Kram (1985), the organizational setting and culture can impede mentoring relationships. Another finding of this study relates to how women's mentorship and guidance may need to consider the socialization process in the workplace. Organizational socialization is very important for female managers, as it helps them learn how to perform in their jobs (Chow, 2002), thus increasing job performance, organizational commitment, and retention (Bauer et al., 2007). The challenge that Participant 1 described of being unable to receive buy-in to an idea or more visibility when compared to a male colleague, in addition to the challenging interactions on the job with male colleagues that Participant 2 and Participant 1 described, suggests that a gender barrier exists in organizational socialization, as women are not getting the proper knowledge to participate as organizational members (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

The challenging interactions between men and women may also support some cultural barriers (Johns, 2013). Additionally, the feeling of exclusion is consistent with Acker's (2012) notion of "gendered substructures" within organizations. It is also consistent with the notion of gender differences that both men and women may perceive regarding their counterparts (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). Furthermore, women may need advice on how to handle professional skepticism. This aspect supports Heilman et al.'s (2015) findings that women are still perceived less competent than their male counterparts. As highlighted by some participants, another important aspect that emerged from the results is the role of male mentors. Female managers recognized that influential male mentors can play a crucial role in changing the culture and becoming women's allies, providing gender-aware mentoring and coaching (Valerio & Sawyer, 2016). According to Valerio and Sawyer (2016), these behaviors can enable an organizational culture shift from the top down. This is also consistent with Claringbould and Knopper's (2008) and Adriaanse and Schofield's (2014) work. In those studies, scholars found

that to advance gender equality in governance women need to be actively supported and endorsed by influential male colleagues.

Based on the gender of the mentor the mentoring experience included different shades and emphasis. While analyzing the specific actions of mentoring provided to and by executives, it seemed that gender also affected the prevalence of the type of support. Male mentors seemed to provide more consistent support and guidance on relationship-building, awareness of power structures within the organization, and thinking on a bigger scale. One explanation for this finding could lie in the popular saying “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”; thus, advancing professionally requires a reliance on effective networks of contacts, especially when involving the recruitment of executives into board-level positions, as it may often take place through word of mouth recommendations (Lalanne & Seabright, 2016). As explained by Lalanne and Seabright (2016), mentors may sit on several boards, within the company and/or outside, allowing them to establish personal connections with board members in other companies. The awareness of the informal recruiting process—especially at the top level—and the tendency of men to have bigger networks may explain why male mentors focus their mentorship guidance on building relationships and developing an awareness of power structures within the organization (Lalanne & Seabright, 2016).

On the other hand, it seemed that female mentors were more likely to become subjects of personal identification. Being mentored by a successful female executive can send a message to the mentee that she might be able to accomplish great things too. This is consistent with Kram’s (1985) findings that a mentee can discover a model of whom she might become through the same-gender mentorship. The insight provided by a female mentor who has been through the same scenario as the mentee is more valuable (Tharenou, 2005). The fact that there are still few

women at top levels in the professional sport industry makes these women's career paths even more appealing, providing other women with stories and examples of how to advance. Female managers want to learn from other female professionals how they accomplished their professional status, how they managed to get where they are, and what they have learned during their careers (Valerio, 2009).

Overall, based on their experiences, executives acknowledged the benefit of having both male and female mentors in order to gain different perspectives. In addition, they advised having a network of diverse mentors, even outside the organization. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Bower, 2012; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Hopkins et al., 2008). For example, Higgins and Kram (2001) portrayed mentoring as a multiple relationship phenomenon. Bower (2012) stated that the benefit of a mentoring relationship is regardless of gender. Lastly, Hopkins et al. (2008) posited that women should cultivate both female and male mentors. Gender seems to also play a role in the way these leaders developed or develop others. Looking at the data through the lens of the gender of the mentors, the findings suggest that female managers with only male mentors more often referred to coaching and exposure and visibility as the main mentoring factors for developing leadership. On the other hand, results indicated that female managers who had only female mentors relied more on role-modeling and counseling as important mentoring functions in leadership development. Participants who had both female and male mentors identified coaching and counseling as the main mentoring functions that enable leadership development.

In contrast with Ragin and Collins (1999), the findings of this study suggest that same-gender relationships would report more psychosocial functions than cross-gender relationships. Gender role influence in mentoring may also explain why all but one female manager mentored

by male mentors relied more on career functions than psychosocial support. On average, men are task-oriented, results-driven, competitive, rational, strategic, and unemotional (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). In general, having same-gender mentors may significantly emphasize one particular perspective on the role of mentoring in leadership development (Kram, 1985). To avoid relying on just one perspective, the results suggest that having both male and female mentors may widen the perspective on the role of mentoring functions. Participants with both male and female mentors described coaching—related to career support— and counseling—related to psychosocial support—as functions critical to leadership development. Providing functions from both the career and psychosocial domains can increase the benefit of the relationship (Kram, 1985). Thus, having both mentors can expose women to the full range of functions and advancement in mentorship skills.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study investigated only one professional sport league, the NBA and the sample included only female participants. However, those were choices made un the planning and design of the study. Nevertheless, this limited the number of potential upper level managers who could have been invited to participate. Therefore, future studies should include more leagues and male participants.

Conclusions and Implications

Mentoring for women has been posited as an important tool and a professional development opportunity to support career advancement (Bower, 2012; Bower & Hums, 2009; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Hoover, 2006; Hopkins et al., 2008; McDonald & Westphal, 2013; Schira, 2007; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Tolar, 2012; Waller et al., 2015). The findings of this study confirm that women perceive mentoring as a pivotal factor in their careers. The mentoring

experiences of female upper level managers who participated in this study confirmed Kram's (1985) two components of mentoring, a professional side and a personal side. Managers with both female and male mentors experienced more of a holistic approach to their development (Sinclair, 2009). Coaching and counseling were the two most important functions in developing a leader. Female managers who had both female and male mentors experienced both functions in their leadership development. Thus, the results of this study support the notion that having a diverse network of mentors is beneficial (Bower, 2012; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Hopkins et al., 2008).

Mentors are looking for relationships that benefit them too. Another important consideration is how the mentoring relationship starts and evolves. Each participant highlighted the crucial role of genuine attraction between mentor and mentee. Having a common ground with the mentor, in regards to personality and/or background, can help start a connection and provides the foundation for mutual identification between the mentee and mentor (Blake-Beard, 2001). Furthermore, the mentee must have certain characteristics to establish a long-lasting mentoring relationship. Based on the results of this study, women who want to pursue a career in the sport industry must be aware of their aspirations and needs in order to identify a good mentor. Being proactive, competent, driven/passionate, hard-working, and having a strong work ethic are all aspects that can help to be spotted by leadership looking for high potential in the organization. In addition, female managers discouraged formal mentoring programs that create mentor-mentee matching based only on résumé and skills. While ice-breaker events/activities are welcome, the matching should be organic and natural. Also, organizations that want to invest in mentoring should consider the organizational socialization and more general job interactions. Mentoring relationships happen in the workplace; thus, if organizational culture does not support

inclusion, then the mentoring relationships would be less beneficial. Conflicts and tensions between males and females present difficulties and can arise for a variety of reasons, especially if male leaders are unaware of gender bias. Therefore, there is a need for education. Female managers recognized that influential male mentors can play a crucial role in changing the culture of the organization and becoming women's allies, providing gender-aware mentoring and coaching (Valerio & Sawyer, 2016).

Future Research

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future research are suggested. Because this study utilized a limited number of female managers it is recommended that future research continues recruiting more female upper managers in the NBA to shed more light into mentoring and career mobility. In addition, since this study was focused only on one professional sport league, it would be interesting to include female managers from other male-dominated leagues to determine whether the same results occur and to further develop the conceptual model. It would be also valuable to interview male managers and explore their perception of mentoring females. This in turn, may expand the mentoring model proposed in this study and allow for some empirical testing of it. Another aspect that would be beneficial is to investigate further what the NBA's goals and/or policies are for the professional development of female managers. Future quantitative studies may be appropriate. In particular, using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) may help identify to causal factors that positively or negatively impact mentoring. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may provide more insights related to the mentor-mentee relationship. Additionally, exploring the perceptions of middle managers on mentoring as they transition from being a mentee to being a mentor may help understand what type of organizational support they need. Exploring this transition in more depth, may help

develop and/or create new recommendations on how to approach mentoring. Lastly, future research could compare female upper managers' mentoring experiences in the U.S. with female upper managers' mentoring experiences in other countries to further develop the proposed mentoring model on a global level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

The role of mentoring for women in upper management in the National Basketball Association (NBA)

1. I am interested in studying successful women executives in sports organizations. Could we begin today with you telling me the story of how you got to this place in your career? What is your educational background? What year were you born?
2. I would like to know more about any specific person/people who have been especially important in helping you succeed. Can you tell me about anyone in particular? How did the relationship develop and what has made this person such a significant part of your career?
3. Think in terms of sports organizations in general. I would like you to give me some advice about mentors for women in leadership in large organizations. How important are mentors to women? Can you give me examples of what mentors should provide? Is this different than for men?
4. What is your opinion on formalizing the mentor/mentee relationship? What would that look like? How would you advise an organization on setting up a formal program for mentoring? How would it work?
5. What are your final thoughts on mentoring for women in large organizations? Is there anything else I should know about this process, particularly as it applies to women?
6. Is there something else you would like to add that you think is related to our discussion but I did not address?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Statement

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSE, KNOXVILLE ***The role of mentoring for women in upper management in the National Basketball Association (NBA)***

INTRODUCTION

This form is to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand what your perceptions towards mentoring are. The objective is to develop an understanding of the impact of mentoring on career mobility of women working in upper management in the National Basketball Association (NBA) teams. You have been chosen to participate because you are a female upper level manager in a NBA team, you have a minimum of 5 years in the organization and your contact information is publicly available (or you have been referred to me by another participant already interviewed for this study).

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Your participation in this study will consist of one interview lasting approximately 45 – 60 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions about your career history and most significant relationships that influenced your career development. Once you have given consent, you will be asked via email to set up a Skype or phone interview with the investigator. Interviews will be recorded with prior permission. All data collected will be stored on a password protected computer only accessed by the researcher. Once interviews are complete, the researcher will transcribe the data via qualitative data analysis software. You will then be asked to review their interview transcript for accuracy.

RISKS

The foreseeable risks in this study are minimal. For example, you may feel frustrated while thinking through a question related to your mentoring that causes you to reflect on a difficult point in your career. You may decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and their participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. The potential breach of confidentiality is present, however, measures will be taken to protect your identity and keep your responses confidential; these are detailed in the confidentiality section below. A pseudonym or code will be used in place of the participant's real name.

BENEFITS

There are no anticipated direct benefits to the participants resulting from their participation in the research. However, the results of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge of women and mentoring. The possible benefits of this study may include practical implications on how to develop effective mentoring relationships for women that want to pursue a career in the sports industry, especially in upper management positions.

Participant's initials: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your interview will be audio recorded; however, your name will not be recorded on the tape. Your name and identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and her faculty advisor will have access to your information and the data will be stored in a secure office on campus. No references will be made in any reports that could link you as a participant to the study or the data.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive any compensation for your participation in this research study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, Dr. Manuela Picariello, through the university at mpicarie@utk.edu. The researcher’s advisors, Dr. Sylvia Trendafilova, can be contacted at sylviat@utk.edu and Dr. Steven N. Waller, can be contacted at swaller2@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or 865-974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s Name (printed) _____

Participant’s Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator’s Name (printed) _____

Investigator’s Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Introductory Email and LinkedIn Invitation

Email

Hello (Participant Name),

I am a current PhD student in Sport Management at the University of Tennessee. For my dissertation, I will be interviewing female upper level managers working in the National Basketball Association (NBA) to find out your perceptions towards mentoring and developing an understanding of the impact of mentoring on career mobility.

Would you be willing to speak with me over Skype or the phone sometime for an interview? It should last between 30-45 minutes.

The study requires your consent, and should you be willing to participate, I will send you the necessary informed consent documents further detailing the study via email. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, a group of people who review research to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this over the phone, please do not hesitate to contact me at 865-974-8891.

Thank you!

Manuela Picariello

LinkedIn Invitation

Dear (Participant Name),

I am a current PhD student in Sport Management at the University of Tennessee. For my dissertation, I will be interviewing female upper level managers working in the NBA about mentoring.

Would you be willing to speak with me sometime for an interview?

- Manuela Picariello, Ph.D.

Vita

Manuela Picariello was born in Avellino, Italy. She attended University of Napoli, Federico II, in Italy, where she earned a bachelor's degree in Management Engineering while pursuing a basketball career in the Italian minor leagues. Upon graduation, due to her passion for sport, she moved to San Marino to earn a master's degree in Sport Management. After working for six months in the men's professional basketball league, Legadue, she decided to pursue further studies at the University of San Marino. In 2013 she earned her first Ph.D. in Management Engineering with a concentration on sport management. During her doctoral studies in San Marino, she was a visiting scholar at the University of Tennessee and she fell in love with the American culture of sport. She later moved to England for a summer position at University of East London, School of Business, where she taught an introductory course of basic management principles in sport. From there, she decided that working in academia was where she wanted to be. She made the decision to move to Knoxville in 2014 to earn her second doctoral degree in Sport Management from the University of Tennessee and pursue an academic career in the U.S.