

'HE OWNED ME BASICALLY . . .'

Women's Experience of Sexual Abuse in Sport

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Abstract Many women have, at some time, been the subject of sexual harassment or abuse in their working lives. This paper explains how similar experiences also occur in sport and why they have particularly devastating consequences for girls and women. Sexual harassment and abuse arise from the culture of sport and from the opportunities for exploitation of power and authority which this affords coaches. Results from studies of personal accounts of abuse by former women athletes are presented and used to test various explanatory theories of abuse.

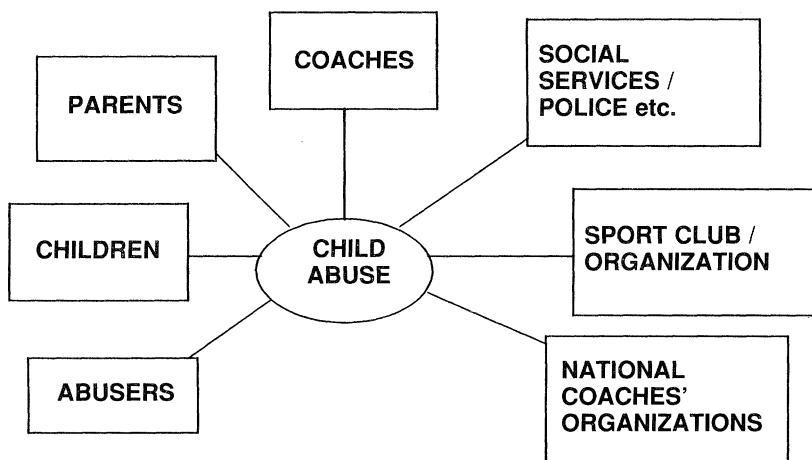
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The nineteenth century origins of many voluntary sports organizations left a legacy of conservatism, causing sport to be viewed as a site of political neutrality. Consequently, many sporting organizations have been slow to embrace the principles of equal rights which are enshrined in other public organizations. Although many previously subordinate groups have attained formal access to equality and equity in sport, there are still those who deny that inequalities and inequities even exist.

This naiveté has not only helped to conceal some of the more disturbing excesses within sport, including drug abuse and child sexual abuse, but might be argued to have allowed them to flourish. As a social institution generated through society and reflective of it, it is inevitable that sport will demonstrate the same social problems as are found elsewhere. Indeed, it could even be argued that sport is a peculiarly active site of social exploitation *because* of its laissez faire attitude to inequality. Reforms to bring about equality for women and children in sport have been slower than in other social institutions, with the topic only now becoming visible because of external social and political pressures.

Despite the tendency of the media to individualize the problem, many individuals and agencies have a stake in denying the existence of or turning a blind eye to sexual abuse. A systems approach to sexual abuse is important if we are to address the cultural and structural changes needed to prevent it. This requires *all* stakeholders to recognize that they have responsibilities within the system and to overcome their tendency to deny the reality of the issue (see Figure 1).

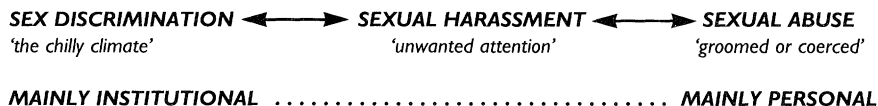
Abusers may be coaches, instructors, chaperones, parent-helpers, bus drivers, other athletes or anyone with access to young girls. Research so far has focused

Figure 1: Stakeholders in the Sexual Abuse System in Sport

on coaches as abusers simply because we have knowledge about abusive coaches and because various sporting organizations are trying to address the issue. Although 'abuse' may include emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect, this paper addresses only sexual abuse. The term 'he' is used to describe the perpetrators of abuse since men are the vast majority of abusers. The focus of the paper is on the female victim and the consequences of abuse for women and girls since they appear to be greatly overrepresented in official statistics from social work (Morrison et al., 1994).

Two basic premises underpin my work in this field: first, that sexual contact between an adult and a child is always wrong, and secondly, that the abuser is always responsible for his actions. While legal definitions of 'child' vary from country to country, I do not draw a distinction between child and adult, because I regard abuse as abuse, regardless of the age of the victim and abuser. However, many social work studies do define a five-year age gap between perpetrator and victim for the incident to be defined as abuse (Finkelhor and Williams, 1988), and many observers might regard abuse of children as more problematic than abuse of women because of the structural dependence of the child on the adult.

Both sexual harassment and sexual abuse may be construed as stages along a continuum of sexual violence (see Figure 2). *Sexual discrimination* involves various institutionalized oppressions (e.g. differential pay structures, unfair working practices or conditions). *Sexual harassment*, a combination of personal and institutional issues, may include:

Figure 2: The Sexual Discrimination/Abuse Continuum

- written or verbal abuse or threats
- sexually oriented comments
- jokes, lewd comments or sexual innuendoes
- taunts about body, dress, marital status or sexuality
- ridiculing of performance
- sexual or homophobic graffiti
- practical jokes based on sex
- intimidating sexual remarks, propositions, invitations or familiarity
- domination of meetings, play space or equipment
- condescending or patronizing behaviour undermining self-respect or performance
- physical contact, fondling, pinching or kissing
- vandalism on the basis of sex
- offensive phone calls or photos
- bullying based on sex . . .

. . . and may be defined simply as '*invasion without consent*', where invasion on the basis of sex is psychological, physical or both. *Sexual abuse* involves:

- exchange of reward or privilege for sexual favours
- rape
- anal or vaginal penetration by penis, fingers or objects
- forced sexual activity
- sexual assault
- physical/sexual violence
- groping
- indecent exposure
- incest.

In much of the literature the line dividing harassment and abuse is unclear. Within this research, abuse is considered to have arisen when the behaviour has been 'groomed' or coerced. (The term 'grooming' is used in social work research literature to describe the systematic preparation, enticement and entrapment of the individual targeted for abuse.) In other words, it *appears* to be wanted, unlike sexual harassment, which is definitely *unwanted*.

One of the many difficulties facing researchers is that sport officials are usually reluctant to admit that sexual abuse might occur in their organizations. Individual coaches and athletes, too, are usually hesitant about speaking out on this issue. There are several reasons why people in sport may be frightened to acknowledge that sexual abuse occurs (Brackenridge, 1994b). These include:

- sport has traditionally been seen as morally good;
- children and players rather than adults and coaches have been urged to 'play fair';
- voluntary sport organizations are often very apolitical; or
- embarrassment and fear of confronting sexuality and social taboos.

Sexual abuse, then, while not recognized through any universal definition, is manifested through a wide range of intrusive behaviours, which violate the person on a sexual basis and is characterized by a subtly coercive process known as grooming.

Researching Sexual Abuse in Sport

Sexual harassment has become a focus for researchers interested in gender relations in the *workplace* (Cassell and Symon, 1994; Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Hearn et al., 1989; Wise and Stanley, 1987) and there are now many useful codes and models of good practice for the identification and treatment of workplace sexual harassment. Sexual abuse, on the other hand, has been intensively researched within the *family*, but *extra-familial* abuse, including that occurring in voluntary sport and recreation organizations, remains under-researched.

In the absence of statistical data from sport, the best we can do is to borrow from these other studies and make some assumptions about the prevalence and incidence of sexual harassment and abuse. With respect to sexual abuse, for example, there are widely differing results depending on the particular research design, sampling and analysis procedures adopted, but there seems to be broad consensus that between one in four girls and one in nine boys has experienced sexual abuse before they reach mid-teenage years (Fisher, 1994). If these figures are accepted then it must also be accepted that a large proportion of participants in sport go through the traumatic experience of sexual abuse before their introduction to sport, and that sexual abuse within sport might simply be building upon existing vulnerabilities established in the family. At this point it is simply not known what the links are, if any, between familial and extra-familial sexual abuse. However, as one research participant explained, the sports club or team can become a *surrogate family* for the female athlete, making sexual abuse by her coach *virtual incest*:

I consider it incest — that's what this is all about. Because the time spent, the demands, the friendship, the opportunity . . . they are giving you something no-one else can. They're brother, uncle, father . . . the child feels safe and will do anything. That's why it's incest. (Survivor)¹

Research into sexual abuse in sport began relatively recently, with isolated studies of coach misdemeanours in the USA (Burton Nelson, 1994; Crosset, 1986), Canada (Kirby, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986, 1992a, 1992b), UK (Brackenridge, 1987, 1991, 1994a, 1994b; Yorganci, 1993) and Germany (Palzkill, 1994). Lenskyj's work, in particular, has helped to build a theoretical analysis of harassment and abuse from a feminist perspective, and she and most of the other authors on this subject have been keen to develop practical guidance on abuse prevention for sports organizations and coaches. In the only national study of its type, Kirby and Greaves (1996) investigated sexual harassment and abuse among former and current Canadian Olympians and found that over 8% of respondents had experienced 'forced sexual intercourse' with what the researchers termed an

'authority figure' in their sport. Apart from this single study, knowledge of the prevalence and incidence of sexual abuse in sport remains elusive. In a comparatively small random survey, Yorganci (1993) found evidence of varying degrees of harassment and abuse by both coaches and male peer athletes, including 'particular influences' by coaches over diet/weight, sleep, dress, hair-styles, social life/parties and boyfriends/sex life. She also found that more behaviours which are *objectively defined* as harassment originated from male peer athletes than from coaches and that more of these experiences were *subjectively perceived* as harassment. In the absence of nationally-based sport-specific data from Britain it was necessary to analyse as much literature as possible from cognate fields such as social work and sociology before researching the issue of sexual abuse in sport. This search provided some theoretical perspectives with which to make sense of the empirical data collected from athletes, parents and coaches.

It is difficult to gather statistics on the subject of sexual abuse since very few cases have been documented and members of athlete populations are, as already explained, reluctant to participate in research. The most serious limitation to quantitative work is the sensitive nature of the topic. It seemed both ethical and logical to start my research with qualitative data, using the snowball technique to find individuals who were willing to share their accounts with me and who put me in touch with others who had similar experiences to relate. There is, however, an obvious need for the collection and analysis of more widespread, quantitative data, such as those presented by Kirby and Greaves (1996) before cross-national and cross-sport comparisons can be made.

A full account of both the methodology adopted in this research and the many ethical sensitivities it presents appear in Brackenridge (1996a). Briefly, contact with potential interviewees arose from the screening of a national BBC television documentary programme in 1993. A telephone helpline, with fifteen lines, was made available for viewers for three hours after the programme ended. Eighty-nine people telephoned, some who had been abused in sport, others who had been abused in different contexts, and some parents and friends of victims. All were asked if they would agree to be interviewed and, through this mechanism, a handful of inductive interviews was secured. These, when compared with information from publicly known cases from biographies and other sources, have now provided data totalling almost 90 accounts. The catalogue of cases from the public domain includes data of variable quality and content and is necessarily neither systematic nor comprehensive, compiled from both personal communication (letters, telephone calls, face-to-face conversations) and text sources (Burton Nelson, 1991, 1994; Mewshaw, 1994; Ryan, 1995). Such is the difficulty of gathering information in this very sensitive field that 'normal' social science conventions have to be applied with flexibility. While it might be argued that this renders the validity of the material problematic, it can also be argued that, used with care, such flexibility adds to the contextual richness. The rest of the paper addresses various explanations of sexual abuse in sport, drawing on the personal accounts of eleven women given in the unstructured interviews and the contextual data from my catalogue of additional public domain cases.

Explaining Sexual Abuse in Sport

In sport, the coach is afforded the respect of authority and is in a position of power over athletes (who want skill, improvement and selection), parents (who want success for themselves and their daughters) and administrators (who need success in the sport for it to flourish and for their empires to survive). The significance of the power of the coach cannot be underestimated and can be likened to that of the priest who is also vested with authority (of God) and whose absolute knowledge is not questioned or challenged. Where the athlete is a girl, she is also structurally less powerful than the adult (usually male) coach in our society. In sexual abuse, the coach exploits his power. This power is sustained because he has the skills and abilities to develop, enhance and maintain success and a strong reputation for the sport. To this extent, then, the coach has a powerful grip over the organization which employs him. This is demonstrated in several of the accounts collected from athletes who claimed that their organization knew of the coach's behaviour but refused to do anything about it since they needed him to produce winning results:

Everyone in (sport) is concerned about X . . . (Survivor)

I tried to think of someone [to report him to] but couldn't — they'd all be frightened to do anything in case they needed him in the future. (Survivor)

Because he coaches the best people in the country no-one questions him. (Survivor)

She reported the abuse but the (sport organization) didn't know how to deal with it. (Survivor)

In such a scenario, the athlete becomes an expendable commodity and may therefore prefer to remain silent rather than risk exclusion from the sport.

The (organization) closed ranks to support him. . . . The upshot was that Susan was dropped . . . he carried on coaching with a female chaperone. (Parent of survivor)

The similarity in the experiences of these athletes is striking and suggests that sexually abusive relations in sport are perpetuated because of widespread fear of challenging a powerful coach. But is it possible to predict who will be an abusing coach by analysing the experiences of female survivors? In attempting to answer this question, sport researchers should learn from the lessons of social work research on perpetrator profiles and should attend to Finkelhor's (1984) and Wolf's (1984) models of abuse, both of which are widely used and regarded (see Figures 3 and 4).

Finkelhor posits four preconditions for sexual abuse: *motivation to sexually abuse*; *overcoming internal inhibitions*; *overcoming external inhibitions*; and *overcoming the resistance of the girl/woman*. This is a useful model because it attempts to integrate the personal and the social or external factors in sexual abuse. It also shows us clearly that, for abuse to occur, the abuser must demonstrate great persistence in overcoming the various inhibitors he faces. Attempts to prevent abuse in sport, therefore, should focus on those external inhibitors and education of the child. It is known that paedophilia is never a one-off act and is

Figure 3: Finkelhor’s Four Preconditions of Sexual Abuse

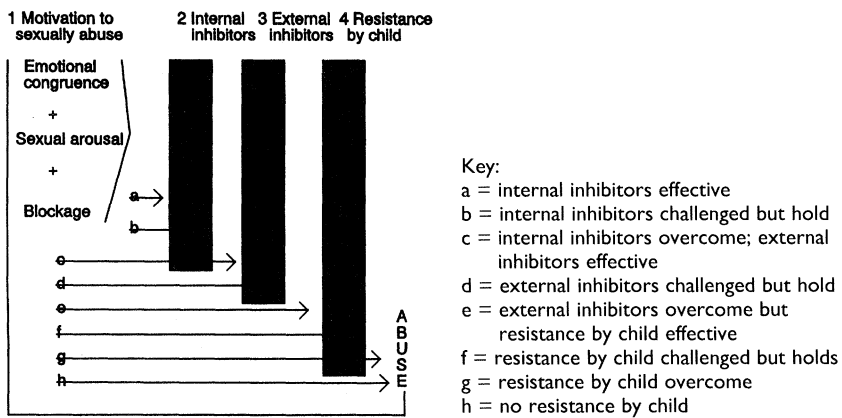
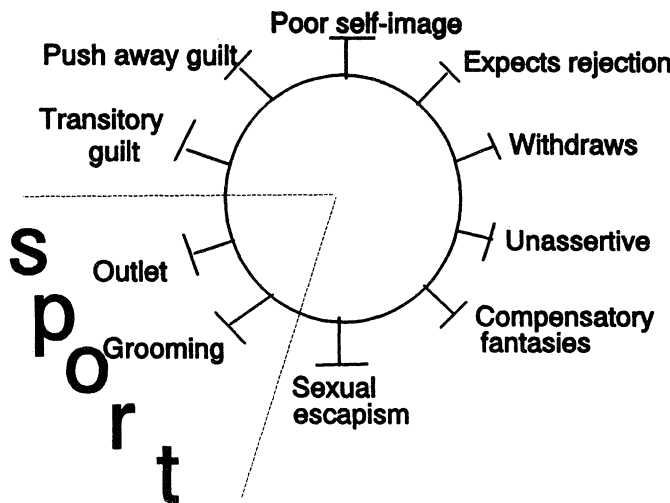


Figure 4: Wolf’s Cycle of Offending adapted to Show the Area of Responsibility of Sport



Source: Fisher, D. (1994) in T. Morrison et al.

highly resistant to rehabilitation (Clark, 1996) so, in sport, all that can be done is to strengthen the barriers against such abuses.

The second model, Wolf’s ‘Cycle of Offending’, also helps to identify areas of prevention which sportspeople may enhance and areas which they have little hope of addressing. Wolf (1984) suggests that sexual offending is addictive behaviour in the same way as that of alcohol or drug use. His sequence begins with negative self-image, expectations of rejection, withdrawal and then the use of sexual fantasies to give the offender the illusion of control. The offender’s behaviour then moves on to establishing situations where sexual abuse might

occur. Grooming of victims may take time — for it must be done in ways that minimize the risk of detection.

Sexually abusive coaches spend a long time, sometimes months or even years, grooming their athletes. This process is a crucial precursor to sexual approaches and involves building trust, gradually pushing back the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and slowly violating more and more personal space through verbal familiarity, emotional blackmail and physical touching. Athletes who recognize and reject these advances may leave the sport for ever or simply be spurned by the coach who turns elsewhere for vulnerable prey. Athletes who submit, whether consciously or not, find themselves trapped and often thereafter unable to resist the demands of the coach.

There were ways of . . . testing yes to see whether basically they . . . passed information on, or whether . . . you could rely on them . . . whether they were able to keep secrets . . .
(Convicted former coach, BBC, 1993)

One reason for the slow and careful grooming process is that the coach cannot afford to be rejected or lose his position of power, so must continue his abusive behaviour when he is sure that he will receive cooperation. The child or woman athlete who rejects the advances of a coach, or who has been cast to one side by him, is in a particularly dangerous position, since she knows his secret and could harm his career by speaking out. The most successful abusers are those who can keep their behaviour clandestine and/or have established a strong alibi of community respect.

I thought 'Wow' when he said he'd coach me. . . . You don't ask him to coach you, he selects you. You are somebody if you're coached by him [. . .] because he coaches the best people in the country no-one questions him. (Survivor)

General explanations of sexual abuse, taken from non-sport disciplines, are a very useful starting point in helping to explain such behaviour within sport. However, sport-specific explanations are needed which will also account for the enormous pressure *not* to leave or drop out faced by the highly talented athlete.

The Consequences of Sexual Abuse

The consequences of abuse are very severe indeed for the individual woman being victimized: social embarrassment, emotional turmoil, psychological scars, loss of self-esteem and negative impacts on family, friends and the sport. It is not possible to know how many young women have left their sport because of such treatment but it is clear that only the strongest survive. Certainly, only the survivors have the courage to come forward for interviews, which means that their experiences and their coping strategies may differ from those who have simply 'disappeared'. Many of those who have related their experiences to me have spoken of their own naiveté at the time of the abuse, their inability to exert control over their own destinies and their complete submissiveness to the sexual demands of the coach:

... he did rape me but I didn't know it was happening ... I was totally in love ... (Survivor)

I was obsessed with him ... it wasn't rape it was seduction ... it was my fault. (Survivor)

... by then I was absolutely dependent upon him — he was God — without listening to myself. From 15–19 he owned me basically. (Survivor)

This was the bloke I'd trusted ... he knew everything about me — more than my parents. (Survivor)

With hindsight, and often after long years of therapy, these same women have come to recognize the coach for what he was and have also come to terms with their own role in the situation. Typically, they feel ambivalence about the abusive coach and some express guilt as they feel *they* may have hurt *him*. This reluctance to blame the coach is an indicator of the effectiveness of the grooming process and perhaps also a reflection of the genuine affection which the athlete has built up for the coach. While it might be argued that the coach uses calculated moments of weakness to exploit the athlete's affection for him, it is also too simplistic to suggest that athletes are entirely malleable. Indeed, one of the great contradictions of sexual abuse in sport is that the abused athlete sometimes feels lasting closeness to, or even love for, her abuser.

Some survivors have returned to confront their coaches, to try and reach an understanding about why the abuse happened and to confirm that they now control their own lives. This strategy has not always been successful as several athletes report having succumbed a second time or having ended up forgiving the coach and blaming themselves:

The reason I went back to him was to make it all right ... The biggest mistake I ever made was to forgive him — because it all started again. (Survivor)

Rodgers (1996), a clinical therapist, reports the following feelings of abuse victims:

- suspicious, unable to trust others
- afraid, unable to stand up for own opinions
- blames self for everything bad that happens
- feels guilty and ashamed even when there is no reason
- withdraws, does not want to spend time with others
- feels 'different' from others
- feels hurt by others a lot of the time
- lonely, bored and empty inside
- suicidal
- feels like a perfectionist
- constantly feels sorry for self
- feels angry all the time
- closes off feelings, unable to tolerate emotional pain
- not caring about appearance
- feels out of control of life
- depressed and sad
- afraid of change

- feels trapped, like nobody understands
- feels stupid, less capable than others
- ashamed of sexual feelings.

Every time I compete he's there and he criticises me . . . he's just pulling me down. [. . .] He writes me letters saying that I've got no ability . . . because he still wants to manipulate me . . . but I'm the one that got away. (Survivor)

As with this athlete, 'the one that got away' can find herself victimized for months or years afterwards.

Research into domestic violence offers sport a rich source of material on abusive relationships which can help us to understand something of the interpersonal dynamics of abuse between coaches and athletes. For example, work by Kelly (1988) and Dobash and Dobash (1992) suggests that the victim of abuse may well reposition herself repeatedly in abusive situations and that she frequently suffers low self-esteem. This is certainly a feature of some of the testimonies in this research, where women reported having endured abusive relationships with their coaches for many years, sometimes even after they had recognized the nature of what was happening to them. The cycle of dependency, sexual attention, guilt and further dependency is very hard to break. In the case of very talented athletes, personal confidence is a prerequisite for performance success, so it is all the more surprising that top performers, who might be expected to have high levels of confidence, find themselves subjected to long-term sexual abuse by their coaches. One explanation for this might be that the higher the athlete has gone in a sport, the harder she will fall if she fails: she is constantly on a knife edge in terms of both her *physical* capability, which can be destroyed at any time by illness or injury, and her *psychological* capability, which can be severely damaged by the withdrawal of attention of the coach and/or by his wilful undermining of her confidence. In other words, she needs the coach to maintain her confident edge.

A recent case in Britain illustrates this well. An athlete who had developed a very close bond with her coach over many months eventually broke away from him when she refused to accept his sexual advances. She continued in the sport under the instruction of another coach but the original coach would reappear every time she competed, standing in her line of vision and using binoculars to stare at her. Even though she had left him physically and technically, she was still badly affected by these psychological invasions which undermined her confidence, attention and performance. A talented athlete might also choose to trade off sexual abuse against her desire to succeed, especially where the coach is deemed to be 'the best'. Men responsible for such crimes cope in various ways. Rodgers (1996, adaptations in brackets) lists these as:

Denial	('It didn't happen')
Minimization	('It was only a bit of fun')
Blaming the victim	('She was asking for it')
Discrediting the victim	('You can't believe someone like her')

All these rationalizations have been proposed in the accounts collected about abusive male coaches during this research. This list helps us to see how *abusers* make sense of their own behaviour. However, in order to develop risk minimization work with *sport organizations*, research needs to move beyond analysis of the experiential aspects of sexual abuse towards predictive models of sexually abusive coach–athlete relations.

Predicting Sexual Abuse

The individual accounts of sexual abuse by women athletes have been used to build an emerging picture of risk factors under the headings coach, athlete and sport variables (see Table 1). All of these require further research but there are already interesting links with research findings elsewhere. For example, it seems that there is scope for further analysis of the possible association between disordered eating and sexual abuse. A number of sports doctors working with United States College teams (American College of Sport Medicine Women's Task Force, 1994) have informed me that athletes presenting in their clinics with eating disorders (anorexia or bulimia) reported having been sexually abused at some time. My own athlete case histories have reinforced this possible link, although it is too early to say whether sexual abuse in the family or in sport may be a causal factor here. It may also be the case that the athlete, who is focused on the body and on particular eating regimes for her sport, uses disordered eating as a mechanism for gaining control over, or rebelling against, sexual abuse.

The nature of a particular sport itself — its rules and techniques — has been suggested as one possible contributory factor in sexual abuse. For example, are athletes in sports whose rules or techniques require minimal clothing and a lot of physical touching more susceptible to abuse? Are girls in individual sports or those which involve peaking at a very young age more likely to become victims of abuse? Since most testimonies have arisen from purposive samples no reliance can yet be placed in the picture of sports represented, but there is some suggestion from the pattern of individual responses that clusters of risk factors might give us some warning signs (see Table 1). For example, sports in which very young girls operate under intense rivalry for attention or selection, where training or competition require long hours away from home, *may* be more at risk. It would be unwise, however, to suggest that any single sport-related factor is *the* trigger for abusive behaviour. It is more likely that abuse arises from a combination of factors to do with the coach, the athlete *and* the sport, and that a number of filters operate to inhibit abusive behaviour. The stronger the filters, the less likely it will be that abuse can occur, *however* persistent the coach might be. A great deal more work needs to be done on this issue before any confidence can be based in claims about 'risky' sport situations.

The analysis of risk factors in this research suggests that sexual abusers in sport are well qualified at their job, intelligent, patient and, unlike many abusers in other contexts (Fisher, 1994), have good interpersonal skills and a positive self-image. Indeed, it became apparent during the analysis that most of the abusing male coaches reported to me did *not* fit Wolf's Cycle of Offending but

Table 1 Risk Factors for Sexual Abuse in Sport

Coach variables	Athlete variables	Sport variables
• sex (<i>male</i>) • age (<i>older</i>) • size/physique (<i>larger/stronger</i>) • accredited qualifications (<i>good</i>) • rank/reputation (<i>high</i>) • previous record of sexual abuse (<i>unknown/ignored</i>) • trust of parents (<i>strong</i>) • standing in the sport/club/community (<i>high</i>) • chances to be alone with athletes in training, at home, at competitions and away on trips (<i>frequent</i>) • commitment to sport/national/sport-specific codes of ethics and conduct (<i>weak</i>) • use of car to transport athletes (<i>frequent</i>)	• sex (<i>female</i>) • age(<i>younger</i>) • size/physique (<i>smaller/weaker</i>) • rank/status (<i>potentially high</i>) • history of sexual abuse (<i>unknown/none</i>) • level of awareness of sexual abuse (<i>low</i>) • self-esteem (<i>low</i>) • medical problems especially disordered eating (<i>medium/high</i>) • relationship with parents (<i>weak</i>) • education and training on sexual abuse and abuse (<i>none</i>) • devotion to the coach (<i>complete</i>)	• amount of physical handling required for coaching • individual/team sport • location of training and comps • opportunity for trips away • dress requirements • employment/recruitment controls (<i>weak/none</i>) • regular evaluation, including athlete screening and cross referencing to medical data • use of national and sport-specific codes of ethics • existence of athlete and parent contracts (<i>none</i>) • climate for debating sexual abuse (<i>poor/non-existent</i>) • coaches association codes of ethics/conduct (<i>weak/none</i>)

Note: Comments in brackets indicate emerging trends from interview data; where no bracketed comment is made, further research is required.

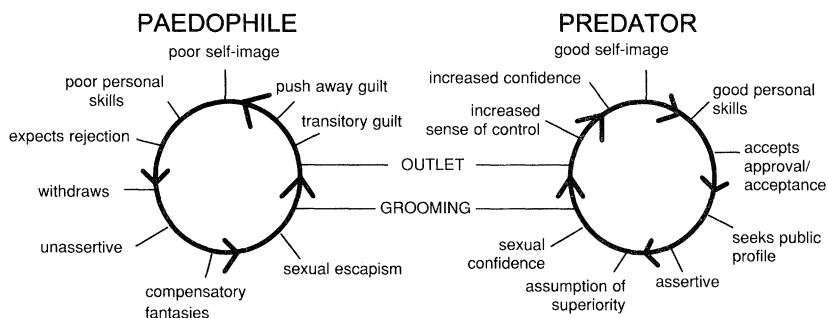
appeared to follow a completely different path. Their cycle, or profile, which is labelled the 'Predator', is a mirror image of the paedophile profile, and links with the paedophilia at two stages only — grooming and outlet (see Figure 5). In the case of the predator, rather than feeling temporary guilt and further loss of confidence from perpetrating the abuse, the incident reinforces feelings of superiority and control, fuelling the assertive behaviour which starts the cycle all over again.

The logic of the abusive situation is not reducible to simple unethical behaviour for personal gain. As previously discussed, sexual abuse can only occur if the athlete 'consents' to it. The sexually abusive coach, therefore, depends upon maintaining control over his athletes in order to groom them and secure their cooperation through this micro-cosmic hegemony.

Conclusions

Cultural feminists such as Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) and Ann Hall (1987, 1996) have called for a transformation in sport whereby changes to institutional

Figure 5: Two Cycles of Offending: The Paedophile (based on Wolf, 1984) and the Predator (Brackenridge, 1996b)



practices and to the cultural atmosphere of sport will make it a safer, less socially divisive and more friendly place for all people. An important part of this transformation will be the rejection of autocratic leadership styles, which set coaches on false pedestals and optimize the potential for athlete abuse, in favour of styles of empowerment which minimize the chances of abuse to athletes. However, the transformative project is a long-term one since many sport organizations have yet to come to terms with simple liberal agendas and concepts like equality, let alone grapple with the implications of sharing power between men and women, adults and children, coaches and athletes.

Ten, five, even three years ago it was very difficult to demonstrate to sport organizations that sexual abuse occurred in sport. There is now sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the problem is not just a moral panic. It can no longer be ignored. The majority of victims of sexual abuse are female, which means that we are either damaging or losing talented athletes from our sports at an unknown rate. Despite common exhortations in sport to 'put the athlete first' there is great pressure on the coach to push for performance enhancement, especially where results are at stake. It should be accepted that the athlete has a life not only *after* sport but also *during* sport and that, therefore, her development should always come first. Sexual abuse thus sits among a range of ethical issues in sport (including drug abuse, fraud and over-training) which are sidelined in favour of results.

No attempt has been made here to analyse the demographic characteristics of those interviewed for a variety of reasons: the number of cases was very small; the sample was purposive; the accounts varied in length, complexity and themes covered; and the interviews were unstructured and inductive. While this approach inevitably begs questions about the variation in experiences *between* women of different ages, classes, ethnic identities and sexuality there are, as yet, insufficient data to explore these questions meaningfully. Previous research has shown repeatedly that personal and social variables are *not* related to sexual abuse incidence or prevalence rates (Finkelhor, 1984; La Fontaine, 1990), but this has not been demonstrated in the specific context of sport. In addition, because of the particular significance of sexuality in sport, important questions remain about victim sexuality and experiences of homophobic harassment and abuse among female athletes (Lenskyj, 1992a).

Table 2 Representation of Current State of Research Knowledge about Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Coach/Athlete Relationships in Sport

		Coach (Perpetrator)	
		Male	Female
Athlete (Victim)	Male	Very few cases, some paedophile, but almost no cases recorded with adults	Very few women coaches or recorded cases
	Female	Almost all recorded cases including many paedophile and predator	No systematic research but anecdotal evidence

Most published research on sexual abuse in sport has been about male coach harassment/abuse of female athletes although clearly female abusers, peer-abusers and athlete-to-coach abusers should also be investigated (see Table 2). At present far more men hold coaching positions than women and therefore they form the majority of reported abusers. Only one female British coach has been arrested for an abuse offence and this case has not yet resulted in formal criminal charges (*The Guardian*, 1996). Notwithstanding the shadow this casts upon male coaches, sexual abuse in sport, then, is mainly a problem for women, perpetrated by men.

This paper has attempted to show that there are dangers in suggesting that sexual abuse is based solely on behavioural factors. Situational contingencies are also very important; for example, opportunities to be alone with girl athletes. This is why some sexual abuse prevention programmes are based on making more open the closed nature of coach/athlete relationships in order to assist with the maintenance of safe interpersonal boundaries. We do not yet know precisely what contingencies are more or less risky for female athletes but can speculate that combinations of particular personal *and* situational factors (see Table 1) should be looked at rather than searching for any single causal factor.

Future research in this field could develop in any number of directions — legal, sociological, therapeutic or policy-oriented to name but a few. The personal and social variables associated with athletes and coaches in abusive relationships clearly require further investigation, and the validity of the risk factors presented in this paper must be tested on a wider basis through carefully designed quantitative techniques. Only when widespread quantitative data are available to reinforce the findings of qualitative research will the case for policy development be accepted. Facing up to the reality of sexual abuse in sport is a daunting prospect for teachers, leaders, administrators and coaches. However, they must all sooner or later recognize that harassment and abuse of women and girls by men in sport are unacceptable behaviours, which not only violate the trust placed in them by athletes, parents and society, but also undermine the respect that society has for their role.

Note

1. Whereas the term 'victim' is used in the body of this paper, it is eschewed when citing quotations from interviews in favour of the term 'survivor'. This is in order to denote the positive process of recovery which characterizes those who have come forward to be interviewed. However, it is important to note that victim/survivor statuses are not fixed, since psychological recovery is neither linear nor necessarily progressive.

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