

UC Davis
Orthopaedic Surgery

Title

The Perceived Importance of Same-Sex Mentors in Academic Medicine

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INTRODUCTION

As medicine diversifies, the importance of peer-based mentorship is often cited as the driving force behind inspiring women to enter surgical specialties. This driving force may be further influenced by the gender of the mentor, especially within male-dominated fields.

There has remained a paucity of female representation in Orthopedic Surgery.¹ Despite the proportion of females in the 2019 US medical student graduation class increasing to 48%, Orthopedic Surgery retains the lowest percentage of female residents of all surgical specialties (15% in 2019).^{2,3}

This gender disparity can make it challenging for medical students and residents to find mentors/role models with whom they identify and from whom they can obtain the guidance to successfully navigate career choices and tackle potentially gender-nuanced situations.

OBJECTIVES

Our study examines the value of same-sex mentorship at all stages of medical training, from medical students to practicing physicians. Between May-October 2019, UC Davis medical students, residents and clinical faculty completed an online survey that asked about their background, mentorship experience, and the factors involved in choosing their medical specialty. The objective was to determine whether having a mentor of the same sex is perceived to be beneficial. Three groups were surveyed:

- (1) all medical students at UC Davis to show whether a same-sex mentor/role model is influential in their specialty selection
- (2) all UC Davis residents to determine the incidence of exposure to same-sex mentors, and whether residents of specialties with differing sex-ratios hold same-sex mentors of value
- (3) Clinical faculty at UC Davis to elucidate whether the increase in females in the medical field over time has correspondingly increased the availability of same-sex mentors, and upon reflecting over their career, what their opinion is regarding the importance mentors of the same-sex

METHODS

- Between May and October 2019, 326 medical students, 309 residents, and 200 faculty members at the University of California, Davis completed an online Qualtrics survey.
- Surveys included 24-25 questions about respondent demographics, attitudes toward role models and mentors, experience providing and/or receiving mentorship, and important factors when choosing a medical specialty. Survey question style was based on a prior study⁴ with similar aims.
- Respondent characteristics were summarized by dichotomizing multiple category characteristics as follows: Sex: Male or Female and Specialty: Surgical* and Non-surgical.

METHODS continued

- Responses were summarized and associations were assessed between respondent characteristics (e.g. gender, specialty) and responses to specific questions about role models and mentors. Responses were first summarized as collected (e.g. agree, neutral, disagree, N/A or Uncertain) and then with responses dichotomized into Agree and Disagree (any response other than Agree). Fisher's test analyses were performed with the level of statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

*Surgical specialties included: General surgery, Neurosurgery, OB/GYN, Orthopedic surgery, Ophthalmology, Otolaryngology, Plastic surgery, Urology, Vascular surgery, Thoracic surgery

RESULTS

Responses from a total of 326 of 468 medical students (70%), 309 of 770 residents (40%), and 200 of 922 faculty members (22%).

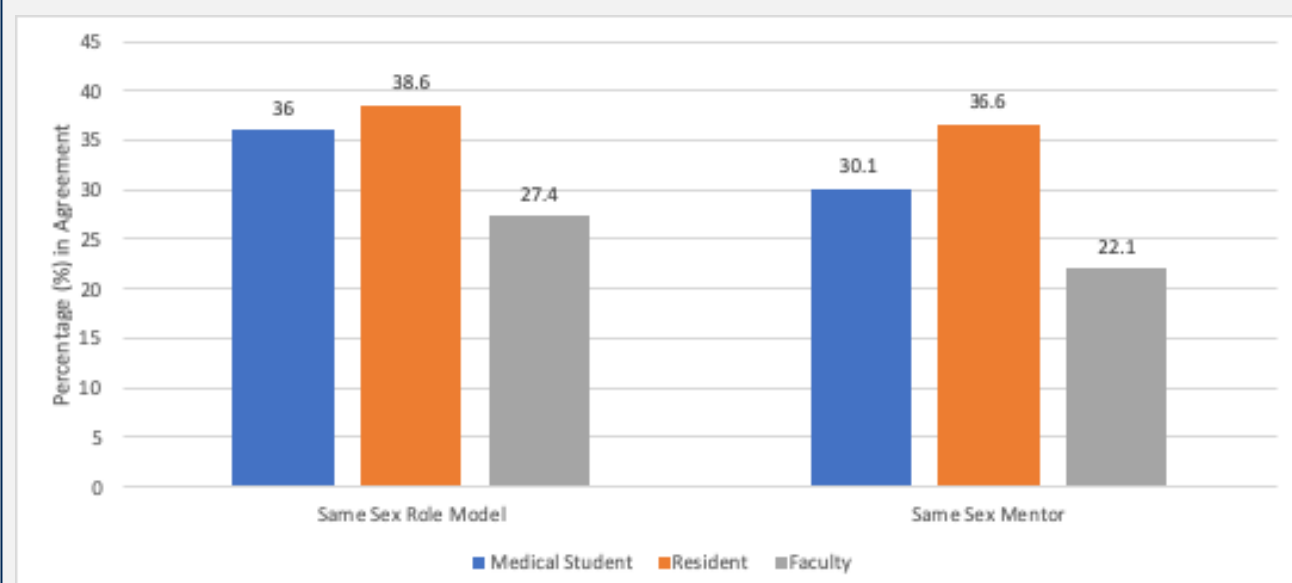


Figure 1. Agreement with "I believe having a SAME SEX ROLE MODEL/MENTOR affected my decision to pursue my field."

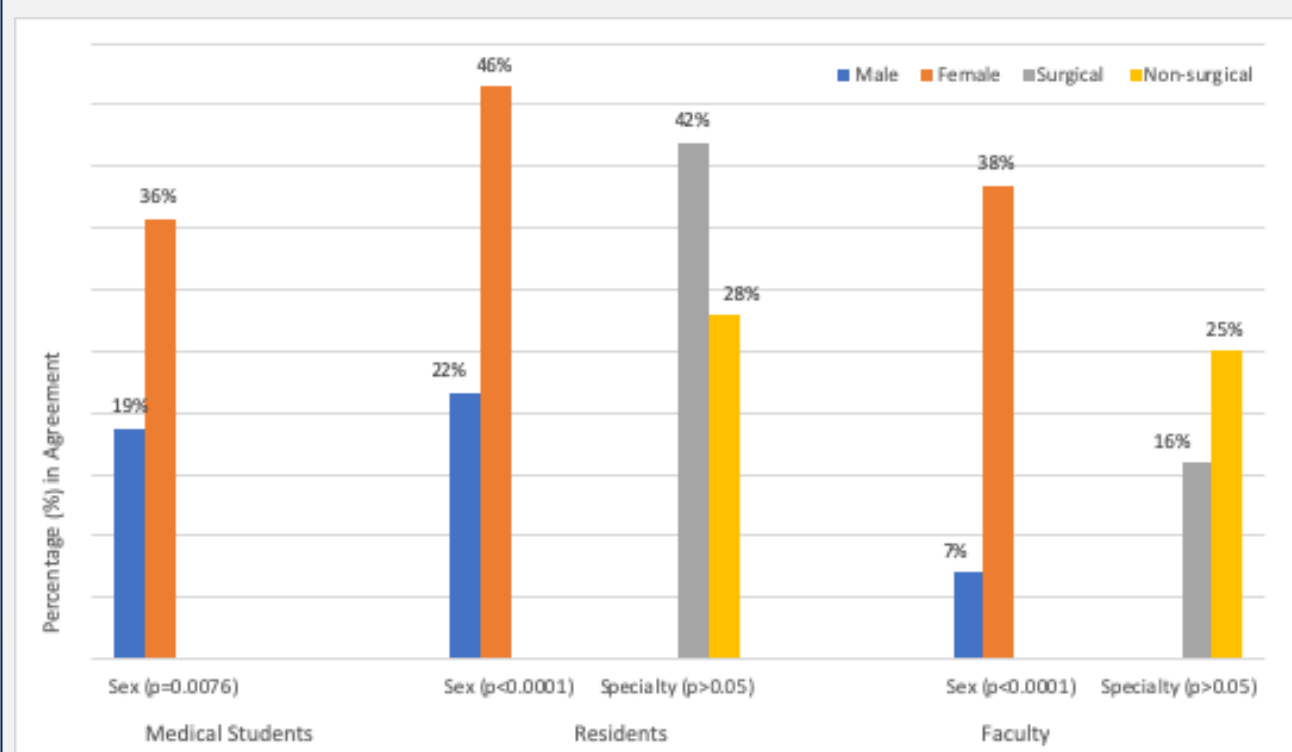


Figure 2. Agreement with "I believe having a MENTOR of my SAME SEX affected my decision to pursue my field."

RESULTS continued

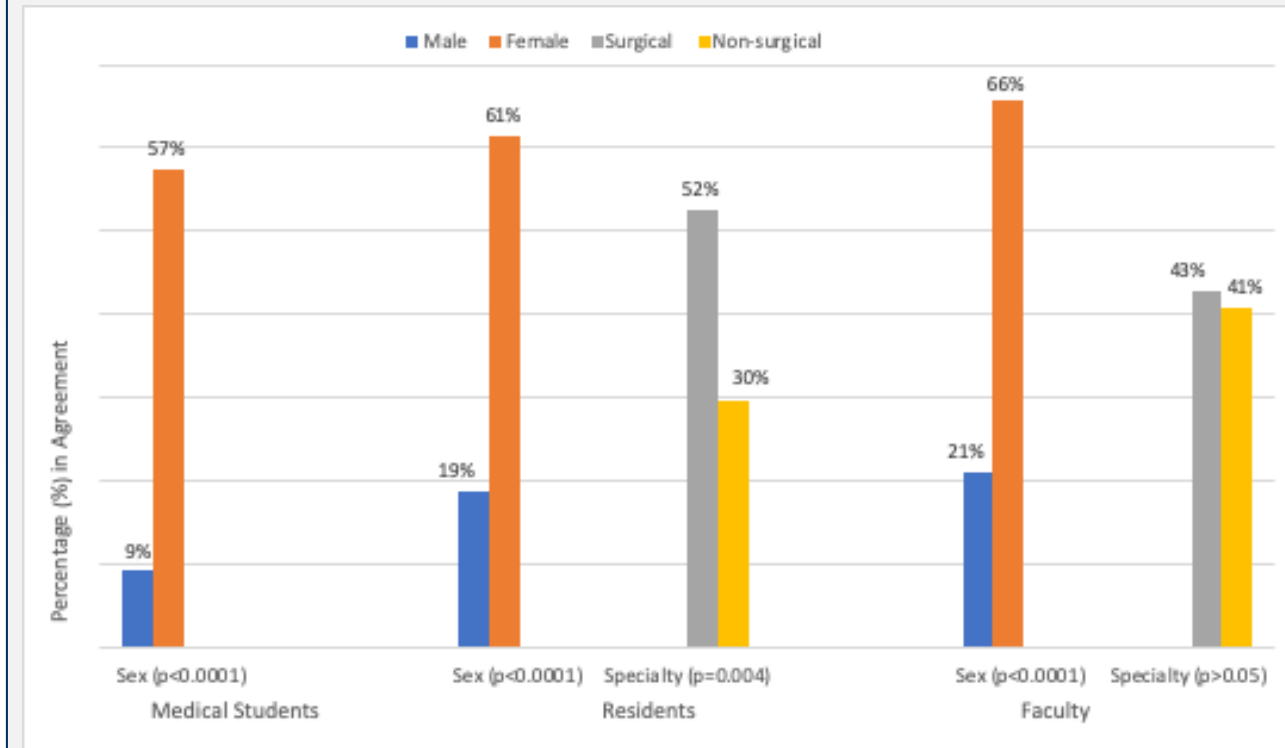


Figure 3. Agreement with "I feel it is important to have a MENTOR who is of my SAME SEX."

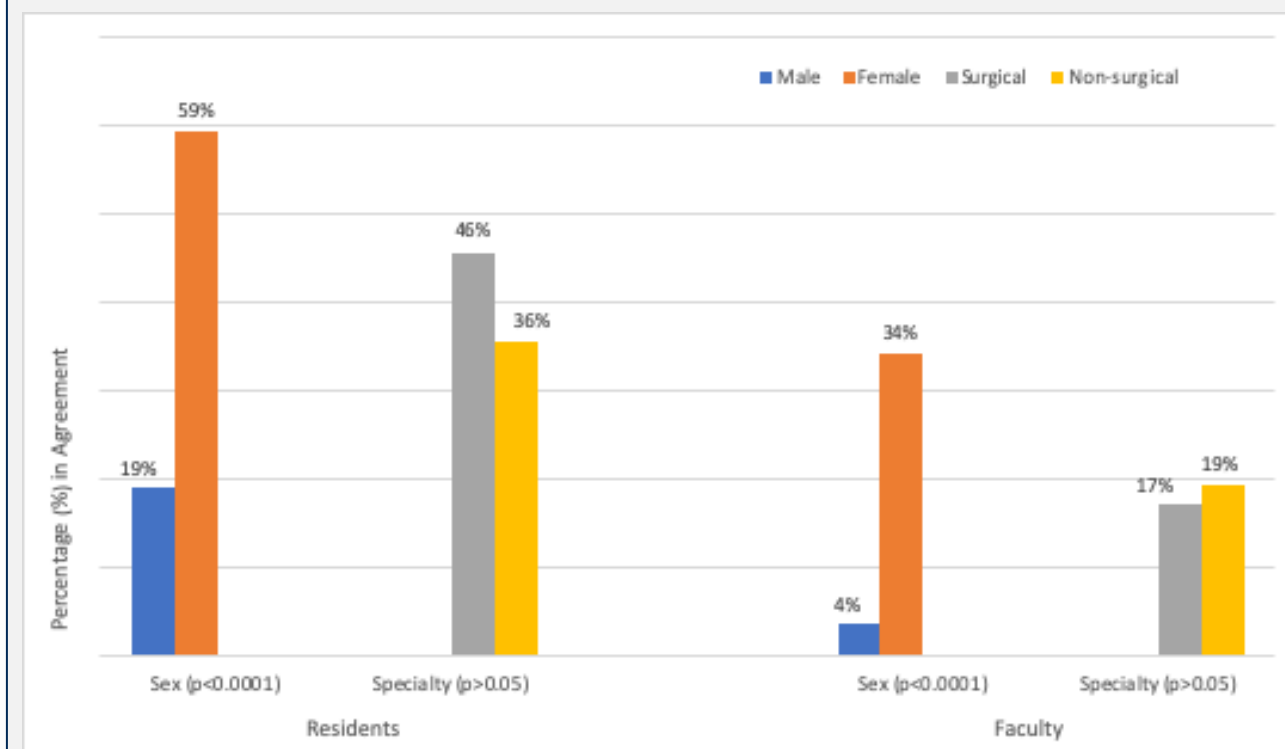


Figure 4. Agreement with "In thinking over my career, I feel having at least one SAME SEX MENTOR is more important now compared to earlier in my training."

	#1	#2	#3
Medical Student	Lifestyle	Time commitment	Supportive department
Resident	Lifestyle	Time commitment	Supportive department
Faculty	Time commitment	Supportive department	Lifestyle

Table 1. Top 3 Factors by Order of Importance in Choosing a Specialty. Across all survey groups, lifestyle, time commitment and a supportive department were the top 3 most important factors when choosing a specialty. Unlike medical students and residents, faculty ranked time commitment and a supportive department above lifestyle.

RESULTS continued

Table 1 continued. Other factors included: income, ability to have parental leave, presence of individuals of my same sex**, presence of people with different sexual orientation**, prestige of the specialty, presence of support groups, a diversity of those from various racial backgrounds**, a good balance of males and females**, and other.

Note: For the purposes of this study, Sex = Gender identity. **within the residency and faculty

CONCLUSIONS

- Surgical residents and female respondents across all levels of training believe having a same sex mentor is important. Same sex mentors were not considered important by the majority of male respondents, non-surgical residents, and both surgical and non-surgical faculty.
- More female than male UC Davis medical students, residents, and faculty believe that the presence of same sex mentors affected their specialty decision. However, the majority of respondents did not believe same sex mentors influenced their specialty choice.
- Similarly, unlike all faculty and male residents, female residents believe having a same sex mentor is more important now compared to earlier in their training.
- The presence of individuals of the same sex within the faculty and residency was not within the top 3 factors respondents considered in choosing a specialty.
- These results demonstrate a difference in attitudes for what makes a successful mentor, with more female respondents prioritizing same sex mentors.
- This has implications for future mentorship development programs, particularly in fields which aim to recruit more women like orthopedic surgery.

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