

2023

## Sexual Misconduct Against Female Athletes: Knowledge, Training, and Readiness to Act of Future Sport Leaders

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Sexual Misconduct Against Female Athletes:  
Knowledge, Training, and Readiness to Act of Future Sport Leaders

Mackenzie Luikart

Thesis submitted to the College of Applied Human Sciences  
at West Virginia University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of a Master of Science in  
Sport Management

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2023

Keywords: Feminism, Power, Sexual Misconduct, Female Athletes, Education and Training,  
Sport Management, Sport Leadership

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Sexual Misconduct Against Female Athletes: Knowledge, Training, and Readiness to Act of Future Sport Leaders**

**Mackenzie Luikart**

The purpose of this study is to understand the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of current education in sport related degree programs and the impact that has on future and current sport leaders to confront and report sexual misconduct in sport.

A total of 15 participants were selected to participate in this study. The participants for this study include current graduate students pursuing degree programs in either coaching studies or sport management, and graduates of these two programs (within the last five years) who are currently in the workforce in their respective fields. Most participants were white, female, and currently served a role in athletics.

Qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews were used to examine the educational and in-field experiences of participants surrounding the topic of sexual misconduct in sport. Following data collection, thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the responses of each participant with a critical feminist approach.

The findings from this investigation demonstrate a lack of formal, instructor-led education within a classroom setting within the master's programs considered. Additionally, in-field training and education have an impact on participants' abilities to recall and apply institutional policy as well as their confidence to identify and report sexual misconduct. Power was a key factor that impacted barriers to reporting. Professional position and staff hierarchies as well as gendered differences found within sport were significant factors that limited participants abilities to address sexual misconduct.

## Acknowledgments

This master's thesis was made possible thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Gonzalo Bravo and my committee members, Dr. Brent Oja and Dr. Melissa Sherfinski. I am incredibly grateful for your continuous patience, support, and belief in me and in the importance of this research. To the faculty and staff of the College of Applied Human Sciences and of WVU, I am so appreciative of all the support and investment that has been provided through this process. Additionally, to each participant that took the time to participate in this study, thank you. Your contribution to this research is invaluable, and your belief in this study's purpose has been overwhelming in the best ways.

For the sportswomen who have fought for equality for all female athletes and worked to make a better experience for future female athletes. To the brave individuals that have faced adversity and become an advocate for change. To the individuals who have been violated or victimized as a result of sexual misconduct who have been empowered and continued to believe in a better future for females in sport and for those who have been heartbroken or felt hopeless and shattered. To all the women who have come before me and who will come after me, you are my inspiration.

Most of all, thank you to my family. Your belief in me has never wavered. You have inspired me to advocate for change, to stand up for those without a voice, and to live my life with love and compassion for those around me. I am so fortunate to have parents who have empowered me to be outraged by wrongdoings and inspired through hope, and most of all to be the best version of myself every day.

## **List of Abbreviations**

CPS: Child Protective Services

MLB: Major League Baseball

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association

NFL: National Football League

NGB: National Governing Body

USA: United States of America

USAG: United States of America Gymnastics

USOPC: United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee

WNBA: Women's National Basketball Association

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sport holds an integral role throughout many cultures and societies and closely mirrors cultural and societal values and practices (Coakley, 2004). Sport practices have been used to teach many core values supported within a culture such as hard work and dedication as well as teamwork, collaboration, and commitment. Historically, sport has been used as a social tool that allows the opportunity for individuals to learn to behave and function within a society or culture (2004). Some benefits of sport participation include learning leadership, resilience, and accountability, as well as the emphasis on health, fitness, and well-being (e.g., *The Benefits of Participating in Sports*, 2013; President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition Science Board, 2020). Sport celebrates working hard and resilience through adversity, while also encouraging the practice of submitting to and becoming obedient to authority through training (Luschen, 1980).

To fully understand the structure of sport, it is important to recognize the key stakeholders. Athletes, coaches, referees, governing bodies, business owners, athletic departments, sports medicine professionals, sports fans, and future sport leaders are members within the institution of sport. Together these individuals and organizations create and support the practices that make up sport today. According to the National Council of Youth Sports (2022), an estimated sixty million children between the ages of six and eighteen participate in sport. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) boasts the athletic participation of 480,000 athletes (NCAA, 2020). Beyond this there are many professional and minor leagues that are home to numerous professional athletes. While sport contributes to many positive practices and values, the practices and structures are not always beneficial to those participating. The



competitive pressures may lead to unethical behavior resulting in harm to the participants.

Through their participation, both children and adults are invested at high levels. Because of its growing popularity and volume of investment by its stakeholders, the competitive nature of sport has opened the doors to toxic behaviors and practices by the many parties involved.

Power dynamics and the highly competitive environment combined may allow for a negative impact on participating athletes. Increased levels of stress, pressures to perform well, and the need to meet specific standards of body aesthetic are a few contributors that can lead to the development of various abusive scenarios such as emotionally, physically, and sexually abusive situations. Coakley (2004) makes note of the many ways in which athletes behave which contribute to a “win-at-all-cost” nature of sport leading to a trend of over conformity. This has become engrained into the culture of competitive sport leading to “over the top deviance” in which athletes demonstrate “extreme dedication, commitment, and self-sacrifice” (p. 110). This is a term coined by Coakley (2004) and refers to surpassing normative limits to the point at which the individual’s health or well-being may be at risk. When athletes and stakeholders accept over-conformity as part of the game, compliance to dangerous behaviors and situations become more likely due to the tolerance and desire to continue participation and often lead to self-sacrificial patterns (Coakley, 2004). Overly obedient responses, meaning submission without regard to potential consequences, to coaches and administration may be categorized as an accepted deviant behavior which contributes to the power the authorities of sport yield, increasing their power capital which includes the combined power accumulated resulting from one’s position (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). Because of the increased importance of obedience and compliance to authoritative members such as coaches and administration for athletic success, as the level of competition increases, so does the likelihood of

an athlete becoming a victim to sexual misconduct by those authorities above them (Gaedicke et al., 2021). As a result, athletes experience an increased risk of being victimized through sexual misconduct (Johnson et al., 2020).

Sexual misconduct exists anywhere that power imbalances may be present and is heightened in spaces where gender inequality is prevalent (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Sexual misconduct is a broad term to describe different forms of sexual violence. Some of these include sexual harassment, sexual abuse/assault, and rape.

### **Definitions**

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexualized attention, advances, remarks, or glances. Sexual abuse/assault is defined as sexually physical acts by one individual toward another individual without their consent or capacity to consent (e.g., Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009; Johansson & Lundqvist, 2017; RAINN, 2022; Sand et al., 2011). Rape refers to penetrative acts without consent or the capacity to consent (RAINN, 2022). Each of these includes a victim, the individual who is being harassed, abused, or raped, and the perpetrator, the individual attempting to or completing the abusive and harassing acts or rape.

In the United States, the profile of the alleged perpetrator persists primarily of individuals who are over the age of 30 and are white (RAINN, 2022). Of the claims made to Child Protective Services (CPS), 88 percent of reported cases indicate the alleged perpetrator is male, and nine percent indicated the perpetrator is female. While all age groups and persons may be at risk of sexual violence, the predominant population at the highest risk of becoming a victim to sexual misconduct falls within the age group 12 to 34 years old (RAINN, 2022). Within this, 20 percent of females and one in 33 males have or will become victim to attempted and/or completed rape (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2021). Of the affected population who has experienced sexual violence, college-aged females are three times more likely to experience victimization by sexual violence than the general population (National Sexual Violence Resource

Center, 2021). One-third of affected females and one-fourth of affected males fall within the age range of 11 to 17 (2021). Statistically, one in nine juvenile females and one in 53 juvenile males will experience some form of sexual harassment or abuse by an adult. From this, it is important to note that 93 percent of impacted youth victims knew their perpetrator (RAINN, 2022).

Within athletics, sexual misconduct is established throughout the power dynamics and structures in place and is sustained through the emphasis of male domination (Sand et al., 2011). Male dominance grants power and increases the influence of those with authority in sport and ultimately amplifies the voices of males while minimizing the female voice. The male dominance demonstrated in positions of power contributes to the sexual misconduct that occurs against female athletes. Sexual misconduct is demonstrated at each performance level but is most executed at the high-performance level in female athletics due to the reliance of athletes on coaches to support athletic success (Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2018). Female athletes are uniquely impacted by the values and practices of sport. Gender power dynamics that exist in sport support the coach to athlete relationship which places athletes in an inferior and potentially vulnerable and compromising position (Brackenridge, 1994). Male superiority, domination and masculine values consume sport and are woven through its culture. An emphasis on certain hegemonic values such as characteristics of aggressiveness, dominance, competitiveness, and power have contributed to certain levels of toxicity and perpetuation of abuse in sport (Sand et al., 2011). Male perpetrators comprise about 90 percent of all reported incidences of sexual abuse and harassment that occurs in athletics. Often, the athlete victimized is a minor (Brackenridge, 1994; Taylor et al., 2019). Despite organizational efforts to impede against sexual violence such as U.S. Center for SafeSport, and the appointment of laws Title VII, Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Equal Protection Clause, sexual misconduct is prevalent and impacts the lives of

many athletes and female sportswomen (Johnson et al., 2020; Masteralexis, 1995). Though sexual violence has been a problematic occurrence throughout history, it has gathered more attention as media tools and movements have been employed to criticize and expose incidents that were previously discounted.

The media has had a presence in uncovering sexual violence against athletes, but it was not until recently that the use of social media platforms have amplified this exposure with an emphasis on the #metoo movement (Reel & Crouch, 2019). With many social media outlets including Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, the exposure of sexual violence has been accelerated. The use of tagging posts with #metoo attached was a social movement intended to bring attention to the issue of sexual harassment and abuse. The hashtag has been used to reveal and expose the sexual exploitation of subordinates by those above them (Reel & Crouch, 2019). Though it was not originated in sport, the #metoo movement exposed previously ignored incidences of abuse and forced organizations to address the issue of sexual violence against their athletes. The topic of sexual harassment and assault in sport has for a long time gone unnoticed, underreported, and unacknowledged. In a review performed by Reel and Crouch (2019), it was estimated that nearly 77 percent of sexual harassment, abuse, and rape incidents go unreported with one-third of victims not reporting and less than 10 percent of college students reporting. The use of the hash tagged movement has not only stimulated much needed media attention on the topic, but also conversations on the topic and a call for change.

Sport has become recognized as a prime environment for sexual harassment and abuse proliferation (Reel & Crouch, 2019). The #metoo movement has increased the exposure of incidents of sexual violence against children and adults and has served to empower and encourage victims to continuously use their voices and advocate for change. Within the general

public, allegations involving many celebrities have come to light including Bill Cosby, Matt Lauer, and Kevin Spacey (Reel & Crouch, 2019). Likewise, many high-profile cases in sport were uncovered and brought to the public's attention such as the abuse found within USA Gymnastics involving their team doctor as well as other cases uncovered within Olympic National Governing Bodies (NGBs). The prevalence and magnitude of sexual violence in sport has been revealed using social movements and media. The employment of #metoo has created a dialogue of the extensiveness of sexual misconduct in all places and institutions.

Sexual misconduct has been demonstrated in sport for many years and the escalation of allegations raises concern for why it may be occurring, and the fundamental components needed to impede it. Some high-profile cases and incidents include the case of Larry Nassar who served as the team doctor for Team USA and USA Gymnastics as well as Michigan State University, and Jerry Sandusky former assistant football coach at Penn State University. Both cases involved the sexual abuse and harassment of minors and college level athletes (Novkov, 2019; Peters, 2021; Reel & Crouch, 2019). Other instances of sexual harassment and abuse in sport include that of Richard Strauss at Ohio State, the many accusations against multiple USA Swimming and Diving coaches, and the recent accusation against U.S. Snowboarding coach Peter Foley (e.g., Daniels, 2022; Peters, 2021; The Ohio State University, 2019). Of the cases that have been exposed, both coaches and administration expressed negligence and partook in obscured processes such as the concealment reports and investigative measures, victim silencing, valorization of the perpetrator, and collusion in their response to incidents and to preventative measures to prevent further sexual harassment and abuse in sport (Nite & Nauright, 2020).

Disproportionate distribution of power, conformity, and tolerance have embedded themselves into sports settings and this has led to role conflict and professional uncertainty

around the topic of addressing sexual harassment and abuse (Roberts et al., 2020). In the instance that abuse is mishandled and not properly reported by authorities, those employees beneath them may feel pressured to comply with the decisions of administration because of the professional uncertainty they may experience. Due to these existing pressures to comply with institutional practices and the hierarchies within sport and the prevalence of sexual misconduct incidents, the education of future sport leaders is of the utmost importance (Coakley, 2004). Despite the integration of SafeSport<sup>11</sup> established by national governing bodies and best practice suggestions put in place by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, sexual misconduct still is an existing issue. Comprehension and the inability to identify compromising and problematic behaviors contribute to the ongoing issue that is sexual misconduct of athletes by their coaches and/or surrounding staff and administration. Recent studies indicate that the education and training on the topic of sexual misconduct is lacking and ineffective Taylor and Paule-Koba (2020) noted that faculty do not receive formal training and education and therefore, the education provided to students tends to be compromised or ineffective. The educational curriculum in both sport management and coaching studies focuses primarily on the functional side of sport, emphasizing the sport experience while there is no required educational curriculum on educating against sexual violence (COSMA, 2022).

The insufficiency of education and training to future sports leaders is noted when considering the studies performed by Taylor and Hardin (2017) and Taylor et al. (2019). The researchers in each of these studies note that less than half of sport management students receive sexual harassment and assault education in the classroom or in the internship setting. The education and training these individuals receive directly impacts their ability to identify, manage

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<sup>1</sup> SafeSport is a non-profit organization designed to educate against and prevent abuse.

and prevent compromising and unethical situations regarding the potential for sexualized inappropriate behaviors between athletes and other staff. If existing pressures to conform exist within the institution of sport, it is essential to equip these future leaders with knowledge to react and be proactive against compromising or inappropriate and threatening situations involving sexual misconduct. The readiness to enter the sport field and implicate change regarding sexual harassment and abuse is compromised due to the lack of education current and future sport leaders are receiving. Because future sport leaders are not well-informed, they may not have the resources or knowledge to create new policies and protocols, nor enforce those already in place.

### **Problem Statement**

This study is grounded in critical feminist theory which recognizes gender inequities because of power discrepancies (Coakley, 2004). Through this scope, sexual violence against female athletes is prevalent, occurring at all levels, and is not addressed or prevented effectively. Power dynamics and hierarchies established through power capital and amplified through male superiority make change difficult to achieve if education and training is not present. The lack of education future sport leaders receives defaults to supporting the continuation of institutions and systems that continue to fail at protecting athletes. The emphasis on masculine and violent culture as well as the power dynamics between athletes and coaches and administration have contributed to these incidents. Organizational structures and power dynamics found within institutions allows for the harboring of abusers with little to no intervention while the threat of sexual harassment and abuse to current and future athletes grows. To create better policies and practices regarding sexual harassment and abuse in sport, future leaders must receive adequate education, and the structures and practices that allow sexual misconduct to occur must be identified, condemned, and ultimately changed.

## **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of current education in sport related degree programs and the impact that has on future and current sport leaders to confront and report sexual violence. For this study, sport management and athletic coaching graduate students will be the main subjects and will be referenced to as *future sports leaders*. In addition, this study will explore the career trajectories of the future sport leaders and correlate that to their responses based on the degree of contact they will engage in with athletes. These future sports leaders will be probed to describe their confidence in reporting and their belief in their ability to create change within sport regarding sexual harassment and abuse. While previous studies have examined the lack of education and training sport students and instructors receive on sexual misconduct, there is a lack of research which considers readiness to enter the field with confidence to address incidents of sexual violence or solicit change. The employment of critical feminist theory and the concept of power capital will be considered throughout this study regarding the phenomenon of sexual harassment and abuse in sport and the factors that enable, perpetuate, prevent, buffer, or impede it. This was determined with the thought that these students will become future administrators, coaches, and employees who will likely have the capacity to uphold or change policy surrounding sexual violence within sport. Throughout this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How effectively do educational systems currently prepare future sport leaders to confidently defend against and impede the phenomenon of sexual harassment?
2. How have current sports leaders working in the field experienced certain notions surrounding abuse in sport such as identifying, witnessing, and reporting, and upholding



policy surrounding those and how has their education impacted their preparedness to do so?

3. How do future sports leaders perceive their future role in athletics and how they impact the phenomenon of sexual abuse and harassment in sport?
4. How do power capital and gendered differences play a role in current and future sport leaders' perceived abilities to make an impact regarding sexual abuse and harassment in sport?

These research questions were driven from critical feminist theory and concern for athlete safety as future and current sport leaders engage within the sport field. Through the exploration of the posed questions, the researcher would like to expose current educational efforts to educate against sexual violence and its prevalence in sport, and to understand how that may impact the confidence of current and future sport leaders to take action to impede sexual violence against athletes.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand the threat of sexual violence against female athletes in sport, this review of literature will address some of the key contributing themes impacting this phenomenon. Sexual violence impacts female athletes and is prevalent throughout sport at each level; however, it is poorly addressed and ineffectively prevented within the sport context. Through the analysis of literature, key components of critical feminist theory and notions of power capital are identified. Therefore, the theoretical groundwork of this study will be drawn from the lenses of critical feminist theory and power capital. Critical feminist theory recognized that females are marginalized because of power discrepancies (Coakley, 2004). This correlates with power capital and the notion that males acquire greater amounts of power capital than their female counterpart (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). With these two concepts at the heart of research, understanding the hardships female athletes face with sexual harassment and abuse and the shortcomings of education on current and future sport leaders may be observed.

Critical feminist theory identifies the gendered differences in sport and how they do not act to empower women (Andrews & Carrington, 2013). When considering liberal and radical feminist movements, despite access being granted to female athletes, power discrepancies still exist, and females are underrepresented as administrators and coaches in decision-making environments (2013). Additionally, though females have been allowed opportunity in sport, they receive less opportunity to participate at higher levels than men and receive less funding and media attention (2013). The lack of legitimacy female athletes received leave them at a disadvantage in sport.

The values of sport that encourage the belief that sport is a gendered activity favoring male participants include masculinity, physical domination, aggressiveness, and violence, each in alignment with hegemonic masculinity (Coakley, 2004; Stick, 2021). This can lead to discriminatory and oppressive behaviors within sports structures, ultimately disadvantaging females while increasing the status of males (Stick, 2021). When considering the gendered presence of male leaders in female athletics, the power discrepancies are detectible and undeniable. The establishment of these inequalities may be categorized through the concept of power capital and the power inventory male coaches hold when they engage with female athletes. Power capital is comprised of all the forms of power an individual may hold such as positional power, expert power, gender power, and physical power (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). For this study, it is important to address the increased power capital males yield when engaging with females in sport.

To understand the injustice of sexual violence, its causal factors, and the efforts sport organizations are doing to curb this problem, this literature review will be organized in five sub-categories: (a) athlete experiences and the impact of sexual violence; (b) enabling relationships and process of sexual harassment and abuse; (c) organizational structures and law and policy practices; (d) sexual harassment and abuse education to current and future sport leaders, and (e) current organizational efforts in place to curb sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

### **Athlete Experiences and the Impact of Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence has both psychological and physical impact on female athletes. This can lead to the deterioration of both the athlete's physical and mental health (Fasting et al., 2002). Interviews conducted by Fasting et al. (2002) with twenty-five elite female Norwegian athletes who had previously encountered sexual harassment by someone in sport revealed that being

harassed led to athlete changes in behaviors and decreased performance as well as other consequences such as continuous reflection on the experience, feelings of negative self-esteem, anxiety, and development of eating disorders. Sundgot-Borgen et al. (2003) similarly found that in their study, athletes who reported eating disorders has also experienced sexual harassment or abuse. Physical consequences were observed in the study performed by Rintaugu et al. (2014). Those who had endured abuse reported physical symptomology such as headaches, fatigue, nausea, and insomnia as a result. Fasting et al. (2007) observed through semi-structured interviews with 25 female athletes from Norway, ages 15 to 33, who reported incidence types included unwanted physical touch, unwanted sexually suggestive jokes, language, and glances, ridicule and humiliation, and threats of sexual proposal. Responses to these occurrences during the interview process were fear, disgust, irritation, and anger.

Ultimately, the solution the athletes sought was avoiding their abuser. This is a similar pattern found in both studies by Kavanagh et al. (2017) who conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 elite athletes who endured abuse and Bisgaard and Støckel, (2019) who collected narratives of abused athletes. It is observed in each of these studies that the victim coped through dissociation or denial, avoidance, or leaving their club/sport altogether. In the case of participant experiences from Fasting et al. (2007), none of the participants reported their experiences to authorities or to their parents. This may indicate that female athletes have been conditioned to accept harassment, or that harassment is a part of the cost-benefit equation that all high-performance athletes face in their quest for success. The trauma that sexual violence instills has lasting effects and creates negative implications which threaten not only the athletes harassed or abused, but sport as well. Being harassed by an authoritative figure can create long term implications for the victims due to the violation of trust and considering the power dynamic of

the relationship (Fasting et al., 2002). In each of the studies, the coach was allowed to abuse the athlete due to the dynamic of the coach-athlete relationship and the dependency and access associated.

### **Enabling Relationships and Process of Sexual Harassment and Abuse**

Because of the unique nature of competitive sport, a relationship between coaches and administration is required. A dependency of the athlete on their coach is necessary for them to achieve athletic success. This relationship ultimately gives power to coaches and administrative members over the athlete. It is this disproportionate distribution of power combined with the access staff members have to their athletes that ensures the ability for a perpetrator to target and harass or abuse their victim. The power dynamics, gendered relationships, and dependency of athletes create unique roles for coaches and administration which may lead to the enablement of abuse (Johansson & Lundqvist, 2017; Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2018). Coach-athlete relationships require trust, closeness, contact, and time. This, while a norm of sport, can become extraordinarily problematic when taken advantage of and may leave athletes vulnerable. Specifically, when considering the totalitarian nature of sport, the closeness and dependency of athletes to their coaches allows for abuse to be prominent and unaddressed. The closeness and amount of time these members spend with athletes opens the door to the allowance and perpetuation of abuse. This allows coaches and administration to use threats, privileges, and rewards to manipulate the athletes under them (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Johansson & Lundqvist, 2017).

The grooming process is one of the most common techniques utilized by coaches and administration in sport to initiate sexual harassment and abuse. This is the process by which perpetrators solicit sexual relationships with their victims and secure secrecy. It may be

identified through four key stages that are engaged to ensure the ability of the abuser to victimize their target (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005). Brackenridge and Fasting (2005) interviewed two elite athletes, one from Norway, and the other from England who experienced the grooming process by a male coach at ages 16 and 17 but were able to stop it. In doing so, the researchers were able to identify the steps of the grooming process as they occur. The first of these is identifying the victim. Generally, the target victim is in a vulnerable state which allows for the second step to commence which is building trust and friendship. Once this is established, the perpetrator will develop isolation and control as well as build loyalty with their selected victim. The final step is the securing of secrecy and act of sexual abuse. Each of these steps were demonstrated in the narratives of these two athletes except for physically sexual abuse. The access and nature of the relationship each coach had with either athlete allowed for the grooming process to commence. Though the two female athletes in these biographies were not physically sexually assaulted, it is demonstrated that the grooming process can leave victims as being psychologically abused and left with associated trauma. Interpersonal closeness, touch in the form of sport coaching, and power dynamics of the coach to athlete relationship are a few contributing factors that contribute to the discrete allowance of sexual behavior in sport (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005). This process is motivated by power, and the gendered relationship aspects and power dynamic of the coach to athlete relationship leaves many athletes vulnerable and at a greater risk of experiencing this kind of trauma.

Female athletes are found to be at a greater risk of being sexually harassed or abused, and often this harassment or abuse is more likely at the hands of a male coach than female. One in four females compared to one in nine males will experience some form of sexual misconduct toward them during their time in athletics (Brackenridge, 1994). Totalitarian coaching styles and

behaviors only amplifies the issue of disproportionate power and the likelihood of abuse to occur. This was observed in research by Sand et al. (2011) in which participants expressed increased rates of abuse in environments where totalitarian behavior and coaching styles were present. This emphasized the power over athletes coaches hold which has become socially accepted and normalized within sport culture (Sand et al., 2011; Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009). In part, this can be explained through the power capital males coaches yield when interacting with their female athletes. Power capital includes the positional power established through their role as a coach, expert power established through the knowledge and expertise they assume, gender power established through the sociocultural structures which naturally advantage males over females, and physical power established through male genetic advantage to strength over females (e.g., Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). When male coaches are successful, they gain the respect of their athletes and network which allows them to establish greater trust. This grants behavioral freedom to a degree in which they can behave in ways without having their actions questioned, ultimately allowing for sexual advantages and exploitation of their female athletes (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011).

### **Organizational Structures and Law and Policy Practices**

Power dynamics are necessary to consider when deliberating sport organizations and their functionality. Power linked to the ability to dictate influence (French & Raven, 1959). In a sport organization, coaches, administration, and managerial staff all have the potential to either negatively or positively influence the experiences of their subordinates. For the purpose of this study, this must be considered regarding the power dynamics that may be influential between superiors and female athletes. There are different kinds of power that can occur. These include legitimate power, expert power, referent power, and coercive and reward power (French &

Raven, 1959; Tedeshi & Bonoma, 1972). Legitimate power refers to power relative to a person's professional position within an organization while expert power is relative to one's knowledge or the assumption that one may have knowledge. Referent power regards social status and respect relative to a loyal network of colleagues or peers, and coercive power is relative to the ability to dispense punishments or rewards (French & Raven, 1959; Tedeshi & Bonoma, 1972). These concepts are relative to power capital as aforementioned by Bisgaard & Stöckel, (2019) and Sand et al., (2011). Collectively, these subcategories of power may hold influence in sport organizations regarding the power dynamics that exist. Disproportionate power dynamics may be found within organizations where there are discrepancies in power both in terms of a superior over subordinates or where gender imbalances are present.

Disproportionate power dynamics may be found within the structures of sport organizations as women are found to be vastly underrepresented professionally despite growing female sport participation (Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2018). Male perpetrators have accounted for 90 percent of reported abuse and harassment incidents and there has been a repeated history of negligence and a lack of moral and legal scrutiny about the topic (Taylor et al., 2019). The gender-powered relationships and the power dynamics that exist throughout sport organizations have contributed to the perpetuation of abuse, and sexual, verbal, and physical abuse have all developed as byproducts of becoming successful in athletics (Novkov, 2019). Young athletes are often victimized by the same perpetrators for years with no intervention, and administration and other stakeholders are found knowledgeable of abuse incidences, yet do not properly address them contributing to corrupt legitimization and a habit of concealment and collusion. Obscured processes, lack of internal discipline, valorization, and victim silencing all contribute to the prolonging of abuse throughout sports (Nite & Nauright, 2020).



When young professionals enter the field and sexual misconduct is detected, disproportionate distribution of power, compliance, and tolerance have embedded themselves through institutional structures and staff hierarchies into sports settings and have led to role conflict and professional uncertainty around the topic of addressing sexual harassment and abuse (Roberts et al., 2020). According to Hartmann-Tews et al. (2020), organizational culture and self-governance have been described as conflicting in their approaches to prevention and intervention of sexual misconduct in sports, and organizational culture and institutional framework do not defend against sexual harassment and abuse in neither their policies nor practices. The lack of unity in the approach for confronting and managing sexual misconduct in sport may contribute to the continuation of incidents of sexual harassment and abuse. Organizational culture and self-governance have been conflicting in the prevention and intervention of sexual misconduct in sports (2020). The relations of sport governing bodies and organizational social structures correlate to the lack of enforcement of comprehensive prevention policies (2020). There is an expressed need for increased accountability for addressing threats and actions of athletic members (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2020).

In the United States, with the passing of certain laws and policies, liability for sexual assault now reaches beyond the perpetrator and places the accusation of negligence on certain administrative members as well. Some of these include Title VII, Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Equal Protection Clause found in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Masteralexis, 1995). These laws prohibit discrimination, and lead to difficult decision making for administrative members who may have to address sexual abuse and harassment. For this reason, sport specific policies and general standards for child protection may need to be established and enforced to best practice proactive prevention and intervention (Hartmann-Tews

et al., 2020). It is essential that law and sport policies from National Governing Bodies (NGBs) reflect boundaries that empower young athletes to manage their relationships and exercise their autonomy. The adherence to current laws and sport policies is lackluster and current practices are failing to support basic human rights and place all the power in the hands of the administration (Novkov, 2019).

Without the compliance with law and policy, sport organizations and their administrative members may find themselves liable and facing legal action accordingly for incidences of sexual harassment and abuse (Masteralexis, 1995). Comprehensive sport policies and understanding law are necessary (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Sport policies and law need to coincide with one another and be enforced throughout the NGBs and sport organizations. Law and policy creators must also consider the limitations coaches and administration should have in their rules of conduct (Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2018). Whole system approaches are necessary to advance the prevention, intervention, and management of sexual misconduct incidences (Roberts et al., 2020).

### **Sexual Harassment and Abuse Education to Current and Future Sport Leaders**

Education creates the foundation for all current and future sport professionals currently in and entering the field. Without proper education, sport professionals cannot properly identify problematic situations and unethical behaviors. As education is lacking, it accounts for the responsibility of the perpetuation of sexual misconduct that occurs in sport. Presently, education on sexual harassment and abuse is ineffective and absent; therefore, sport professionals have compromised abilities to identify and report incidents of sexual misconduct (Taylor et al., 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2017). Without proper education, professionals are less likely to make evidence based informed decisions. Formal education and training for future administrators and

sports leaders is required to minimize and eliminate the sexual harassment and abuse of female athletes (Taylor et al., 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2017). The absence of education is reflected in most sport management programs, and existing education has proven to be insufficient and ineffective in the decreasing of stigma and discomfort around the topic (Taylor et al., 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2017). There is an existing concern surrounding whether professionals entering the sport field had the appropriate education to identify, address, and uphold existing laws and policies pertaining to sexual violence in sport and how to apply them.

With existing discomforts surrounding discussion of sexual harassment and abuse, education is key for opening informed and educated discussion and understanding of the phenomenon, so that change can occur. In research conducted by Taylor et al. (2019), it was revealed that less than half of sport management students received sexual misconduct education in neither their classroom nor internship setting, and less than 35 percent received sexual misconduct training. This indicates that nearly half of the young professionals entering the sport field have not been educated on sexual misconduct in sport and nearly 65 percent have not received any training. Therefore, this indicates how ill-prepared students entering the sport field may be to address sexual violence. In addition to the lack of education, evidence suggests that the education currently in place does not act to curb rape myths and is therefore inadequate (Taylor et al., 2019).

Despite efforts to incorporate sexual misconduct education through discussion and student led learning, many faculty feel uncomfortable speaking on such matters in their classrooms (Taylor et al., 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2017). Taylor and Paule-Koba (2020) interviewed sport management faculty members and in doing so, it was observed that despite the incorporation of current events related by the topic through discussion, one fifth of the

participants expressed a lack of confidence in leading a meaningful conversation surrounding the topic of sexual harassment and abuse in sport. The majority of faculty also expressed that they had not received formal training on the topic nor is it incorporated formally into their class curriculum. Appropriateness of the topic in certain courses came into question, but one of the most unanimously expressed barriers to discussion by faculty included the members place as the majority were white, male instructors (Taylor & Paule-Koba, 2020).

Diversity amongst sport faculty members is not common as many of the instructors, specifically within sport management classrooms, are white males (Taylor & Paule-Koba, 2020). Female leadership is lacking not only in the sport field, but in the classroom as well (Taylor & Hardin, 2017). In sport management programs across the United States, 66 percent of all programs have less than 40 percent of their faculty members that are female. Of the membership group of the North American Society for Sport Management, women made up only about 33 percent (Taylor & Hardin, 2017). As sport is a male dominated industry, the lack of female representation both in the sport and educational settings increases the likelihood of inappropriate and unprofessional conduct due to the hegemonic masculine values in place such as aggressiveness, dominance, competitiveness, and power (Taylor & Hardin, 2017). Taylor and Hardin (2017) also note that organizations that lack gender balanced environments are more susceptible to experience cases of sexual harassment. With a lack of female leadership in the classroom and in the field, sport has the capacity to remain problematic regarding sexual misconduct against female athletes. Additionally, Fasting et al. (2014) observed that sexual harassment and abuse of female sport counterparts is more likely to occur by male peers in the sport specific field than male athlete peers. This may suggest that behavioral expectations and camaraderie between fellow male and female athletes in sport is not shared in a sport classroom

setting. Considering the male domination found within the walls of sport, concern of sexually abusive behaviors towards female athletes may be discerned as those males who are to enter the field of sport management will likely hold authority and autonomy over decision making regarding athletics and its policies.

Though increasing female leadership in coaching and administrative positions would pose a possible solution, incorporating more comprehensive education and training to both current and aspiring professionals would perhaps also help to reduce the occurrences of sexual misconduct in sport. In the context of students pursuing a career in sport, both the internship and classroom setting may need to be structured to both decrease belief in rape myths and create more ethical decision makers of both current and future leaders in the sports field (Taylor et al., 2019). Potter et al. (2016) noted that by including readings and discussion on sexual harassment and abuse policies, more knowledge by students was retained. Instructors may be able to increase the knowledge on this topic by more formally introducing sexual misconduct topics into their curriculum. Similarly, Fasting and Brackenridge (2009) emphasize the use of educational tools such as sexual harassment scripts as a solution for identifying different behaviors and characteristics of how a perpetrator may present themselves. Future sport leaders must understand how abuse can develop in highly competitive environments to bridge the educational gap demonstrated. By doing so, reporting of incidents may increase and more ethical decisions and protocols can develop (Johnson et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). The need to educate future leaders on the experiences of female athletes in sport is imminent (Fasting et al., 2014).

### **Organizational Efforts to Curb Sexual Harassment and Abuse: SafeSport**

While education and training are lacking in the formal educational setting, certain organizations are making efforts to curb the issue of sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

SafeSport is currently at the forefront of addressing awareness and training surrounding the issue. SafeSport is a nonprofit organization that provides education and training about sexual harassment and abuse to National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and is funded by the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), the National Governing Bodies, and Congress, and created revenue through purchase by organizations apart from the USOPC (*Training and reporting to prevent abuse: U.S. center for SafeSport, 2022*). This training comprises a 90-minute online educational session and is required of all NGB members (*Training and reporting to prevent abuse: U.S. center for SafeSport, 2022*). The U.S. Center of SafeSport provides a resource to all members of NGBs including coaches, administration, parents, and athlete alike to report incidents of abuse. Many times, individuals who fail to report have a lack of knowledge for how or to whom they should address complaints. An estimated 77 percent of incidences go unreported annually. Since participation in the U.S. Center for SafeSport has been required throughout the NGBs, reporting of abuse incidents has increased nearly 600 percent. This statistic emphasizes the importance of education and training in the detection of abuse (Johnson et al, 2020).

Though the impact of SafeSport is evident, there are still areas that can improve education and training on sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Online training forums are not always reliable due to the inability to verify the identity of the individual completing the course. While NGB members are required to complete the course and receive certification each year, there is no way to confirm that the designated person is completing their course work. Online forums are more accessible to the larger population; however, in-person continued education may be more impactful. Presently, SafeSport focuses primarily on sport organizations involving minor athletes and has no authority outside of the NGBs which do not account for the National

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and other professional leagues such as the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), or Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) (*Training and reporting to prevent abuse: U.S. center for SafeSport, 2022*). Despite potential shortcomings, the impact SafeSport has on sexual violence reporting and awareness is apparent.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **METHOD**

The purpose of this study is to examine the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of current education in sport-related degree programs and the impact that has on future and current sport leaders to confront and report sexual misconduct. Specifically, this study aims to examine the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of current education in sport-related degree programs and the impact that has on future and current sport leaders to confront and report sexual misconduct. The population of concern who inspired the pursuit of this study includes female athletes who have experienced sexual harassment and abuse. The researcher addressed this purpose through interviewing current sport management graduate students, coaching studies graduate students, and recent graduates from each of these programs from within the last five years. In doing so, the researcher sought to explore the views of both groups, those currently receiving education regarding their field, and those who are already working on the field.

Qualitative methods were applied to conduct this study. Qualitative research is described as thoughtful in nature and provides a naturalistic approach to conducting research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Baumgartner et al., 2021). This method allows for the collection of descriptive data that best represents the views of the participants within the context of which that data is retrieved. Data were collected via the utilization of semi-structured qualitative interviews to investigate the nature and comprehensiveness of sexual harassment and abuse training experienced by current students and recent graduates. Nonnumerical data were collected through interviews which allows for research to be conducted in the context that the phenomenon occurs. Within qualitative research methods, the researcher must reject the idea that the world is stable,



but that it varies depending on the context in which the phenomenon occurs (Baumgartner et al., 2021). In qualitative research, the researcher acts as a tool and creates meaning through the interactions with participants as they understand and interpret the insider perspective obtained through their participants' experiences (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the context of this study, this allows the researcher to consider the positionality of the study participants as well as their own when interacting to best understand the experiences of the participants.

### **Epistemology**

This research is engaged through the epistemology of critical feminist theory. The feminist approach encourages the exploration of issues faced by marginalized groups (females in sport) and aspires to facilitate change (educational reform) (Andrews & Carrington, 2013; Lapan et al., 2012). When utilized in qualitative research, "Feminist approaches to qualitative research encompass a wide range of theories, practices, and methods used to generate knowledge about the social and physical world; to challenge oppressive forces and beliefs" ... "and to spur social change that improves the lives of women and other disadvantaged groups—and, by extension, all human lives" (Lapan et al., 2012, Ch. 16, para 1, p. 1). The use of feminist theory in this study allows the researcher to capture the injustices against female participants in sport resulting from power discrepancies and to study and understand how educational efforts impede or prolong its severity.

The scope of this study correlates with the ideals and the definitions of radical and liberal feminism. According to feminist scholars Andrews and Carrington (2013), radical as well liberal feminists are concerned with issues of representation and power discrepancies. These ideas recognize that there is a lack of female representation specifically in places where decisions are

being made. Also, there is a lack of representation of women in leadership positions, and there are power discrepancies that prevent women from excelling at their fullest potential (Andrews & Carrington, 2013; Coakley, 2004). Sand et al. (2011) recognizes key characteristics of sport which include themes of male superiority, domination, and masculine values. Despite growing participation in sport, female participants are not granted the same opportunities as men neither on the playing field nor professionally. Because the author recognizes gendered power discrepancies and injustices to women in accordance with critical feminist theory and ideas of power capital, the goal of this research is to communicate the conflict of sexual harassment and abuse in sport against female athletes and potential causing factors.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Gendered discrepancies have been made aware to the author from childhood into adulthood, both as an athlete and as a professional. Male domination within the sport field was ever-present throughout their participation as a youth athlete to their studies in sport management and employment within the sport industry. These experiences combined with the author's upbringing and familial values have led to her adopting a more feminist outlook. The author noted her own experiences that contributed to the construction of her feminist perspective. The author was brought up in a traditional Christian family raised in South Carolina, United States. In this region, there is an emphasis on the value of the male head figure as the head of the household and the female head figure as the caregiver for their children consistent with biblical values. Within the state, women are underrepresented in the state government and net less than 80 percent of what a male counterpart is expected in earnings (Women's Rights & Empowerment Network, 2021). In the area in which the author was raised, female sport participation was not encouraged nor was it valued, and athletic opportunities for females were

not abounding. Though the author's parents never discouraged her from participation and interest in sport, members of the community in which she was raised taunted her with sexist comments regarding the masculine nature of sport participation specifically regarding an overly muscular physique and references to her having "man hands" resulting from callouses on her palms. As the author developed, her peers taunted with comments then turned sexual in nature with regards to flexibility as a gymnast. Despite the culture surrounding the author's upbringing, she was never discouraged from a career in sport and was raised in a household which valued female strength and gender equity.

The author participated in competitive gymnastics from the ages of four to 17 years old under the national governing body, USA Gymnastics. Though male coaches were more common in the state, the author was trained by a female coach, and was further encouraged to develop feminist beliefs in addition to belief in her own ability. Once the author retired from their athletic career, she began coaching competitive gymnastics and did so from ages 17 to 23 under USA Gymnastics. As a coach, the author received education for SafeSport on three different occasions in addition to other USA Gymnastics membership required online trainings. It was during the author's undergraduate studies in exercise science, graduate studies in sport management, and coaching career that they became further aware that female athletes were marginalized against and that there was an imminent threat of sexual harassment and abuse found within the sport field. With the exposure of the Larry Nassar, USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal<sup>2</sup>, the researcher was inspired to understand how a tragedy of this magnitude could be made possible and the ways in which it can be prevented in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Larry Nassar was the team doctor for USA Gymnastics and Michigan State who, during his employment, sexually abused hundreds of female athletes under the guise of medical treatment. He was initially sentenced to 60 years in prison in December 2017, then further sentenced to 175 years in January 2018.

For this study, feedback was provided from each member of this master's thesis committee. The committee consists of three United States residents including one Latino male with a background in sociocultural studies, a white male with a background in organizational behavior, and a white female with expertise in methodology and who may relate to prevailing barriers based on gender. Each member has encouraged the author to broaden their thinking and explore emerging themes with open-mindedness and curiosity. Being rooted in a diverse committee of both race, gender and expertise for this thesis has helped the author remain open minded outside of their own experiences.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study include current graduate students pursuing degree programs in either coaching studies or sport management, and graduates of these two programs (within the last five years) who are currently in the workforce in their respective fields. A smaller pool of participants was studied to focus on best learning and gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. A population size of 16 participants was considered including 8 current graduate students and 8 recent graduates of sport management and coaching studies programs from the same institution (Smith et al., 2015). To approach this desired number, 12 members from each group were initially planned to be invited to participate, being either current graduate students or recent graduates from either program. Then, invitations were planned to be submitted to potential participants on an as needed basis in response to the invitation acceptance rate. Purposeful sampling was used to initially invite participants to this study followed by snowball sampling in which the participants recommended prospective participants based on the criteria of this study. The study population was sourced from a Division I, Power Five university located on the East Coast of the United States.

## **Instrumentation**

Semi-structured interviews were used to examine how the participants educational and personal experiences have equipped them to report and prevent sexual misconduct in sport. By utilizing semi-structured interviews, a degree of flexibility is granted and allows the researcher to understand the participants more fully through questioning and commenting to stimulate a more thorough response (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A question guide was used with each participant to provide structure to the interviews; however, responses were open-ended (Interview Protocol, Appendix A). Questions one through six of the interview protocol inquired about the background of the participants so the researcher can best tailor the interview to that participant's experiences. This segment was provided to participants following their acceptance of the study invitation in order to provide the researcher background information prior to their initial interview. The remainder of the questions were asked in the interview process and were specific to gaining insight on the initially posed research questions driving this study. Question six specifically inquired on the overall knowledge each participant had on the topic of sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Questions seven through 10 inquired specifically on the educational impacts of their knowledge and preparedness to identify, report, and prevent incidents of sexual misconduct. Questions 11 and 12 were more specific to reporting sexual misconduct including behavioral expectations the participants anticipated going through the reporting process, the barriers they may anticipate in that process, and their expected level of confidence. The participant's role relative to their beliefs about opportunities they have to create change regarding the magnitude and attitudes of sexual harassment and abuse in sport was addressed in questions 13 and 14. Questions 15 and 16 specifically asked questions regarding power capital and gendered differences. Finally, question 17 probed the participants to reflect on their educational

experiences and whether they feel change is necessary to better prepare them for managing and preventing incidents of sexual misconduct in sport.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were employed to gather and analyze the data. Throughout the interviews, the researcher utilized a constructivist approach through their collection of data. Each participant was ensured anonymity and encouraged to share as much as they were comfortable with, specifically regarding a more sensitive topic such as sexual harassment and abuse. The researcher was mindful of each participants' comfort levels and respected the boundaries in which they were comfortable disclosing information. Taking advantage of the semi-structured approach, participants were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences while flow was established by the researcher with guiding questions. Interviews were conducted in a more conversational nature with an emphasis on reflective listening as opposed to a reported nature to initiate a more natural approach to meaning making. Prior to the collection of data, a pilot interview was conducted with one participant from within one of the correlating undergraduate programs. The purpose for targeting an undergraduate student for the pilot study was to not exhaust a potential participant for the research study, but to maintain a relevance to the research. This was decided as this population did not contribute to the data of the study but did contribute to revealing the effectiveness of the questions and exposed any adjustments that were needed before the conduction of research with the study population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Each of the interviews were recorded through Zoom, transcribed, and coded. Following each interview and the transcription process, member checking was used to ensure the participants' responses reflected their true feelings and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

By recording interviews via Zoom, the researcher anticipated that participants were less apprehensive by the nature of recording the interview as it is unobtrusive. By having access to a verbatim transcript, the data analysis was more accurate as it is less obstructed by barriers of recollection or misinterpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, due to the flexibility permitted in semi-structured interviewing, the researcher had the opportunity to refine the interview techniques to receive rich data. Initial data analysis was followed by member checking to ensure the interpretations of the researcher appropriately reflect the experiences of the participants. By engaging in respondent validation, internal validity may be strengthened, and the data will provide a more accurate representation of members' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through the pilot study, member checking, and increased trustworthiness may be accomplished through increased credibility and dependability (Shenton, 2004).

A goal of this study was to inquire about the sample population's educational and professional experiences surrounding sexual violence in sport. In doing so, data were utilized to indicate the preparedness of future professionals to enter the field and properly address issues such as sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Therefore, by collecting the experiences of the sample population, one can assume the effectiveness of education as perceived by the recipients. Following the conduction of each interview, the interviews were transcribed and thematically coded with respect to the phases of thematic analysis prescribed by researchers Braun and Clarke (2006). With regards to Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher first familiarized herself with the data through transcription of the interviews conducted. This was done through self-collection of data and listening to interviews while editing transcripts for accuracy. As this was done, raw data was initially coded in ways that create meaning. Coding interviews allows for a more intensive understanding of major themes relative to the research. By coding the data, words and

phrases could be best categorized to find major themes within the research and allowed for more comprehensive and attentive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapan et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2015). Considering the researcher's engagement with the data, themes were developed in a flexible and responsive manner, then further refined as major themes are discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith et al., 2015). Within the organization of data, the researcher refined these themes and identified subthemes which prevail with relevance to the narrative of the research and were relevant and compelling in relation to the research questions posed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Internal validity was established through both consistent coding and member checking. This provided the opportunity to both reach a point of saturation and ensure clarity and accuracy from the emic, or insider's, perspective (Lapan et al., 2012).



## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

Findings of this study present the perceptions of the participants based on their experiences of education and training surrounding sexual misconduct in sport and their overall preparedness to address this issue. The sample in this study consists of 15 participants (Appendix B) from sport management and athletic coaching and education master's programs. Each participant was either a current graduate student or a recent graduate from the last five years (2018-2022). Participants' ethnic and racial background included nine white/Caucasian participants (including two international), four Black/African American, one Asian, and one Asian/Indian/International. Regarding gender, 10 participants identified as female, and five participants identified as male. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 41 years old with a mean of age of 26 years old. Four participants have graduated with a master's degree in sport management, three participants graduated with a master's degree in athletic coaching and education. Four participants are current students in a sport management master's program while three participants are current students in athletic coaching and education master's program. One participant is both a graduate from the master's in sport management and is currently a student in the athletic coaching and education master's program. Current students in both programs anticipate graduation between the years 2023-2024. Those who already graduated from each program graduated between the years of 2020-2022. Of all participants who partook in this study, three of them disclosed that they have previously reported incidents of sexual misconduct in sport, and two disclosed that they have personally experienced victimization by sexual misconduct in sport. Each interview conducted took place between October and December of 2022, and the average duration of each interview was approximately 35 minutes. From the 15

interviews conducted, four main themes were identified: (a) the impact of education and training, (b) power and professional establishment, (c) gendered differences, and (d) attitudes towards reporting. Before I discuss each theme, I provide a broad overview of participants' mindsets related to sexual misconduct in sport.

### **Overall Mindsets on Sexual Misconduct in Sport**

Overall thoughts expressed by participants broadly describe the idea. The injustice of sexual misconduct in sport was widely expressed and all participants recognized it as a common problem in sport both historically and presently. Comments include that it is a sensitive topic that is not talked about much and a phenomenon that is often underreported: "I feel like it's a little too common. It shouldn't be happening as often as it does, and I feel like people should have learned from what has happened in the past" (Participant 13, 12-7-2022).

In addition to regularity<sup>1</sup>, the nature of sport was also mentioned as a causal factor which allows sexual misconduct to continue. This may refer to the highly competitive nature of sport and the over-conformity ranging from dedication to stoicism which is normalized or perceived as necessary to achieve success. For example,

We're talking about [sexual misconduct] more right now than we used to, but it's still something that's not talked about enough, or maybe overshadowed a little bit, because in sport you push through injury, and you don't tell people that you're injured because you want to keep competing. You want to keep going, and for a team sport you want to win...So, I think it's kind of along those lines where you keep it to yourself because you don't want to, like if something happens or like you have an experience like a sexually (sic) misconduct experience, you don't want to say anything, because you don't want to

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<sup>1</sup> The term regularity refers the nature of being regular. Within this study, participants described the regular or common occurrence of sexual misconduct in sport.

be viewed as like the weaker link, or you don't want to want it to jeopardize your opportunity to still compete in your sport or still be active in your sport. So, I think it's something that victims become even more of a victim and keep it inside. (Participant 1, 10-21-2022)

Another participant mentioned the underreporting found surrounding sexual misconduct in sport, specifically noting the idea of silence in exchange for remaining successful:

I feel like it's very much underreported in the sense of obviously when you're playing in sports a lot of people start when they're younger, and when you're getting older, you want to get up to the top, so you are a lot more silent about it, especially women's sports. (Participant 4, 10-27-2022)

One participant shared their thoughts on the injustice of sexual misconduct in sport and how it serves as a potential barrier to participation:

I think the first thing that kind of jumps to my mind is that it's just unfair, like the injustice of all of it, as somebody who studied physiology, for example, we know the benefits of sport and exercise transcend gender and sex, and it's just it's unfair that half of the world's population is doesn't have access to these kinds of benefits due to these kinds of experiences, because of all of these barriers in the way and one of those barriers definitely a sexual misconduct. So, it's just unfair that that's one more thing we have to combat, and it's always [the victim] that have to combat it. The responsibility is always on the victim to just be strong. Use your voice like call these behaviors out like that's exhausting, you know. (Participant 15, 12-15-2022)

The participants responses indicate an acknowledgement to the continual existence of sexual misconduct in sport. Additionally, the desire for successful is present in the minds of the

participants as a potential causal factor which leads to the continuation of sexual misconduct incidents. The desire for success and the reluctance to be viewed as the “weaker link” (Participant 1, 10-21-2022), point towards the concept of that admitting to victimization may lead to fear of diminished accomplishments or potential for athletic success/growth.

### **The Impact of Education and Training**

The impact of education and training about sexual harassment and other misconduct was a common theme across all participants’ interviews. I discuss this theme as it related to four ideas that participants discussed during the interviews: classroom and in-field training, out-of-classroom training, their knowledge about reporting responsibilities, and their feelings of preparedness to identify and report sexual misconduct.

#### ***Classroom Training***

Between both the sport management master’s program and the athletic coaching and education master’s program, nine participants stated they have had student-led discussions and presentations on specific cases of sexual conduct within their classrooms, four participants described having formal instructor-led education, one participant described having both instructor and student led education, and one stated they have had no formal instruction or student-led discussions and presentations.

First, I will discuss the participants’ student-led experiences. There are several reasons participants gave for student-led experiences.

One individual highlighted why they felt the topic remained more student-led, accrediting the difficulty of discussing the topic formally:

It was definitely more of a student-led conversation than a professor-led for class content-led discussion just because it's a tough subject to talk about, especially from a professor

standpoint, because you don't know what people are going through, and we even from a student standpoint, we didn't know what we were going through. (Participant 1, 10-21-2022)

Another participant described their experience with student-led presentations pertaining to sexual misconduct:

We've not had any specific material dedicated to sessions kind of on this unless a student went up with their own research on [sexual misconduct] within a presentation, and you learn more from that presentation...It wasn't general knowledge but was just research [from a different current] issue. [For example], this is what Title IX is, and this is how it affects this presentation. (Participant 7, 11-2-2022)

While some education was received by means of student-led instruction, the knowledge was more pertinent to the specific cases and current events being specifically discussed. There was no expressed knowledge application to identifying, witnessing, reporting, or preventing sexual misconduct in sport.

Regarding instructor-led education, two of the four participants who stated they have received instructor-led education. These participants described the instruction as relative to sexual misconduct, but also as broad and not pertaining to sexual misconduct explicitly.

We had a class on specifically like creating an environment where people are comfortable and like, you know, it just helps with building [a healthy] culture, but with anything specifically said in terms of, "Don't do this, don't do that, or here's how to create that type of culture," I don't think we really talked about sexual harassment and stuff as much. (Participant 10, 11-22-2022)

This indicates that while topics related to sexual misconduct were mentioned formally in the classroom setting, they were not specifically related to identifying, reporting, or preventing sexual misconduct.

### ***Out-of-Classroom Training***

Outside of classroom experience, 10 participants have received in-field training including general Title IX education and sexual misconduct in sport. For example:

I was able to learn a little bit more about Title IX just from [online] training that I had to do from other organizations on campus, but they don't really get into much of like the misconduct, (sic) besides just regular Title IX of if you see it report it. (Participant 4, 10-27-2022)

Similarly, one participant shared their experience with their online Title IX education: I feel like they try to touch on [sexual misconduct education]. They make us do kind of a mini class that we have to pass before we start dealing stuff (sic), but I feel like that's not enough... I thought it was helpful, but I feel like it's better if someone talks to us about it instead of doing it on our own and on our phones like it's just taking information in differently, especially about a topic like this, where you really have to remember it so that you can see the obvious signs of something happening. It should be more in person than online. (Participant 13, 12-7-2022)

Despite classroom education and in-field training, a lack of knowledge retainment was noted by many participants. One participant described uncertainty as to whether instructor-led content was specifically presented in class:

I can't remember any specific instances honestly. I'm sure it was touched upon in some of our coaching theory classes, but there aren't any specific lectures or assignments or

projects that stick out to me being specifically about sexual misconduct, so they obviously didn't stick with me if we had discussions about it” (Participant 14, 12-13-2022).

Another participant expressed a lack of knowledge retainment as a factor that left them less confident in their ability to report and uphold policy surrounding sexual misconduct: “I have been bold in other areas and this area is no different, but my lack of knowledge [on sexual misconduct], has really prevented me from participating in a lot of conversation and dialogue” (Participant 7, 11-2-2022). Additionally participant 8 expressed, “It's just not retaining, that's something that I can't recall off the top of my head” (Participant 8, 11-1-2022).

One participant despite expressing that their knowledge retainment was not perfect, the online SafeSport training they completed was impactful:

It's not like I remember 100% of [the training]. I just remember like, for example, last year in training one of my athletes didn't get a ride, and I was like, oh, hey, hold on! I need to have my assistance. Stay with me because I cannot be left alone with that athlete so, like those it's one instance, where I remember like certain things where I have to like act properly. (Participant 12, 12-3-2022)

From the data, it is suggested that education and training does impact the participants' abilities to address sexual misconduct properly; however, the mode by which education is provided and the depth of discussion and instruction on the topic may significantly impact the participants' abilities to recall and properly address sexual misconduct. Participant 12's response does reiterate that while knowledge retainment may not be perfect, that some education on the topic still aids in properly addressing certain situations that may be ethical issues.

### ***Knowledge about Reporting Responsibilities***

Another consideration related to the theme of The Impact of Education and Training is related to participants' knowledge of their reporting responsibilities including their potential role as a mandatory reporter, who they may report to, and knowledge of the appropriate steps in doing so. When prompted to describe how knowledgeable participants were of the reporting process and the participant's role and responsibility in reporting, nine participants responded indicating that they were "knowledgeable" about sexual misconduct and reporting:

I make sure I am paying close attention to situations where I feel like [sexual misconduct] could be starting to happen, and I report certain situations that I feel are inappropriate interactions to our Title IX Coordinator who was also our director of compliance.

(Participant 14, 12-13-2022)

Another participant responded with knowledge of their responsibility to report saying, "So like by law, [we are] mandatory reporters" (Participant 3, 10-27-2022).

One participant reflected on their role as a mandatory reporter based on her previous experiences:

I knew from my experience as an athlete that coaches are mandatory reporters that is like even without the training. That's something I knew like up, because you get told that as an athlete pretty often that coaches are mandatory reporters. So, I told [victim] that right away, you need to know that me (sic) and [coach] are both people who have to report this when you tell this to us. There are people available to you in the athletic department and on campus who are confidential, but me and coach are people who have to report this up because it is a problem. (Participant 9, 11-22-2022)

Meanwhile, four participants described themselves as somewhat knowledgeable about sexual misconduct. For example, a participant described their minimal knowledge and lack of



certainty about sexual misconduct this way: “I would say, I’m becoming more knowledgeable...I think I’ve definitely talked about it more in the last year and a half than I ever had before, I don’t think I am a pro by any means” (Participant 8, 11-1-2022). Congruently, another participant stated: “I can understand the different instances of sexual misconduct but identifying it can be a challenge depending on the hidden queues of a person” (Participant 4, 10-27-2022).

Two participants described themselves as not at all knowledgeable on reporting processes though did not express this as a deterrent to reporting.

I think I would be able to report the incident, but I probably would go to my supervisor, and then seek knowledge of where it needs to go further just because I have not had the appropriate training into which I would know confidently which person it goes to.

(Participant 2, 10-23-2022)

Another interview question asked about participants’ knowledge of sexual misconduct and reporting policies at their current institution. Eight participants responded yes, they were aware of their institution’s reporting policies and methods. One participant made note to parts of the protocol required.

If we did see kids showing signs of neglect and sexual abuse, then there were certain places that we’d have to bring it forward. I would bring it to the supervisor first, and then take it through the channels from that point. (Participant 10, 11-22-2022)

A participant also noted an education they received as a staff member within their institution and made note of the provided resource to assist in guiding him through reporting policies. “We have a training, and we got an email outlining [our institution’s policies]” (Participant 3, 10-27-2022).

Participant 7 stated she was moderately aware of these policies and methods, noting their knowledge as “better than before” following continued education and professional experience.

On the contrary, five participants stated they were unaware of their institutions policies. Of the participants that claimed to be unaware of their institution’s policies, three of the five individuals expressed that they had online resources that they could utilize if they needed to employ these policies. One participant answered “no” when the researcher inquired whether they were aware of their university’s policies but expressed themselves as having the resources to report regardless of the lack of knowledge: “I know where to go to look up how to report something that was happening, and I feel like I’d be fine reporting it” (Participant 13, 12-7-2022). Another participant shared similar sentiments stating, “It’s not something that I can recall off the top of my head. I can do a quick google, and I’m sure I can find it in two seconds, but it’s not something I know” (Participant 8, 11-1-2022).

The mixed responses of knowledge of policies and reporting responsibilities may reflect the amount of education each participant is receiving on the topic and the mode by which they are consuming this knowledge whether that be in-person or online training.

### ***Preparedness to Identify and Report Sexual Misconduct***

Considering participants’ ability and preparedness to identify and understand sexual misconduct, six participants stated that they were prepared to both identify and report sexual misconduct:

I would definitely be prepared for it. I would make sure that I know the details and would make sure that I know who the right person/people to report to are. I would make sure to meet with them and have additional paperwork filled out, if needed, to make sure that the report is not missing anything. (Participant 4, 10-27-2022)

Another participant also answered that interview question with certainty saying, “Yes, I would be able to identify it and understand what's happening and because I work with different age groups depending on which age group it is, it'd be a little different how it's handled from there, whether it's working with the kids or adults” (Participant 5, 10-27-2022). Five participants described themselves as mildly prepared to identify and report sexual misconduct, for example,

I think I would be able to report the incident, but I probably would go to my supervisor, and then seek knowledge of where it needs to go further just because I have not had the appropriate training into which I would know confidently which person it goes to.

(Participant 2, 10-23-2022)

Similarly, another participant stated,

I feel semi-prepared. I feel more prepared than I did without knowing anything for sure, but I still think there is a lot to learn. I think I would know who to start with and kind of like go about it that way, but I would need guidance. (Participant 11, 11-30-2022)

Two participants acknowledged a lack of preparedness to identify and report sexual misconduct:

No. I would seek assistance. There are so many parties that could get involved already just from that situation, and I don't want to be the party who misuses, or miscommunicates, or that says or does the wrong thing, where our student athlete is negatively impacted. I would much rather to seek help with someone who's a professional who has gained experience in that area. (Participant 7, 11-2-2022)

Meanwhile, Participant 11 was prepared to identify sexual misconduct but not prepared to report it, and Participant 10 expressed an understanding of identifying sexual misconduct in

sport and an ability to aide an athlete in need but voiced that they would likely not report unless specifically asked.

If no one's going to do anything about it, it gets just really challenging to keep reliving it over and over, as you continue to bring that forward to people... I feel like a lot of times the re-traumatization, and not really having an outcome in the ends would make me not want to pursue it personally. (Participant 10, 11-22-2022)

This participant's response demonstrates that the risk of re-traumatization compared to the results from reporting may serve as an additional barrier not only for the victim coming forward, but also for the person responsible for reporting despite reporting preparedness or knowledge.

### **Power and Professional Positions**

The second theme reported is about Power and Professional Positions related to sexual misconduct. There were two aspects of participants' responses that were very salient, and I report them under this theme. These are participants' barriers to reporting and participants' roles and the perceived impact of those roles when they were reporting.

#### ***Barriers to Reporting***

Participants highlighted various barriers to reporting including, age, professional establishment, length in position, and gender. Being of young age was a factor mentioned by participants as a barrier which may impact the participants' reporting abilities: "I think [age] for sure [impacts reporting], just because being young, you are the bottom of the totem pole because you are just a graduate assistant, and still in school and fresh to your career" (Participant 11, 11-30-2022).

Additionally, many participants noted the nature of their position within their staff and how that impacts their ability to report and maintain accountability in the instance that they may need to report an incident of sexual misconduct. Professional establishment and the length of time they have spent in the position was mentioned as a factor which may serve as a barrier to reporting sexual misconduct:

I probably would say definitely a barrier is my position in the organization. So, I feel like I'm someone on the bottom who people wouldn't listen to...and then also, just in general, like who [the suspected perpetrator] is. If it's someone like a powerful person or organization, that would be a barrier as well as if they are the people that you to report to. (Participant 4, 10-27-2022)

Familiarity with the accused perpetrator was also mentioned by many as a variable that would increase difficulty in reporting: "I think it makes it harder to actually report something when you know people versus a stranger. I would have no problem going to report like if I you know something going on with a stranger" (Participant 8, 11-1-2022). Similarly, another participant stated:

This is something I hate to admit, but it's a hundred percent true if it's, if I witness [sexual misconduct] between, say, it's an athlete and someone on staff, or like a coach, and I really like that coach or that staff member I'd be like, "Oh, My gosh! I don't want to throw this person under the bus like that would be something that would make me hesitate" (Participant 1, 10-21-2022)

This points towards the ideals of power capital and how power can influence an individual to be less reactive towards reporting sexual misconduct. Participant 1's response specifically represents the concept that power impacts influential ability as described by French

& Raven (1959) and Tedeshi & Bonoma (1972). Power is represented as an influential factor that impacts participants beliefs towards their ability to address sexual misconduct.

***Participants' Roles and their Perceived Impact When Reporting***

Participants were asked to discuss their potential impact in their current position, then these ideas were followed up with a question of how and why their impact may change in comparison with a future role in their career. Based on their current roles most participants described themselves as having little power to create change surrounding sexual misconduct specifically without relying on someone of greater power to encourage the change. This was consistent despite the differences in each of the participants' current roles:

I don't have the power to make change. On a team with all the full-time staff, I have the lowest power. So, like, because I am only part time, basically, on the hierarchy, I'm in the lowest position. However, I do believe that if I raise my voice to address my standpoint with the coach, that my voice would get heard, but it will depend on the next supervisor to... carry on that voice to next level. (Participant 12, 12-3-2022)

Many participants answered similarly regarding their current positions. For example,

I would like to say I have a high influence, but over my past year and a half here I haven't had much movement on really any of the changes I've tried to enact in here, and not just in policy, but in support [within my department] for the student athletes, creating culture. I haven't really been able to get not only buy-in from coaches, but just from an administrative perspective. It doesn't really feel like I have much power in that regard, so I don't know how much of an effect I could have. (Participant 14, 12-13-2022)

Despite the expression of a lack of ability to create change as seen in the quotes by Participants 12 and 14 among others, many participants did mention the ability to use their

relationships with student athletes to create a healthier and more open culture to share and discuss incidents of sexual misconduct. This was a shared expression regardless of the amount of direct day to day contact the individual had with athletes:

I don't think I have any power for any change... I do not feel that I am in a spot to create change surrounding sexual misconduct, but I do believe I am in a spot to help athletes feel more comfortable. I am not able to change policy or put steps in place to help or prevent misconduct. I am, however, in a position to build relationships with athletes and hopefully make them comfortable enough to reach out to me if they are in a bad situation, but do I actually have any power to change anything. No. (Participant 5, 10-27-2022)

When considering a future role within athletics, participants indicated whether they felt they would be able to create change and if that ability was more, less, or equal to their ability in their current position. This question posed mostly positive responses from participants. Eleven participants said they felt as though their ability to create change increased as they moved up in their role professionally:

I think [my ability to make change] would be a little bit better, because I would have like a title instead of just like another athlete. I'd actually have more of a voice at that point of my career, and I feel like people take titles seriously. (Participant 13, 12-7-2022)

Another participant described their impact relative to their established work ethic and credibility in their role if they were to continue moving up within their organization. They went on to say,

If I were to become [promoted within my organization], and work my way up here, then yes, I would definitely have a better position [to create change]. As a woman in and a

male dominated industry, I would have a position to help make change and help to make there be more attention to certain issues and certain topics. (Participant 1, 10-21-2022)

Furthermore, one participant felt as though their ability to create change increased slightly. This was credited to an increase of power and credibility that one acquires as they move up in position:

If I were to receive [a greater] role, I would be able to create change since I'd be part of senior staff, and I'd work with the athletic director and other members of the senior staff to make decisions. So, I'd be able to properly make sure the right policies and procedures are in place. (Participant 6, 11-1-2022)

Though many participants anticipated a change in their ability to create change, three felt as though their ability to change remained minimal despite a change in position. Of those who described themselves as having minimal ability to create change, it was expressed that the ability to create such change did not lie with the nature of their position. The ability to create change was expressed to be either with the coaches or with administrators and the athletic director depending on the participant's position and previous knowledge to how those in their position have experienced reporting sexual misconduct or have been able to make an influence.

Penn State's whole strength and conditioning staff knew... They reported it to the President. They reported it to the head coach, and nothing was done. So, it would be nice to think that my opinion mattered, or that I would have to say. But it's either you reported up the chain, and you go to the police, and that's it. My opinion isn't really going to change policies. (Participant 5, 10-27-2022)

This data indicated that participants who anticipated little to no change to their power to create change realized their lack of power compared to the personnel over them within a department.



There were mixed responses about whether change was most impacted by coaches or by administration. Coaches were described as the most vital component to creating change by some participants:

I think coaches have the biggest impact to be honest because [athletes] spend more time with their coaches than anyone else... I think coaches do have the biggest impact on student athletes just in general. They're big, big part of all these other things that athletic departments try to do right to like you know, specifically in academics... if a coach doesn't buy into academics being important, the student athletes never really care. If we do all these trainings for Title IX, sexual misconduct, those kinds of things it's just to if a coach doesn't buy into it and doesn't, you know, pass it on, pass it forward, so to speak, and then essentially, it doesn't matter. So, I think they're the biggest component on everything that an athletic department tries to do. It's why they're a big investment.

(Participant 8, 11-1-2022)

Mixed responses from participants indicated coaches or administrators as responsible for creating change. Of participants that expressed the power to create change as lying with administration, a participant described the only person they believed capable of creating change to be the athletic director: "In terms of the athletic department, I think very few people have power to create change. Maybe the athletic director would be the only person who I would put in that category" (Participant 14, 12-13-2022). Other participants described the ability to create change as dependent on the context:

If it's within a team, I think the coaches do have a pretty influential factor. But overall, I would say administrators, just because what they say goes. Even as a sport administrator, you have oversight of that team. So, I think the administration is kind of higher up than

coaches. Although, if it's happening on a team, then the athletes might respect the coach more. (Participant 11, 11-30-2022)

Overall, there were mixed responses as to who would have an ability to create change surrounding sexual misconduct. This may contribute to a lack of accountability due to confusion over who has power to create change and who that responsibility lies with.

### **Gendered Differences**

The third theme reported in the results of this thesis is Gendered Differences. There was only one substantive finding in the data, and it related to how gender impacted, or was perceived to affect, the sexual misconduct reporting process.

#### ***Male versus Female Reporting***

Gender mattered significantly regarding how reporting was done. Female participants were more prone to disclosing their gender as a potential barrier to reporting. Female participants mentioned issues of believability due to societal power discrepancies between males and females, underrepresentation of women in sport, and stereotypical beliefs of women:

I think [being female] does [impact reporting] because I am a woman and, in that sense, sometimes people don't take you seriously... In the corporate world and even in everyday life, men are typically seen as the best leaders or decision makers versus old traditional roles where women are meant to be in the home. Because of this traditional thinking that has been taught to those of older generations who are still in high positions, women are still being discredited and not fully looked at for the capabilities and skills that they possess. Especially in sports, it is still heavily male dominated in athletic directors. (Participant 4, 10-27-2022)

Additional comments related to women's role in reporting included:

I think that when it comes to the realm of sexual misconduct, women tend to be considered more hysterical when it comes to things like [sexual misconduct], and as someone who has experienced sexual misconduct myself, which most women have like, you aren't considered like a reputable source for things like that, because you are considered emotional and dramatic and not factual. (Participant 9, 11-22-2022)

Meanwhile, most male participants expressed that their gender had no impact on their ability to report. However, Participant 5 specifically noted that their role as a male may impact athletes' comfortability in raising concerns of sexual misconduct to them, thus inhibiting their ability to report, saying, "I do not believe that being a male impact how comfortable I am in reporting sexual misconduct. I do believe that it can impact the connections that I have with athletes and how comfortable they may feel reporting misconduct to me" (Participant 5, 10-27-2022).

Participants also answered to whether they would be more comfortable reporting to a female or a male superior. Six of 10 female participants answered they were more comfortable reporting to a female superior versus a male superior. This was credited to the indication that female superiors are likely to have more similar experience to the participant and a better understanding of the impact of sexual misconduct on females in sport. Participant 7 specifically noted that they would feel more at ease in the presence of a female superior in a male dominated industry such as sport. "I just think women can relate more...sure that may not be the same for every woman, but you have room to be little less tense in my personal opinion" (Participant 7, 11-2-2022). Despite most female participants' preference to report to a fellow female, four of the 10 female participants shared no preference or uncertainty on preference between reporting to a male versus a female superior on the matter:

For me, reporting as a third party, I don't think it makes a difference because I'm generally pretty comfortable with this topic. When it comes to just reporting a situation, I don't think it would me a huge difference for me if I had to report to higher up, whose male versus a higher up, who, you know, is female. (Participant 9, 11-22-2022)

All male participants did not express a preference between reporting to a male versus a female superior. When Participant 5 discussed the reporting relative to gender, he expressed, “Being male, that is something I would have never thought about or cared about. To me, it would make no difference” (Participant 5, 10-27-2022). The male participants broadly expressed that if they were reporting, the sex of their superior had no impact on their reporting of sexual misconduct.

### **Attitudes Towards Reporting**

The fourth and final theme is about participants’ Attitudes Towards Reporting. The two specific findings center on participants’ motivations to report, and on participants’ perceptions of the impacts of reporting.

#### ***Motivation to Report***

When participants were prompted to answer whether they report sexual misconduct, an activist-like mindset was detected in a few participants who answered yes with unwavering confidence. Participant 4, for instance, disclosed that they would report sexual misconduct without a doubt. When the researcher followed up with a question about whether their answer would remain the same if they were reporting on the misconduct of a superior, the participant described a plan of action supporting their steadfast response to report in any instance. A second participant answered with similar certainty, but also acknowledged the inclusion of the victim, saying,

Yes, I would talk to the victim about it first and tell them that I believe this is what's happening, and I believe it needs to be reported, but I wanted to let them know that that's what's happening instead of just reporting it and not saying anything to them. (Participant 9, 11-22-2022)

Participant 9 also mentioned their position as a mandatory reporter in their interview. This position requires them to report if they are made aware of a situation involving sexual misconduct.

While some participants expressed certainty in their motivation to report an incident of sexual misconduct, many participants initially described themselves as certain of their steadfast action to report sexual misconduct in sport, followed by expressions of self-doubt. For example, when asked if they would report an incident of sexual misconduct, one participant shared,

I want to say one hundred percent absolutely. Yes. But I feel like, if I were put into that situation I would still feel like we're like uncomfortable or reluctant... so, yes and no, because I would be a little intimidated, a little worried to kind of bring that up, because that's a big thing that you're either accusing someone or like bringing up, but also yes, because you know, you want to stick up for the people around you, and if someone around you or someone that you work with is struggling or going through something you would want to help them. (Participant 1, 10-21-2022)

Not all participants felt compelled to report sexual misconduct on their own. For example, Participant 10 answered that they would likely not report sexual misconduct unless it was deemed necessary or was requested specifically by the victim. They stated, "Personally, I am on the side of not really doing much about [reporting sexual misconduct]. If it was somebody

else that they wanted to [report it], and they needed my support, I would absolutely lend my support to that” (Participant 10, 11-22-2022).

Reporting confidence is demonstrated as an important factor in the mindsets of the potential reporters and their ability to report sexual misconduct in a steadfast manner.

### ***Participants’ Perceptions of the Impact of Reporting***

When the researcher inquired on the impact of reporting, participants highlighted the impact of reporting in previous scenarios, for example those high-profile cases reported in the media. Participants also answered by predicting the impact of reporting future incidents of sexual misconduct in sport. Participants generally agreed with the importance of reporting, but the belief in its impact relinquished various responses based on previous experience in reporting or personal experience with sexual misconduct. Of the participants who have previously reported sexual misconduct, Participant 15 described a scenario in which they needed to report sexual misconduct which resulted in the perpetrator being released from their position but noting the misleading nature by which their employer released the individual.

If [sexual misconduct] happens to someone, it can happen to anybody, and [the perpetrator] is a threat to society and shouldn’t be allowed to do that anymore. So, I had to [disclose the sexual misconduct] to the rest of the team, and then I raised it to our immediate boss, then to [human resources]. Then, I called a companywide thing. So, that's how I escalated it. The outcome was I got gaslit by my boss a little which left a bad taste in my mouth. That colleague eventually ended up getting fired from the job, but he was under performing anyway. So, I we don't know [exactly the cause of termination]. I'm not happy with how that ended. I no longer work for that company... (Participant 15, 12-15-2022)

Another participant described their scenario as well, but specifically noted that once the report was made, there was no detection of action or changes being made. When asked whether there was an outcome to their reporting efforts, this participant answered, “No. I've not heard any follow up, or anything after I've brought it to the attention of administrators” (Participant 14, 12-13-2022). Despite less direct outcomes of their reporting efforts, both participants expressed with certainty their belief in the importance of reporting.

Interestingly, Participants 9 and 10 both were victims of sexual misconduct, but their responses differed according to their beliefs on the impact of reporting. Participant 10 stated, “There is no accountability, and it is not followed through on enough of the cases that have happened in the past to signal that anything has changed. If the coaches or players don't face consequences it would just be a matter of more of the same. In my opinion I have taken steps mentally to deal with it on my own by figuring out ways to survive it.” (Participant 10, 11-22-2022)

Participant 10 further went on to disclose that they likely would not report unless prompted to by the victim due to the lack of impact reporting may have.

Participant 9 did not indicate the impact of their own victimization but did describe the outcome of previously reporting sexual misconduct on behalf of another person, which positively resulted in the individual receiving medical attention. However, in this case there was no indication of impact beyond that for the perpetrator.

Of the participants who have had no experience with sexual misconduct and reporting, no indication of impact was noted. Overall, regarding participants' beliefs on the impact of reporting it is important to note that personal experiences frame the mindsets of the participants.

The findings related to this theme of Attitudes towards Reporting might suggest that the overall mindset on impact of reporting is not definitive from an objective standpoint, but rather is relative to the participants experiences and how those experiences have framed their thoughts on what is impactful about reporting sexual misconduct.

### **Closing Thoughts and Summary**

In conclusion of each interview, participants were encouraged to share closing comments regarding in what ways they think their educational experience can or could have improved their ability and confidence to report incidents of sexual harassment and abuse in sport, or if they think their current education is sufficient. All fifteen participants responded by expressing that more instruction is needed to help them be successful when addressing sexual misconduct in sport.

I feel like the more you talk about it, the more you come you're comfortable about it. So, I feel like education would help anybody do it... I think it needs to be talked about more. It's part management programs in general. So, kind of just doing what you're doing, just trying to make it a mandatory class or lesson throughout the sports management program.  
(Participant 6, 11-1-2022)

Additionally, another participant describes the courses already included within their master's programs and indicates that sexual misconduct should be included within the curriculum.

We have a sport law class. We have ethics in sport. We have a few classes that could include [sexual misconduct education] within the curriculum. I think that if that was to be the case, it should be coming from someone who has knowledge of that not just, you



know, a little bit of knowledge, but it needs to be something that's taught and embedded in the in the curriculum. (Participant 7, 11-2-2022)

Participant 13 expressed the need for inclusion of more education even as a portion of a course and not an entire course dedicated to it:

I feel like, if they actually had like a, like either like within a class, or have a like a class on it. I don't know, having like a whole class on is too much. Well, at least, having like a module like specifically talking about that topic like sexual assault, and that would be helpful. (Participant 13, 12-7-2022)

There are strengths in having more education including accountability and ensuring that reporting is properly submitted. By having one's own knowledge, one participant expresses that ability to be more self-reliant.

I think just knowing better (sic) the specific policies that are in place would help a lot with reporting issues. Instead of needing to rely on the direct of compliance, to kind of go through them and make them aware like how it is now... If I hear about something, I bring it to them, and then kind of expect them to go to the proper channels, whereas if I was educated on what those proper channels would be, I wouldn't have to rely on someone else to make reports. (Participant 14, 12-13-2022)

Similarly, participant 2 expressed that education would increase their abilities and confidence in being proactive regarding preventing sexual harassment and abuse.

I personally think that it would enhance it significantly [my knowledge] more than anything, just because I have no education, and I'm also very young. So just because I have not had any personal experience or training in the past, I think that I haven't had the opportunity to learn what that looks like identifiability, or even just a reporting

standpoint...A lot of times, we can prevent situations if we have accurate solutions before we need one. So, I think that's the biggest thing. If we're able to get training before we need it, then in the instance that we do need it, we'll be able to find an active solution a lot faster than we would if we didn't have it. (Participant 2, 10-23-2022)

Participant 15 specifically noted that the earlier conversations are had regarding sexual harassment and abuse, the better equipped individuals will be to handle it.

If I were to take my case, it was, for example, my upbringing that started [my sexual abuse and harassment education]. But that shouldn't have been the case, like what I would have loved is to talk about these things at a school level, because that's where we most of us have our first introductions to sports, right? College is too late. Grad school is too late. The damage has been done by then. We need to start younger, and I'm a big believer in institutional level changes. So, why are we not talking about these things with middle school kids, or even like the incidences of like child sexual abuse, right, like again, like just (sic) college is too late. It's great that we're talking about this. Now don't get me wrong. It is important [to discuss in college and graduate school], but it should go down deeper. We talk about long-term athletic development [at a young age]; I think we should be talking about these things from that age as well. (Participant 15, 12-15-2022)

Significant data indicated that more classroom education is required to aide future and current sport leaders in their ability to manage and prevent incidents of sexual misconduct.

To summarize the data collected from this study, 15 interviews conducted which identified four main themes: (a) the impact of education and training, (b) power and professional establishment, (c) gendered differences, and (d) attitudes towards reporting. Significant findings

were detected which will be further discussed in the following chapter in correlation with the four original research questions of this study.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The result from this investigation will be discussed based on the four initial themes framed withing the research questions of this study (Educational preparation, experience and ability to address sexual misconduct, professional roles, power, and impact, and gendered differences). The purpose of this study was to recognize the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of current education in sport related degree programs and the impact that has on future and current sport leaders to confront and report sexual violence. Unlike previous literature, this study has considered the readiness of future sport leaders to enter the sport field and properly prevent, identify, and address sexual misconduct in sport. Though other studies, such as Taylor and Hardin, (2017), Taylor et al. (2019), and Taylor and Paule-Koba (2020) have investigated education and training for sexual violence prevention, this study engages with the participant's self-perception of their preparedness and confidence to impede and buffer against incidents of sexual misconduct in sport which has not been previously studied. Additionally, this study engages with more descriptive data which includes the voice and perceptions of the participants. Differently from previous literature, this research comprises data predominantly from the female participants' perspectives with a greater saturation of female participation while previous studies on this topic have predominantly consisted of male populations.

For this study, sport management and athletic coaching graduate students and recent graduates of both programs were the main subjects and were referenced to as *future sports leaders*. The researcher of this investigation focused on the experiences of future sports leaders to understand their ability to address sexual misconduct and consider the impact of their education on sexual misconduct.

## **Educational Preparation**

The researcher of this study aimed to address how effectively educational systems currently prepare future sport leaders to confidently buffer against and impede incidents of sexual misconduct in sport. In pursuit of this, the researcher inquired on the amount and quality of education and training each participant received on sexual misconduct and how impactful it was on participants confidence and ability to address sexual misconduct in sport. When considering this research question, the researcher took into consideration both the participants' educational experiences inside the classroom as well as training in their field. Important of note regarding education and training, training refers to experiences which are required of the individuals to alleviate potential legal consequences through a department or organization. Meanwhile, education is referred to more broadly and in relation to a curriculum. Education is a concept most linked with creating awareness of the issue and attention to its prevalence and the implications involved with its prevalence. Though within the interview process, a lack of distinction may have been clear, the responses indicated no impact to their "feeling to be ready to act."

While nine participants received student-led instruction, only four participants had formal instructor-led instruction with topics in correlation to sexual misconduct. One participant received both student-led education and instructor-led education, and one participant received neither student-led nor instructor-led education. When considering the education participants received in the classroom setting, it is significant of note that more than two-thirds of the participants have had no formal education while in their master's program to aid in their knowledge of sexual misconduct prevention, identification, reporting, or management. Similar

results were found in studies conducted by Taylor and Hardin (2017) and Taylor et al. (2019) as they expressed an insufficiency of education and training to future sports leaders.

In each of these studies, the researchers note that less than half of sport management students receive sexual harassment and assault education in the classroom or in the internship setting based on their participant pools (Taylor & Hardin, 2017; Taylor et al., 2019). When considering classroom education, a study performed by Taylor and Paule-Koba (2020) revealed that faculty of these sport programs are uncomfortable leading meaningful discussions surrounding sexual misconduct in sport. The majority of sport management faculty within the study expressed that they had not received formal training on the topic nor is it incorporated formally into their class curriculum (Taylor & Paule-Koba, 2020). Despite efforts to incorporate sexual misconduct education through discussion and student led learning, many faculty feel uncomfortable speaking on such matters in their classrooms (Taylor et al., 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2017). This could be a potential factor that prevents appropriate instruction for those participants of this study who did not receive any instructor-led instruction.

While the results from this study reflect similarly with consideration to classroom education, the results differed regarding the internship setting. Though this study did not specifically seek data regarding the “internship setting,” in-field education was investigated. Ten of 15 participants expressed educational experiences relative to sexual misconduct within their professional field whether that be as an active student-athlete or within an internship, graduate-assistantship, or full-time position. Many participants did reflect on consuming knowledge relative to these topics predominantly through online educational forums and certifications; however, few, within their field, did receive in-person training.

The education and training these individuals receive impacts their ability to identify, manage and prevent compromising and unethical situations regarding the potential for sexualized inappropriate behaviors between athletes and other staff. So, when considering how impactful the education participants received was, the researcher investigated knowledge retainment and how knowledgeable participants felt about their role within reporting sexual harassment and abuse. Nine of the participants within this study described themselves as knowledgeable regarding sexual harassment and abuse and their responsibilities of reporting. Key terms that were mentioned include compliance, Title IX, mandatory reporters, and confidentiality. The use of knowledgeable terminology indicates a positive impact of education and training for some participants within the study. Understanding their roles as mandatory reporters, their responsibility to report, and the impact of Title IX may point to a comprehensive understanding. This differs from previous literature which pointed to a minimal educational impact (Taylor & Hardin, 2017; Taylor et al., 2019). This finding was unanticipated considering that two-thirds of participants in this study had not received formal instructor-led education. This indicates that student-led presentations combined with a significant number of participants receiving in-field training may be impactful in sufficient knowledge development; however, not all participants expressed the same level of knowledge. Four participants described themselves as somewhat knowledgeable and made specific claims to difficulty identifying sexual misconduct and understanding and detecting the potential hidden cues. Two participants described themselves as not knowledgeable at all, though they would still report.

Though student-led education and in-field training may have been sufficient and impactful for some participants of this study, it was not for other participants. As previously stated, many participants expressed their in-field training as online forums or certifications and

only about 26-percent of participants received instructor-led education within their classroom. With online training, a lack of retainment was noted, and instruction may not be extensive or frequent enough to be impactful for some participants which is supported by studies by Taylor and Hardin (2017), Taylor et al. (2019) and Taylor and Paule-Koba (2020). Additionally, with student-led instruction participants noted that sexual misconduct education was case specific to a current event or issue a student may be presenting, and instructor-led education was noted as relative to sexual misconduct issues, but not descriptive or informative to how one would apply their knowledge to identifying and reporting. These findings are specifically concerning taking into regard the grooming process which is occupied by perpetrators to victimize their targets by first identifying their victim, then building trust and friendship, developing isolation and control, and finally securing loyalty and secrecy (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005). As reflected in the narratives from a previous study by Brackenridge and fasting (2005), the grooming process can be difficult to identify, but is commonly used to select victims and ensure the ability of the perpetrator to initiate and complete sexual harassment and abuse. For future sport leaders it is imperative to be able to identify and confront this process as well as any other cues that may point to sexual harassment and abuse.

Considering whether educational systems currently prepare future sport leaders to confidently buffer against and impede the phenomenon of sexual harassment and abuse, it is inferred that though systems are in place to provide some education to current and future sport leaders, more structured and specific education may be required. Education is needed to positively influence current and future sport leaders' experiences of reporting sexual misconduct, upholding policies surrounding sexual misconduct, and impeding the phenomenon of sexual harassment and abuse in sport.



### **Experience and Ability to Address Sexual Misconduct**

As this study considered participants presently working within the sport field, the researcher inquired on experiences the participants have had regarding certain notions surrounding sexual misconduct in sport such as identifying, witnessing, reporting, and upholding policy as well as how their educational experiences have prepared them to do so. Few participants have had experience in reporting sexual misconduct. Only three participants of this study have had experiences of reporting sexual misconduct in sport (Participants 9, 14, and 15). Participant 9 has experience from reporting on behalf of someone else as well as experience and perspective from their own personal experience of victimization from sexual harassment and abuse. Additionally, participant 10 has not reported abuse previously but has also disclosed their own personal experience of victimization from sexual harassment and abuse and how that has shaped their views on reporting and policy surrounding sexual misconduct. As a smaller participant pool, it is unsurprising that few participants from this study have needed to report sexual misconduct within their field, especially considering the limited amount of time each participant has been in their role as this study considers current students and recent graduates.

Of those who have reported sexual misconduct, impactful results from reporting were not detected from an institutional-response standpoint. For example, two of the three participants who have reported sexual harassment and abuse have detected no positive changes from their reporting outside of any necessary medical attention being provided to the victim. Participant 15 noted a positive impact from reporting which resulted in the accused perpetrator being terminated, but also made a note that this was not communicated clearly as correlating to the act of sexual harassment and abuse, but rather to his underperformance in his position. Participant 10, who has experienced sexual harassment and abuse but has not reported it on behalf of

another, described a jaded perspective on reporting. She mentioned the process as menial, and described the impact of reporting as more harmful to the victim from re-traumatization than it is impactful by making change surrounding the incident. Participants 9 and 10 both described a lack of accountability for the perpetrators within the reporting process.

As noted by Nite and Nauright (2020) in previous literature obscured processes, lack of internal discipline, valorization, and victim silencing all contribute to the prolonging of abuse throughout sports. Often, victimization can occur for years with no intervention at the knowledge of stakeholders and administrators without being properly addressed contributing to corrupt legitimization and a habit of concealment and collusion by an institution (Nite & Nauright, 2020). The lack of impact found by participants with experiences of sexual harassment and abuse and reporting incidents may be, in part, due to these factors. However, with the passing of laws such as Title VII, Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Equal Protection Clause found in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which prohibit discrimination, administrators may have difficulty in decision making while addressing sexual abuse and harassment, especially in instances without irrefutable evidence against the perpetrator (Masteralexis, 1995). Terekli and Çobanoğlu (2018) noted that law and policy creators should consider the limitations of coaches and administration within in their rules of conduct. Therefore, sport specific policies and general standards for child protection may need to be established and enforced to best practice proactive prevention and intervention as suggested by Hartmann-Tews et al. (2020) in his study regarding managing the prevention of sexual violence. With more proactive policies and practices, the need to report sexual misconduct in sport could become less dire considering the phenomenon as the opportunity to sexually harass or abuse is diminished.

Despite the lack of experience reporting for some participants, participants did respond to their awareness of institutional policies within their organization and their knowledge of how to apply them. Eight participants described themselves as aware of their institutions' policies while five participants described themselves as unaware; others responded stating they were moderately aware. Relative to awareness of reporting policies, participants also responded to how prepared they viewed themselves to identify and report sexual misconduct. 40 percent viewed themselves as prepared to both identify and report sexual misconduct confidently. Meanwhile, thirty percent of participants described themselves as mildly prepared to do so with credit to a lack of knowledge as a factor impairing their confidence and ability. Two participants said they were not prepared to do either, and one participant said they were prepared to identify sexual misconduct but unprepared to report it.

When considering the attitudes of the participants, confident attitudes toward reporting abilities directly correlated with their preparation to identify and report sexual misconduct. Prepared participants responded with steadfast in their attitude towards reporting with certainty towards their role as a mandatory reporter and respect to communicating this with the victim. The participants who responded with more self-doubt mentioned they may feel uncomfortable reporting. Other terms of note include reluctant, intimidated, and worried regarding the reporting process. As young professionals in the field disproportionate distribution of power, compliance, and tolerance for abusive behaviors in sports settings may lead to role conflict and professional uncertainty around the topic of addressing sexual harassment and abuse (Roberts et al., 2020). Those who were more prepared and knowledgeable of sexual misconduct and policies seemed to have a buffer against the professional uncertainty mention by researchers Roberts et al. (2020) while those without preparation and confidence to report may be more susceptible to uncertainty

or discomfort when upholding and addressing sexual misconduct and institutional policies and may lead to a lack of policy enforcement (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2020).

Contrarily, only one participant answered saying they understood the reporting process and how to identify misconduct, but they would not report unless it was specifically requested by the victim. Though all but one participant responded with a responsibility towards reporting, a lack of confidence in the reporting and identification process, may be problematic when considering competency of those responsible for reporting sexual misconduct and could contribute towards negative experiences. Furthermore, there is a threat of apathy towards reporting as is seen in participant 10's case. A lack of accountability can pose as a threat to enthusiasm to report. The data collected from this study support the idea presented by Roberts et al. (2020) claiming that whole system approaches are necessary to advance the prevention, intervention, and management of sexual misconduct incidences. From educators to professionals in the field, there are many aspects that can impact an individual's ability to confidently and appropriately address sexual misconduct.

### **Professional Roles, Power, and Impact**

The third facet of this study focused on how future sports leaders perceive their current and future roles in athletics and how they impact the phenomenon of sexual abuse and harassment in sport. Participants were asked to address their ability to create change surrounding sexual misconduct and policy in their current position as well as how they thought that may change compared to a future role they may have in athletics. From the participants responses, four main barriers were detected. These barriers identified by participants include age, professional establishment, length in position, and gender. These barriers correlate with different

types of power as defined in literature by French and Raven (1959) and Tedeshi and Bonoma (1972) as well as the idea of power capital (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011).

As participants addressed their ability to currently create change and uphold policies surrounding sexual misconduct, each participant described their level of impact as minimal. This is attributed to the barriers previously mentioned. As young professionals in the field, participants served in roles such as student-athletes, interns, graduate assistants, and new professionals. When considering the barriers of age and staff hierarchy, participants described themselves as fresh in their career and the bottom of the totem pole. Participant 4 specifically stated that they were someone on the bottom who people wouldn't listen to. The majority of participants described their role as menial compared to their superiors. The lack of credibility that participants are describing is related to expert and legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959; Tedeshi & Bonoma, 1972). This indicates that as a result of the participant's position, they lack the ability to create influence based on their position and the assumption of a lack of knowledge. Regarding power capital, this results in the participants' power inventory decreasing with less positional and expert power (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). Though each participant described a menial role, participant 12 did say that though they do not hold the power to create change in their current role, they can use their position to create a safe space for student-athletes to reach out in.

Further establishing the idea of power as an influential factor on ability to uphold policy, participants mentioned that reporting against a person of power in their organization would serve as a barrier to reporting. In addition, participant stated that they would hesitate reporting against a well-known coach versus a stranger, and similarly, participant 8 mentioned that they would have a more difficult time reporting against someone they knew. This refers to referent power,

meaning the power related to social status, respectability, and a loyal network (French & Raven, 1959; Tedeshi & Bonoma, 1972).

When further prompted to respond to their ability to create change in a future role they may hold in athletics, 11 participants responded saying their ability to create change would increase while one participant said their role would slightly increase and three participants claimed they would still have minimal power to create change as they believed it did not coincide with the nature of their position. Participant 6 noted that as a part of senior staff, if he were to serve in that position, he would have the opportunity to make decisions and ensure that proper policy and procedures were in place. As the participants become more established within their organization, they expected more credibility, power, and influence to coincide.

Those who did not expect a change in their credibility described the ability to create change surrounding sexual misconduct as not within the nature of their position. Mixed responses were recorded of whether the influential power most lied with coaches, administrators, athletic directors, or the campus president. This mixture of responses indicates that each of these roles' levels of power are relative to perspective of power inventory correlated with each position as well as the concept of professional uncertainty (Roberts et al., 2020). Without having responsibilities specific to each role regarding sexual misconduct and reporting, this could potentially serve as an additional barrier to timely reporting and management of incidents of sexual misconduct. Clear roles should be identified to prevent negligence and the mishandling of cases involving sexual harassment and abuse.

Specifically due to enabling relationships, understanding one's role and the impact they have regarding sexual misconduct policy could prevent missing cues, or allowing relationships between athletic staff and athletes from being taken advantage of. The closeness and dependency

of athletes to their coaches allows for abuse to be prominent and unaddressed when education and responsibilities within professionals' roles are uncertain. It is important to note that while coaches and administrators both have the influence to create change and uphold policy surrounding sexual misconduct, they also yield the power to distribute threats, privileges, and rewards to manipulate the athletes under them (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; French & Raven, 1959; Johansson & Lundqvist, 2017, Tedeshi & Bonoma, 1972). For this reason, each professional has a need to understand their role and should be empowered to aid in detection and prevention of abused power.

### **Gendered Differences**

Finally, the researcher inquired how gendered differences play a role in current and future sport leaders' perceived abilities to make an impact regarding sexual misconduct in sport. This relates to gendered power as described by Bisgaard and Støckel (2019) and Sand et al. (2011) as another component of power capital and power inventory. As power inventory consists of positional power, expert power, gender power, and physical power, males are known to have increased power capital compared to their female counterpart. The sum of their power inventory increases significantly when males engage with females (Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Sand et al., 2011). The disproportionate power found between males and females is reflected in the participants' responses.

Participants were asked how they perceived their gender as potentially impacting their ability to address sexual misconduct in addition to whether they would be more comfortable reporting sexual misconduct to a female or a male supervisor. Each female participant of this study disclosed gender as a barrier to reporting while male participants did not. Additionally, six of 10 female participants disclosed a preference to report up to a female superior as opposed to a

male superior while four female participants disclosed no preference. Male participants also disclosed no preference to gender when reporting to a superior. Though male participants did not address gender as a barrier to reporting, reporting confidence, or regarding preference in reporting up to superiors, participant 5 did acknowledge that student-athletes may not be as comfortable reporting to him due to his position as a male. Participant 5's response demonstrates an empathy for the female participant's experience and the potential of increased comfortability reporting to other females.

Gender powered relationships exist in sport and coincide with a lack of female representation. This is reflected in coaching roles, sport administration roles, and in sport education roles (Andrews & Carrington, 2013; Taylor & Paule-Koba, 2020). Coakley (2004) recognizes that females are marginalized as a result of power discrepancies. Critical feminist theory supports this notion as well as identifies that gender differences in sport do not act to empower females, and while athletic opportunities for female athletes, females remain underrepresented in professional roles and in spaces where decisions are being made (Andrews & Carrington, 2013; Coakley, 2004). These concepts were supported in the responses of participants within this study. The underrepresentation of women in sport and the male domination in sport was noted by each female participant and reflected briefly by few male participants. Specifically, female participants of this study expressed concerns of a lack of believability and being considered too emotional, dramatic, or not factual. Participant 4 described women as not being taken seriously, and that male domination and traditional social roles of women contribute to a lack of reputability.

Responses found within this study are concerning when considering the issue of sexual misconduct in sport. The phenomenon of sexual misconduct in sport is one that predominantly



impacts female participants. Male perpetrators comprise about 90 percent of all reported incidences of sexual abuse and harassment that occurs in athletics (Brackenridge, 1994; Taylor et al., 2019). Additionally, 25 percent of female athletes compared to one in nine males experience sexual harassment and abuse while participating in sport (Brackenridge, 1994). When contemplating the results of this study, it is potentially problematic that females lack comfortability in reporting to males and view themselves as a disadvantage due to their gender. With a lack of female representation in sport, this barrier can be extremely limiting. One can infer that as males are the predominant perpetrators and the field is male dominated, that incidents of sexual misconduct may be more underreported than expected as a result of comfortability in reporting. Not only does the lack of female representation impact reporting, but also directly links back to sexual misconduct education as one of the leading barriers to instructor discomfort in leading conversations within their classroom included faculties' positions as white male instructors (Taylor & Paule-Koba, 2020). This indicates that an increase in female representation in both administration and instruction could possibly serve as potential solutions to improving reporting and education.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

Female athletes are at a risk of being exposed to sexual violence and abuse in sport. The power discrepancies that exist between female athletes and male coaches and administration place these athletes in vulnerable and potentially compromising positions. Sport requires trust and closeness between an athlete and their coach to cultivate athletic success. When this is taken advantage of, there is a greater risk of becoming a victim. Effective education and training for those entering the sport field to become professionals is important to impeding sexual violence in sport. By studying and understanding the education students are receiving and the impact or lack thereof the education has on recent graduates, the preparedness that of those entering the sport field to combat these issues can be inferred. Current and future sport leaders should be educated and trained in a way that empowers them to create change and work to eradicate sexual harassment and abuse in sport. The protection of athletes is at the forefront of concern. Through education, future sport leaders will have the knowledge and resources to provide the best future for athletes. Presently, formal education and training is lacking, and the education provided is not comprehensive enough for a well-rounded understanding of how to prevent, identify, report, and create change surrounding sexual misconduct in sport. Gendered difference and male domination in sport continue to disadvantage female participants and power discrepancies act as a barrier to combatting sexual misconduct in sport.

#### **Study Limitations**

There are limitations to every study within research, and the potential for skewed results can be impacted by these limitations. This was carefully contemplated when considering methodologies for this research study. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions

were used to gather data because they are beneficial for providing flexibility amongst the interview process so the researcher can gain comprehensive knowledge of each participant's experience; however, the sensitive nature of sexual harassment and abuse in sport must be considered carefully. However, to combat this, as the researcher conducted the interviews of this study, they allowed the participant to take the lead and guided them through follow up questions and reflective listening. The researcher encouraged participants to share with her what they were comfortable with to reassure participants of their autonomy and demonstrate respect for their boundaries. The order of the interview and the content of the research questions are important to contemplate, especially with a more sensitive topic, as there is potential for participants to give careful responses that do not reflect the full truth of their experience due to discomfort (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By reassuring anonymity and allowing flexibility throughout the interview, participants were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences while flow was established by the researcher. Despite researcher efforts, it is important to consider the possibility of participants withholding certain experiences which impact their perception on a sensitive topic. In addition to sensitivity the segmented nature of coding analysis must be considered. By coding the responses from each interview, each portion of the data were segmented and analyzed without the context of each participant's full experience.

### **Future Recommendations**

Based on this study and previous literature, the researcher recommends that future research consider the readiness of future sport leaders to enter the field and address sexual misconduct. Few studies have considered the impact of sexual misconduct education and how well this education and training can be applied in real world settings specifically when identifying and properly reporting incidents of sexual misconduct. Furthermore, there is limited

research on different populations who may be impacted by a lack of education and training including coaches of youth, high school, and collegiate programs, as well as athletic administrators and parents of youth participants. Qualitative studies should be utilized to gain the experiences of students and graduates from similar programs across multiple institutions, as well as the other populations. The researcher also recommends that quantitative studies be performed which employ knowledge assessments to evaluate the current level of education different populations have in order to aid in identifying current and future sport leaders' gaps in knowledge.

Once these gaps are identified, curriculum should be put in place to diminish them. Taylor and Hardin (2017), Taylor et al. (2019), and Taylor & Paule-Koba (2020) demonstrate the lack of educational prevalence relative to sexual violence within sport management programs, and this study demonstrates the lack of readiness future sport leaders possess, so, changes should be made at the institutional level so sexual misconduct in sport can be properly addressed. Education should be incorporated in ways that specifically include curriculum pertaining to sexual misconduct in sport, how it occurs, how to identify it, and how to prevent it. In addition to curricular and educational changes, the researcher hopes that this research inspires increased female representation in leadership positions as both administrators and instructors, and increased accountability and understanding amongst current and future sport leaders.

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## Appendix A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Sexual Misconduct Against Female Athletes:  
Knowledge, Training, and Readiness to Act of Future Sport Leaders

#### I. DEMOGRAPHIC

##### Participant Background:

1. Basic Information (for example, age, gender, race, etc.)
2. Are you currently enrolled in M.S. Sport Management or M.S. Coaching Studies educational program at WVU?
  1. If yes, how long have you been enrolled in your program, and what is your projected graduation date?
  2. If no, what year did you graduate?
3. Please indicate which program of study you have or are currently pursuing:
  1. Sport Management
  2. Coaching Studies
4. Are you currently working in a sporting organization?
  1. If yes, where and what is the nature of your position?
5. What is your career goal/what position would you prefer to work in?
6. Overall, can you express your thoughts on sexual misconduct in sport? What do you know about this issue?

#### II. EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

7. How would you describe your ability to understand and identify sexual misconduct in sport?
8. In your classroom training, to what extent and what nature were sexual misconduct in sport discussed?

9. Do you feel prepared to report incidents of sexual misconduct?
10. Are you currently aware of the policies involved in reporting sexual misconduct at your institution?

### **III. REPORTING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN SPORT**

11. If you were to witness a situation that involved sexual misconduct, would you report it? In case not, what barriers may prevent you from doing so?
12. How would you describe your preparedness to report an incident of sexual misconduct?
  1. Have you reported sexual misconduct previously?
    - A. If yes, can you describe your confidence during the process of doing so and the outcome?
    - B. If no, if you were to encounter this situation, how would you react, and why?

### **IV. YOUR ROLE AND IMPACT**

13. Given your current position (graduate student/coach/ athletic administrator/etc.), how do you perceive your ability to create change surrounding sexual misconduct?
14. With a goal of becoming a (coach/athletic administrators/etc.), how do you think working in this role increases your ability to impact sexual misconduct in sport?

### **V. POWER CAPITAL AND GENDERED DIFFERENCES**

15. Do you believe your position in gender has an impact on your comfortability of reporting sexual misconduct?
16. When considering policies on sexual misconduct, who would you rely on within your organization to guide you through reporting and why?
  1. How would this impact your reporting if they were the suspected perpetrator?

**CLOSING QUESTION AND COMMENTS**

17. In what ways do you think your educational experience can/could have improve (d) your ability and confidence to report incidents of sexual harassmnet and abuse in sport?

**NOTE:** Questions 1 to 5 will be sent on an email after the invitation has been accepted by the participant. This will allow the researcher to customize and personalize some of the questions included in this protocol.

## Appendix B

### STUDY PARTICIPANTS

| Participant # | Student Status    | Program  | Graduation Year | Race                       | Age | Gender | Employee Status               |
|---------------|-------------------|--|-----------------|----------------------------|-----|--------|-------------------------------|
| 1             | Graduated         | Sport Management                                 | 2021            | White                      | 24  | F      | Employed                      |
| 2             | Current           | Sport Management                                 | 2024            | Asian                      | 22  | F      | Employed                      |
| 3             | Graduated         | Sport Management                                 | 2022            | White                      | 28  | M      | Employed                      |
| 4             | Graduated         | Sport Management                                 | 2022            | Black/African American     | 24  | F      | Intern                        |
| 5             | Current           | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2023            | Black/African American     | 28  | M      | Employed & Graduate Assistant |
| 6             | Graduated         | Sport Management                                 | 2022            | White                      | 24  | M      | Employed                      |
| 7             | Current           | Sport Management                                 | 2023            | Black/African American     | 24  | F      | Graduate Assistant            |
| 8             | Current           | Sport Management                                 | 2023            | White                      | 24  | M      | Employed                      |
| 9             | Current           | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2024            | White                      | 23  | F      | Graduate Assistant            |
| 10            | Graduated         | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2020            | White/International        | 41  | F      | Doctoral Student/Volunteer    |
| 11            | Current           | Sport Management                                 | 2023            | White                      | 24  | F      | Graduate Assistant            |
| 12            | Graduated/Current | Sport Management/Athletic Coaching and Education | 2022/2023       | White/International        | 28  | F      | Graduate Assistant            |
| 13            | Current           | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2023            | Black/African American     | 22  | F      | Student-Athlete               |
| 14            | Graduated         | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2020            | White                      | 26  | M      | Employed                      |
| 15            | Graduated         | Athletic Coaching and Education                  | 2020            | Indian/Asian/International | 30  | F      | Employed                      |

## Appendix C

### INVITATION LETTER



Dear Prospective Participant,

This letter is a request for you to participate in a research project to investigate sexual harassment education and training and the readiness of future sport leaders to report and uphold policies relative to the sexual harassment against female athletes. This project is being conducted by Mackenzie Luikart, BS in the College of Applied Human Sciences at WVU under the supervision of Dr. Gonzalo Bravo, an associate professor in the College of Applied Human Sciences, to fulfill requirements for a master's degree in Sport Management.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be conducted and recorded via zoom on a day and time that best suit your schedule. Your participation in this project will take approximately 45 minutes. To participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older, and either currently enrolled in or recently graduated (2017-2022) from the M.S Sport Management or M.S. Coaching Studies program.

Your participation in this project will be kept anonymous and confidential as legally possible. All data will be reported in the aggregate. You will not be asked any questions that could lead back to your identity as a participant. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer, and you may stop participating at any time. The West Virginia University Institutional Review Board's acknowledgment of this project is on file with the WVU Office of Human Research Protections.

Please indicate below (mark with an X) if you will be interested to participate in this interview.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me by email at Dr. Gonzalo Bravo at [gonzalo.bravo@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:gonzalo.bravo@mail.wvu.edu) Additionally, you can contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protections at 304-293-7073.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could help us better understand the effectiveness of education surrounding sexual abuse in sport. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Gonzalo Bravo, PhD**  
Principal Investigator  
EMAIL: [gonzalo.bravo@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:gonzalo.bravo@mail.wvu.edu) (304)-293-0862

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