

Running Head: Coach and Athlete Perceptions ...

**Coach and Athlete Perceptions of Ambiguous Behaviors and Sexual
Harassment**

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Coach and Athlete Perceptions of Ambiguous Behaviors and Sexual Harassment

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of coaches and athletes of ambiguous behaviors (i.e. actions which may or may not be construed as sexual harassment) in order to inform curriculum development in coach education. This study replicates and extends a previous American study which examined perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment among 210 female college athletes in the USA (Volkwein, *et al.*, 1997). The Americans' research design was based on earlier work in education by Garlick (1994). The present study is the first, large-scale UK survey of sexual harassment among student athletes ($n = 311$) and coaches ($n = 182$). A sexual harassment questionnaire (Garlick, 1994) was adapted to a sport setting and UK context. The questionnaire contained statements regarding 19 ambiguous behaviors. Factor analysis identified four subcategories of the questionnaire: Invitations/1-to-1; Social enquiries; Invasion of personal space; Personal Enquiries. A 2 x 2 (Gender by Role) MANCOVA, with age as a covariate revealed no interaction effect (Wilk's $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 481) = 1.46$, $p > .05$), but both main effects were significant (gender Wilk's $\lambda = .93$, $F(4, 481) = 8.62$, $p < .001$, role Wilk's $\lambda = .956$, $F(4, 481) = 5.56$, $p < .001$). Further analysis confirmed that athletes rated each of the four sub-scales as significantly more appropriate than coaches. Females rated social enquiries and invasion of personal space as more appropriate than males.

Introduction

Sexual harassment in sport has emerged since the mid-1980s as an issue of concern for coaches and athletes (Crosset, 1986; Lenskyj, 1992a and b; Brackenridge, 1987, 1991) and as the object of policy development in several westernized countries such as Canada (CAAWS, 1994) Australia (Australian Sports Commission 1998a, b, c, and d) and the UK (Child Protection in Sport Unit www.sportproprotects.org.uk 2001). Coach education workshops have been delivered as part of anti-harassment and/or child protection programs in all these countries yet little is known about differences in the ways that coaches and athletes perceive potentially harassing behaviors. The purpose of the current study is to examine the perceptions of coaches and athletes of ambiguous behaviors (i.e. actions which may or not be construed as sexual harassment) in order to inform curriculum development in coach education.

Sexual Harassment

Numerous studies (e.g., American Association of University Women, 1993; Bargh and Raymond, 1995; Rospenda, Richman and Nawyn, 1998) have investigated sexual harassment in the past twenty years. As yet however, there is very little empirical research within the domain of sport. Furthermore, definitional ambiguity leads to a lack of comparability and clarity of results (Stockdale, 1996). It is clear that perceptions of sexual harassment are subjective and are influenced by a number of factors (e.g., age, gender, power, role). Thus, it is entirely possible for two different people to interpret the same behavior as sexual harassment, or for the same person to interpret differently identical behaviors displayed by two others, or the behavior of

one person differently on separate days. The notion that men and women perceive identical behaviors differently has received attention over the last two decades (Abbey, 1987; Saal, 1996) but no conclusive explanation has been found.

In general, it is *gender* harassment that leads to definitional and perceptual confusion: less ambiguous behaviors, such as bribery, threats and physical abuse, are more consistently and clearly labeled as sexual harassment. One study in academia attempted to examine differences in perception between severity of behaviors (Garlick, 1994). Rather than using blatant behaviors, as used in previous research, Garlick presented 19 behaviors which were ambiguous, that is open to multiple interpretations, and which might or might not be sexual in nature. Such behaviors might produce either positive or negative effects depending on how they are interpreted (Hurley and Fagenson-Eland, 1996).

Students undertaking a research methods course were used to generate Garlick's 19-item scale. Face validity and internal consistency were established. The students (N = 354) were asked to rate each of the behaviors for appropriateness on a 5 point Likert scale ('totally appropriate', 'appropriate', 'neutral', 'inappropriate', 'totally inappropriate') and then to rate how personally comfortable they would be with each behavior. For the purpose of analysis, the 5 points on the Likert scale were collapsed into three - 'appropriate', 'neutral' and 'inappropriate'. The middle 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' points were included in the 'neutral' category when, arguably, they should have been grouped instead with the outer extremes of the scale.

Garlick's analysis consisted of calculating frequencies and percentages of responses per item and comparing these for differences using Pearson Chi Square. The statistical means of male and female responses were obtained and differences assessed using multiple t-tests. These analyses indicated that the males rated twelve behaviors as significantly more appropriate than the females in the study. In particular, men and women differed in their responses to 'touching behaviors', that is those where personal space has been invaded. The use of multiple t-tests increases the probability of a type-I error occurring, that is finding a difference where in fact there is none. It is preferable to use an ANOVA which adjusts the significance levels accordingly, thereby partialling out these effects. A useful analysis would re-examine the data set using more rigorous statistical procedures. This does not detract from the usefulness of the original study, the intention of which was which was to examine ambiguous behaviors in relationships where there is a power differential. Rather, it suggests that the original research tool and analysis could be made more robust.

Sexual harassment in sport

Literature on sexual harassment in sport to date has tended to be exploratory in nature and concerned with definitions, experiences, prevention and policy development (Brackenridge and Fasting, 2002). Several studies have attempted to establish prevalence rates in Canada (Kirby, Greaves and Hankivsky, 2000), Denmark (Toftegaard Nielson, 2001), Norway (Fasting, Brackenridge, and Sundgot-Borgen, 2000), the United Kingdom (Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997) and the United States (Volkwein et al., 1997). The percentages of athletes reporting behaviors defined as sexual harassment have ranged from 15% to 55%. This level of variability may be explained by a lack of definitional agreement and differences in measurement tools

used. Before researchers can accurately measure prevalence of sexual harassment, there must first be agreement on what is being measured. For instance, some researchers have only measured actual behaviors experienced (Fasting et al., 2000; Kirby et al. 2000), whereas others have examined the athletes' perceptions of these experienced behaviors (Toftgaard Nielson 2001; Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997; Volkwein et al., 1997). With the exception of Volkwein et al. (1997), previous researchers have failed to report the validity and reliability of the instruments used.

The study by Volkwein *et al.*, (1997) was the first in sport to look specifically at *perceptions* of sexual harassment based on a validated scale, replicating and extending Garlick's earlier study in academia. However, comparability between these two studies was minimized when 8 additional behaviors were added to the sport questionnaire and the response format was changed to a 4-point Likert scale.

The behaviors added by Volkwein *et al.* to the 19 original ambiguous items were very unambiguous in nature. If one considers sexual harassment on a continuum (Brackenridge, 2001) then there might be a theoretical justification for doing this. However, adding blatant sexual harassment and abuse behaviors to the measuring instrument detracts from the purpose of the study, which was to investigate differential perceptions of *ambiguous* behaviors. In addition, the presentation of items on a presumed graded scale builds in a potential bias to the responses in that it might invite participants to respond according to that scale, in other words, to guide them to respond in particular ways. Two further sections were added by Volkwein *et al.* to Garlick's original format. The additional sections asked the respondents to indicate the extent to which each of the behaviors would interfere with a) the team's ability to

compete and b) an individual athlete's ability to compete. The respondents were then required to mark each item a second time, denoting the frequency of, and emotional responses to, each item. It could be argued that ambiguity is caused by inquiring into cognitive, affective and emotional 'issues' consecutively. Not only might this amount of questioning be off-putting in a voluntary survey, potentially reducing the response rate, but it is also impossible to know in what order the sections were completed.

A further problematic feature of Volkwein's study was the use of athletic directors and head coaches to gain access to the athletes, adding the possibility that those coaches whose teams were *not* allowed to participate might experience more sexual harassment. Only the higher divisions of collegiate sport were well represented in that study, providing a very discrete population. Analysis consisted of comparing frequencies and percentages, not statistically, but at face value. Furthermore, when behaviors were combined into categories for the purpose of reporting results, the categories were not statistically based. Rather, category assignment was subjective. The results found cannot be compared with the original study (Garlick, 1994) because of the adaptations, different methodology and statistical approach and, most importantly, because only female collegiate athletes with an average age of 19.4 years took part. Rather than extending the Garlick (1994) study, as they claimed, Volkwein *et al.* (1997) have provided an insight into the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment in this distinct, collegiate athlete population.

The study

The present study was intended to extend Garlick's (1994) study to an athlete population and to ameliorate the shortcomings of Volkwein *et al.*'s study (1997). It

concentrated on the original 19 behaviors, not confounding the ambiguous nature of the statements by adding unambiguous sexual harassment behaviors. In the analysis the behaviors were divided into categories according to severity and more rigorous statistical procedures were adopted than used by Volkwein *et al.* Furthermore, the study extended previous research by including a male and female coach sample to facilitate comparison of gender- and role-based perceptions. The investigation examined whether men rated the 19 ambiguous behaviors as more appropriate than women and whether coaches rated the 19 ambiguous behaviors as more appropriate than athletes.

Method

Participants

Coaches: The questionnaire was mailed to 777 coaches in the South West Region of England via the National Coaching Foundation (NCF, the education and training agency for coaches in the United Kingdom, subsequently re-named *Sportscoach UK*), 182 (56.6% male and 43.4% female) questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 23.4%. The average age of respondents was 44.03 years (range 19-87 years). Amongst the respondents 96.7% self-defined as White (UK), 1.1% as Black (UK) and 2.2% as Other. The main sports among the 47 represented were: Rugby (7.7%), Swimming (6.6%), Equestrian (21%), Track and Field (6.6%) and Archery (5.5%). The spread of coaches across sports compares favorably with NCF membership figures at the time of the study.

Athletes: Three hundred and eleven (62.7% male and 37.3% female) questionnaires were completed in total. Eleven were returned blank, giving a response rate of 96.6%. Average age was 21.54 (range 18-49 years). The greatest proportion of respondents

(95.8%) self-defined as White (UK), 1% as Black Caribbean, 1.6% as Black (UK) and 1.5% as Other. The highest number of respondents was in Football/Soccer (25.4%), followed by Rugby (18.33%), Track and Field (9.32%), Field Hockey (8.04%), Swimming (6.1%), and Netball (4.18%).

Measures

- Figure 1 about here -

Sexual Harassment Questionnaire: The 19 ambiguous behaviors suggested by Garlick were adapted directly from academia to a sport setting by substituting ‘coach’ for ‘professor’ along with the anchors for the 5-point Likert scale (1 = extremely inappropriate, 2 = inappropriate, 3 = neutral, 4 = appropriate, 5 = extremely appropriate). Further American phrasing was replaced by British phrasing to eliminate any possible confusion (e.g. “A professor invites you out for a cup of coffee after class” to “A coach invites you out for a cup of coffee after a training session”). The first page of the questionnaire included a cover letter stating who the researchers were, their qualifications and contact details. Additionally, information was included as to the nature of the research, the involvement and permission of the NCF, the time required to complete the questionnaire and the anonymity of the responses. Details were also given of assumptions required for completing the questionnaire, the athlete version of which is below:

1. The coach is your main coach.
2. This is the first time this behavior has occurred.
3. The relationship between you and the coach has been strictly professional until this point, with no interactions of a personal nature.

4. The sexual preferences of you and the coach are unknown to each other.

Procedures

Coach Survey: The coach questionnaires were distributed with a pre-paid and addressed return envelope with the NCF Coachwise membership publication '*Faster, Higher, Stronger*' to ensure anonymity. Coaches were informed that participation was voluntary. A blanket reminder letter was mailed one week later, again with the assistance of the NCF.

Athlete Survey: The athlete questionnaire was distributed in three Higher Education institutions (two in the South West and one in the West Midlands), approached through personal contacts. Data collection for the athlete survey took place in April and May 1999 to ensure a high student attendance due to the impending end of year assessments. The majority of questionnaires were distributed by the researcher. However, at one institution they were left with a staff member with instructions on distribution. A letter was obtained from this person to verify that these instructions were followed and that only they had access to or had handled the completed and uncompleted responses.

Surveys were distributed to sport and exercise students who attended lectures at the institutions and defined themselves as athletes. Students were asked to read the instructions carefully and then complete the questionnaire without discussion. Students were informed that participation was voluntary, they could discontinue participating at anytime, responses were anonymous, and that participation would not affect their academic standing. Detailed operational queries were dealt with by the researchers as they occurred but any questions about the research hypotheses were

answered only after the questionnaires had been collected. Re-collection of the questionnaires immediately after completion ensured a higher response rate and that no data could be contaminated. The presence of the researcher ensured that no discussion occurred between respondents before or during completion.

Data Analysis

Two approaches were taken to the main analysis. The first considered scores as a Total Appropriateness Rating (TAR), which involved calculating the total score for each respondent for the 19 behaviors. A mean TAR was then computed for each subgroup. A 2 x 2 ANOVA examined whether age differed for either role or gender and whether the effects of age needed to be partialled out by selecting it as a covariate in subsequent analyses. Finally, a 2 x 2 (Gender x Role) ANCOVA with age as a covariate was performed to compare the TAR for role and gender.

The second approach was to provide a more parsimonious representation of the 19 ambiguous behaviors. Such an approach is justified when the results of Garlick's original study (1994) was considered, as he found gender differences for some items. Further, Volkwein *et al.* (1997) grouped the behaviors to aid comparison, suggesting differences between certain behaviors. Three factor analyses were conducted, two to establish similarity between coach and athlete responses and a third to extract categories of behaviors from the pooled coach/athlete data. Although the factor loadings for the separate coach and athlete samples were not identical they were sufficiently similar to justify conducting a combined analysis with the coach and athlete data pooled. Having extracted a four factor solution, a MANCOVA was

conducted with the four factors as the dependent variables and age as a covariate, followed by four ANCOVAs to establish the direction of any differences.

In summary, the following analyses were conducted:

1. ANOVA (age by gender) on the TAR score to test whether age needed to be entered as a covariate
2. ANCOVA (gender by role, with age as covariate) to test mean differences on TAR
3. Factor analyses (coaches only, athletes only, and combined)
4. MANCOVA (the four factors from above entered as dependent variables, gender and role as independent variables, and age as a covariate)

Results

In light of previous research (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1988; Frazier, Cochran, and Olson, 1995; Reilly *et al.*, 1982; 1986) a 2 x 2 (Gender x Role) ANOVA was performed to examine age as a potential confounding variable for both the coach-athlete and male-female data. Results confirmed that coaches were significantly older than athletes ($F(488) = 24.3, p < 0.01$); no significant age differences were found between males and females ($F(488) = 1.29, p = .18$). To control for any potential confounding effects of age differences between the coaches and athletes, age was included as a covariate in the remaining analyses.

A 2 x 2 (Gender x Role) Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) revealed that when age was controlled for, males and females did not differ significantly on the Total Appropriateness Rating (TAR). Significant role differences, however were present ($F(488) = 6.25, p < .05$) illustrating that coaches ($M = 45.83; SD = 10.5$) rated the behaviors as significantly less appropriate than athletes ($M = 51.23; SD = 10.27$).

Two exploratory factor analyses were conducted on the coach and athlete data sets. Exploratory factor analysis was selected over confirmatory factor analysis because the research in this area is in its infancy and does not yet provide a theoretical basis for the underlying processes influencing differences between the four factors (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). The principal axis analysis method with varimax rotation was utilized, resulting in a four-factor solution for both. Examination of the scree plots supported the extraction of four of these factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. The rotated four-factor solution accounted for 59.5% variance of the perceptions of ambiguous behaviors for the coach sample and 58.7% for the athlete sample. Although these four factor solutions were not identical they were sufficiently similar and therefore were pooled to aid further analyses and interpretation.

Table 1 - about here

A third factor analysis was conducted on the coach and athlete data sets for which a four-factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 resulted, supported by examination of the scree plot. This solution accounted for 48.9% variance of the perceptions of ambiguous behaviors. Factor loadings equal to or greater than .40 were interpreted (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996) and named by an independent group of child protection and sexual harassment and abuse specialists (Table 1). The four categories were: Invitations/1-to-1, Social Enquiries, Invasion of Personal Space, and Personal Enquiries. To determine factor reliability, the internal consistency of each factor was assessed by computing Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient. All four subscales indicated an acceptable level of internal consistency with coefficients greater than .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

To investigate whether gender and role (coach/athlete) differences existed on perceptions of ambiguous behaviors a 2 x 2 (Gender by Role) MANCOVA, with age as a covariate, was conducted. The dependent variables were the four subscales of the Sexual Harassment Questionnaire: Invitations/1-to-1, Social Enquiry, Invasion of Personal Space, and Personal Enquiry. Correlations among these variables ranged from .44 to .62. The MANCOVA revealed no interaction effect (Wilk's $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 481) = 1.46$, $p > .05$), but both main effects were significant (gender Wilk's $\lambda = .93$, $F(4, 481) = 8.62$, $p < .001$, role Wilk's $\lambda = .956$, $F(4, 481) = 5.56$, $p < .001$).

Four follow-up ANCOVAs were conducted to determine which dependent variables were most important for maximizing role and gender differences. An ANCOVA for the Invitations/1-to-1 category revealed significant differences for role ($F(488) = 8.9$, $p < .01$) but not for gender ($F(488) = 1.58$, $p = .21$). Comparison of adjusted means showed that athletes ($M = 2.45$; $SD = .68$) rated these behaviors as more appropriate than coaches ($M = 2.09$; $SD = .71$). Significant effects were found for both groups in the second category, Social Enquiries (role - $F(488) = .94$, $p < .01$; gender - $F(488) = .34$, $p < .01$) with athletes ($M = 3.05$; $SD = 0.5$) rating these behaviors as more appropriate than coaches ($M = 2.94$; $SD = 0.8$) and females ($M = 3.02$; $SD = 0.5$) as more appropriate than males ($M = 2.97$; $SD = 0.5$). Significant effects were also found for both groups in the third category, Invasion of Personal Space (role $F(488) = .99$, $p < .01$; gender $F(488) = 20.04$, $p < .05$). As with the previous category, adjusted means comparison showed that coaches ($M = 2.89$; $SD = 0.6$) rated the behaviors as less appropriate than athletes ($M = 3.05$; $SD = 0.5$) and females ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 0.5$) rated them as more appropriate than males ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 0.4$). The ANCOVA for the final

category Personal Enquiries displayed significant main effects for role ($F(4,88) = 16.8, p < .05$) but not gender ($F(4,88) = .21, p = .65$). Adjusted means comparison suggests that athletes ($M = 2.27; SD = 0.6$) rated personal enquiries as more appropriate than coaches ($M = 2.0; SD = 0.9$). These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 - about here

Discussion

The findings that coaches rated the 19 ambiguous behaviors as less appropriate than athletes, and men rated them as less appropriate than women, are contrary to the expectations and to previous research findings (Garlick, 1994; Volkwein *et al.*, 1997). A number of predictions exist as to why athletes in this sample perceived behaviors as more appropriate than the coaches did. The first explanation might be naïveté amongst the athletes, related to possible innocence and lack of awareness of the potential for abuse in a coach-athlete relationship. Power is the basis of any coach-athlete relationship (Brackenridge, 1987, 2001) and is manifested in two distinct ways. First, a coach has the power of assumed knowledge and the power to make selections. At elite levels this translates to the power to make or break a career. Second, where the relationship is between a male coach and a female athlete, the coach also holds political, sexual and often physical power over the athlete. It has been assumed that coaches are often unaware of this power and the implications of language, jokes and their sheer physical presence. However, what is often unnoticed is the possibility that athletes might also be unaware of the presence or impact of this power.

Whilst these results indicate a significant difference between males and females, and between coaches and athletes, it should be noted that the effect size for these main effects indicates that only 6% of the variability can be explained by role and gender. Thus, although the main effect was statistically significant it may not be meaningful in relation to other factors that may better explain the difference. One such explanation is gender role (Deaux, 1995; Gill, 1992). Recent studies suggest that it is not gender *per se* that predicts differences in perceptions, rather it is solely a surrogate measure of gender role orientation and gender based attitudes (Bursik, 1992; Tucker and Whaley, 1998). These models could be useful for examining perceptions when adapted to a sporting context.

Increased public awareness of sexual harassment and child protection issues in sport since the completion of previous studies may have influenced the UK coaches' opinions. In other words, it is possible that the results shown here are reflective of a backlash effect akin to that seen against feminism (Faludi, 1991; Finkelhor, 1994). A backlash in this case describes a reactive and oppositional countermovement to the success of an anti-sexual harassment movement, one consequence of which is that coaches develop more conservative, and by default more 'professional', attitudes towards their coaching relationships. At its most extreme, the coaching backlash against child protection and anti-harassment initiatives leads to a drop out of coaches who are prepared to work with children and young people since they fear being falsely accused of sexual misdemeanours (Brackenridge, 2001). The possible positive and negative effects of such a movement are, as yet, unclear and require further investigation. At this juncture it is important to note that the effects of increased awareness and child protection and anti-harassment initiatives are also unknown.

Within the last five years the volume of academic and advocacy literature on harassment, abuse and child protection in sport has increased significantly (Brackenridge, 2001; Brackenridge and Fasting, 2002; Fasting, et al., 2000; Kirby *et al.*, 2000). The effect of changes in coach and athlete attitudes towards the subject may well, therefore, be related to the prominence of this discourse, especially in the UK.

The athletes in the sample for this study are likely to have encountered different socialisation processes in sport (see Brewer, 1982) than the coaches who are, on the whole, an older population. Furthermore, it is entirely plausible that the average age of the athlete sample (university students) is much higher than that of the athletes that the coaches in the sample actually work with and have assumed in the hypothetical ratings. Potentially, therefore, there might be a lack of comparability between both data sets. Future research should build on these findings that age might affect perceptions and investigate them by comparing populations of different ages.

Significant differences were found for gender and role in all of the categories except Invitations/ 1-to-1, where only role differences were found. With regards to role, the athletes always rated the behaviors as more appropriate than the coaches. Females rated social enquiries, invasion of personal space, and personal enquiries as more appropriate than males did. The finding that females rated an invasion of personal space as more appropriate than males was contrary to previous research (e.g. Garlick, 1994) and prior expectations. This difference could again be attributed to the explanations above, *viz* backlash, increased professionalism, and social desirability. Two other potential explanations exist. Women's perceptions may have been affected

by a changing social climate. With more women entering traditionally male domains so, too, their expectations are changing. Furthermore men, in particular coaches, are now more used to working with groups of women and may have adjusted their coaching styles accordingly.

Sexual harassment is not experienced as a one-off (single) instance; rather, it is akin to a 'dripping tap' (Wise and Stanley, 1987). In the questionnaire, however, the 19 behaviors are framed as first time occurrences. They are therefore perhaps less likely to be regarded as sexually harassing by younger female athletes. A comparison of responses to first time and on-going ambiguous behaviors is necessary to further highlight apparent differences. In-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups could be usefully employed to examine these possibilities in greater depth.

A change in women's perceptions overall is suggested by these results. It is interesting to note that there was no interaction effect; both female athletes and female coaches perceived the ambiguous behaviors as more appropriate than did both male groups. Few previous studies of this type have been conducted in sport. It is therefore possible that attitudes to interpersonal behavior within the culture of sport, which requires a certain amount of touching, are different from those outside sport. Furthermore, since women often assume caring roles, both inside and outside sport, they might be more likely to perceive hypothetical invasions of personal space as more appropriate than men.

Limitations

All the coaches in this sample were members of a quasi-professional body (NCF). Their responses might therefore reflect a higher level of professionalism than amongst coaches who are non-members. It is also possible that some participants may have associated the questionnaire with the professional body, thereby leading them to give socially desirable responses. Further investigation using a population not directly connected to a professional body is therefore justified. Future studies might also consider including the Crowne and Marlowe (1964) Social Desirability Scale to establish the extent to which responses reflect socially desirable answers. The degree of professionalization of coaching in the UK is difficult to estimate: what is certain, however, is that UK government's eventual goal for the coaching community is to professionalize (UK Sport, 2001; Department for Media, Culture and Sport, 2001). Research is needed to quantify and qualify whether and how the discourse about sexual harassment and abuse over the last few years has influenced the professionalization process in coaching and, if so, how this has affected coach-athlete relationships.

Although the distribution of questionnaires for this study was random, it was undertaken only within the coaching membership of the NCF. As suggested above, it is possible that this group holds more professional (*viz* conservative) attitudes towards sexually appropriate behavior than non-members. The coach sample may have been further biased by the unusually high number of responses from equestrian coaches. This sport is enjoyed mainly by those from higher social classes and also requires, relative to other sports, a substantial degree of touching and physical correction of

body position. The athlete respondents might also have been atypical since they were drawn from higher education students who are predominantly white and middle-class. Also of importance is the voluntary nature of the study: it should not be overlooked that those who responded might be more aware of and sensitive to ethical practice. It must also be acknowledged that those who did not respond might be hiding something and therefore have been disinclined to respond.

The hypothetical nature of the questionnaire is a major limitation of the study. It is impossible to know who the respondents were thinking about when they replied to the scenarios, in terms of the age difference, level, gender, sexuality and length of relationship. In-depth interviews, focus groups and even participant observation would provide further insights into these aspects of the topic. One criticism made by some respondents at the end of the questionnaires was that the statements were too ambiguous. However, the questions were deliberately designed to be ambiguous, in order to investigate differences in perceived acceptability. Nonetheless, it might be argued that the relationship between hypothetical scenarios and actual behavior should be more carefully explicated.

The potential for homosexual and homophobic inferences is especially pertinent with regard to the gender differences found in the study for the Invasion of Personal Space category. The hypothetical nature of the questionnaire is also a potential confounder. It is not possible to know who the respondents had in mind when completing the questionnaire and therefore comparison of data is problematic. Following Garlick (1994), 'sexual preference' was kept ambiguous so it was not a confounding factor. It was therefore left to respondents to determine this on the basis of their own

expectations and experiences. For instance, it is probable that the majority of the female athletes will have had a male coach (Acosta and Carpenter, 2000), and therefore assumed a male coach in the scenarios. On the other hand, if the male athletes assumed a male coach in the scenarios they might well have seen the behaviors as inappropriate due to possible homosexual and homophobic connotations. Indeed, comments accompanying some of the questionnaires “I’d kill him if he tried this” or “You must be joking” alluded to this.

It was beyond the scope of this particular study to account for level/standard of involvement (for example, intermediate or elite performance) in the analysis. Even though the demographic information obtained was not sufficient to conduct valid comparisons, it did indicate that respondents came from a range of different levels. Future research should investigate whether there are, indeed, differences in perceptions of sexual harassment between the levels of sport. In particular, the ‘stage of imminent achievement’ model (Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997), which hypothesizes greater risk of sexual abuse for athletes at the pre-elite level, might give useful guidance.

It is pertinent that the questionnaire adapted here had, at the time, undergone little development. It was modeled closely on the original, in part because of the confusion caused by adaptation and additions in the Volkwein *et al.* (1997) study. This study, and the problems encountered with the hypothetical nature of the questionnaire, should therefore be considered as part of the ongoing development of the research tool. As Stockdale and Hope’s (1997) informative revalidation of the original USMSPB (1981) scale suggests, it is not appropriate to use a research tool without

examining its continued reliability. The translation of all 19 behaviors from academia to sport also requires further consideration, particularly because attitudes to touching behavior might well be different in the sport context.

The relatively low response rate (23.4%) in the coach survey, although acceptable for research of this sensitive nature (Kirby and Greaves, 1996), might be considered problematic when compared with the higher rates obtained in previous studies (for example, Garlick, 1994 and Volkwein *et al.*, 1997). The earlier studies used exclusively student populations and were not reliant on a mailed survey, hence they achieved higher response rates. Finally, differences in expectations about sexual harassment and social tolerance in the different countries (USA and England) might also be at play here and therefore require further research before valid comparison can be made.

Conclusion

The results presented here challenge long-held ideas about gender and role differences in perceptions of sexual harassment and suggest that, in sport, these differences are reversed, with male coaches adopting more reserved or conservative attitudes than female athletes do towards ambiguous interpersonal behaviors. Perhaps the most important message is that there are differences, whatever their direction. These differences, stemming from definitional ambiguity, will ensure that sexual harassment remains a contested and problematic area of coach-athlete relations. Until greater clarity and consensus is brought to bear on these issues, and the moral panic about sexual harassment in sport recedes (Brackenridge, 2001), coaches will continue to react cautiously in interpersonal situations and to worry that their behavior might be

misinterpreted as sexual harassment. Current professional development programs for coaches in the UK overlook some of these issues, an omission which is even causing some coaches to reconsider their motivation for staying in sport. This omission ultimately poses a threat to the already limited pool of UK sports coaches.

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Figure 1 **Categorization of behaviors****CATEGORY 1:**

- 5. Invitation to lunch
- 4. Invitation for a drink after training session
- 6. Invitation to dinner
- 1. Invitation to coach's house for tactics discussion
- 18 Invitation for coffee after training session
- 19 Coach closes the door when meeting an athlete in an enclosed space

CATEGORY 2:

- 10 Coach enquires about weekend plans
- 15 Coach tells about spare time activities
- 11 Coach talks about weekend plans
- 14 Coach asks about spare time

CATEGORY 3:

- 9 Coach gives hug as congratulatory gesture
- 17 Coach gives playful shoulder massage or back-rub
- 2 Touching on shoulder/arm whilst giving instructions
- 3 Coach sits/stands close when talking
- 8 Coach puts hand on athlete's shoulder/arm while giving a greeting

CATEGORY 4:

- 13 Coach talks about personal life/ relations
- 12 Coach enquires about personal life/relations

DID NOT LOAD

- 16 Coach compliments appearance
- 7 Coach uses pet name (e.g. 'Honey')

Table 1 Loadings for the items of the Sexual Harassment Questionnaire (Garlick, 1994).

Behavior	FACTOR			
	1 Invitations/ 1-1	2 Social enquiry	3 Invasion of personal space	4 Personal enquiries
Congratulatory hug	.18	-.01	.47	-.08
Playful massage	.16	-.05	.43	.29
Touches whilst instructing	-.02	.19	.67	-.01
Compliments appearance	.18	.29	.34	-.04
Invite to lunch	.62	.23	.13	.23
Enquires about weekend plans	.27	.58	.22	.22
Tells about spare time	.24	.72	.17	.27
Stands close when talking	.12	.33	.54	-.08
Invite for a drink	.49	.22	-.09	.35
Talks of personal life	.29	.30	.16	.79
Enquires of personal life	.35	.31	.19	.63
Invite to dinner	.69	.27	.15	.31
Puts hand on arm as instructs	.21	.28	.54	.24
Talks about weekend plans	.28	.69	.17	.27
Asks about spare time	.26	.58	.32	.11
Uses pet name	.31	.16	.29	-.08
Invite to house	.67	.16	.23	.14
Invite for coffee	.72	.26	.16	-.03
Enclosed space for meeting	.41	.12	.30	.21

Note Extraction method: Principal axis factoring. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Table 2 Comparison of means and standard deviations for significant main effects with age as a covariate

	Role		Gender	
	Athlete	Coach	Female	Male
Invitations/1-to-1	2.45 (0.68)	2.09 (0.71)	n.s.	
Social enquiries	3.05 (0.5)	2.94 (0.8)	3.02 (0.5)	2.97 (0.5)
Invasion of personal space	3.05 (0.5)	2.89 (0.6)	3.07 (0.5)	2.8 (0.4)
Personal Enquiries	2.27 (0.6)	2.0 (0.9)	n.s.	
Total Appropriateness Rating (TAR)*	51.23 (10.27)	45.83 (10.5)	n.s.	

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means are based on responses to the following Likert scale: 1 = extremely inappropriate, 2 = inappropriate, 3 = neutral, 4 = appropriate, 5 = extremely appropriate. *TAR represents the sum of the 19 questions on the scale.