

## Preventing sexual harassment in sport - a need for transforming coaching education?

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During the last 10-15 years, studies have shown that many girls and women have experienced sexual harassment and abuse in sport (Brackenridge & Fasting 2002). It is difficult to state how large the problem is, but newspapers in many countries often seem to report on cases where female athletes have been sexually exploited by their coaches. This is illustrated by a study from Norway among all the elite level female athletes that found that 29 % had experienced sexual harassment from someone in sport. I agree with Celia Brackenridge when she states that sexual exploitation probably is the biggest problem confronting sport today. In an interview with reference to her own country, England, she says that "everyone talks about the perils of doping, but if there were 100 drugs cases under investigation in football, or 60 in swimming, or 40 in tennis there would be uproar. Yet that's the scale of the problem with sex abuse today." (Internet)

Both structural and cultural inequalities can act as precursors to sexual harassment in sport. In our Norwegian study, we found that the characteristics of the harassed athletes' sporting milieu could be categorized into these two groups. Structural inequalities were that the sports were dominated by males, often a small environment combined with a powerful coach. Cultural inequalities turned out to be the heterosexual culture, particularly in the forms of: sexist language, the enculturation of the athletes into this culture, the use of alcohol, and the message signaling that 'women don't belong in the sport' (Fasting et al 2002). These results were mirrored in the harassed athletes' description of their own coaches. Our analysis revealed that their coaches could be grouped into the following three types: 1) 'The flirting, charming coach', characterized by always flirting, joking, trying to touch, etc. 2; 'The seductive coach', characterized by "trying to hit on everyone" and 3) 'The authoritarian coach', characterized by having a degrading, almost negative, view of women in general: The 'flirting, charming coach' was characterized by always flirting, joking, trying to touch, etc. An example Lisbeth said that her coach often for fun tried to 'fight or wrestle with them' and pinched them to check if they had put on weight. The 'seductive coach' went further and was

characterized by trying to "hit on everyone", as Ingrid said "I think he had as a goal to get everyone into bed". According to the athletes the `authoritarian coach' was, in addition to being powerful and using his power, also characterized by having psychological/psychic problems and often had, in addition, a degrading, almost negative view of women in general. "With him it is that he has this opinion about women that they should keep silent and do what they are told. That's it", said Kristin. Some athletes were even given the feeling that women should not participate and compete in their sport.

The European Parliament Resolution on Women and Sport adopted last year has a paragraph that reads as follows:

Urges Member States and Sport Federations to adopt measures for the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment and abuse in sport by enforcing the legislation on sexual harassment at work, to inform athletes and their parents of the risk of abuse and the means of legal action available to them, to provide sports organisations' staff with specific training and to ensure that criminal and disciplinary provisions are applied.(§ 40)

Over the last few years some countries have also done a lot to prevent sexual harassment and abuse from occurring in sport, particularly, UK, Australia, New Zealand ,Canada, USA and the Netherlands. A number of codes of conduct have been developed by sport and political organizations. On request from the Council of Europe's Sport Division a few years ago, Celia Brackenridge and I analyzed more than 100 codes, policies, and other materials relating to ethical practice in sport and leisure. The content analysis of the different national codes of conduct for coaches revealed many common areas, which were not sport specific. These central themes were:

- issues of responsibility of the coach
- issues concerning intimate relationships
- private life
- coach/parent relationship (cooperation with parents)
- venues and meeting places (being alone with an athlete)
- the language of the coach
- touching

As an example I will just quote a few statements from New Zealand. In the Hillary Commission's Code of Ethics for Coaches it states that: "You should:

- know that you have considerable power over athletes and you should not abuse it

- consider how your personal style is seen by those you coach
- be aware that unnecessary touching may offend
- be careful about which part of the athlete's body you touch
- be aware that what an athlete is wearing may influence how she/he feels about being touched
- use appropriate language and behaviour
- not ask an athlete out on a date
- discourage an athletes from attempting to start an intimate relationship

It is often hypothesized that sexual harassment is not about sexuality, but about power. The classic definition of power as 'power over' or 'power as property' is often associated with structural inequalities, because the power exists either within an institution (sport) or within an individual (coach). Structural conceptions of power imply a hierarchy, in that there are the powerful (male coaches) and the powerless (female athletes). In relation to leadership and coaching it seems that it is particularly this dogmatic style of authoritarian leadership, that the athletes often are uncritical and dedicated too, which have facilitated optimum conditions for sexual exploitation in sport (Brackenridge 2001). This coaching style and the behaviour which is imbedded in it reflect sport as a masculine domain, generated through the generated institution of sport.

So what can we do to change this situation, what can be done so that sport becomes a safer environment for girls and women? How do we change this culture? It should also be mentioned that in most cases, particularly in top level sport the female athletes are coached by men. Just to give you a few examples from major events: At the 2002 world championships in women's volleyball in Germany, in which 24 teams participated, all head coaches were men. The situation is similar in international handball. At the European women's handball championships, held in Denmark in 2002, 15 teams were coached by men while only one team had a female coach. And looking at the last soccer world championship in the USA - 4 of the 16 teams had female coaches.

Would it help to bring in more female coaches? Would this contribute to a change in the culture of sport and also in the culture of coaching? Since most abusers are men, one could anticipate that more female coaches in the world of sport would reduce the risk of being harassed. But that is not sure, because we also know that athletes have been harassed by

female coaches. This may be related to the fact that the women have been educated in the same way as many of their male colleagues and accordingly have adopted the same autocratic coaching style as many men. On the other hand a study by Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) showed that players who were coached by women perceived less discrimination and were more inclined to enter coaching than those women coached by men. The authors conclude that these results strongly support the call for hiring more female coaches.

Coaching education and coaching practice seem however to be orientated towards male needs and ideal, and it can therefore be difficult for women to adapt themselves to male norms and values. This is in my opinion, one of the reasons for the lack of female coaches, because research concerning leadership in sports shows that the male culture either excludes women or does not attract nor accommodate large groups of women (Fasting et al 2001). In addition to preventing sexual harassment an argument for adopting another coaching style than the autocratic one can also be used in the debate about recruiting more female coaches. But what kind of coaching style are we talking about. I will argue for the necessity for coaches to be more democratic, but it is more than what often has been called a democratic leadership style. One alternative is what Celia Brackenridge calls empowerment-based coaching. Empowerment-based coaching has redefined the traditional definition of power as mentioned earlier (i.e. power over) and defines power as 'energy and capacity' and uses sport as a vehicle to empower the athletes.

In a study from Canada of more than 500 athletes and about 70 coaches, the reasons mentioned for why people were reluctant to report harassment were:

Fear of being cut from the team	38%
Fear of not being believed	36%
Ashamed/embarrassed	51%
Loyalty to coach/team	29%
Don't know who to talk to	27%

According to Celia Brackenridge the exploitation -fear- silence - exploitation cycle is only broken when the athlete speaks out, is listened to and heard. Giving voices to the athlete is, then, an essential prerequisite for establishing safety and confidence in sport. To dare to speak out one must feel safe and have self-confidence. The process of empowerment leads to autonomy; and with autonomy comes responsibility for self and for the consequences of

investing effort and emotion into the embodied demands of the sporting performance. It may also easier lead to a fulfilment of paragraph 33 in The European Parliament Resolution on Women and Sport, which states that: "Urges sportswomen to organise themselves in order to defend their sporting, economic and social rights and to bring cases of discrimination and harassment to the competent authorities or before the courts". It is only independent and matured, i.e. empowered athletes who will dare to do so.

Empowerment strategies may lead athletes to develop the necessary confidence, skills and opportunities to resist sexual exploitation. It is according to Brackenridge more than simply a matter of personal style. For it to be effective, and sustainable, the empowerment approach should permeate the whole ethos of a sport organisation and its working practice. For this to happen education of not only coaches, athletes and parents but also other people involved in sport is a necessity.

I would also like to state that there are dozens of examples of coaches who are committed to empowerment-based coaching, just to mention a couple that some of you may know: Pia Nilsson from Sweden and Marit Breivik from Norway. I would like to close this introduction by showing you the recommendations for minimising the risk of sexual exploitation in sport that WomenSport International has put up in their new position statement on sexual harassment of Girls and Women in Sport. As you will see implicit in these is the development of an empowerment approach to sport.

- adopt harassment-free policies and procedures that are in line with international ethical and human rights statutes and that are inclusive;
- encourage open debate about sexual harassment, homophobia and exploitation of women and men in sport;
- embed both an equitable balance of males and females in all roles and also democratic leadership styles to mitigate against abuses of power;
- act as advocates of harassment-free sport through education and training programs for every member of the sport;
- actively monitor the effectiveness of all anti-harassment initiatives;
  
- initiate research into men's, women's and children's experiences of abuse and bullying within their sport;
- give active representation to athletes indecision-making at every level of the sport

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