An Exploration of Knowledge and Attitudes About Sexual Assault Occurrence and Prevention Among Former Intercollegiate Athletes

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2015

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Abstract

The 1990s saw the development of research on sexual assault perpetrated by intercollegiate student-athletes, though empirical results were mixed and subject to criticisms from the field. Research on sexual assault in college athletics stagnated during the last 15 years, despite the fact that this time period has evidenced multiple high-profile, even fatal, cases of violence against women at the hands of male student-athletes. These events and others prompted the Office of Civil Rights to call upon universities to more appropriately investigate and sanction perpetrators of sexual assault. In April 2011, using Title IX as an imperative, the Office for Civil Rights issued a “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL) as a call for universities to more swiftly and adequately address incidences of sexual assault by students. In the wake of the DCL, universities must have a fuller picture not only of student sexual assault in general but also of student-athlete involvement as they begin implementing or revamping programs to reduce sexual assault on campus.

Due to the lack of current research, and considering past criticisms on methodology and theoretic frameworks, it is imperative to study the nature of sexual assault within intercollegiate athletics to adequately address the problem. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which former student-athletes understand sexual assault, as well as their perceptions of their athletic department’s
response to occurrences and prevention. Drawing upon a grounded theory methodology, one goal of this research was to learn more about what student-athletes know sexual assault to be, so that practitioners and researchers alike can work toward creating and implementing more effective programs, ultimately leading to sexual assault-free college sports.

Semi-structured interviews were completed with 15 former intercollegiate student-athletes from big-time athletics departments. Findings indicated three major themes: (1) Participant Knowledge of Sexual Assault; (2) Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics; and (3) Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture, leading the creation of the Sexual Assault Prevention Paradigm for Athletic Departments. Relevant implications for athletic departments and universities are presented, including the curriculum for a model sexual assault prevention education program, *A Zero Tolerance Approach: Sexual Assault Prevention Education for Student-Athletes (SAPES).* Future research involves learning more about the nature of sexual assault within athletics, as well as testing the paradigm model and model education program.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men who experience sexual assault on college campuses.

It is also dedicated to those who work tirelessly to prevent sexual assault and provide support to survivors.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Sue Sutherland and Dr. Brian Turner. This dissertation is far more methodologically sound and expansive due to their wisdom and instruction. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Patti Lather, whose qualitative expertise was a constant presence throughout the design and execution of this study. Most importantly, Dr. Donna Pastore, my advisor, is the reason I am here today, completing a dissertation and a doctoral program in three years. Thank you for taking a chance on this California girl and turning her into Dr. McCray. Your mentorship, support, and guidance are immeasurable and I am so very grateful that I ended up at THE Ohio State University with a former Trojan. ☺

Second, I would like to acknowledge the professionals working in the fields of sexual assault support services and prevention education. To my former co-workers at SARP and the current staff at SVES, thank you for all the information and advice you provided as I worked on this dissertation. An especially hearty thanks to Lisa Nosal, who provided thorough proofreading and editorial feedback on the content of my dissertation.

Third, I would like to acknowledge the cadre of cheerleaders who have supported me near and far: Robin McCray Goodman, Alyssa Ward, Lauren Kleinman, and Rosalie Siler. Your support is matched only by that of my family. To my sister and brother-in-law, Kelly and Mitch Rufca, thanks for your humor and infusion of fun into everything.
we do. To my parents, Kenny and Laurie McCray, thank you for the unconditional love and support you’ve shown me. I would not be here today without the work ethic, perseverance (stubbornness? 😊), and love for reading you instilled in me at a very young age.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my biggest cheerleader, teammate, and life partner, Dr. Heather Kelly-Marie Bartlett. Thanks for being on Team McCray for the last nine months. I know that supporting me through this dissertation process was not an easy task, but you made it look effortless. Your love knows no boundaries and I cannot wait to see what the future has in store for us as Dr. & Dr. I love you.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Prior to the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, sexual assault, rape, and other forms of violence against women were rarely discussed in public forums, let alone studied in academic settings. During this era of the women’s rights movement, rape crisis centers and other support mechanisms for women were created nationwide, though little research into either victimization or perpetration was conducted during this time (Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006). The 1980s began to see general research in the field of violence against women. After a multitude of high-profile athletes garnered media attention specifically for violent acts against women in the 1980s and 1990s (many of which are detailed in Benedict, 1997), researchers in fields ranging from sociology to psychology to higher education took notice and began conducting studies to assess the prevalence of student-athlete violence against women (i.e., Crosset, Ptacek, McDonald, & Benedict, 1996; Koss & Gaines, 1993; see Chapter Two).

Empirical results regarding the prevalence of student-athlete violence against women from the 1990s were mixed, and, as such, were subject to criticisms from the field. Further, there is a definitive gap in the literature in the 2000s. In April 2011, however, the Office for Civil Rights issued a “Dear Colleague Letter” as a call for universities to more swiftly and adequately address incidences of sexual assault by
students, though there is little current research on student-athlete populations (Ali, 2011). In the wake of this “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL), universities must have a fuller picture not only of student sexual assault in general but also of student-athlete involvement as they begin implementing or revamping programs to reduce sexual assault on campus. Due to the lack of current research, and considering past criticisms on methodology and theoretic frameworks, it is imperative to study the nature of sexual assault within intercollegiate athletics to adequately address the problem.

**Background**

*Violence against women* is a broad term, encompassing all forms of violence against women, whether sexual in nature or not. Violence against women includes stalking, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and any other assault or battery on a woman. Though some studies in the literature on student-athletes combine sexual assault and violence against women (Crosset, et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993), the research focus of this study is specifically on sexual assault, not the broader forms of violence against women. This is further elaborated on in the section called Key Terms. Though the background and literature may focus on broader forms of violence against women, this study stays near to the literature and instances of sexual assault by male student-athletes.

Until the 1990s, research in the field of student-athlete violence against women was nonexistent. Melnick (1992) was one of the first in the field of sports to call upon colleagues to examine the relationship between intercollegiate athletic participation and sexual assault by male student-athletes. He proposed five potential reasons for the prevalence of student-athlete perpetration; based upon these presumptive reasons, he also
laid out the case for reforms, concluding with the most radical: “reformation of the male sport experience” (Melnick, 1992, p. 35).

Perhaps in direct response to Melnick’s (1992) call to action, researchers in the mid-1990s began examining violence against women perpetrated by male athletes, particularly intercollegiate student-athletes. Mostly quantitative in nature, empirical findings were mixed. What follows is a brief overview of the literature, to be expanded upon in Chapter Two: Literature Review. Crosset, Ptacek, McDonald, and Benedict (1996) found an overrepresentation of male student-athletes as perpetrators of sexual assault in reports to campus judicial affairs, and Koss and Gaines (1993) reported a low but significant relationship in the self-reports of sexual aggression by student-athletes. Further, one study documented a disproportionate identification of student-athletes as perpetrators by college women (Fritner & Rubinson, 1993), and another showed student-athletes had higher levels of self-reported sexual aggression as compared to non-athletes (Boeringer, 1996). In contrast, Crosset and colleagues (1995) found that student-athletes were not represented at higher rates in campus police reports, and while they self-reported higher levels of sexually aggressive attitudes (Boeringer, 1996), they did not self-report higher levels of aggressive acts against women (Boeringer, 1996; Schwartz & Nogrady, 1996). Further, Koss and Cleveland (1996) detailed the methodological and conceptual concerns with the studies that led to such mixed empirical results, and they called for more qualitative research.

During the last 15 years, only one study sought to question whether male student-athletes are more likely to perpetrate sexual assault (Sawyer, Thompson, & Chicorelli, 2002) and many studies have documented the generally positive effects of sexual assault
prevention programming with student-athletes (Foubert & Perry, 2007; Jackson & Davis, 2000; McMahon & Farmer, 2009; Moynihan & Banyard, 2008).

In summary, findings indicated student-athletes disproportionately represented perpetrators of sexual assault (Crosset et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993), and disproportionately held attitudes accepting of sexual aggression and rape myths (Boeringer 1996, 1999; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Sawyer et al., 2002). In contrast, one study found that student-athletes were not overrepresented as perpetrators of sexual assault in campus police reports (Crosset et al., 1995).

Rationale

Despite the somewhat mixed findings, as well as the documented successes of some prevention programs, incidences of student-athlete violence against women continued to proliferate in the media during the last decade. Most notable is the 2010 fatal battering of lacrosse player Yeardley Love at the University of Virginia (UVA) by her ex-boyfriend George Huguely, also a lacrosse student-athlete at UVA (Ng, 2012). Though Huguely was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 23 years in prison, not all publicized incidents of violence against women receive the same level of criminal justice prosecution for victims. In 2010, reports surfaced of a sexual assault by a University of Notre Dame football player resulting in the suicide of the victim, Elizabeth Seeberg, a student at nearby St. Mary’s College. No charges have been filed in the Notre Dame case (Doyel, 2013), as is common with many reports of sexual assault, particularly those perpetrated by student-athletes who receive media attention.

In addition to the UVA and Notre Dame cases, incidences of male student-athlete violence against women continue to abound in national press coverage. Throughout 2010,
multiple University of Montana football players were investigated and/or charged with sexual assault and rape (Robbins, 2012). In August 2010, a Missouri football player was arrested for felony sexual assault (O’Neil, 2010). In September 2010, a Wake Forest basketball player was arrested for assault and accused of kicking and pushing his girlfriend, and a Florida football player was arrested on suspicion of stalking his girlfriend (O’Neil, 2010). In October 2010, a Baylor basketball player was arrested for assault and accused of breaking his girlfriend’s jaw (O’Neil, 2010). In December 2010, a Florida International University baseball player was charged with rape in the Bahamas (Beasley, 2011). In February 2011, a University of Washington basketball player was accused of raping a 16-year-old girl (“No rape charge against,” 2011). In February 2012, two Boston University hockey players were charged with sexual assault (Carmichael, 2012). In the fall of 2012 and spring of 2013, three Ohio State football players were investigated in a suspected rape reported by a female student (Hope, 2013), though ultimately no charges were filed against the men. In December 2013, Florida State University’s star quarterback and Heisman trophy winner, Jameis Winston, was investigated by the State Attorney General for sexual assault, although charges were not filed (Schlabach, 2013). Despite the lack of evidence in the criminal case, the victim filed a Title IX complaint against Winston, ending with a campus code of conduct hearing that cleared Winston of the allegations (Axon, 2015). Further, in the spring of 2015, the victim filed a Title IX lawsuit against Florida State, as well as a civil lawsuit against Jameis Winston himself; both cases are pending as of the writing of this dissertation (Axon, 2015). Multiple cases of sexual assault continued to proliferate in the media throughout late 2014 and early 2015, as detailed in Crosset (2015).
Though criminal charges may not be filed or eventually dropped, student-athletes may face disciplinary actions by their universities for their alleged involvement in such cases. Recently, in the spring of 2014, the University of Oregon dismissed three men from its basketball team under investigation for rape, though no charges were filed (Norlander, 2014). In April 2014, two Brown University football players were ordered to leave the university after a freshman woman from nearby Providence College said they raped her (Walsh, 2014). Although charges have not yet been filed against the men, an investigation by local police authorities is ongoing.

While there is concern that student-athletes face unfair scrutiny in and by the media due to their higher-profile status when compared to non-athletes on college campuses (Coakley, 2009; Melnick, 1992), it remains that student-athletes do commit violence against women. Whether they do so more than non-athletes is not the focus of this study; the fact is, student-athletes perpetrate sexual assault, as do other students on college campuses, and this needs to be addressed for the safety of student-athletes and other students on campus.

Regardless of student-athlete involvement, sexual assault continues to be highly prevalent on college campuses nationwide. In 2007, the National Institute of Justice released the Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study. This study found that one in five undergraduate female students were the victims of attempted or completed sexual assault while in college, and the study included recommendations for future campus education and prevention (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). Based upon the findings in this study, the Office for Civil Rights released a “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL) in April 2011 instructing universities to take more decisive action to combat
sexual assault on campus. The legal basis for this letter rests in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, banning sex discrimination in educational settings. The DCL outlined how Title IX may be applied to adjudicate student-on-student sexual assault and further explained the responsibility of institutions to begin taking immediate steps to end violence against women on college campuses (Ali, 2011). While calling for institutions to more appropriately investigate and sanction perpetrators of sexual assault, the DCL also mandates that universities provide overall campus education and prevention programming to reduce the incidences of sexual assault. Unfortunately, however, universities have struggled with complying with the new requirements set forth in the DCL, as the language of the document is both broad and vague, and many universities lack the oversight, resources, and funding to appropriately comply with the new regulations (Kelderman, 2012).

Furthering the DCL’s initiatives, in January 2014, President Obama launched a federal task force on sexual assault based upon a report released by the White House Council on Women and Girls titled *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action* (Felch & Gordon, 2014). This report “identified college as a particularly risky place for women, noting that campus rapists are often repeat offenders,” and President Obama therefore “called on college presidents across the country to do more to prevent the assaults” (Felch & Gordon, 2014). The DCL and President Obama’s calls for action are expected to spur further prevention efforts by universities.

These efforts are crucial, given the devastating effects of sexual assault on its victims. According to Brener, McMahon, Warren, and Douglas (1999), college women who have experienced sexual assault were more likely than their non-victimized peers to
engage in drinking and driving, binge drinking, marijuana usage, and suicidal ideation. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Black, et al., 2011) discovered that victims were more likely than non-victims to report difficulty sleeping, activity limitations, chronic pain, and frequent headaches. Due to these debilitating, and often lifelong, effects, further study of sexual assault, and the implementation of evidence-based prevention activities, should seek to eliminate sexual assault entirely to make colleges, including intercollegiate athletics, a better place for young men and women. This cultural change will require continued, more methodologically sound research to explore not only the occurrence, predictors, and risk factors for student-athletes, but also the efficacy of education and prevention programming.

This study fills a gap in the literature on sexual assault within college athletics. Additionally, following Lather’s (1986) research as praxis, its use-inspired research will further the work of universities and athletic departments in preventing sexual assault from occurring. As such, this study contributes to bettering the lives of student-athletes by preventing and reducing sexual assault through an evaluation of the policies and programs of the department. Additionally, through understanding of the impact of sexual assault, this study contributes to the implementation of the DCL and President Obama’s calls to create and maintain effective prevention programs and will thereby reduce the occurrence of sexual assault within athletic departments.

**Purpose**

Drawing upon grounded theory and using semi-structured interviews, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which former student-athletes understand sexual assault, as well as their perceptions of their athletic department’s response to occurrences
and prevention. One goal of this research was to learn more about what student-athletes know sexual assault to be, so that practitioners and researchers alike can work toward creating and implementing more effective programs, ultimately leading to violence-free college sports. Grounded theory was critical for this research and is more thoroughly explored in Chapter Three. However, it is useful to know that grounded theory helps a researcher generate, or ground, theory in data collected from the field, instead of proving an already-existing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given the gaps in the existing literature on sexual assault in intercollegiate athletics (see Background), grounded theory was appropriate for this study.

Through semi-structured interviews with former student-athletes, this study utilized grounded theory seek to understand the ways in which intercollegiate athletic departments respond to occurrences of sexual assault and work to prevent future assaults from occurring. According to Lather (1986), research as praxis critiques the status quo, potentially resulting in a more socially just environment. Due to the critical need to reduce sexual assault within athletic departments, conducting research as praxis was one goal for this study.

Research Problem

While there is a clear need for further empirical data on the prevalence of student-athletes as perpetrators of sexual assault, there is also a call to prevent such assaults from happening, regardless of the numbers or demographics of perpetrators. In addition to further empirical data, there is a lack of understanding around the phenomenon of sexual assault in intercollegiate athletics. Thus, the research problem was that it is important to examine the occurrence, as well as the prevention efforts, of sexual assault through
qualitative methods. Qualitative methods help expose the “how” and “why” of phenomena, and once a fuller picture is painted of the environments in which student-athletes play, practice, study, and live, prevention efforts can be tailored to help reduce sexual assault within athletic departments.

**Research Questions**

Research questions for this study include:

1. What do student-athletes know about sexual assault?

2. In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?
   
   a. In what ways does the occurrence of sexual assault impact student-athletes’ personal lives, academic performance, and/or athletic performance?

3. What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?
   
   a. In what ways are these effective or not effective?

4. What support is necessary to provide an optimal, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes?

**Key Terms**

It is crucial to understand the meaning of key terms within this study. In particular, it is important to note the distinctions between sexual assault, sexual violence, sexual abuse, and violence against women. Though these terms are often used interchangeably in society, the meanings and definitions may vary from state and federal laws that define these crimes and govern the prosecution of said crimes. Additionally,
varying definitions are used through the literature (further elucidated in Chapter Two when referencing specific research studies). However, for this study, the following definitions are attributable to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (“Types of sexual violence,” n.d.) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“Sexual violence: Definitions,” n.d.).

*Sexual assault* is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of physical, non-consensual sexual acts including rape, battery, forced oral copulation, and any other unwanted sexual act. The legal definition of sexual assault varies from state to state. The term “rape” is also often used interchangeably with sexual assault, though sexual assault encompasses a wider range of acts than rape. *Sexual assault* is generally known to include physical contact of some form, whereas *sexual harassment* is verbal in nature.

*Sexual violence*, in contrast to sexual assault, is often understood to include any violence based on sex, sexuality, or gender, including the harassment of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. Though a sexual assault perpetrated by a man onto a woman is sexual violence, the term will not be used as such in this study, as sexual violence (e.g., LGBT harassment) may imply a much broader concept than can be addressed here.

*Sexual abuse* is considered to take place between an adult and a child, also often called molestation or child rape. As the focus of this study was on the college population, the term “sexual abuse” was not utilized.

Lastly, *violence against women* is the broadest term, encompassing all forms of violence against women, whether sexual in nature or not. Violence against women includes stalking, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and any other assault or
battery on a woman. Though some studies in the literature on student-athletes combined sexual assault and violence against women (Crosset, et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993), the research focus of this study was on sexual assault, not broader forms of violence against women.

When referring to research within this study, sexual assault is the preferred term. However, when referring to other research, the terms sexual violence, sexual abuse, or violence against women may be used to appropriately coincide with the terminology used within those studies.

In the realm of education, there are three types of sexual assault programming: risk reduction, awareness, and prevention. These programs are based upon the premise that only the perpetrator can stop a potential assault from happening and that victims, or potential victims, are not responsible for the assault. As such, any programming aimed toward women as victims (i.e., self-defense or “tips” on how to avoid sexual assault) are considered risk reduction programs. These programs aim to teach women how to reduce their risk of being sexually assaulted, with the understanding that the women themselves cannot prevent the assault—only the perpetrator can in fact stop an assault from occurring.

Awareness programs may be directed toward either men or women. These programs inform participants of the definition and types of sexual assault, and teach appropriate responses for victims and their friends.

Prevention programs are aimed at potential perpetrators and seek to change the attitudes and behaviors of men before an assault can occur. These programs often occur throughout a prolonged period of time (months or years) and address the root causes of
sexual assault (i.e., rape culture; see Sanday, 1990). These programs may also include bystander intervention, which teaches students how to intervene with others if they believe a sexual assault may occur. Bystander intervention also helps to change attitudes and behaviors through peer policing of actions.

Other key terms in this study include:

- **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):** The governing body of intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA is divided into three divisions; the most competitive is Division I (DI). Much of the literature in sports and sexual assault is conducted at NCAA DI institutions. According to the NCAA, “Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletic budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships” (NCAA Division I, n.d.). Division I is further subdivided into another elite tier comprising teams that participate in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). In August 2014, the NCAA voted to grant more autonomy and control to the Power 5 conference, which mostly participate in the FBS (Sherman, 2015). These conferences include the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big 12, Big Ten, Pacific 12 (Pac-12), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC).

- **Student-athletes:** Students who participate in NCAA intercollegiate athletics. Sometimes referred to as “varsity athletes,” these students often, though not always, receive athletic scholarships and participate in sports at the highest levels of competition (i.e., DI).
• **Non-athletes**: students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics, though they may be involved with recreational sports. The literature often compares student-athletes to non-athletes.

**Overview of Remaining Chapters**

Chapter Two summarizes and synthesizes the pertinent literature in the field regarding sexual assault and violence against women in intercollegiate athletics. Gaps in the literature are highlighted, as well as critique of the existing studies. The literature includes sexual assault studies in intercollegiate athletics as well as within the realm of higher education as a whole, sexual assault prevention techniques and education within higher education, and relevant information on masculinity and rape culture, as they pertain to sexual assault within intercollegiate athletics.

Chapter Three details the methodology and methods used to undertake this study. A thorough examination of the researcher’s epistemology is included, as well as rationale for doing a grounded theory study. In addition to an outline of qualitative methods (i.e., interviews) and how they were used, a timeline of the study and research participant information are reviewed.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study, focusing on major themes derived from coding participants’ interview transcripts. Concepts and themes include participant knowledge of sexual assault, sexual assault within the context of athletics, and how athletic departments can create change in the future.

Chapter Five provides implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research. It also outlines the elements of effective sexual assault prevention education. Drawing upon responses from participants, this chapter offers a
model education program that athletic departments may utilize in the future to reduce sexual assault on their campuses.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two begins with an overview of rape culture, followed by an examination of masculinity and hypermasculinity, particularly as it pertains to sexual assault and college athletics. Further, a comprehensive review of the literature in the field is presented, beginning with an overview of sexual assault at the university level, which is followed by information about sexual assault within intercollegiate athletics. This section includes an examination of male student-athletes as perpetrators as well as criticisms and gaps in the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of sexual assault prevention efforts at the university level and in college athletics.

Rape Culture

Prior to the 1980s, rape was assumed to be a consequence of male nature, in that men were “programmed for rape” (Sanday, 1981, p. 6). However, through her study of 156 tribal societies, Sanday (1981) posited that rape is not a biological need, but something can be attributed a society’s culture; thus, the term rape culture was born. Herman (1984) was the first to capture America as a rape culture. In a society where the majority of the nation’s leaders, both in the workplace and in elected government are men, “the eroticization of male dominance means that whenever women are in a subordinate position to men, the likelihood for sexual assault is great” (p. 52). Herman concluded, “To end rape, people must be able to envision a relationship between the
sexes that involves sharing, warmth, and equality, and to bring about a social system in which those values are fostered” (Herman, 1984, p. 52). The ideal of a rape free environment was supported by Messner and Sabo (1994), who wrote:

Compelling as the evidence is, we want to emphasize two points. First, nothing inherent in men leads them to rape women. Peggy Sanday, an anthropologist, and other researchers have found that there are rape-free societies in the world, and that they tend to be characterized by low levels of militarization, high levels of respect for women, high levels of participation by women in the economy and the political system, and high levels of male involvement in child care. (p. 34; emphasis original)

Thus, rape cultures are often characterized by high levels of tolerance for violence, and strict sex segregation and gender roles, which foster lack of respect for women.

These characteristics of a rape culture are often cultivated and supported by rape myths. According to Burt (1980), these are “stereotypes and myths—defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists—in creating a climate hostile to rape victims” (p. 217). Examples of rape myths are “look at how she was dressed—she was asking for it” or “he couldn’t help himself—he’s a guy just following his sexual urges, what do you expect?” Rape myths include stereotypes about both victims and perpetrators, but hold only the victim accountable for the sexual assault (Burt, 1980). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) further contributed to the field’s understanding of rape myths, noting they are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134).

Rape myths and stereotypes often uphold traditional views on sex, gender and masculinity (i.e., women are to be pure and chaste, men are celebrated for sexual conquest). Burt’s groundbreaking findings indicated that rape myth acceptance is
“strongly connected to other deeply held and pervasive attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, distrust of the opposite sex (adversarial sexual beliefs), and acceptance of interpersonal violence” (p. 229). This last finding is particularly worrisome, as the acceptance of interpersonal violence was found to be the strongest predictor of rape myth support. In sum, rape myths and their acceptance contribute to a culture that is supportive of rape (i.e., a rape culture).

Thus, rape cultures are those that (1) “display a high level of tolerance for violence, male dominance, and sexual segregation” and (2) “lack the social constraints that discourage sexual aggression or contain social arrangements that encourage it” (Crosset, 1999, p. 245). In the realm of higher education, Sanday (1990) conducted additional research examining college fraternities and rape culture, and many facets of American society, including intercollegiate athletics, are often considered to be rape cultures or display elements of rape culture. Curry (2002) exposed rape culture in college athletics through an examination of locker room talk. He found that locker room talk about women “promotes harmful attitudes and creates an environment supportive of sexual assault and rape” (p. 183). Further, Messner and Sabo (1994) connected locker room talk to peer support of violence:

And when verbal sparring and bragging about sexual conquests led to actual behavior, peer group values encouraged these young men to treat females as objects of conquest. This sort of masculine peer group dynamic is at the heart of what feminists have called “the rape culture.” (p. 50)

Peer support of violence is cited as the main reason for acting in a sexually aggressive way. According to Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997), “We argue that North American is a ‘rape-supportive culture,’ where values and beliefs that support and encourage the
sexual victimization of women are widely available to all men” (p. 52). However, just because someone is supportive of rape myths does not necessarily mean acting upon those beliefs. Schwartz and DeKeseredy propose that perpetrators of sexual assault do so based on perceived peer support for violence against women (1997).

**Hypermasculinity**

Rape cultures can be aggravated by hypermasculinity (Sanday, 1990). However, an examination of masculinity within the context of sport is necessary first. Crosset (1990) argued that in the Victorian era, “physical educators and ideologues of early modern sport professed inherent connections between sport, morality, and manliness” (p. 45). This early connection between sport, manliness, and masculinity has been supported throughout current sport manifestations. Messner and Sabo (1994) contended that to display masculinity in sport, men must be “competitive, successful, dominating, aggressive, stoical, goal-oriented, and physically strong” and therefore “many athletes accept this definition of masculinity and apply it in their relationships with women” (p. 38). However, they also argued that sport in itself does not make athletes more likely to sexually assault women. Drawing up rape culture characteristics, they wrote, “Nothing inherent in sports makes athletes especially likely to rape women. Rather, it is the way sports are organized to influence developing masculine identities and male peer groups that leads many male athletes to rape” (p. 34; emphasis original).

In her work on male violence against women, Brackenridge (2002) argued that violence against women in sport (i.e., against female athletes themselves) is due to a crisis of masculinity facing men in sport. She described sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse as a continuum of violence against women that began in the
1970s and continued throughout the 1990s. Further, she acknowledged that “under-reporting is a common problem in research studies of rape, for obvious reasons of confidentiality and post-disclosure victimization,” (p. 258) thus limiting her arguments to mostly those of sexual harassment, as there is little existing data on sexual assault victimization of female athletes.

While Brackenridge (2002), theorized that male athlete violence against women is due to a crisis of masculinity, others attributed it to concept of hypermasculinity. As noted, rape cultures can be aggravated by hypermasculinity (Sanday, 1990). Corprew and Mitchell (2014) thoroughly explored hypermasculinity, noting that a more classical definition includes “an exaggerated adherence to traditional male gender role beliefs” which “encapsulates a belief by men that they should be tough, be independent, act as provider and protector, and be resistant to femininity” (p. 549). This was expanded to include “characteristics such as a supervaluation of competitive and aggressive activities” as well as “higher levels of status and self-reliance [that] are important to the hypermasculine male and that sensation-seeking, dominance over others, and interpersonal violence become necessary components of the hypermasculine male’s perception of maleness” (p. 549).

Murnen and Kohlman (2007) defined hypermasculinity as values associated with all-male groups (e.g., fraternities, the military). Hypermasculinity is three-pronged in promoting (1) “the idea that violence is ‘manly’;” (2) “that men are naturally aggressive and dominant over women;” and (3) “that the ‘sexual conquest’ of women is an important aspect of masculinity” (p. 146). These values are often seen in the military due to its rigid sex roles and unwelcoming environment for women (Turchik & Wilson, 2010). In
addition, Corprew and Mitchell (2014) noted that college fraternities “may generate more opportunities for antifeminine ideological development and exhibition of behaviors associated with sexual aggression” (p. 550).

Hypermasculinity has also been linked heavily with sport participation of men and violence against women. Brackenridge (2002) noted:

This hyper masculine, heterosexual culture of sport, with its sexually intense initiation rituals, excessive use of alcohol and demeaning attitudes towards women, can remove inhibitions for sexual abuse and assault, both by males to females (singly or in groups) or by males to other males. (p. 262)

In a study on professional football players, Welch (1997) found that players in certain positions were more likely to commit violence against women. He said, “due to the degree that violence, aggression, domination, and physicality are rewarded in the context of the sport, it ought not be surprising that some football players enthusiastically embrace versions of hypermasculinity” off the field (p. 394). Welch’s study appeared to be the only one attempting to measure the differences in hypermasculinity between specific positions. In addition, Corprew and Mitchell (2014) warned that studies attempting to measure masculinity were flawed as they exhibited mixed results, thus it is inconclusive if hypermasculinity is a correlate or a cause of violent behaviors, particularly sexual assault. It is important to remember this in the next section about sexual assault on college campuses, which outlines information on both perpetrator and victim characteristics.
Sexual Assault on College Campuses

Victimization

It is often difficult to survey sexual assault due to sensitive and confidential nature of the subject (Brackenridge, 2002; Crosset, 1999). However, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) released in 2010 is widely accepted by those within the rape crisis field as the most current and accurate picture of victimization of sexual assault in the United States (Black et al., 2011). The NISVS indicated that one in five women have experienced rape in their lifetime, with more than half reporting the perpetrator as their intimate partner and 40% reporting an acquaintance as perpetrator. Further, the study showed that almost 80% of female victims experienced a completed rape prior to the age of 25, making college one of the highest risk time periods in a young woman’s life (Black et al., 2011). This supported the findings of the 2007 Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study released by the National Institute of Justice, which found that one in five undergraduate female students were the victims of attempted or completed sexual assault while in college.

As there are high numbers of women are assaulted each year on college campuses, the National Institute of Justice compiled research on victimization statistics (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). According to the report:

Although exceptions exist, most sexual victimizations occur when college women are alone with a man they know, at night, and in the privacy of a residence. Most women attempt to take protective actions against their assailants but are then reluctant to report their victimization to the police (p. 34)

Additional risk factors for women and sexual assault victimization included being single (i.e., unmarried), living on-campus, prior victimization, and “frequently drinking enough
to get drunk” (p. 23). The role of alcohol is clearly present in campus sexual assault, with research finding it consistently present in at least 50% of campus assaults (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Crowe & George, 1989; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Logan, Cole, & Capillo, 2006; Pope & Shouldice, 2001; Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999). In sum, campus sexual assault often involved women who live on campus, are intoxicated, and know their perpetrator, which leads to the next section on campus perpetrators.

**Perpetration**

As noted, alcohol was present in more than half of campus sexual assaults, with both victims and perpetrators exhibiting intoxication. However, more important from the standpoint of perpetration is peer support. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) noted that many cultures exhibit rape-supportive attitudes, but just because someone believes rape myths does not necessarily mean that he will engage in sexual assault. The authors noted that male peer support for sexual assault might lead men to commit the act. Peer support and the need for bystander intervention are discussed further in prevention efforts.

There is no typical “profile” of a campus perpetrator. However, Lisak and Miller’s (2002) work “has been instrumental in highlighting the role of the ‘undetected rapist,’ a male who is an average person, who commits repeated assaults yet is not reported” (McMahon, 2011, p. 5). The “undetected rapist” was one who does not self-identify as a rapist, but when asked questions about sexual encounters, exhibited behaviors of sexual violence. For example, the perpetrators admitted to using physical violence, such as holding down a victim who is struggling, only after verbal and/or psychological coercion did not work (Lisak & Miller, 2002). This lack of physical
violence was also demonstrated by Carr and VanDeusen (2004), whose research found:

> Few men acknowledged using physical force to obtain sex, whereas more men acknowledged some form of sexual coercion. This included pressuring women and saying things they did not mean to obtain sex, using alcohol to obtain sex, and having sex with a woman even when she wanted to stop. (p. 286)

There is a strong link between alcohol, lack of force, and coercion by perpetrators of sexual assault. This is often upheld through peer support and rape supportive attitudes in rape cultures on college campuses. The next section is a comprehensive review of sexual assault in college athletics, particularly male student-athletes as perpetrators of sexual assault.

**Sexual Assault in College Athletics**

**Male Student-Athletes and Violence Against Women**

Until the 1990s, research in the field of student-athlete violence against women was nonexistent. Melnick (1992) was one of the first in the sport field to call upon colleagues to examine the relationship between intercollegiate athletic participation and sexual assault by male student-athletes. He proposed five potential reasons for the prevalence of student-athlete perpetration: (1) male bonding; (2) sport as a masculine proving ground; (3) combative sports (i.e., contact sports) and violence; (4) the athletic justice system (i.e., athletes believe that they are subject to more lenient rules by coaches); and (5) big-man-on-campus syndrome (i.e., athlete are so accustomed to “easy” sex that they’re not used to hearing “no”). Based upon these presumptive reasons, Melnick also laid out the case for five reforms: (1) elimination of student-athlete specific residences; (2) elimination of sexist talk in the sporting environment; (3) tougher, swift punishment for perpetrators; (4) rape prevention education for student-athletes; and (5),
the most radical, “reformation of the male sport experience” (p. 35), which one can see echoed in sociology literature (Coakley, 2009; Messner & Sabo, 1994). However, despite these calls from Melnick and other scholars, no one is reforming the male sport experience in ways that are comprehensive and/or focus on masculinity, rather through nitpicking one element of a sport experience (i.e., alcohol abuse).

Perhaps in response to Melnick’s (1992) call to action, the mid-1990s saw the development of research on violence against women perpetrated by male athletes, particularly intercollegiate student-athletes. Mostly quantitative in nature, empirical findings were mixed. What follows is a review of the literature detailing research indicating higher rates of student-athlete perpetrators of sexual assault, rates similar to non-athletes, criticism of the field, and the positive impact of rape education prevention programming with student-athletes. It is important to note that in studies of sexual assault, other campus factors (e.g., fraternity affiliation, drug and/or alcohol use) were addressed; however, due to the focus of this study, only athletic participation is considered here.

One of the first studies, by Fritner and Rubinson (1993), provided early data on student-athlete perpetration of sexual assault. Their study focused on the correlation of fraternity affiliation, alcohol use, and student-athlete involvement with violence against women. The authors sampled 925 randomly selected women. Responses categorized women as experiencing one of four crimes: (1) sexual assault; (2) attempted sexual assault; (3) sexual abuse; and (4) battery, illegal restraint, and/or intimidation. Results indicated that 27.1% of women were victims of one of these crimes. Additionally, many women experienced more than one form of abuse. Victims identified their perpetrators,
with student-athletes representing 22.6% of perpetrators of sexual assaults; 13.7% of perpetrators of attempted sexual assaults; 13.6% of perpetrators of sexual abuse incidences; and 11.09% of perpetrators of battery, illegal restraint, and/or intimidation incidences. During the time of the study, student-athletes represented less than 2% of the overall male student body. As such, Fritner and Rubinson (1993) indicated that student-athletes were “vastly overrepresented as offenders of these crimes” (p. 282) and noted that future research into this area should be undertaken. The need for further study is noted throughout the decade by other researchers.

As with much of the literature, Koss and Gaines (1993) explored the link between fraternity affiliation, athletic participation, and sexual assault. Taking an approach different than Fritner and Rubinson (1993), the authors surveyed 530 male students, including 140 student-athletes, of which 16% participated in revenue-producing sports (i.e., football and basketball). Scored on such attributes such as sexual nonaggression, uninvited sexual advances, unwanted sexual contact, sexual coercion, and attempted or completed rape, the authors found true the “prediction of sexual aggression by participation in organized athletics” (Koss & Gaines, 1993, p. 104). However, the authors did indicate that the connection between being a student-athlete and sexual aggression connection was less than that of alcohol and/or nicotine use (i.e., alcohol and/or nicotine use is a higher predictor of sexual aggression than athletic participation).

While Koss and Gaines (1993) relied on students’ self-reports, Crosset, Ptacek, McDonald and Benedict (1996) examined the incidences of sexual assault reported to campus judicial affairs. In their study of 10 judicial affairs offices during a three-year period, they found an overrepresentation of male student-athletes as perpetrators of
sexual assault and battering (i.e., domestic violence). Though the intent was to study battering, not all schools in the dataset kept complete records, and thus both sexual assault and battering were analyzed. In the 10 participating schools, 35% of the reported perpetrators of sexual assault and battering were student-athletes, though they comprised only 3% of the student body. The authors did acknowledge the small sample (69 reports of sexual assault, 21 reports of battering) and cautioned that the reports only constitute a small number of actual assaults occurring on any campus at any given time, due to the stigma, fear, and negative stereotypes experienced by victims of reporting these crimes, which, by their nature, are intimate and taboo.

Though previous research found a link between athletic participation and sexually aggressive behavior and actions, Boeringer (1996; 1999) found a link between sport participation and sexually aggressive attitudes. After surveying 477 male undergraduates, of whom 16.2% were student-athletes, he found that student-athletes displayed a “greater rape proclivity” (Boeringer, 1996, p. 134). Further, student-athletes were more likely than their non-athlete counterparts to report potential use of coercion, alcohol and drugs, and force. Participants were asked to indicate their likelihood in engaging in acts such as coercion, force, etc. if there was no chance they would be caught. Due to the hypothetical nature of the survey, the dataset cannot definitely prove if student-athletes are more likely to actually use coercion, drugs and alcohol, and/or force; thus, Boeringer (1996) was only able to measure attitudes. As such, he reported that while student-athletes are more likely to hypothetically engage in incidences of sexual force, they are not more likely than non-athletes to hypothetically engage in sexual aggression. He concluded by noting that this study did not allow for variances between different types of student-athletes, and
suggested longitudinal research in the future to determine whether or not student-athletes who enter the sports world are already predisposed to violence and aggression, or whether participation in sports may encourage this aggression.

Boeringer (1999) followed his 1996 study with additional information about the likelihood of student-athletes to support rape myths, which are “beliefs and situational definitions that excuse rape or define assaultive situations as something other than rape” (p. 82). For example, a rape myth is that a woman “asked for it” by wearing a short skirt or revealing clothes. Within a sample of undergraduate men (detailed in Boeringer, 1996), he found that student-athletes were significantly more likely to report agreement with 14 rape-supportive myths than did non-athletes. Boeringer hypothesized that hypermasculine environments were responsible for 56% of student-athletes responding positively to rape-supportive myths, whereas only 8% of non-athletes agreed with the same statements.

Despite student-athletes’ self-reports and campus records indicating higher proclivity and incidences of sexual assault among student-athletes, other research indicated otherwise. Crosset, Benedict and McDonald (1995) surveyed 20 campus police departments, and found that student-athletes were not represented as perpetrators of sexual assault at higher rates than non-athletes. A significant limitation of this study is that more than 80% of all rapes go unreported to police, and thus the campus police reports are not necessarily a representative sample (Crosset, Benedict & McDonald, 1995).
Criticisms and Gaps in the Literature

The bulk of research on student-athlete violence against women was conducted and published in the mid-1990s. During this time, Koss and Cleveland (1996) detailed the methodological and conceptual concerns with the studies that led to such mixed empirical results. The authors noted sampling problems such as convenience, as well as the need for larger and more representative samples. They also indicated that “qualitative richness has not been matched by quantitative rigor” (Koss & Cleveland, 1996, p. 181). Additionally, they addressed the nature of self-selection: Are more aggressive, rape-supportive men joining sports teams because they are naturally aggressive, or do sports actually make student-athletes more aggressive? Their findings from this time period do not address this concern. Lastly, they discussed a need to measure sport subcultures. Boeringer (1996) acknowledged this as a limitation, and Crosset (1999) focused on this in his critique.

Similar to Koss and Cleveland (1996), Crosset (1999) addressed the variance of sports and their individual cultures, and he noted that future research “should focus on why some positions, teams, sports, or programs are prone to committing specific types of violence against women” (p. 249). It does not appear that this research has been undertaken since Crosset’s criticism in 1999. He also wrote that much of the research relied too broadly upon rape culture and called for both specificity in methods as well as theoretical constructs in future research. Lastly, Crosset indicated a need to focus on structural changes within intercollegiate athletics and higher education, instead of relying upon individual and punitive responses to incidences of sexual assault against women by student-athletes.
Despite the calls to re-evaluate the methods and conceptual frameworks and continue to study student-athlete sexual assault (Crosset, 1999; Koss & Cleveland, 1996), there is a significant time gap in the research, with only two publications addressing student-athlete violence against women during the last 15 years. One study sought new empirical data on whether male student-athletes are more likely than non-athletes to perpetrate sexual assault (Sawyer et al., 2002). While the authors did narrow their focus and sample a variety of student-athlete groups (e.g., team-based versus individual sports, class rank), they did so with a convenience sample, one of the issues noted by Koss and Cleveland (1996) as a limitation in this field of study. Though the results of Sawyer et al. (2002) cannot be generalized, their findings do support the idea that student-athletes are not a homogeneous group and should be studied accordingly.

Finally, the most current research on student-athlete violence against women is still five years old. Murnen and Kohlman (2007) conducted a meta-analytic review of both behaviors and attitudes that support sexual aggression. Through statistical analysis, they discovered a moderate effect between athletic participation and hypermasculinity, an attribute that positively contributes to rape culture (Sanday, 1990). Further, small but significant associations were found between athletic participation and sexual aggression and rape myth acceptance. The authors recommended longitudinal studies with this student population, as well as distinct studies among student-athlete subcultures and teams. Murnen and Kohlman (2007) also suggested institutional change.

**Sexual Assault Prevention Efforts**

Regardless of these mixed findings in sexual assault perpetration by athletes, many universities understood the critical need to reduce sexual assault on campus and
began implementing both awareness and prevention education programs on campuses. Though athletic participation is only one correlate of sexual assault, efforts have been made to document the effects of programming with student-athletes. Jackson and Davis (2000) outlined an athlete-specific rape prevention program, similar to what many universities provide to student-athletes. Unfortunately, while the abstract noted that “the program has been in place for 10 years and has demonstrated several uniquely positive results” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 589), these results were not detailed in a methodologically sound way within the paper. Several other programs, however, have documented success with empathy-based prevention (Foubert & Perry, 2007) and bystander intervention (Katz, 1995; McMahon & Farmer, 2009; Moynihan & Banyard, 2008).

Though the above studies related to awareness and prevention programming were specific to student-athletes, studies throughout the literature noted the impact and success of general and/or campus-wide efforts not specific to student-athletes (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Berg, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Breitenbecher, 2000; Heppner, Neville, Smith, Kivlighan, & Gershuny, 1999; Rothman & Silverman, 2007; Thatcher, 2011). According to Breitenbecher, however, “most published investigations have reported favorable, short-term results on at least one outcome variable measured in the study” (p. 39), with the most consistent support for programs that reduce rape myth acceptance. Why? She called this problem the “file drawer problem” as “studies that result in nonsignificant findings are often less likely to be published” (p. 40). However, the elements found to be effective are further discussed in Chapter Five in connection with a model education program for student-athletes.
In summary, findings indicated student-athletes disproportionately represented perpetrators of incidences of violence against women (Crosset et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993) and possessed attitudes of stronger sexual aggression and rape myth acceptance (Boeringer 1996, 1999; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Sawyer et al., 2002). In contrast, one study found that student-athletes were not overrepresented as perpetrators of sexual assaults in campus police reports (Crosset et al., 1995). Further, research supported the success of awareness and rape prevention programming with student-athletes (Foubert & Perry, 2007; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Katz, 1995; McMahon & Farmer, 2009; Moynihan & Banyard, 2008).
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodological positioning and research design for this study. Knowledge of the researcher’s methodological position is critical to understanding why and which methodologies and methods were used. The research design details the population and sample, grounded theory, the methodology used, and information on qualitative research methods (i.e., interviews). Other information covered includes data analysis, validity, ethics, and a timeline of the study. This chapter concludes detailed descriptions of the research participants.

Methodological Positioning

A new doctoral student in the sport management field may take a theory class, reading up to a dozen articles each week. This immersion into the field might show this student that, while there are countless theories used in the field to explain everything from sport participation to corporate management of sport equipment, there are relatively few methods used in sport management research and even fewer paradigmatic variations. Much research in the field is quantitative, often described in very positivistic ways. In the last decade, however, some scholars have called for a more critical focus with varied methods, including more qualitative research (Amis & Silk, 2009; Frisby, 2005). This section explores the paradigms that shape sport management research, arguing for a more
critical approach in the future. Such an approach benefits scholars and students by bringing more nuanced and critical understandings to the field.

Defining and distinguishing the varying paradigms used in the field is important. To begin, an outline of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods is required. According to Bryman (2012), each researcher has his or her own ontology, which is the theory of nature of social entities. Ontology is, essentially, what one knows to be reality. Ontology is often broken into two categories, objectivism and constructivism. Objectivism purports that there is an objective, absolute reality or knowledge in the world just waiting to be discovered. Constructivism, however, purports that there may be multiple realities, constructed by the individuals participating in them.

A researcher’s ontology often shapes his or her epistemology, or theory of knowledge. In short, epistemology is how one knows reality. According to Bryman (2012), epistemology is “a stance on what should pass as acceptable knowledge” (p. 711). What is accepted as valid and true? Does one believe there can be truth—absolute or otherwise? Epistemology may be broken into four basic paradigms: positivist, interpretivist, critical, and poststructural. These paradigmatic epistemologies may be connected to ontology as shown in Figure 1.
Positivists, falling under the ontology of objectivism, believe there is an absolute right and wrong, one reality to be discovered. The other paradigms fall under a constructivism ontology. Interpretivists believe there are many ways to interpret, or construct, reality, depending on one’s standing and viewpoint in the world. There is not necessarily an absolute right or wrong. Critical researchers take this one step further, however, and recognize that there are power differentials at play in interpreting the world. Where one sits in various hierarchies in society can significantly affect how one interprets the world. Finally, poststructuralists seek to eliminate binaries and boundaries, going beyond structure, so to speak.

Depending on one’s ontology and epistemology, methodology is chosen. Methodology is the theory of how inquiry should proceed; *how one figures out* reality (Bryman, 2012). This is how the researcher designs a study, which could include
controlled experiments, observations, and creating hypotheses, and how a researcher chooses to analyze data. Methodology and methods are distinctly different. Methods are simply the tools a researcher uses for collecting data, whereas methodologies are the theories for constructing a research study. Methods are often described as quantitative or qualitative, and some studies are considered to be mixed-methods (combining both quantitative and qualitative research). Bryman (2012) detailed the numerous methods used in social research, though one may assume quantitative methods to be the “how many” and qualitative methods to be the “how.” Quantitative methods often include surveys and statistics, numbers and counting. Qualitative methods often include interviews and observations, questions and free-flowing answers. The combination of these varying paradigms, defined through their ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and methods, drives research.

In the field of sport management, much research is done from a positivist paradigm, using quantitative methods. Frisby (2005), however, recently called for the use of multiple paradigms and viewpoints:

One of my key arguments is that if we are to fully understand all dimensions of sport management, we need research to be conducted from multiple paradigms. The paradigms we operate from as researchers, whether it is positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, critical social science, post modernism, or a combination of these paradigms, shape the questions we ask, the methods we use, and the degree to which our findings will have an impact on society. (p. 2)

In noting that research can, and does, have a direct impact on students, practitioners, corporations, and society as a whole, Frisby suggested turning away from mainly positivist research. She wrote, “The type of knowledge we produce will be restricted if we rely too heavily on any one” of the paradigms (p. 2). Frisby concluded with the notion
that critical work is often left to the sociologists, but those in sport management need to be doing this type of research as well.

Amis and Silk (2009) further advanced Frisby’s (2005) call for more paradigms, very specifically focusing on how sport management researchers should be using a critical lens and focusing more prominently on qualitative methods. They wrote, “Too often our work in sport management has been presented as neutral and value free, with little regard for the historical, social, political, and cultural context in which the work takes place” (Amis & Silk, 2009, p. 4). Further, they noted that the field is “dominated by brazenly hypercommercial enterprises and spectacles that make no effort to disguise their cardinal objective of delivering entertaining products designed to maximize profit margins” (Amis & Silk, 2009, p. 4). Embracing a critical framework can therefore help the field. While sport management can and should continue to focus on management, researchers can still approach the field critically and incorporate the voices of the marginalized to help managers build and sustain sports organizations.

Amis and Silk (2009) suggested methods and methodologies that have a critical framework and noted the noncompulsory nature of the positivist ideals of reliability, validity, and generalizability. In fact, generalizability is not ideal when comparing different people and communities. In a diverse society, it is perfectly acceptable—and perhaps, more ethical—to put things into a localized context. Sport management has historically been an interdisciplinary field, and Amis and Silk concluded their argument by noting that, as such, sport management needs to embrace interdisciplinary approaches, including varied methodologies and methods, specifically critical thought. Though only
one person conducted this dissertation research, the possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration on the prevention of sexual assault in intercollegiate athletics are numerous.

**Researcher Positionality**

According to Lincoln (1995), it is critical for researchers to “come clean” about their stance or position on any research subject, calling positionality a “kind of quality criteria” (p. 280). Researchers must “come clean” about their position in relation to a variety of research characteristics (i.e., race, gender, social class, education) that may influence both the researcher and participants. In previous sociological works, researchers claimed they could produce a “whole and complete truth” (Lincoln, p. 280), but this is not possible due to the varying positions taken by both researchers and participants. As such, it is critical for researchers to examine their positionality in relation to the work they are doing.

Positionality is not bias. It is reflexivity on behalf of the researcher to determine how—not if—she may influence the research based on her own background, identities, and beliefs. Prior to beginning my dissertation, I completed two qualitative research courses with Dr. Patti Lather at The Ohio State University, who also served on my doctoral candidacy committee. In this capacity, Dr. Lather provided me with the literature and tools to examine my position in relation to that of my participants. For example, one course activity required me to conduct practice interviews on this topic (i.e., sexual assault in college sport) and reflect on the interviews. I found that my previous role as a rape crisis counselor and educator made me feel as though I wanted to “educate” the students on sexual assault if they gave a definition or example that was different from mine. Dr. Lather’s thorough preparation helped me to examine why and how I felt this
way, to ensure it would not happen—or be less likely to happen—during my actual dissertation interviews.

To explore my positionality in relation to this study, it is important to disclose my many identities and characteristics that may influence participants. I am a white woman, as were the bulk of the study’s participants. I was never a Division I student-athlete, as all of the participants were. However, I worked as an academic advisor for student-athletes at a Division I university, so I have a good understanding of the many demands often placed on them by their universities, coaches, and sports. While working as an academic advisor, I began volunteering for a local rape crisis center, later accepting a position as Executive Director of this agency. In my role there, I regularly discussed and provided education on sexual assault to a variety of people, ranging from agency volunteers and local law enforcement to university staff and college students. These experiences have ensured that I feel comfortable discussing sexual assault, a very taboo and difficult subject for many people. It also means, as demonstrated by the practice interview anecdote above, that I see myself as an educator on these issues. My biggest struggle, as noted in my reflexive journal, was ensuring that I allowed participants to speak without “correcting” them or “educating” them on the topic. I simply needed to listen and hear their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs on sexual assault.

In sum, my position as a former rape crisis center worker meant that I have more knowledge on sexual assault that many people, including most of the participants I interviewed. It also meant that I needed to be quite careful to retain my role as researcher, listener, and learner, shedding my prior responsibilities as Executive Director of a rape crisis center and as a sexual assault prevention educator. Here is an excerpt from my
reflexive journal on this matter, written immediately after an interview with a female participant:

I was also a bit talky in this one—she seemed like she wanted to be educated—apologizing for not knowing, saying “I should pay more attention” etc. so I thought…maybe she cares? Maybe she’ll listen? This was definitely MY needs overriding hers. Or not even so much as overriding, I don’t know that I was pushy (definitely not like I was during my practice interviews), but “educating” her was MY need, not necessarily in reaction to something she asked for.

In this instance, the participant had expressed, in my opinion, interest in what I had to say. This was quite different from my practice interviews, in which I had pushed the “correct” definition of sexual assault onto those I was interviewing. Yet, it is still important to consider how my words and thoughts, when shared with participants, may influence their opinions and beliefs. As noted by Lincoln (1995), considering these topics does not invalidate or “bias” the research. If anything, having complete “detachment and author objectivity are barriers to quality, not insurance of having achieved it” (p. 280). No one is truly objective at all times, and disclosing my role as sexual assault educator ensures that my voice is acknowledged in the work as separate and distinct from that of the participants.

As the purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge of former student-athletes as well as the occurrence and prevention of sexual assault within college athletic departments, I aimed to understand the ways in which large athletic departments responded to occurrences of sexual assault and worked to prevent future assaults from occurring. Further, I explored what student-athletes knew about sexual assault, as well as how they knew it. Using grounded theory helped to expose the “how” and “why” of the phenomenon of sexual assault, in the hopes of painting a fuller picture of the
environments in which student-athletes play, practice, study, and live, thus allowing targeted prevention efforts to help reduce sexual assault within athletic departments.

**Research Design**

**Population and Sample**

The population selected for study was former student-athletes in big-time athletics. Similar to what Sperber (2001) coined as *Big-Time U*, “a large public research university with high-profile football and/or men’s basketball teams playing at the NCAA’s highest levels” (p. xii), big-time athletics in this study comprised athletic departments with high-profile football and men’s basketball teams from both public and private universities. These teams are found in 65 athletic departments that participate in the NCAA’s Power 5 conference (i.e., the ACC, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-12, and SEC). This study’s population included former student-athletes in big-time athletics from Power 5 conference schools, as well as one Ivy League institution. The intercollegiate athletic departments in the Power 5 conference are situated in the NCAA’s Division I, the highest tier of competition available. The intention was to study the culture of big-time athletics as seen through the eyes of former student-athletes participating in the big-time athletics. It is often the high-profile, highly competitive athletic departments similar to Sperber’s *Big-Time U* that receive criticism in the popular media (e.g., Gray [2014]) as well as within academia (e.g., Sperber [2001]), particularly around sexual assault concerns.

Former student-athletes who have graduated, rather than current student-athletes, were recruited for this study. This decision was made for several reasons. First, due to the intense time demands placed on current student-athletes (Jolly, 2008), former student-athletes may have more time and availability to participate. Many student-athletes spend
up to 30 hours per week on their sport (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000) in addition to their academic demands and other commitments (e.g., family, church, clubs, or campus activities). Second, according to Galletta (2013), it was crucial to consider what types of participants were able to offer responses most useful to the research questions. Former student-athletes might feel a greater freedom in answering questions honestly, without fear of repercussion if their responses criticize their former athletic department. To ensure transferability and continuity, I limited my sample to student-athletes who left their institutions within the last five years. The Office for Civil Rights’ DCL was issued in 2011, as sexual assault issues became more prominent on campus. Thus, many schools began implementing new programs to become compliant with Title IX around that time. The rationale for limiting participants to student-athletes who graduated within the last five years ensures that participants were part of big-time athletics while schools rushed to address the DCL. Prior to contacting former student-athletes, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, which informed the study’s informed consent procedures.

Former student-athletes were recruited through snowball sampling methods. I was a graduate teaching assistant for undergraduate courses at a school within the Power 5 conference, and approximately one-quarter to one-third of my students each semester were student-athletes. Many of these students have graduated, and these graduates were thought to provide a rich sample. Further, having previously worked at another institution in the Power 5 conference, I have many contacts, mainly in academic advising departments, at big-time athletics institutions throughout the country. These people served as gatekeepers to former student-athletes at a variety of Power 5 schools as I used
snowball sampling. According to Patton (1990), snowball sampling “begins by asking well-situated people…[and] by asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (p. 176). I began by emailing two groups of people: former students from my classes and my contacts in various athletic departments. I emailed former student-athletes from my courses to ask for their participation. I also emailed former students from my classes who were not athletes, asking if they had recommendations, which yielded a number of participants. Lastly, I emailed gatekeepers and contacts at various big-time athletics institutions, mainly in academic services, to recommend participants. As I interviewed participants, I asked them for referrals of other former student-athletes who would be willing to participate in the study.

As a type of purposeful sampling, snowball sampling was appropriate for this study, as “qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). According to Galletta (2013), sampling should be purposeful and faithful to the research, not random. As such, the number of participants was not to be pre-determined, as qualitative methods focus on saturation of data: “the most ideal approach is to continue recruiting participants until you feel that the interview data are no longer producing new thematic patterns” (Galletta, 2013, p. 33). Thus, I continued to recruit former student-athletes until data was saturated. Given the timeline of dissertation research, as well as the need for transferability (see below for more information on both topics), I anticipated interviewing no fewer than five former student-athletes and no more than 20, with the final number of participants holding at 15. Further, by beginning with participants who were my former students, I already had a level of trust and rapport built
with them (see below for the importance on building rapport during interviews) that helped to elicit honest and useful data.

**Methodology: Grounded Theory**

I studied sexual assault in college athletics by employing qualitative research methods using a grounded theory methodology. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), “Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known” (p. 19). As evident from the literature review, there is a dearth of information about sexual assault in intercollegiate athletics. There are numerous qualitative research methodologies, but grounded theory was the most relevant for this study.

Creswell explained that “the intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation” (1998, pp. 55-56). Using this methodology, a researcher is to generate, or ground, theory in data collected from the field, instead of proving an already-existing theory: “One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Though a variety of theoretical frameworks influence this study (i.e., rape culture; see Sanday, 1990), grounded theory does not set out to prove an *a priori* theory and instead allows the researcher freedom in exploring the themes that emerge from participants’ narratives. These themes are then combined into a story line or narrative that may be converted into a theory or paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
Additionally, the practical nature of grounded theory aligns with Lather’s (1986) *research as praxis*: research should be useful, both for those doing the research as well as those being researched. Using grounded theory helps generate a theory or paradigm model based on the lived experiences of former student-athletes, providing an explanation for a phenomenon (i.e., sexual assault) and a path for future research endeavors (i.e., effective prevention education). The paradigm model displayed at the conclusion of Chapter Four significantly influenced the sexual assault prevention education program outlined in Chapter Five, which may be utilized by athletic departments to educate student-athletes.

**Method: Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviewing is a qualitative method frequently used by critical researchers. Referring to baseball, Glesne (2011) created a perfect sports analogy for interviews: “Think of interviewing as the process of getting words to fly” (p. 102). The interviewer’s questions are the pitches, in the hopes of the interviewee (i.e., the batter) hitting a home run, where his or her words fly out of the baseball park.

Interview types vary. According to Griffin (2005), three main views on this method exist: conventional, where the interviewer is objective, neutral, and invisible (positivist); modern, where the interview data is the resource, faithfully reflecting the interviewee’s reality (interpretivist); and postmodern, where the interview reflects a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and the interviewer (critical). Further, the researcher must decide between a structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview (Bryman, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Structured interviews have a set list of questions that every interviewee is asked, never straying from the script. Semi-structured interviews
may have a list of questions that the interviewer hopes to cover, but this format allows for flexibility if the interviewee strays from the topic or the interviewer hopes to pursue new or different information that comes up during the interview. During unstructured, or open, interviews, the researcher does not have necessarily have a plan in place. Often, there is no “agenda” and perhaps only one question is asked (Bryman, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Semi-structured interviews with a postmodern/critical view were used in this study, as “a key benefit of the semi-structured interview is its attention to lived experience while also addressing theoretically driven variables of interest” (Galletta, 2013, p. 24).

In addition to setting the interview structure, the purpose of interviews should also be clarified. According to Bryman (2012), there are three reasons to conduct individual interviews: life history, oral history, and topical interviewing. The life history interview asks participants to look back broadly over their lives and to provide details of experiences throughout the lifespan. Oral history interviews, however, ask the participants to focus on a specific incident, era, or time period in their lives. Topical interviewing focuses on a specific program, issue, or process in the life of the interviewee (Glesne, 2011). This purpose may sound similar to the oral history, but it is quite different. An oral history interview, for example, may focus on what a participant did during World War II and whether she worked in factories as a “Rosie the Riveter.” The researcher will ask other women about their experiences during World War II to build a picture of what life was like for women during the war. Topical interviewing, however, focuses much more on the individual’s role and experiences in a particular program or issue. For example, topical interviewing may ask former student-athletes to respond to
questions about how sexual assault is handled in the athletic department, particularly focusing on their experiences, to paint a picture of how this one campus responds to and prevents sexual assault. Topical interviewing is used quite often in critical, qualitative research, including this study.

Before conducting interviews, it is wise to get hints, tips, and advice on how to best get the participant’s words to fly (Glesne, 2011). Many scholars provide very hands-on and useful advice, which were incorporated throughout this research design and into the interview protocol (Bryman, 2012; Galletta, 2013; Glesne, 2001; Griffin, 2005; Holloway & Jefferson, 1997; Mishler, 1986). Most importantly, Galletta provided a three-part framework for semi-structured interviews. The opening segment should create space for the participant’s narrative, grounded in his or her experiences. The middle segment should address questions of greater specificity, exploring the participant’s narrative in detail. The concluding segment should revisit the opening narrative, search for theoretical links within the narrative, and provide closure.

Galletta (2013) suggested conducting three separate interviews with participants to hone in on each part of the framework. However, due to time constraints for both the participants and the researcher, I incorporated all three pieces of her framework into two interviews with each former student-athlete. Interviews were anticipated to be 45 to 60 minutes in length; however, due to the nature of qualitative interviews, some were much shorter (i.e., 15 minutes) or much longer (i.e., 90 minutes). The first interview drew upon the former student-athlete’s demographics and began exploring his or her experiences in sport. These initial questions helped build rapport with the participant and eased into what were sometimes the more difficult questions on sexual assault that were addressed
in the later part of the first interview and in the second interview. After learning about the former student-athlete’s background and experiences in sport, I shifted into the basic knowledge of sexual assault, asking what they knew about sexual assault, consent, etc. These questions on sexual assault were broad in nature and can be seen in the interview protocol in Appendix A.

The second interview took place four to six weeks after the initial interview. This timeline served two purposes. First, it allowed me time to transcribe the first interview and provide transcripts to the participants. These member checks are critical to establishing validity of the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, the participants had time to reflect on the questions and their answers from the first interview, potentially providing further depth and insight during the second interview. While the first interview was a broader discussion on sexual assault, the second interview delved into the intersection of sexual assault and intercollegiate athletics. This second round of interviews focused specifically on the participants’ experiences, knowledge, and understanding of sexual assault within the context of their athletic departments. (See Appendix A for the full interview protocol.)

As explored more in depth below, data collection and data analysis often overlap (Galletta, 2013). As such, participant responses sometimes necessitated a change in the interview protocol. For example, many participants defined sexual assault and sexual harassment as the same thing, lumping them together. Thus, at the beginning of the second interview, I spent a few minutes outlining the differences between the two, so that I could ensure participant responses in the second interview truly did focus on sexual assault within the context of athletics, without straying too much into the topic of sexual
harassment. The interview protocol in Appendix A is the original protocol. Though it was modified over time, most modifications were slight in nature, except the example given on defining sexual assault and sexual harassment differently.

When necessary, I sent participants an email with follow-up questions after the second interview for additional clarification of interview responses. For example, I was unsure on one participant’s age as I forgot to ask for it during the first two interviews. For another former student-athlete, who had described many feminist experiences but did not specifically identify herself as a feminist, I sent a follow-up email for clarity on the subject.

Participant interviews were conducted in a private, quiet location, particularly important given the sensitive nature of discussing sexual assault. Five participants were interviewed in person, taking place in a private conference room at a local university. While it was my hope to conduct as many interviews as possible in person, the remaining participants were interviewed via telephone or Skype or FaceTime. These technologies were utilized to maximize convenience to the researcher and the participants when they were in distant locales. In accordance with IRB, interviews were digitally voice recorded with participant permission. Additionally, brief handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. I transcribed all of the interviews myself, in an attempt to get the data “into my bones” to aid in data analysis (Lather, 2014).

Data Analysis

The methodological approach of grounded theory included intense data collection via individual interviews followed by immediate analysis of the data through transcription and coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The semi-structured interview
protocol is found in Appendix A; however, this protocol evolved throughout the study, as various ideas, concepts, and categories emerged. According to Galletta (2013), data analysis should be ongoing and iterative. Therefore, I transcribed interviews as soon as possible after conducting them (i.e., within approximately one to two weeks) and began data analysis at that time in order to track how research categories, concepts, and ideas were evolving.

In conducting a grounded theory study, data analysis and data collection were not two separate actions but one intertwined process. Initial data from the interviews were immediately analyzed for emerging categories and ideas. This was often recorded in the researcher’s reflexive journal. Once ideas began to surface, I used these categories to guide further data collection, and the process continued until the data was saturated—that is, until no new information could be gleaned from further data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Throughout the data analysis, it was critical to keep the research questions in the forefront of my mind; crucial to this process was reflexive writing (Galletta, 2013). As I intertwined data collection and data analysis together, I kept a reflexive journal, paying close attention to the thoughts, feelings, and ideas that arose before, during, and after interviews. This reflexivity is key to the validity of the study, to be covered in more detail below.

The first step in data analysis was creating files and organizing the data. Strong record keeping and organization was critical in this stage (Galletta, 2013). Each recorded interview was transcribed into Microsoft Word, leaving large margins for codes and other notes. Once the data was transcribed, I formed the initial codes through “open coding.”
Open coding consisted of reading through the transcripts and making notes in the margins, noting all possible categories of data information (Creswell, 1998). After naming events and actions, I immediately compared these items in my findings. I used these comparisons to determine which events, actions, etc. belonged with each other in coding.

The second step of grounded theory data analysis was “axial coding,” which sometimes overlapped with open coding. I grouped the previously discovered open codes into conceptual categories. These categories reflected similarities in causal condition, context, intervening conditions, strategies, or consequences (Creswell, 1998). For example, conceptual codes from this study included alcohol as problematic, media influence, and components of sexual assault. After the data was analyzed via open and axial coding, I determined if further data collection should occur or if the interview protocol should be altered. At this point in the research, the attempt was to “saturate” the data field; that is, to engage in data collection and analysis to such a point that no new information could create a new code or category. During the axial coding process, I compiled concepts and categories from the reflexive journal, as well as quotes (i.e., evidence) from the transcripts into various Word documents. As I continued to re-read the transcripts and add information, I kept separate Word documents, labeled v1, v2, v3, etc., so that I could go back and see what, if anything, changed throughout the data analysis process. After compiling all of the lists of categories and concepts, reaching a point of data saturation, I re-read my research questions. Then, I continued paring down the information as I prepared to engage in selective coding.
At the point of saturation, I engaged in selective coding, which “treats the various code clusters in a selective fashion, deciding how they relate to each other and what stories they tell” (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005, p. 5). Selective coding allowed the final themes to emerge. In seeking the relationship between the themes, the researcher should produce a theory or paradigm model. The final steps in analysis were to develop a paradigm model and present the theory via a visual model or chart (Creswell, 1998). This last step, according to Scott and Howell (2008), “is ultimately designed to paint a picture of the central phenomenon, defining and describing it in a manner sufficient to account for the study data holistically as a narrative” (p. 8). Thus, the Sexual Assault Prevention Paradigm for Athletic Departments was created to finalize the data analysis process.

Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the basics for qualitative validity, comprising credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility can be established through prolonged engagement; triangulation of methods, sources, and researchers; peer debriefing; and member checks. Transferability refers to thick description, and dependability and confirmability include an audit trail. These criteria are often used in qualitative research; however, some scholars believe they are too closely related to and linked to the validity of positivism (Scheurich, 1996). Further positions were created, most notably summarized by Lather (1986). These additional criteria include catalytic validity, which posited that a critical piece of research is valid if and when research participants are moved to action themselves. Due to the time limitations of this study (i.e., a one-year dissertation), I was unable to see the longitudinal outcomes of
this study to determine if participants were moved to action in some way, though that is always the hope when addressing the issues of sexual assault and prevention education.

To establish validity, I engaged in triangulation of sources, interviewing a variety of former student-athletes, including both men and women. This triangulation provided a fuller picture of big-time athletics, and the various programs, policies, and responses employed, by not limiting participants to a particular school or sports team. Credibility was further established through peer debriefings. Peer debriefers are usually those with an expertise in one or more areas of the research study. Thus, a peer debriefer is someone who may be called upon one or more times to receive feedback about the research. For this study, I conducted regular and multiple peer debriefing sessions with my advisor, Dr. Pastore, as well as with another committee member, Dr. Sutherland, an expert in qualitative research. I also debriefed with other faculty in the sport management department at my university, as well as with qualitative researchers and mentors at other institutions. Lastly, I engaged with peer debriefers in the fields of sexual assault counseling and rape prevention education. Peer debriefing may be casual in nature, such as chatting on the phone, or more structured, such as sending a draft of a chapter and having a meeting to receive feedback. For this study, peer debriefing took the form of emails, phone calls, informal and/or impromptu conversations, and formally scheduled meetings.

I also engaged in member checks, allowing participants to review the transcriptions of their interviews. This allowed them to make clarifications or corrections on what they said, further allowing me to get richer description of their stories and experiences. All participants were sent transcripts after the first interview, and were
allowed time to discuss any follow-up during the second interview. After the second interview, transcripts were emailed to participants; only a few replied to say they had no changes or corrections.

In addition to member checks of the transcripts, the selective coding themes were sent to four participants. These four women had indicated an interest in the findings, thus I sent them the initial findings to garner feedback. Two did not reply, but the two who did gave favorable feedback. One woman said:

*That looks good to me! I look forward to reading the paper. You are presenting some very important concerns and outlining really useful considerations for the departments. I really like distinguishing the kinds of responses and offering ways that schools can be more proactive about this issue.*

The other said:

*Great job Kristy! I would love to read the final product of this study. I think everything looks fine to me...the only part that made me nervous (but you put a note in it) was the thought that Athletic departments keep SA events hush-hush. But, I like the three styles and the note about create sexy names, haha, it made me laugh. I also find it interested [sic] the diversity in understanding consent. That will be very interesting to read. Well, thanks for letting me take a peak [sic] and I think you are on the right track! Can’t wait to see the finished product!*  

The feedback and involvement from two participants in member checking the selective coding themes was critical to ensuring credibility of the study.

In addition to credibility, I took great measures to ensure the last two elements of validity. Transferability was provided in the thick description of results and findings in my study (see Chapter Four). The data is the participants’ words, so I have taken great care to use their words as often as possible, without altering their language. In a few places, I may have inserted a word using brackets to ensure clarity of their statement (for example, adding [sexual assault] when the participant had said “it”). In all other cases,
their language remains unchanged, including ums, uhs, you knows, and various pauses and other noises. Lastly, I included clear documentation and organization throughout, leaving an audit trail that attends to dependability and confirmability. For example, as mentioned, each round of coding was saved as a new version, so I could track any changes that were made between readings of transcripts and different rounds of coding.

Beyond these actions toward validity, Galletta (2013) remarked on the importance of reflexivity, as “it strengthens the rigor of the design by attending to your thought processes, assumptions, decision making, and actions taken in order to locate and explore ethical and methodological dilemmas” (emphasis added; p. 12). It is important to use reflexivity to “locate potential interference” (p. 104) during qualitative research because the researcher is the instrument, and “as the primary instrument, the researcher extends questions and pursues ideas conveyed in the participants’ responses, probes particular statements, and encourages, as well as sometimes shuts down, participants’ responses” (p. 104). As previously noted, a reflexive journal was kept to attend to issues of reflexivity as they pertained not only to validity but also to ethical considerations, discussed in further detail below. The reflexive journal was used intermittently throughout the IRB process and initial participant recruitment, with the first entry dated September 18, 2014. Once data collection began, however, I wrote in the journal regularly, sometimes up to three or four times per day. I took care to write in the journal after every interview, as well as after every peer debriefing session. The journal is 36 (single-spaced) pages and the last entry was written May 31, 2015, after a peer debriefing session with a qualitative research professor from another university.
Ethical Considerations

Glesne (2011) wrote, “Interviewing is an occasion for close researcher-participant interaction. Qualitative research provides many opportunities to engage feelings because it is a distance-reducing experience” (emphasis added; p. 134). To create this distance-reducing experience, interviewers must build rapport—and rapport can help make the words fly. Because of this rapport building, there is a clear subjectivity in the interview experience between the researcher and the participant and thus a high need for reflexivity on behalf of the researcher (Bryman, 2012; Galletta, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Due to the distance-reducing nature of interviews, a number of ethical considerations must be examined. According to Mishler (1986), concerns of neutrality and bias were prevalent when interviews were conducted from a positivistic or conventional standpoint (Griffin, 2005). Neutrality and bias, however, have given way to issues of ethics as the purpose of interviewing has shifted from the fill-in-the-gaps needs of quantitative research to the creation of meaning and reflection of life goals of qualitative research (Mishler).

A concern often explored in connection with interviews is that of exploitation (Bryman, 2012). What is the researcher getting from the interview compared to what the participant is gaining? Does the interview and research process serve the researcher more than the participant? Particularly in the fields of anthropology and sociology, as researchers in the 20th century shifted to a more interpretivist, ethnographic standpoint, these issues and questions arose. Many researchers can conduct interesting, useful, and illuminating research at the expense of their research subjects. If the answers to the research questions do not benefit the researcher and the participant (near) equally, there is a risk of exploitation.
In addition to concerns of exploitation, Mishler (1986) detailed the hierarchical nature of interviewing. Despite informed consent from IRB, does the participant truly feel free to say no or refuse to participate? If the answer is no, there is a need to redistribute power, and Mishler suggested various scenarios that balance power more equally. Instead of conceptualizing the interview as one between the researcher and the researched, for example, one may envision these roles as that of informants and reporters, learners/actors and advocates, or research collaborators. Bryman (2012) echoed these concerns and suggestions by noting that critical researchers support methods that include a high level of rapport, reciprocity, emphasis on the perspective of the interviewee, and non-hierarchical relationships.

Rapport, reciprocity, and non-hierarchical relationships may be accomplished through compliance with IRB provisions to protect participants as well as through reflecting on the process and interviews, as I did through reflexive journaling. In practice interviews conducted for a research methods class, I learned that reflexivity is the key to maintaining an emphasis on the participant’s perspective by reminding myself that I am the learner in these discussions of sexual assault, not the educator.

In addition to using reflexivity to create and maintain fair and balanced relationships, my main ethical consideration was that of dealing with the sensitive nature of sexual assault, particularly if one or any of the former student-athletes is a sexual assault survivor. However, as a California-state certified sexual assault crisis counselor, I was well prepared to attend to emotions and other issues of trauma that arose for participants, whether they disclosed they were survivors or not. Though it was critical that I remain in my role as interviewer and not evolve into a crisis counselor, my
background in this field better allowed me to recognize the ethical issues in doing research on sexual assault. For this reason, I provided information and referrals to support services and resources (i.e., counseling and rape crisis hotlines) to all participants. This was done via email if the interview was done using Skype, FaceTime, or the phone. In-person interviewees received a small card with local resources. Although my initial thought was only to provide information and referrals if a survivor was triggered during the interview, there arose the possibility that a participant may be triggered and not disclose this information to me. Providing information and referrals to all participants made no assumptions about each participant, regardless of what he or she disclosed during the interview. The full procedure for providing information and referrals was thoroughly vetted and approved by IRB. In summary, I was always aware and reflexive of how the interviews affected the research participants.

**Timeline**

The timeline for this dissertation shifted significantly from the proposal. I completed the initial IRB application in September 2014 but did not receive approval until January 12, 2015. During this time, I also applied for—and received—a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institute for Health (NIH), further ensuring participant confidentiality and privacy. This Certificate will prohibit the public disclosure of my data, including through subpoena. Upon IRB approval in January, I began contacting gatekeepers, former students, and former student-athletes. Interviews began on February 2, 2015, and ended on May 8, 2015. As noted, transcriptions for the first round of interviews were completed prior to beginning the second interview with each participant. All of the second interviews were transcribed by May 24, 2015, and sent to
participants as I finished transcribing. Final data analysis and writing were completed by the middle of June 2015, with a defense date of July 7, 2015.

**Participant Descriptions**

**Atlantic University (Atlantic U, AU)**

*Nicole* is a 23-year-old woman from Southern California who attended Atlantic U, a private university on the Southern Atlantic coast. As a scholarship athlete, she was recruited to play volleyball by many schools, but she chose AU for its focus on both academics and athletics. Nicole double majored in psychology and African-American studies, while also participating for four years in a feminist leadership group for women. She attended AU from 2009 to 2013 and currently works for a professional sports team in California.

**Ivy University (Ivy U, IU)**

*Karen* is a 23-year-old woman from Texas who attended Ivy U, an Ivy League institution in the Northeast. As a swimmer, she was recruited by other Ivy League institutions, which are considered DI but do not offer scholarships to their student-athletes despite a high level of sports participation. Karen majored in psychology and minored in art history. She attended IU from 2009 to 2013 and is currently training for the 2016 Olympic trials.

**Pacific University (Pacific U, PU)**

*Gina* is a 25-year-old woman from Southern California who attended Pacific U, a public university on the Pacific Coast. She was recruited as a walk-on for the softball team because she knew the coaches from living nearby; she was not recruited or interested in playing sports for other universities. Gina majored in psychology and
minored in education, while also participating in a student-athlete mentor group at PU, where she attended from 2007 to 2011. She currently works as a student affairs professional in Southern California.

**Midwestern University (Midwestern U, MU)**

Amy is a 23-year-old woman from Central Ohio who attended Midwestern U, a public university in Ohio. She walked on the rowing team after transferring to Midwestern U from another university. Amy majored in early childhood education and was involved in many activities and internships in Student Life, including educational outreach for issues on sexual assault on campus. She attended MU from 2009 to 2013 and is currently finishing her master’s degree in education.

Kim is a 26-year-old woman from Eastern Europe who attended Midwestern U. She was recruited and offered a full scholarship to participate on MU’s fencing team. Because of the difference between her home country’s educational system and that of the United States, she was already a few years older than the average freshman upon entering MU, where she majored in psychology. Kim attended MU from 2010 to 2013 and is currently finishing her master’s degree in sport management.

Julie is a 25-year-old woman from Pennsylvania who attended Midwestern U. She was recruited to play field hockey, choosing MU because of its strong focus on athletics: “But for me, I wanted the athletic piece first, and then the education second. So that’s also something about [MU] that they gave off to me as what would happen. You were an athlete first, and then you were a student. And your athletics would take up most of your time…which it did.” Julie majored in communication and participated in Athletes
in Action. She attended MU from 2007 to 2011 and is now an assistant field hockey coach at a small Division I university in the Northeast.

_Gail_ is a 26-year-old woman from Virginia who attended Midwestern U. She was recruited to play soccer at many DI institutions, but she chose MU after her visit with the team: “I just had the most incredible time. The first time that I went to the [football stadium], I just knew this was where I wanted to be.” Gail majored in strategic communication and marketing at MU from 2007 to 2011. She now resides in Israel and works for a nonprofit organization.

_James_ is a 22-year-old man from Ohio who attended Midwestern U. He was recruited by many top universities around the country, but his choice to attend MU was a “no-brainer.” He said, “I’ve always been a [MU] fan. I could remember coming to games here when I was little. And just knew I wanted to play here. And then obviously, education-wise, it’s hard to beat, our education. It’s a win-win.” James majored in sport industry with a minor in business from 2010 to 2014. He currently works for a professional sports organization in Central Ohio.

_Michael_ is a 26-year-old man from Central Ohio who attended Midwestern U. Despite recruitment offers to play football and/or track and field for DII or DIII school, he came to MU as a “preferred walk-on” because “who would turn down a chance to compete for [MU]?” He majored in sociology and minored in entomology. Michael attended MU from 2007 to 2012 and currently works for a technology company in Central Ohio.

_Paul_ is a 23-year-old man from Wisconsin who attended Midwestern U. He was recruited to play volleyball for MU, which fulfilled his dream of playing for a major
conference school. He majored in actuarial science while also participating in Athletes in Action and the university’s student-athlete advisory committee. Paul attended MU from 2010 to 2014 and currently works for an insurance company in Central Ohio.

*Jason* is a 25-year-old man from Central Ohio who attended Midwestern U. After playing ice hockey in Canada’s junior leagues, he was recruited by MU’s coaches as he is originally from the region. Jason majored in accounting and was a peer educator for student-athletes as well as a volunteer for a local youth charity organization. He attended MU from 2009 to 2013 and is currently an accounting consultant in Ohio.

**Western University (Western U, WU)**

*Kelly* is a 26-year-old woman from Eastern Europe who attended Western U, a private university on the West Coast. While rowing in Europe, she was recruited by the WU coach, who offered her a full scholarship. Kelly double majored in psychology and human performance from 2007 to 2011. She is currently back in school in Europe for an advanced degree in physical therapy.

*Melissa* is a 25-year-old woman from Eastern Europe who attended Western U. The WU coach recruited her while she was rowing on her national team. Melissa majored in human performance and minored in nutrition. She attended WU from 2009 to 2013 and currently works as an au pair and volunteer crew coach in Ireland.

*Elizabeth* is a 27-year-old woman from Eastern Europe who attended Western U. She was recruited to be a rower for the WU team and did not consider other universities. Elizabeth majored in international relations from 2006 to 2010. She currently resides in Warsaw and is a planning specialist for an international product manufacturer.
Rebecca is a 28-year-old woman from Northern California who attended Western U. Though she had been recruited to play soccer at the DIII level, she chose to walk on to the rowing team at WU because she was seeking an “all-encompassing experience” of being a student-athlete at a big-time athletics university. She double majored in fine art and neuroscience from 2005 to 2009, choosing WU for its outstanding educational opportunities in both art and academics. Rebecca currently works as an adjunct art instructor in Southern California.
Chapter Four: Findings

Overview of Research Process

This study utilized qualitative research methods to uncover what former student-athletes know about sexual assault, as well as what they know about it in the context of their athletic departments. Fifteen participants from big-time athletic departments were recruited through various gatekeepers and a snowball method. All participants were interviewed twice, except for one who chose not to participate in the second interview. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and sent to participants for review. Transcription was done by me and included all elements of participants’ speech patterns, including any use of “um” or “uh,” as well as noises such as sighs or laughter.

The interviews followed a three-part structure. The first interview began with questions about the participant’s background, followed by what he or she knew about sexual assault, including what shaped that knowledge. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and sent to the participant for review prior to the second interview. The second interview covered sexual assault specifically within the context of athletics. All second interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and sent to participants before final data analysis began.

Data analysis for this grounded theory study followed a three-part structure (Creswell, 1998). First, open coding was conducted to find all possible categories of
information, followed by axial coding, which grouped the open codes into conceptual categories. Upon completion of axial coding, selective coding allowed the final themes to emerge, creating a story line to shape the paradigm model. The paradigm model creation was the last step in this grounded theory research and is presented at the conclusion of this chapter.

Summary of Participants

Fifteen former student-athletes from five universities participated in this study. The five universities were Atlantic University (AU), a private university in the Atlantic South; Ivy University (IU), an Ivy League institution in the Northeast; Pacific University (PU), a large public institution on the Pacific Coast; Midwestern University (MU), a large public university in the Midwest; and Western University (WU), a private university on the West Coast. Nicole, a volleyball player, attended AU; Karen, a swimmer, attended Ivy U; and Gina, a softball player, attended PU. MU garnered the most participants: Amy, a rower; James, a baseball player; Kim, a fencer; Julie, a field hockey player; Gail, a soccer player; Michael, on the track and field team; Paul, a volleyball player; and Jason, an ice hockey player. Lastly, all of Western U’s participants were on the rowing team, though at varying times: Kelly, Melissa, Elizabeth, and Rebecca.

All participants graduated between 2009 and 2014, the criteria set forth in Chapter Three. Rebecca was the oldest participant, graduating from WU in 2009. Paul and James were the youngest participants, graduating from MU in 2014. Most of the participants were Caucasian, with only Nicole and Amy identifying as African American, and Gail said she was Caucasian/Jewish. Gina did not answer this question. Demographic information on participants can be seen in Table 1.
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Table 1. Participant Demographics

Findings

This chapter addresses the findings as they relate to the study’s research questions, which are:

1. What do student-athletes know about sexual assault?

2. In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?
   a. In what ways does the occurrence of sexual assault impact student-athletes’ personal lives, academic performance, and/or athletic performance?

3. What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?

66
a. In what ways are these effective or not effective?

4. What support is necessary to provide an optimal, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes?

There are three main themes that emerge: (1) Participant Knowledge, (2) Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics; and (3) Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture. Findings and sub-themes may overlap between some areas, but these are the major areas. Research Question 1 is answered through the theme of Participant Knowledge. Research Questions 2 and 3 are addressed by the theme Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics. The last theme, Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture, reveals findings that address Research Question 4.

**Participant Knowledge**

The first theme, Participant Knowledge, directly answers Research Question 1, what do student-athletes know about sexual assault? In addition to learning what former student-athletes know about sexual assault, findings also indicate how they have come to that knowledge. Thus, the theme of Participant Knowledge is, quite simply, broken into the two sub-themes of what they know and how they know it.

**Knowledge: What They Know**

**Defining Sexual Assault.** Each participant was asked to both describe and define sexual assault, as well as name the necessary components of sexual assault. They were also asked to give scenarios or situations that would be considered sexual assault. By asking these varied yet similar questions, a full picture emerged on what former student-athletes know sexual assault to be. The majority of participants responded in a way that combined both sexual assault and sexual harassment into one. Of the 15 participants, nine
of them lumped assault and harassment together. Two former athletes included all forms of violence against women in what they knew sexual assault to be. Thus, defining sexual assault as a physical, sexual act without consent, as is the definition used in this study as well as in the field of sexual assault prevention, was only done by four participants.

Definitions of sexual assault that include those used in the field were demonstrated by participants like Gina and Rebecca. Gina said, “I would say sexual assault is any sexual contact and the recipient has not given consent.” Rebecca’s definition is similar: “The act of physically harming or touching someone in a sexual manner without their consent.” When Paul, whose definition upheld certain rape myths around the use of force, was asked to describe sexual assault, he said, “…Uh, I guess…I always think of it as somebody forces themselves onto somebody else who isn’t willing in a sexual way.” After exploring what “force” meant, he was asked to define sexual assault. He said, “Um…forcing yourself…somebody forcing themself sexually upon an unwilling victim?” Notice the question mark in Paul’s statement. Despite repeating a variation of this knowledge of sexual assault multiple times throughout the interview, or giving scenarios that demonstrated this definition, he was unsure in declaratively giving that definition. The last person to define sexual assault in a way that is physical, sexual, and nonconsensual was Nicole, who said it was “a nonconsensual sexual experience,” which was followed up by repeated scenarios and situations that included the use of unwanted physical contact to demonstrate sexual assault.

Two participants, Julie and Amy, strayed from the pack and included all elements of violence against women in their knowledge of sexual assault. Amy, whose experiences included working for student wellness programs on consent, said, “Sexual assault can be
anything that is…digital penetration, vaginal or anal. It can also be harassment. It can also be stalking,” including “cyber stalking” and “aggressive texting.” Not only was her definition all-encompassing of harassment, a non-physical element, it also included elements of stalking, as well as using more technical language than other participants. Julie, however, who did not have the same educational and activity background as Amy, also included all elements of violence against women. Her definition was “one person or party, um, trying to…make a sexual encounter to another person or party that does not want…to…uh, take part in the act, I guess,” and she followed this up with scenarios that including stalking and unwanted texting, as well as the violence of property destruction, describing a situation in which a jilted lover “took a baseball bat” to her car.

Most participants did not include such extreme visions of violence against women as Amy and Julie did. They did, however, include both physical and verbal manifestations of nonconsensual activity. Examples of this included:

**Kim:** It’s just something that…it doesn’t really have to be an act, but it’s either a behavior or just attitude towards someone that makes that someone feel uncomfortable.

**Kelly:** Probably anytime that someone...does something that another person...um...doesn’t consent to, but I don’t necessarily think that consent has to be verbal. ...Um, and I don’t think it, I don’t think it has to be physical either. Like, I think you can be, well, obviously you can be verbally sexually assaulted.

**Michael:** I’d say the unwarranted act of sexual...um...I’m trying to think of the word...um, sexual activity, I guess, would be the best way to say it? But it wouldn’t have to be an action, it could be verbal as well.

**Gail:** I would define it by saying...um...any harm from one, any harm displayed from one person to the other, whether it be through physical, verbal, emotional, mental, um...that’s unwanted.

**Melissa:** Um, someone taking sexual advantage of another person without permission.
Some of these participants defined sexual assault in a way that may have been more vague, like Melissa’s comment of “taking sexual advantage” of someone, but when probed further, continued to combine the elements of physical and verbal assault. For example, Melissa later said, “In my opinion, it has to be physical. But uh, you know, I think it depends on the person. Like, some people are more sensitive and I think for them it could be verbal. So uh, for it, I think it just depends on the person.” Similarly, James defined sexual assault as “any sexual act where both parties aren’t in consent” and after discussing consent, followed up with: “But verbal and physical in there, it’s not just touching. ‘Cause there can be verbal sexual assault.” Lastly, Michael was able to distinguish between sexual assault as a physical act and sexual harassment as a verbal act, but still responded this way when asked to define sexual assault:

_I like to say that it also depends on the lawmaking body around you. What your setting is, who the people are, the age of the people involved. Um, I think assault would probably have more of a lasting impact, be more of an impactful thing. I think that the joke, the sexual joke, could be more under the harassment. Because it won’t necessarily have long-lasting effects. It’ll just be immediate, that offended me, I’m upset. Whereas, offense would be more harassment, I think lasting impressions would be more of assault, I think of the classifications._

These varied definitions of sexual assault, including all forms of violence against women as well as sexual harassment, indicate that former student-athletes have a wide array of knowledge, some of which overlaps.

Lumping sexual assault and sexual harassment together was evident early on to me in the data collection process. After each interview, while working in my reflexive journal, this was a topic I wrote about often. For example, on February 19, less than a month into data collection, I wrote
[Kim] also referred to SA in terms around verbal and physical. Her scenarios were mostly verbal in nature. After I’d ask her all my questions, I brought it up at the end—I told her that I’d categorize verbal as sexual harassment and physical as sexual assault. She said, they’re both bad, why differentiate them? (not her exact words; a paraphrase)

The first two participants I interviewed were Amy and Nicole, who gave definitions closer to those used in the field. However, those interviewed after them gave responses much similar to Kim’s, as was noted in my journal as an early finding or theme.

Another way to gauge what former student-athletes know about sexual assault was by asking them to answer the question, “What are the necessary components of sexual assault?” Most participants simply restated elements of their definition, such as “lack of consent” (James), or “physical, unwanted contact” (Gina). But this question allowed for more depth in understanding what sexual assault can include, such as pain, fear, and dynamics of power and control. Gail noted that some of the necessary components are “some sort of pain, whether it be emotional or physical.” During her second interview, I followed up on this comment, and she noted that emotional pain could indicate the long-lasting, traumatic effects of sexual assault.

Fear indicated a more nuanced understanding of sexual assault. For example, Nicole, who participated in a feminist women’s group during her undergraduate years, noted that fear is likely present during an assault, but it can be difficult to perceive:

> I would say that 90% of the time it’s probably there, um…but I’d also say that fear looks different to different people. So maybe someone is really afraid, but the way they’re coping with the situation is like trying to act unafraid so they don’t get hurt further or trying to diffuse the situation. Um, so, a person saying, “Well, they didn’t look scared” is just too much of a...debatable emotion.

Amy, who also had training in gender issues, indicated that fear may be experienced by men, who are not often thought to be victims of sexual assault. However, men may
experience fear of saying no to a woman, fear of his sexuality being questioned if he does say no: “Like, I’m gonna tell everyone that you’re gay, or like, you’ll have to prove that you’re a man now.” This type of fear is described as “emotional manipulation” by Amy, which also overlaps with the last component, power and control dynamics.

Amy noted that an essential component of sexual assault is the “loss of power physically or emotionally.” Kelly said that sexual assault must include “overpowering the other person, either verbally or physically.” Nicole describes power and control as an even more important element than fear:

*I think that that, power and control, looks more of a certain way than fear, you know, that’s an easier thing to kinda, um, pinpoint in every situation. I think that that also touches on a lot of like, I’d never want to say there are different kinds of sexual assault, but I think, power and control, um...is a good way to describe when rape happens when someone’s extremely intoxicated and date rape and stuff like that when you know the person. Um...you know, like, I think you can be in a situation where you know the guy and you’re not afraid of him, but you do feel like you have zero control. And that is probably, you know, afterwards if someone is asking you about it, like, “Well, were you scared?” Well, maybe I wasn’t scared, but I definitely felt like I had no power and he had it all. So I think that is almost always, if not always, a component.*

Nicole’s description of power and control is one that is often used to describe sexual assault (Foubert & Perry, 2007) when providing education. It is essential in teaching young people that sexual assault is not necessarily about lust, or even sex, but about power and control, which is in the hands of the perpetrator, while the survivor feels as though he or she has no control or power over the situation at hand.

**Alcohol’s Influence.** When asked to describe and/or define sexual assault, many student-athletes turned to alcohol as a factor. When asked what the necessary components of sexual would be, James said, “I think, as a student, it’s not necessary, but a common component is alcohol.” When discussing the different between drug-facilitated sexual
assault (i.e., roofies, ketamine), he also said, “I think that alcohol plays a way bigger factor than drugged sexual assault.” Participants did not touch on the issue of drugs, but alcohol was a common factor in their stories, scenarios, and descriptions. Alcohol was seen as problematic, helping enforce gray areas, blurry lines, or inability to have sound judgment, both as a victim and/or as a perpetrator. Examples of the problematic influence of alcohol included statements such as these:

Nicole: Because consent shouldn’t be blurry, but for some reason, it is, especially on a college campus like ours, where drinking is so heavy.

James: Just because...sexual assault is so related to alcohol, maybe...I don’t know. Maybe it’s not. But the way, through my eyes, when I see it, and I see it very often, it’s like...always alcohol.

Melissa: I mean, whenever I think about it, like, uh, especially being at a university, um, and you see all the drunk students, or uh, all the parties, but I think uh...you know, so many times it happens and people get just so drunk, they are wasted completely and they are not conscious.

Gina: Um...well, I’m trying to get to the point for example of, when alcohol is involved, and someone is taken advantage of because they’re not in a state of mind to make decisions about the consent.

Julie: Unfortunately this has happened to multiple friends of mine, you’re so drunk, like in college, so drunk, and a guy takes you home and they clearly know you’re not in a state where you can either consent or, um, not consent, and they still, uh, do sexual things to you.

Nicole: I think that alcohol definitely makes things more complicated, especially at [AU], because the boys are as drunk as the girls are. Which I think is really, it’s where you, from the conversations I’ve had on campus, it’s kind of where you get, like, the push back to, “No, it’s not assault” if she was drunk, because he was drunk too. That’s kind of like where people find the gray area.

James: You know, if they’re smashed, you can’t take advantage of that [drunk girls flirting with you]. And I think that’s where people get in trouble. And like I said, that’s when alcohol just...really takes over and... ‘cause I think people know this is morally not right. But when they get drunk and they do something stupid [snaps fingers]. You can’t blame it all on the alcohol.
Julie: *And I think...the other difficult line in those situations, too, is the sense of, you know, he was just as drunk as she was. So, like, they were both wasted, so...who, who’s the responsible party for something like that, you know?*

Amy: *I had a friend who went to a party and the guys just kept feeding her—everyone—alcohol and then, like, waited ‘til, like, basically she was incoherent, she was coming in and out, to start talking to her and, like, didn’t give any of us the time of day...and just cozied up to the one that was the inebriated.*

These statements on alcohol reflect its pervasive nature in sexual assault on college campuses. It also reflects an amount of confusion or uncertainty, which can lead to shifting views on sexual assault, the next theme.

**Shifting Views.** Most participants defined sexual assault to include sexual harassment, and some were able to expand on their definitions through noting key elements, such as power and control, fear, and pain. Some participants also noted that their definitions or understanding of sexual assault had shifted over time. For some, this happened during the course of the interview. Near the end of the first interview, when Julie was asked if she knew any survivors of sexual assault, she replied:

*I mean, I wouldn’t have said that an hour ago. But...now that I’ve talked to you about what I really, what shapes everything that I think of is wrong, I guess, is the word that I’m gonna use, is wrong. Because I know it used to be like, this, like domestic abuse, uh...you know, like those key words and like actions were considered sexually assaulting, but now I think the definition has really broadened because of what’s been happening with, you know, our cell phones and texting.*

Over the course of approximately 40 minutes, Julie herself could see how what she believes sexual assault to be has shifted and changed. She followed that up a bit later with, “A lot of times, I didn’t want to have sex with him but I still did. So, those kinds of things? Yeah. Like, literally, I’m not kidding you, before this conversation I would’ve
said no [it was not sexual assault].” Also during the conversation, Gina’s idea of sexual assault shifted as she was even talking herself through it:

> Um, sexual assault...to me, is, um...any unwanted and uninvited contact with, between two individuals. Um...um...I think it can also apply in different areas, whether it’s, um, maybe like a verbal harassment or sexual harassment, um...that’s what I would count that as, you know, in that category. Things like even domestic violence, you know, we have partners together and they possibly may have some violence between them. I would put that in the same category. Um...I would count...mmm...that’s kind of how I would first describe it.

She later goes on to give her “final” definition to include sexual contact, not including harassment or stalking.

Nicole and Rebecca, two women who describe themselves as feminist, could specifically see how their views of sexual assault have changed over the course of years, both in and out of college. Nicole’s experiences throughout college, as well as afterward, helped her to expand her ideas on sexual assault. She said:

> I think, over my four years, it [rape] definitely got broader and broader. You know, like when you first get there [college], rape seems like the only thing that you could possibly, like, someone could possibly go to jail for. But I think over my four years, and out of college now, like it’s definitely just grown and grown to things that don’t make you feel good. Just based on the fact, of like, meeting adult men and older guys, you know, on campus, like seniors and fifth years and stuff like that, who never make girls feel that way and starting to learn, like, that’s it not an occupational hazard of having sex and the hook-up culture. That at some point, you don’t have to feel bad. You know? So I definitely think over my growing up, that it’s gotten broader and broader.

Rebecca, an artist, said:

> I was doing a lot of my own outside research about issues of gender and sexualization. Part of that research, sexual assault and rape was coming up. Um, so I was reading things that were showing me, I think, that it was broader than I had thought. I think before I had starting researching, I had a more narrow definition of sexual assault, but it started to broaden the more I started doing my own investigation.

Rebecca also mentioned:
Um, now I see it as a much broader thing and a lot more things as not being acceptable in terms of how it’s talked about and how we see sexual assault. But when I was in college, I fell into more of that category of, you know, there has to be more requirements for something to count as sexual assault.

Even Rebecca, who could identify that she experienced a change in her definition over the course of many years, still grappled with this shift in real time during the interview. For example, after our first interview, I wrote this in my reflexive journal about the process of interviewing her:

I was enjoying hearing her “talk through” a definition. She didn’t have one down pat, but she didn’t keep quiet or pause much. It’s almost like hearing the inner workings of her brain while she was speaking, hearing her make connections from A to B to C.

Both Nicole and Rebecca incorporated feminist experiences (e.g., research, women’s groups) and personal experiences to find their views on sexual assault had shifted from something narrow to something much broader, a word they both use to describe sexual assault.

Ambivalent, Gray Areas. These shifting views on sexual assault connect with the gray areas and ambivalence some participants expressed about the topic. Many participants expressed the difficulty with defining sexual assault, the room for blurry lines, gray areas, or confusion. For example, Julie noted, “The other difficult line in those situations, too, is the sense of, you know, he was just as drunk as she was. So, like, they were both wasted, so…who, who’s the responsible party for something like that, you know?” Kim struggled with the difference between sexual harassment and sexual assault: “Maybe it’s because, when I think, even say, sexual assault, there’s kind of, it sounds pretty much like the same thing. ‘Cause you’re already feeling uncomfortable.” Nicole, a self-described feminist, was even willing to categorize sexual assault in two ways: the
sexual assault that “you’re talked into” versus “the sexual assault that’s problematic is when someone says no and you don’t care.” James’s ambivalence showed when he discussed the ongoing case of Jameis Winston at Florida State:

And you need to, you know...you shouldn’t be in that place anyway! I mean, he obviously did something, like some random girl’s gonna say something? Obviously they have done something, I think. Or he—did something stupid to where she could say something. So I’m not saying that he’s—I’m not saying that he’s right or she’s right, but I’m saying that he probably did something that, you know...I don’t know.

Even as he was acknowledging that Jameis Winston likely is guilty (i.e., “he obviously did something”) and the survivor is not lying (i.e., “like some random girl’s gonna say something?”), he followed immediately with, “I’m not saying that he’s right or she’s right, but I’m saying that he probably did something that, you know...I don’t know.”

Some participants were able to directly acknowledge the gray areas involved with sexual assault, which often came up when discussing the concept of consent. Rebecca said, “Like, if you haven’t clearly defined what consent it, and if it is really gray, then there’s a lot of room for one person to take advantage of another person and blame them for that.” She reiterated this gray area again later by saying:

I think it’s verbal...and it gets. [sighs] You can have a form of...physical consent. Um...I mean, this is, I think this is something...that I still haven’t fully processed. Because what I want to say, but keeping the definition easy for consent, like consent has to be something that is verbal, but I could also think of situations where you can be in a relationship and have established, you know, this is a form of physical consent. So with every sexual act, a form of sexual assault, is when someone hasn’t verbally said yes. In my opinion, I don’t think, no, I don’t think that’s the case. But I also think that you cannot assume, just because someone hasn’t said yes, um...that if they’re physically resisting, that it’s okay to push through because they haven’t verbally said no. So, um...I think...I think it gets into...the gray area for me that way.
In addition to the fact that she literally says, “This is a gray area for me” multiple times, her ambivalence and confusion with the topic is shown throughout sighing and repeated pauses while she spoke about this. Karen also displayed this struggle with consent:

That’s why I hesitate to say it doesn’t have to be verbal, but...[sighs]...um...this has, this has always been hard for me. Like, I’ve always struggled with, um...did you say no or did you just say no after the fact? Or were you uncomfortable after the fact? So I, I wish that every person that was ever sexually assaulted or, um...was like, put in that situation, could say that they said no, but I feel like you could even...act a certain way, behave a certain way, and that would be a sort of non-verbal consent.

Less around the issue of consent, but still acknowledging a gray area, Rebecca said, “It’s hard for me to think of friends who don’t have a story that has that gray area where it’s uncomfortable to talk about and the, like, you know, we’d bring up the rape word coming in there.”

Another example of the ambivalent gray areas comes from Jason. As a peer educator for student-athletes, he was trained on issues of sexual assault, consent, and how to discuss these issues with his peers. Here, he discussed how talking about consent with peers presented a gray area:

Well I think there’s supposed to be discussion, uh, between two people before, um, any physical contact happens. Obviously, like in our training at least, don’t quote me on any of this, but I think you used to have to literally, um, you know, like, ask. Make sure you got a confirmation or something before um, you know, people got intimate. Um, but at the same time, you’d always get the question of, well you know, I’m not gonna ask—verbally ask, if things are just going well, seamlessly, then just kind of go with the flow. Um, you know, there’s no negative signs or pushback or anything that and you both are in the moment, then you’re just gonna go with it. So, I forget, I forget all the details but I’m almost positive that, to be perfectly clear, you're supposed to get a verbal okay or something like that. Um...
Jason described how the presentations were designed to teach consent as a verbal yes, but his peers were concerned with this (i.e., “I’m not gonna ask—verbally ask”), which is a gray area in how student-athletes understood issues around consent and sexual assault.

Another way to address the gray areas surrounding sexual assault is how a perpetrator knows they are assaulting someone. Michael noted that victim is the one to decide what is sexual assault and what is not:

\[
\text{[It’s] being classified by the victim as sexual in nature. Um, and I don’t think there’s, the offender doesn’t really have much of a say in it. Because...maybe they don’t think that’s what it is, maybe they know it, maybe they say, “Oh, I didn’t think so,” but I think that by the victim is has to be declared as sexual in nature and unwanted.}
\]

He also described the nature of “assault” can vary from an inappropriate joke to rape, and what is deemed offensive to the victim is the “right” way to decide if something is sexual assault or not. Amy articulated a similar feeling, that whether or not the perpetrator intended to assault someone is not the issue; it is how the survivor felt, the impact of the perpetrator’s actions, that matter:

\[
\text{It doesn’t matter what you intended, it’s your impact...I think most people are generally not trying to be evil people, but if you’re not listening to your partner, or the person you’re engaging in any activity with, um, even if they’re not even verbal, you can tell when someone, when the light is out of their eyes.}
\]

Amy also connected this “inadvertent assault” to the issue of entitlement. First, she said, “No one’s thinking, ‘Oh, I’m being a rapist right now’ but you strategically bought these drinks and then felt entitled for something to happen and that’s your decision to waste that money.” She followed that up later with:

\[
\text{I mean, if you just look at the bars, if a girl walks past you and you think she’s hot, you’re not going to say hi to her, you grab her. Why do you feel like you deserve to be able to touch me? Why can’t you just say, like, “Excuse me?”…No}
\]
girl is gonna just grab a guy and be like, “C’mere, baby.” Um, but yet, men feel like it’s, they can just do that.

Consent was often considered to be a gray, ambivalent area, as well as what actually constitutes sexual assault, such as Amy’s connection to “inadvertent assault” and the entitlement of men.

**Difficulty Labeling Rape.** Some participants struggled to label what had happened to them or to their friends as rape or sexual assault. In some cases, like those of Amy or Rebecca, they could articulate the reluctance or inability to label something as sexual assault. In other cases, however, it was less clear to the participant or she was ambivalent about the story or experience as sexual assault. Amy said, “Um…it took me a long time to understand…Like, I still, to this day, have a hard time labeling it as rape. Um…I’m in love with that person.” She went on to describe a conversation from one of her classes around sexual assault:

*Because, the women in our class, including myself, were all men that we knew. And so…it made it really hard to rationalize and label them as rapists or our rapist, because we were in a relationship and continued to stay even after being assaulted, or they were mentors. And so it’s really hard to label that and deal with…I also was not just physically taken advantage of, but emotionally and mentally. And I think those are the hardest, that people don’t understand, that it’s harder to label.*

Rebecca said:

*Even right now it’s very atypical for me to label, you know, what happened to me as rape. I feel very uncomfortable saying that. I really don’t wanna say that. I just want to call it this really awkward situation. I prefer to call it that. I prefer not to label it as rape regardless of all the information I’ve had and all the reading I’ve done. It’s still this really…um, difficult thing for me to put this label on it as that.*

Others were less able to articulate what happened to them or others as sexual assault but could still acknowledge that something was amiss:
Kristy: Do you know any survivors?

Julie: [takes in deep breath] I mean, from now on, I wouldn’t say that, I wouldn’t have said that an hour ago. But...now that I’ve talked to you about what I really, what shapes everything that I think of is wrong, I guess, is the word that I’m gonna use, is wrong.

Note that Julie cannot—or chooses not to—use the term rape or sexual assault, but merely labeled what happened as “wrong.” When asked if she was a survivor, Gina replied:

...I would say that...I’ve had drinking nights where...I’ve hooked up with someone and I’m like, “Oh, I probably shouldn’t have done that.” But, but...I, at that time and now, I don’t think I’m ready to call that sexual assault. Because...see, I still sort of think that was my decision and...that and it wasn’t to the point that I felt as if I was truly violated or taken advantage of or anything like that.

Rebecca told multiple stories of friends who had been sexually assaulted, but neither she, nor they, defined it as such at the time in college. For example, she started one story by saying, “So um, any, it’s like…it almost feels like a minority of my friends to talk about who haven’t had some kind of really difficult experience at some point.” Rebecca proceeded to describe the experience of a female friend who had repeatedly said no to a male sexual partner:

Um, but then he just kept going and ended up raping her and...the way that she describes the story is not a rape...He’s having sex with her after she’s already told him, “No, I don’t want to do this, I don’t want to do this.” And then, um, it stops and he starts back into hanging out with his buddies in the other room.

Rebecca finished this story by noting, “So for the two of us, at the time in college talking about it, you know, I was really sympathetic with her, but um...it was still a time where for both of us, it was blurry.” She described another story, involving a friend who was quite intoxicated, as such:
So what happened was they had sex. As far as I know with her telling him, “I wanna have sex, this is good.” She was still drunk enough that he couldn’t necessarily say he had her consent for that. Um, but in any case, it starts off being something both of them are wanting to do and then um…she started to get really sick to her stomach and he just kept on…she would have to get up and throw up because she’s drunk too much and he kept on just pulling her back to the bed, saying, “Let’s have sex again, let’s have sex again.” And she describes this process as being so drunk and so out of it, that she’s just alternating from having to throw up and going back to bed and someone having sex with her. So…that’s, when she told me this story, it was…this is a hook-up story, this is crazy, are you okay? But again, it didn’t get the label of rape, it didn’t get this, this bad guy that did this bad thing, it was just, oh, this is the nature of what happens with a hook-up. And she and I have talked a lot about that experience since then, and it’s only recently that she’s really seen it for what it is.

These comments by Rebecca, Amy, and others are not unusual, particularly given the context of the stories, in which the survivors knew their perpetrators, or were even in relationships with them. According to Ben-David and Schneider (2005), “As the acquaintance level increased, there was a greater tendency to minimize the severity of the rape…the situation was characterized less as rape, and was perceived as less violating of the victim’s rights” (p. 385). The inability to label situations that happened to them or others as sexual assault is further evidence of shifting views and gray areas for participants when it comes to defining identifying sexual assault.

**Scenarios.** All participants were asked to describe sexual assault, then define it, followed by a request to describe a scenario that would constitute sexual assault. The scenarios and situations that they described were critical in four ways: upholding their definitions that included sexual harassment; acknowledging the reality of alcohol in campus sexual assault; upholding rape myths; and refuting rape myths, showing that some former student-athletes are hearing the messages given during educational programs.
Some scenarios that upheld their definitions of including sexual harassment included these:

Gail: I even think sexual assault doesn’t necessarily have to involve the acts of intercourse, I think it could just be verbal abuse from a male superior on a younger woman. Um…saying really harsh, rude, negative allegations or words to make them feel down or belittle them.

Elizabeth: I would say...um...if my coach would propose me, um, “Come with me later at night, I would offer you, uh, a stroke position in the boat.”

Kelly: Okay, so let’s say we have a girl and then we have a man, approaching her, and let’s say that he flashes her, I think that would be a sexual assault as well. Because she probably doesn’t want to be, she doesn’t want to see what she’s about to see, right?

Michael: Um, I mean...one of the most obvious ones would be flashing somebody.

Karen: Yeah, so I think it could be as simple as a derogatory remark made in the workplace, or, I mean it could be anywhere, a grocery store, any sort of derogatory sexual remark towards someone. Or, like even if someone’s in earshot of it.

Kim: It can be between the coworkers, where one coworker is making comments about the other coworker. Just, kind of, not even touching, but kind of saying things that make that person uncomfortable, like saying—Er, or actually, not even saying things that make that person uncomfortable, but maybe like, the tone of their voice, and like, facial expression. Just like, saying, “Oh, you look good today!” or saying something like that that makes that person feel uncomfortable, that, um...that I think would be sexual assault. Yeah, a sexual assault.

James: Um...I don’t know, maybe, I’m thinking of this really biased ‘cause I’m thinking of this as a guy, but, um, like guys yelling stuff at girls. You know, like verbal, saying inappropriate, out of context...stuff like that. Sexual stuff like that.

Julie: Um...maybe, like what I was saying about texting, saying vulgar things over text messages...um, and like I said before, being like, um, “I’m sorry, I don’t feel the same way,” and they continue to do that and they talk to your friends about you, and...sexually, or of that nature. And it persists and they know that you don’t want it to persist, I think that would be a scenario as well.
As one of the participants who defined sexual assault as both verbal (i.e., harassment) and physical (i.e., assault), Michael’s second scenario, after already saying, “flashing someone,” was:

Um… I mean, obviously, rape would be sexual assault, that’s like the highest degree of it. Obviously. Um, something of a lesser nature could, I think it could be defined as an inappropriate joke.

Just as many participants included sexual harassment as a piece of sexual assault, most participants were also highly cognizant of the role alcohol plays in situations of sexual assault. Their imagined scenarios that included the problematic use of alcohol in sexual assaults that occur with students and/or on college campuses were:

Paul: There’s two people, and there’s at least one of them, the victim, could be drunk and… maybe they’re both drunk and there’s, they’ve been like talking or something. And one person thinks that it’s going somewhere and so they’ll act on it but then the other, uh, person… might not realize that they’re giving the wrong signals or something. So then they try to stop it, but the other person just keeps going.

Melissa: … I mean, whenever I think about it, like, uh, especially being at a university, um, and you see all the drunk students, or uh, all the parties, but I think uh… you know, so many times it happens and people get just so drunk, they are wasted completely and they are not conscious.

Karen: So let’s say that you are being walked home, from a bar, two people, and you’re both, you’re drunk and the guy’s drunk, or the girl, whatever. And, um… you get home and then you decide that, you know, you don’t want to go any further. You just want the other person to leave.

James: Seems like the biggest one is a student, um, when someone’s drunk, or both parties are drunk. And one may take advantage of the other, uh… maybe not even intentionally thinking that both parties want it. But maybe something not.

Gina: So, two individuals are at a party, and… um… maybe both of them are intoxicated with alcohol, and… if they… have sexual contact and… I don’t know. Is that sexual assault though? Um… well I’m trying to get the point for example of, when alcohol is involved, and someone is taken advantage of because they’re not in a state of mind to make decisions about the consent. And… hmm… I think that’s
an example of, let’s say someone hooked up at a party and was inebriated, and it was unwanted and forced upon them, then that’s sexual, sexual assault.

Some of these scenarios touch upon the idea that alcohol interferes with one’s ability to consent. As someone who has worked in this field for a long time, I can personally say this is a small victory to hear student-athletes acknowledging the problematic issues of alcohol and consent.

Consent was also touched upon in scenarios in a way that refuted rape myths. A long-standing rape myth is that “yes means yes” and, as such, consent cannot be revoked (i.e., consent to one sexual activity indicates consent to all sexual activity). Educators have long worked to ensure that young people understand that consent can be revoked. For example, just because a person consents to oral sex, does not mean he or she consents to sexual intercourse, or just because a person consents to kissing, does not mean he or she consents to touching below the waist. Some of the scenarios provided by participants indicated that consent can be revoked, as well as breaking other rape myths:

Karen: So let’s say you go home with someone and you start making out with them and then all of sudden you’re like, “Wait, I don’t want to do this anymore.” But if they continue to then I would consider that sexual assault.

Kelly: Well, the most basic one, really, is when the guy tries to finish the action of whatever he started, go to the third base or fourth base or whatever it’s called, and then the girl says, “Ahhhh wait, actually I don’t want to do it!” and he still pushes her to do it, well, again, that would be [sexual assault].

Julie: Say you are, like, doing, doing things in bed or in a car. Or I don’t know, somewhere. And...you’re comfortable to a certain point, and then you’re not comfortable to a certain point. And you say, “I, I don’t want to do that, I don’t want to continue...um...this isn’t what I had in mind.” Um, those kinds of things, and he keeps persisting and keeps touching you and grabbing you and...kind of forcing you, like, even forcing your hands down, forcing your wrists. Um, and saying...like, “Don’t be prude” or...um...what else? “You told me you would” or “You told me this, that” or... It’s the cool thing to do,” or those kinds of things and he—or she—uh, like, kind of forces you to keep doing what you’re doing.
even if, like, you allow the first...uh, like, they initiate or you initiate and you’re not comfortable past a certain point and they continue to do things, and touch you and keep you there. I think that could definitely be considered sexual assault.

Despite refuting the rape myth of consent for one act is consent for all others, some participants did provide scenarios that completely uphold rape myths. This included the need for a verbal no, as opposed to asking for a verbal yes. Jason gave two that meet this criteria, the first as, “Ryan goes up to Jenny at a party, grabs her butt. Jenny says, ‘Hey, stop that’ and Ryan then gropes the girl and she pushes him off and he tries to kiss her and she pushes him off again. Sexual assault.” When I asked him for another scenario, he said:

Jenny and Ryan are in bed. Ryan’s sleeping, Jenny starts kissing him. Ryan wakes up and says, “Stop that,” and pushes her off. He goes back to sleep. Jenny starts kissing him again. He wakes up, pushes her off, says, “Stop”. Um, and Jenny tries to touch him and he wakes up again and says, “Hey, stop.” Sexual assault.

Despite the fact that all of these scenarios are indeed sexual assault, the ways they are described by participants suggests that a verbal no, resistance, or push back is needed to indicate consent, as opposed to asking for consent or affirmative consent.

Other scenarios upheld the rape myth of fearing a stranger. Most assaults, particularly on college campuses, take place by a perpetrator known to the survivor (National Institute of Justice, 2008). However, Paul gave the example of, “Uh…you mean, just like, a straight up rape I guess. Somebody just attacks a stranger and like forces himself on them.” In addition, Melissa said, “But I’ve seen movies and uh, there are some people just walking on the street, it’s night, you know, dark outside, and then somebody runs after them and they rape them.” While most scenarios overwhelming tended to support the participants’ definitions of sexual assault, including sexual
harassment, these scenarios also provided further insight into the relationship between alcohol and sexual assault, as well as a glimpse of how student-athletes both believe and reject certain rape myths.

**Consent.** Sexual assault, as defined in Chapter One, is any non-consensual sexual act. Definitions of consent vary. For example, the state of Ohio’s penal code notes that sexual assault is any sexual activity without consent, but does not define consent itself. Many universities, in an attempt to comply with Title IX under the DCL, are adopting what is known as “affirmative consent” (New, 2014). Affirmative consent aligns with guidelines set forth by the White House in their recent attempts to help end campus sexual assault. According to NotAlone.gov, the White House’s guide for campus sexual assault prevention:

“Consent” must be informed, voluntary, and mutual, and can be withdrawn at any time. There is no consent when there is force, expressed or implied, or when coercion, intimidation, threats, or duress is used. Whether a person has taken advantage of a position of influence over another person may be a factor in determining consent. Silence or absence of resistance does not imply consent. Past consent to sexual activity with another person does not imply ongoing future consent with that person or consent to that same sexual activity with another person. If a person is mentally or physically incapacitated or impaired so that such person cannot understand the fact, nature, or extent of the sexual situation, there is no consent; this includes impairment or incapacitation due to alcohol or drug consumption that meets this standard, or being asleep or unconscious. (2015)

This “affirmative consent” is the definition most often used on college campuses for adjudication of and education on sexual assault (New, 2014).

In discussing definitions and descriptions of sexual assault, consent was a centerpiece of this issue for many participants. All of them were able to articulate the importance of consent, even if they did not use the word itself. Six participants used the word “consent” on their own, while seven others used words such as “uncomfortable,”
“without permission,” “vulnerable,” “unwanted,” “unwilling,” or “unwarranted” to describe consent, or lack thereof. Two participants, Kim and Gail, initially said “uncomfortable” and “unwanted,” but then used the word consent repeatedly after I had said it to them. However, in Kim’s situation, based on the recording, I am not entirely sure if she said it first or if I did. Here is my exchange with her on the issue of consent:

Kristy: So like if I said, how do you define sexual assault?
Kim: Umm...so I would say it’s an act...or...an attitude towards someone. Umm...the...or, it’s sexual act or attitude toward someone that makes that someone feel uncomfortable.
Kristy: Okay. How...how do you know if somebody’s uncomfortable?
Kim: Umm...well...you mean if I act towards someone in the way that makes that other person uncomfortable?
Kristy: Mmmhmm. Kim: Well, you can either see it in their facial expression...or just by their body movements, I guess. Or just, it, it can be also verbal, so someone can consent [unclear; note: not sure she said consent here, which is why I brought it up below] verbally to that.
Kristy: Mmmhmm. Okay. When you say uncomfortable, does that...does that convey an element of consent?
Kim: Yes.

I was not entirely sure if she said consent or not, so that is why I asked if she meant consent. She said yes. Moving forward, here is how she characterized consent:

Kim: So yeah, I would say that...that would be something that the other person doesn’t give you a consent to do.
Kristy: Okay. How...what is consent?
Kim: Hahhh...consent is...some...[sighs]. Ahh...[Laughter by both] Consent I would say...it’s an...it...it’s...[sigh]. How do I say it? Consent...it’s something that...that...person allows you to do.
Kristy: Okay.
Kim: Or agrees towards something.
Kristy: Mmmhmm.
Kim: Verbally or non-verbally.

This exchange with Kim was not uncommon in asking participants about consent.

Whether they used the exact word consent, or something else that implied consent, such
as permission, or unwanted, I often probed further to ask what they meant by that. How did they know if they had permission? How would they know if something is unwanted? For some, consent was verbal, in either the form of a verbal yes, or enthusiastic in some way. For example, Nicole described consent in these three ways:

So, consent, in my opinion, should be verbal, it shouldn’t just be, you know, allowing someone to continue.

Because consent shouldn’t be blurry, but for some reason, it is, especially on a college campus like ours, where drinking is so heavy.

I’m now to the point where I think anyone’s who’s not attracted to enthusiastic consent has a problem.

Others described verbal and/or enthusiastic consent in these ways:

Amy: Asking for consent and checking in.

James: Verbal. Yeah. It’s gotta be a yes.

Gina: Consent is yes. It is not the absence of a no.

Melissa: It would have to be verbal, I would say, because you know, like um...as I mentioned, after alcohol, people can take advantage. So in my opinion it has to be verbal to make it.

Rebecca: Consent is the...um...confirming that you want to be touched or treated in a certain way. So, um, actually having, um...the verbal confirmation, “Yes, I want this to happen.”

However, consent was often seen as unclear or difficult to articulate. This is already evidenced in some of the quotes above, where participants paused often or used fillers, such as “um” or “like” or “you know.” Here are some other examples where participants struggled to describe or define consent or lack of consent:

Julie: So somebody comes onto you, and you, you don’t feel the same way or have feelings for them or you’re not sexually attracted to them, or...um...you’re, you’re...you want nothing to do with the act of what that other person wants to do.
Paul: ...Uh...I mean, I guess...the easiest way would be like “yes” but it’s not always just a straightforward question, so just um...like, there’s no...resistance or they’ve, like...given signals that they’re willing.

Paul’s answer also indicates that while participants are told or taught that a verbal “yes” is required for consent, they and their peers often still rely on other indicators of consent, such as body language. As Gail says, consent can be determined based on how “someone is giving off signals.” Michael answered similarly:

_Sometimes you can tell from body language, body cues. Um, in sociology, I got to figure out why people will do things they do. And what happens in social situations. But, sometimes you can’t tell. Sometimes you may have crossed the line. It’s taboo for some and not for others. But for the most part you have to read visual and body cues from other people._

Kelly said that “consent would be an agreement” but defined this in terms of reading cues from other person by saying, “You can usually predict what someone wants from you, by their actions, you can basically say what’s going to happen next.”

Further, a few participants were able to acknowledge that they disagreed with the definition of consent as given during an education program. For example, Karen struggled to define consent:

...Um...I would say consent is...um...I don’t know if permission is the right word, but um...sort of allowing anything that they, they, you know. Allowing something to happen. And if you don’t want to, if you, if that, like if you say no, then that’s not consent. Anytime a no, so I would say, a yes. Either, verbally stated or implied.

She noted that her statement that consent can be implied conflicted with what she had learned, saying, “Which, I know is going to get me into trouble, because of all the, it’s funny, ‘cause [IU] does all these classes on like, what is consent, and blah blah blah, and it’s just completely gone out the window for me.” James, however, was very clear that he
had learned that consent was not ambiguous: “Verbal. Yeah. It’s gotta be a ‘yes.’ That’s a big… I remember getting these presentations, all the athletes got it, and the slide would just say, ‘YES.’” These two contradictions, of Karen’s hesitation to accept what she had learned, as well as James’s acceptance of material, continues to indicate the uncertainty of the topic.

Rebecca’s answer to the question, “What is consent?” seems to sum up this entire section on consent. Her answer, though long, wound her through gray areas, verbal consent, implied consent, and uncertainty:

*I think it’s verbal...and it gets...[sighs] You can have a form of...physical consent. Um...I mean, this is, I think this is something...that I still haven’t fully processed. Because what I want to say, but keeping the definition easy for consent, like consent has to be something that is verbal, but I could also think of situations where you can be in a relationship and have established, you know, this is a form of physical consent. So with every sexual act, a form of sexual assault, is when someone hasn’t verbally said yes. In my opinion, I don’t think, no, I don’t think that’s the case. But I also think that you cannot assume, just because someone hasn’t said yes, um...that if they’re physically resisting, that it’s okay to push through because they haven’t verbally said no. So, um...I think...I think it gets into...the gray area for me that way.*

Consent was a tricky area for most former student-athletes, as it held the opportunity to dispel some rape myths and uphold others, all couched in uncertainty and ambivalence. Throughout the interviews, participants made statements that often upheld rape myths or dispelled them. The next two sections address the ways in which participants discussed sexual assault to accept or refute rape myths.

**Rape Myths: Upheld.** A few rape myths, or stereotypes that are commonly held, about sexual assault were displayed by participants throughout the interviews. The two most common were victim blaming and use of force as necessary for sexual assault to occur. The other stereotypes were assumptions about victims as women, perpetrators as
men, while also indicating that only certain types of people commit sexual assault, including strangers (i.e., “stranger danger”).

Victim blaming attitudes and beliefs operate under the assumption that, in some way, no matter how small, the victim is to blame for what happened. An example of this might be, “What did she think would happen if she wore such a revealing dress?” The former student-athletes interviewed displayed victim blaming in two ways: blaming others and blaming themselves (i.e., “self-blame”) if they were survivors of sexual assault. Victim blaming others can take the form of criticizing the victim’s actions, as if something she or he did contributed to the assault or caused it to happen. An example of blaming others came from Elizabeth, who said, “They [potential female victims] can already see that something already goes toward that direction, they can look for help. Rather than just wait until it really happens.” I asked her to clarify, “What do you mean if they see it going in that direction?” She responded:

*I think it, it’s kind of, at least I have such a thing, a feeling—I think I have such a feeling that I can kind of predict or...just, uh, kind of...well it, sometimes it can be really suddenly happening like, sexual assault, but sometimes you can first be harassed, and then it actually can follow by sexual assault. So I guess...um, you can, it’s two different things, but you can sometimes avoid it. That’s what I think.*

Assuming that a woman can and should avoid sexual assault puts the onus on her to stop something from happening, removing the blame from the person truly responsible for sexual assault, the perpetrator.

Karen, in recounting her lack of experience, chalked it up to her lifestyle by saying, “I’m not the girl you’re going to take home at the end of the night.” However, she seemed to recognize that a statement as such could indicate victim blaming and tried to
correct herself, though it still appeared that she thought going home with someone at the end of the night was a recipe for disaster:

> And I don’t know if that’s...um, like, I don’t want to say that those girls are victims because they asked to be, but I think that...um, I, I don’t know. I don’t know because I was never, I never just went home with a stranger, or...really went home with anybody! Because, um, it was just my personality, but so, I know that, um, there’s a lot of different personalities out there. So...yeah. So, plus, I mean, some of my friends would be the people that went home with someone at the end of the night and I just, I just...personally, have never been in a situation that I would say is...sexual assault, or close to it.

Michael said something similar about his college years, noting, “You saw all the girls stumbling around and you’re like, ‘This is gonna happen to her.’ And you just knew the look, I worked in a bar, you just knew the look of who it was gonna happen to.”

Rebecca, a feminist who has done her own personal research into this area, could clearly articulate victim blaming. Though she did not agree with it, she could see how it happened in her life, with friends blaming her for her actions:

> Well there’s also so many ways of blaming, like placing blame on the person who’s been assaulted when something happens to them. Um, and I think a lot of it can come from other women too. Um, ’cause I, for that period of time when I decided I really don’t want to have sex yet, I would go meet someone at a party, bring them home and make out with them, some clothes would come off, and then as I’m recounting this story to my friends [they] would tell me, “God you’re such a tease. You’re making out with someone naked, what are you doing?”

Another common type of victim blaming is to assume that the victim is lying in some way or to connect her previous actions to her current situation. Amy described the story of a teammate who was assaulted at a party, but was afraid to tell anyone because “she got a bad label for being a party girl, so she didn’t think anyone would believe her,” even though her teammate was virgin when she was assaulted.
In addition to blaming others, women, as victims, often blame themselves. This internalized self-blame can take shape after hearing it from others first. For example, Kelly, who was about 11 years old when an older man flashed and kissed her in a shopping mall elevator, told me that her mom said to her, “Things like this happen,” encouraging her to be more careful in the future. Kelly followed up by saying, “So that’s the experience. And that’s when I learned I should be a bit stronger, maybe faster, and a bit more intelligent to not get into the elevator with a man I don’t know that was bigger than me.” Rebecca also internalized the victim blaming that was done societally after her assault:

> Um, but there was a lot of, um…that dialogue that I found uncomfortable, like…it made it harder for me to really blame another person. Like, even this thing of like, “Oh, well I went and started flirting with this guy and I was the one who took him back to my place and I was the one who started taking off my own clothes.” You know, there are ways where that’s really filtered into my own self-perception from people reinforcing like, “Oh you’re being a tease, you’re doing this, you’re doing that. Why are you giving this person the impression something’s gonna happen and then pulling it away?” You know?

Research has long linked societal victim blaming to the internalization by victims as self-blame (Warshaw, 1998; Pitts & Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz & Leggett, 1999). It is not unreasonable that Karen and Rebecca both experienced this self-blame as well as recognized victim blaming in other parts of their lives.

Another common rape myth, as well as another form of victim blaming, is to assume that sexual assault requires some sort of force, as evidenced by some form of resistance, fighting, or pushing back from the survivor. This came up in many ways throughout the interviews. A few excerpts included:

> Paul: *I always think of it as somebody forces themselves onto somebody else who isn’t willing in a sexual way.*
Elizabeth: ...someone who is, uh, I would say, forcing on me.

Julie: ...grabbing you and...kind of forcing you, like, even forcing hands down, forcing your wrists.

Gina: Let’s say someone hooked up at a party and was inebriated, and it was unwanted and forced upon them.

Elizabeth: I would say, um...a coach would um, on a camp, he would ask a girl to his room and then he would force himself on her.

Paul: ...they’re like...fighting back the resistance that the...the victim is putting up.

Many participants did use the word “force” to indicate it as such, but even Jason could describe the use of force, resistance, and fighting back through this example, when he said, “Ryan goes up to Jenny at a party, grabs her butt. Jenny says, ‘Hey, stop that’ and Ryan then gropes the girl and she pushes him off and he tries to kiss her and she pushes him off again.” By indicating that Jenny is pushing Ryan away, there is an assumption that victims must resist or fight back in some way, rather than assuming Ryan is responsible for asking Jenny for consent first.

Other common rape myths regard the nature of the perpetrator. While most assaults are committed by a perpetrator known the victim, some of the participants gave descriptions or scenarios that indicated “stranger danger” sexual assault by someone unknown to the victim. For example, Paul said, “Somebody just attacks a stranger and like forces himself on them.” Melissa, connecting this image of “stranger danger” to media influence, said, “But I’ve seen movies and uh, there are some people just walking on the street, it’s night, you know, dark outside, and then somebody runs after them and they rape them.”
For some participants, they upheld the rape myth by struggling to believe it could happen between people who know and/or trust each other. For example, Kim participated on a fencing team where both men and women traveled to competitions together, and often trained together, under one set of coaches. Due to this highly integrated nature of men and women being teammates, Kim believed sexual assault among her teammates was unlikely. She said:

*Because um, you have...I guess it’s different for, for teams that have women’s and men’s teams, and those two kind of work together. Like, when I’m thinking about a fencing team, there are guys practicing with girls and we travel all together...I think that sexual assault, if it happens, it’s more likely to occur not within a team but between teams because you don’t wanna... ‘Cause you’re so close with the people you know on the team that you don’t really want get, be that one person, um, sexually assaulting or offending someone else on your team.*

A statement such as this belies the fact that many victims know their perpetrators, who are often trusted friends, acquaintances or partners. Gail expressed similar beliefs. In recounting a story of a former teammate who accused an assistant coach of sexual harassment, she exhibited disbelief that someone she knew and trusted (i.e., the coach) could harass a teammate. This story also demonstrated elements of victim blaming in Gail’s inability to believe her teammate:

*This is your team, you’re with them all the time. You go through like blood sweat and tears with them and to have of the team members who knows what you go through every single day and was a part of that and then to just, allegedly throw these...allegations to someone that you trust and you train with and you listen to and you like, abide by what they’re telling you to do? Um, to have a peer of yours, and someone you thought you loved and cared for just...freely, just say these things? Was really, really hurtful and I didn’t know how to respond.*

She followed that up a bit later with:

*But yeah, it was really hard for me. It was, it was really difficult to...to see that happen. Because...[clears throat] the coach she was saying all these awful things*
about had never treated me that way. Um, we were very close, he was the, the one that recruited me.

Gail struggled to accept or acknowledge that someone she knew and trusted could be capable of sexual harassment, let alone sexual assault, or that someone with a similarly close relationship to her coach could have been assaulted by him. However, between 85% and 93% of victims of sexual assault on college campuses know their perpetrator (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; National Institute of Justice, 2008; Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999). These perpetrators range from classmates to neighbors to partners, and more than half of assault take place in the context of a date. Thus, the “stranger danger” myth that many participants upheld belies the truth about sexual assault for college women.

Other stereotypes or rape myths about the nature of perpetrators and victims revolved around gender. It is traditionally believed that men are the perpetrators of female victims; men cannot be victims of sexual assault; and women are not perpetrators. For example, James does not see himself as victim of sexual assault that is perpetrated by a women: “It’s just, uh, I can’t…I can’t really see a girl doing that, that to me.” When I asked Kelly if she thought men could be victims, she said no, they could not be victims of rape, but they could be “victims” in the sense of false accusations. She said, “By that I mean that, uh, for example, if you have a male coach, coaching a female team, he might be a victim but because someone might accuse him of sexual assault even though he hasn’t done a thing.” Gail was able to recognize how the media influences stereotypes, saying, “I think the media…the media shaped what I know in terms of sexual assault being very much so male on female. And making the male the perpetrator and the female the victim.” Lastly, Jason connected overt masculinity with the perpetration of sexual
assault. When discussing the masculinity of elite college athletes, and why they are often more scrutinized in the literature, he said, “[It’s] who the people are! Who their, like the DNA is. Like, take a bunch of people who are computer programmers and I bet they’re not [perpetrators], maybe, because their testosterone levels are lower than mine.” All of these statements from participants uphold these stereotypes about the characteristics of victims and perpetrators based on gender.

Lastly, there are often stereotypes about the “type” of person who commits sexual assault. Given the stereotypes and “stranger danger” noted above, it often assumed that a perpetrator fits societal stereotypes about who is “dangerous,” generally someone who is low-income, mentally ill, a person of color, and/or in an urban environment. James upheld this notion by describing his upbringing in a wealthy suburb:

So, I think it’s, you know, where kids were raised. It’d be interesting to see, how many kids, how many people are accused of sexual assault, what kind of background they have. Or where they were raised. Because in [wealthy suburb] that doesn’t happen. My high school, there was none of that stuff. In [wealthy suburb], there was no sexual assault stuff.

Paul had a similar reaction to discussing the types of education he received. As a white man from an affluent neighborhood in Wisconsin, he did not identify with the football and basketball players at his university, whom he saw as more likely to commit sexual assault. Thus he believed that the sexual assault prevention education was more geared toward these athletes:

Um…I mean…I always feel like, I always felt like, it’s kind of bad to say this, but the meetings were definitely more geared towards like, the football team or…the basketball team or something, like, I don’t know. We’re, the volleyball team is like 15 white guys and like it’s…I’m not trying to sound racist or anything like that, but there’s like this, I don’t know, we come here to go to school, and play volleyball as like a side thing and there’s just, also because football players are more in the spotlight, so…there’s definitely…more geared towards like, people
are gonna be coming after you and stuff like that. And it’s, that’s not like the case for us.

While some studies (see Chapter Two) have shown that student-athletes are more likely to perpetrate sexual assault, there is no evidence to support that only certain types of men based on race, social class, etc. are more likely than others. In fact, the CSA discovered that 80% of sexual assaults done while the victim was incapacitated by alcohol were committed by white men (Krebs et al., 2007).

**Rape Myths: Refuted.** Despite the prevalence of rape myths upheld by former student-athletes, there were a few ways that participants pushed back against, or refuted, stereotypes around sexual assault, mostly around the gender assumptions of victims and perpetrators. First, many participants were able to get outside the traditional male perpetrator/female victim ideals. This was sometimes less explicit, and as simple as using both female and male pronouns when telling a story. As James said, “Realizing, you know, that I didn’t want this or that she didn’t want it or that he didn’t want it.” Or as Karen described a scenario of sexual assault:

*So, let’s say that you are being walked home, from a bar, two people, and you’re both, you’re drunk and the guy’s drunk, or the girl, whatever. And, um...you get home and then you decide that, you know, you don’t want to go any further. You just want the other person to leave.*

This was sometimes explicitly stated, such as by Michael, when he mentioned, “Anybody can victimize anybody. Maybe bring a male victim forward. Say something happened to him. You know? I mean, there’s no reason that can’t be the face of somebody too.” Other examples from participants included:

Nicole: *This is heteronormative, so I apologize. I understand that women can be aggressors as well.*
Julie: *And he keeps persisting and keeps touching you or grabbing you—and I’m sorry, I keep saying he, shouldn’t say he—and he or she keeps touching you and grabbing you.*

Jason: *But no one—not many people would give that example because normally people view sexual assault as a male on female violation.*

Some participants were clear in the fact that sexual assault is a more gender neutral act and/or does not just happen in the context of heterosexuality:

Gail: *Sexual assault, it can be same-sex or it can be opposite sex*

Jason: *Um…I think sexual assault can be, could happen to, by male or female.*

Michael: *I feel that it’s not necessarily a gender specific thing, anybody can be sexually assaulted.*

These quotes from participants demonstrate that many are willing to go beyond assumptions that sexual assault is typically heterosexual, occurring with male perpetrators and female victims. According the National Institute for Justice (2010), most victims are women and most perpetrators are men. However, acknowledgment that sexual assault goes beyond the male-assaulting-female paradigm is helpful in allowing victims who are male and/or victims of same-sex assault come forward and seek services.

The last area of refuting rape myths surrounds the issue of “stranger danger.” Both Gina and Michael acknowledged that sexual assault is likely to come from someone the victim knows and trusts. Gina said:

> And…like, I have to acknowledge that while, you know…rape will happen, you know, I just see that rape will happen from people you know, not necessarily a complete stranger. And that is...something that’s kind of scary. ‘Cause it’s like, “Hey, it’s your friend! Someone you know!” And if they are to force themselves upon you, you know, I mean that’s probably what we see most often with sexual assault, they are people you know. And it is from those experiences, it’s not only, like, here’s a stranger and they grab me. You know?
Michael indicated that sexual assault is not relegated to only the bigger universities, but also quite likely at smaller schools:

*I would say sometimes it’d be more likely because, smaller people, you know everybody, you trust everybody. Everybody is your friend. Whereas your guard is up—your guard is down with your friends—at [MU], you don’t know hardly anybody, so you’re protecting yourself more.*

Lastly, the only person to address the issue of victim blaming was Karen. One of her family members was assaulted in a very public case, and her family experienced a lot of victim blaming as a result. She said:

*So there was a lot of emotions surrounding that attack because, and she, she’ll say people will put the blame on her like, why were you out [late at night]? And her biggest thing is, you cannot blame the victim, that’s absurd. So there’s always been chatter about that and it was like over 25 years ago and it still comes up.*

Karen was very clear that victims should not be blamed for their actions, no matter how late at night they were out.

Throughout interviews with the former student-athletes, it became apparent that they knew a lot about sexual assault and consent, even if they felt ambivalent or unclear about these issues. They often lumped sexual assault and sexual harassment together, and could acknowledge the problematic issues that alcohol brings to these already confusing situations. They also both upheld and refuted rape myths that are pervasive in society. While it is important to know what former student-athletes know about sexual assault, it is equally as critical to learn how they have come to this knowledge. The next section addresses who and what has shaped their ideas of sexual assault.

**Knowledge: How They Know It**

It is important to know how people are influenced in their definitions and descriptions of sexual assault. Participants’ ideas of sexual assault were shaped by
educational experiences, feminist experiences, team and/or university culture, experiences as a survivor, media, and family background. This section explores participant answers to the question, “What has shaped or influenced your knowledge of sexual assault?” as well as gleaning information from other parts of the interviews.

**Educational Experiences.** Many participants cited educational experiences, or educational settings, as influencers and shapers of sexual assault knowledge. Some of this education began before college. James first learned of sexual assault during a health class in high school, saying, “It’s just definitely hit on in high school now.” Gail remembered something from middle school but not much of the details, saying, “I feel like I remember learning something about it for the first time, um, when I was in middle school, taking PE class, we watched a video on sexual assault.” For most participants, though, the bulk of educational experiences came during college.

Many participants remembered or named university-wide programming or campaigns. Karen recalled emails from IU with information about sexual assault, as well as attending a program during freshmen orientation. Kim also mentioned a program on sexual assault that was optional during freshmen orientation, but she did not attend it. Paul remembered a program from his residence hall, as well as brochures on sexual assault: “I think in the dorm there was a, like a brief meeting about that or RAs mentioned it at the beginning of the year. There’s like, there’s pamphlets all over the place about it.” Two participants were able to describe specific educational campaigns on campus. Karen remembered IU’s “Consent is Sexy” campaign, and Nicole recalled AU’s “I Don’t Say” campaign. In addition, Nicole was able to articulate a consent campaign done by AU, as well as what she learned from it and how it influenced her and her peers:
[AU] did this really cool thing, I guess it was my junior year, where they started pushing enthusiastic consent really hard, which I thought was awesome. Because consent shouldn’t be blurry, but for some reason, it is, especially on a college campus like ours, where drinking is so heavy. Um, and consent hasn’t been sexy in the past, you know, saying like, “I wanna sleep with you” has, like, not been sexy over the history of how women should express their sexual feelings. So [AU] started pushing this initiative of um, enthusiastic consent, which really spread on campus and really spread in the circles that I was in, which I thought was really cool. So, consent, in my opinion, should be verbal, it shouldn’t just be, you know, allowing someone to continue. Um, because that just gives people the wrong ideas in the future. So…I think consent is enthusiastic, and it’s verbal.

For some, participants, their recollection was just that a campaign or education existed.

For others, like Nicole, tangible educational benefits were reaped.

Other educational experiences at the university level included those offered by athletics departments. While some participants struggled to recall any educational opportunities, let alone what they learned from them (to be covered fully later in this chapter), some participants did say athletics programming influenced their knowledge.

Melissa said:

*Especially like, before, before I went to [WU], uh, we didn’t really talk much about it, it was like, oh, you know, you could read in the newspaper or see on TV, somebody raped someone. But actually at [WU], we talked about it more often. We could see the, uh, presentations. Like even in the athletic department there was uh, you know like, kind of, a poster, like everybody has to be treated equally, doesn’t matter what, whether it’s race or religion or gender, everything else. And uh...there’s even like a [WU athletes] code, and you say, “We are [WU athletes], we don’t do this, we don’t do that, this and that” and then they say, you would never take sexual advantage of someone without permission, or someone who is, uh, not conscious.*

James, who is the most recent graduate in this study (December 2014), actually said athletics was a main influencer and, “I don’t, I don’t recall it being addressed much out[side] of athletics.” The other two to mention influence by athletics education were both peer educators or mentors at their respective universities, Gina and Jason. Gina said:
I don’t really remember strong presentations along sexual assault, how to prevent it, um, how to identify it, things like that. What was monumental for me was my involvement with the [peer mentor] group and I remember vividly and clearly from that organization, um, being trained on bystander intervention and things like that. But that was something that was, yeah, it was a group of student-athletes, but it wasn’t something that was for the entire [student-athlete] population.

Jason started his interview by saying, “Um, wait, can you, can you hold the brakes for a second there? I was involved in [student-athlete advisory committee] and this, this…I was a peer educator.” He went on to explain how he was certified on peer mentoring topics, including sexual assault prevention, and that he provided training to other student-athletes.

Other factors for educational experiences including classroom learning experiences. Melissa and Kelly both recalled information from classes relating sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to sexual assault. Michael recalled taking sociology classes on law enforcement and deviance that touched on sexual assault. However, none of these participants brought up this education on their own, it was only after I asked, “What about in your classes? Did sexual assault ever come up in GEs or your major courses?” As such, it is not clear how or if this education in the classroom was effective, as the participants did not mention it on their own as a shaper of their beliefs.

The last participant to mention educational experiences was Rebecca, whose influencers were unique. As an artist, Rebecca specifically sought out information, such as articles and literature, professors (e.g., Michael Messner), documentaries, etc. that explored gender relations, to prepare herself for an art collection on the sexualization of female athletes. She recalled:
So I was making a series of artwork about this overt sexualization of female athletes, um, and in that process, I was doing a lot of my own outside research about issues of gender and sexualization. Part of that research, sexual assault and rape was coming up. Um, so I was reading...things that were showing me, I think, that it was broader than I had thought. I think before I had starting researching, I had a more narrow definition of sexual assault, but it started to broaden the more I started doing my own...investigation for my art. And then when I was teaching that class, I got really obsessed with this site called the Media Education Foundation.

As she noted, Rebecca’s experiences also straddle two time periods, both during college as well as post-college. Two other participants noted educational experiences beyond their college careers. Julie, a current coach, explained a recent Title IX training she had attended, and Kim interned in the Human Resource department of a university, during which time she attended programming on sexual assault for both employees and students.

Many educational experiences were available to participants. Some were lesser, or less likely to be remembered, at the high school or middle school, and most participants could identify some way in which education through their university and/or athletic department influenced them. Three participants had very unique experiences, before, during, and after college, that helped them identify as feminist and learn more about sexual assault.

**Feminist Experiences.** Three female participants were particularly influenced by feminism, and all three identified as feminist. Nicole’s experience was influenced by participation in a women’s leadership program throughout her four years at AU. She said, “I think that the other thing that was just like a big part of my [AU] experience that anyone at [AU] probably identifies me with, is I was in a program called [Women’s Leadership] when I was there.” Each year, a group of freshmen women are chosen through an intense application process. Nicole explained:
The goal was to change campus culture. The way they handled the program is that they select 18 women per year. And, um, the goal is that they create, um, they pour into these 18 women. They want you to become leaders and competent in all these things, and the goal is that these 18 women, they go to their 18 different circles and share the things they learned and spread that. So they pick 18 different girls who are in 18 different circles, which I find really cool because it ends up being a really non-competitive space.

Nicole further explained that she was the only student-athlete chosen in her group of 18 women. Throughout her interviews, she tied much of her knowledge or experience back to the women’s leadership group. In fact, her response to the question, “What has shaped your knowledge of sexual assault?” was this:

Um, [Women’s Leadership] has definitely been a really, really big part of that. Um, I don’t think I’ll ever forget our freshmen retreat, and they had people in from our women’s center. Our women’s center always does, kind of like, seminars on sexual assault with all the sororities and fraternities and athlete groups and stuff like that. Um, and they came in and talked to us, and we’d probably only been [on campus] for three weeks, maybe.

Her connection with this women’s leadership program at AU shaped both her knowledge of sexual assault as well as her identity, particularly as a feminist. She said, “That was definitely a big part of my college experience and a big part of my developing as a feminist over the past five years. So, um, it’s just a big part of my identity that is probably important.”

While Nicole’s feminist experiences, particularly as they influenced her knowledge of sexual assault, seemed firmly rooted in her undergraduate experience, both Rebecca and Amy describe feminism as a piece of their lives since childhood. Rebecca explained it this way:

I was a tomboy growing up. I used to play with cars, and dinosaurs and other “boys” toys. I also had the usual array of Barbies and stuffed animals, but I chose to follow the things I liked regardless of gender. I think I have always been
a feminist but did not have the word for it until I was a teenager. I did not begin to seriously read about feminism until I was in college.

Remember, Rebecca is the artist who did personal research into feminist issues to influence her artwork. She also participated as a research assistant with a renowned academic on work involving media portrayal of female athletes. Her personal and academic interests as an undergraduate have shaped her view of feminism and influenced her knowledge of sexual assault. She continues to be involved in feminist ventures, such as creating an art history class about gender in her current teaching role.

Lastly, Amy, who said she has “only taken on the title of feminist in the last few years,” tied her experience with teaching two different leadership classes, intercultural leadership and women’s leadership. She said, “I’ve really evolved through working as a TA for women’s leadership and having to understand the nuances and the complexity of feminism and having to guide students.” She also described how she must understand the complexity of sexual assault to be able to connect with students where they are at, whether they are working through victim blaming or living as a survivor. Though these experiences as a TA and teaching are post-collegiate, she said:

I’ve always been strongly connected to women’s rights in general...[and] I didn’t always have this language to say, “Oh, gender roles” or “Oh, sexism” but I was able to identify that and understand it was wrong...So I would say I’ve always seen it, understood it, but only recently had the knowledge to add the vocabulary to it.

Amy’s experience in identifying with feminist values was also linked to her experiences as a survivor of sexual assault during her childhood and high school years, which is addressed next.
Experiences as a Survivor. Four participants disclosed that they were survivors of sexual assault. Some were able to articulate how it shaped their knowledge or experience. As already mentioned, Amy identified being a feminist and seeking feminist opportunities due her past history of trauma and abuse. In addition to teaching a women’s leadership course after college, she also had two key experiences during college. She helped form a survivor support group and speakers’ bureau at her university. She described it as “a sexual assault allyship organization.” She also worked with the university sexual violence prevention educators to give presentations on sexual assault and consent. These experiences have no doubt shaped her knowledge of sexual assault. Amy believed that her experience is important to share, as she was sexually assaulted by a boyfriend in high school and said she worries about the misplaced focus on “stranger danger” (a rape myth) by some of the students in her class:

Because also, at the beginning, if it hasn’t happened to you, like, “Oh, it’s stranger danger. That doesn’t happen, like for my home girl over here. That’s not gonna happen to me!” And so I think, I was just talking about this in my women’s leadership class—because, the women in our class, including myself, were all men that we knew. And so, it made it really hard to rationalize and label them as rapists or our rapist, because we were in a relationship and continued to stay even after being assaulted, or they were mentors. And so it’s really hard to label that and deal with and a lot of people don’t understand, like, “But then you continued to be with him and allowed him to do that, and you continued to have sex with him, so like, how can you say that’s sexual assault?” And then you say, “But there’s an emotional connection and manipulation that’s causing me to stay.” So...I also was not just physically taken advantage of, but emotionally and mentally. And I think those are the hardest, that people don’t understand, that it’s harder to label. So I think that’s something to where, it’s that, we say that a lot of this is, a lot of it is not just stranger danger some guy in an alley that’s gonna come and rape you, it’s usually a friend.
Amy also disclosed that she was sexually harassed by a coach in her first year of college, which was not at MU. Again, her experiences through various levels of assault have shaped her knowledge widely.

Michael also said that “when I was a child, I’ve had something like this happen to me” but did not touch it on again. It is unclear how his victimization impacted him, though he did mention, in the second interview, that seeking counseling is very important for survivors. Kelly was also assaulted as a young adolescent, by a man in an elevator who flashed her and kissed her. She did not discuss this much, but as mentioned in the Rape Myth section above, both she and her mother carried victim blaming attitudes into this situation and its aftermath.

Elizabeth is a rower from Europe. It is clear that Elizabeth’s experiences impacted her definition of sexual assault. When asked how she would define sexual assault, she said:

Well...I would define it more like, uh, um, someone who is, uh, I would say, forcing on me, or kind of, you know, giving me...I would say somebody way older than me would kind of...propose various things that are, in my thought, not entirely, uh, let’s say, how to say it...not really proper, I would say. And...offering some sexual activities for a good place, um, say, in boat or better position. Or something like that.

This definition had clear overlap between sexual assault (i.e., “someone who is forcing on me”) and sexual harassment (i.e., “offering some sexual activities for a good place in the boat”). Later, when asked if she was a survivor of sexual assault, Elizabeth said:

Well I cannot really say I was sexually assaulted or anything, but uh, as I said before, my, my first coach, well I was teenager, I was like 13, 14 years old. He was really old guy, he was even older than like my grandma. Um, but, he was my first coach and um...he wasn’t proposing any sexual activities, but the way he was like, sometimes hugging us or grabbing us by the waist, or, you know, kind of...it made me feel uncomfortable. I mean, I saw that he was doing to a lot of girls, uh,
in our club. But for me, it was kind of...not comfortable and something that coach shouldn’t do. I mean, the professional coach shouldn’t do like that. It was, he can give us a hand like, just to shake the hand, or to congratulate. But not like hugging.

This experience of being hugged inappropriately by a coach shaped Elizabeth’s knowledge and opinions of sexual assault. Throughout her interview, she made multiple references to coaches and/or older men as perpetrators.

Lastly, Rebecca experienced a nonconsensual sexual encounter while she was in college with a man she met in a bar. Even though she consented to some sexual activity, he continued to do things she had not consented to. Some of her other experiences included “a physical guilt trip” and instances of coercion by male partners. Rebecca spoke a lot to the gray areas of sexual assault, as already mentioned. But very specifically, when I asked her to define sexual assault, she replied, “So, I don’t know, like...I feel like for me, there’s a lot going into how I define it. Um, a lot of that’s also my own history with sexual experiences and the sexual experiences that my friends have had.”

This study was not intended to seek out survivors of sexual assault. And indeed, only four of the 15 participants disclosed they were survivors of various forms of assault. However, it is clear that these personal experiences shaped how these participants came to understand and/or define sexual assault.

**Peers and Teammates.** Beyond direct personal experiences with sexual assault, many participants relied upon experiences with friends and/or teammates as sources of information. Sometimes this information was knowledge of someone else’s experiences, as Rebecca already said, “So, I don’t know, like...I feel like for me, there’s a lot going
into how I define it. Um, a lot of that’s also my own history with sexual experiences and
the sexual experiences that my friends have had.” Elizabeth described a scenario of a
friend who experienced sexual harassment at work. This no doubt influenced the fact that
she often lumped sexual assault and sexual harassment together. Similarly, Gail’s
teammate who accused a coach of sexual harassment was a defining feature of both of
her interviews, including the fact that she defined sexual assault to include harassment.

Other experiences, however, were more about team culture or peer circles. James
discussed his team, saying, “It kind of goes back to the group I hang out with, it’s just
taught, or it’s [sexual assault] not acceptable.” Karen said:

*It was never talked about negatively, among my friends, it was always something
that was a very sensitive topic, and something that needed to be addressed and
fixed. It was never something like, “Oh, these people are stupid, or crazy, or like,
you know, making things up.” It was always like, “This happened to this person,
and it’s really serious and it’s something that needs to be sort of, um...changed.”*

Karen did not discuss if those friends were specifically teammates or not, though she did
often mention being friends with other athletes. Nicole had a unique experience. Even
though she did not play lacrosse nor attend the University of Virginia, she was still
affected by the case of Yeardley Love, who was abused and murdered by her ex-
boyfriend in 2010. Nicole said:

*Yes, it was in my freshman year, that Yeardley Love was murdered down at UVA
and the lacrosse community is really small, so a lot of our roommates knew her,
knew her family, knew girls that played at UVA. Um, I remember having an
emotional conversation about that. Like, our team was absolutely like,
dumbfounded and disgusted and hurt by the situation.*

Gail was also from the same community in Virginia as Yeardley Love and remembered
her from high school. She mentioned that Love’s situation “was all really awful,
miserable, really sad.”
These are all ways that peers or teammates had an influence on participant knowledge. The next section outlines how parents and family background can influence what people think about sexual assault. Before moving on, however, it is important to discuss one outlier. Nicole was the only person to mention that her coach influenced or shaped her knowledge. In fact, it was multiple coaches, both at the high school and college level. When describing her college coach, Nicole said, “Our coach really just educated us on, you know, positive relationships. She often told us the story of her and her husband and how they fell in love and, like, relationships she was in before that were unhealthy.”

**Family and Background.** Beyond friends, teammates, and other peers, participants cited their parents, families, or other factors from their background and upbringing. All of the following responses came directly from their answers to the question, “What has shaped your knowledge of sexual assault?” This was not necessarily information gleaned from other parts of interviews. Participants said that family and their backgrounds influenced their knowledge in the following ways:

James: *Just morally I was taught that it was wrong and we [my brother and I] were raised morally correct.*

Julie: *My parents are together, my grandparents are together, they’re, you know, like, my family’s very stable, I guess you could say... I never experienced anything like that [seeing domestic violence in the home], so I think anything along those lines, like hitting a woman, that to me growing up was very wrong. And I had never experienced it and I grew up knowing it was wrong.*

Gina: *I would say I had...mmm...like, my parents were, well I was raised to be a good kid. You’re supposed to ask for consent and you’re not supposed to do things, you’re not supposed to force someone into things they don’t want to do. Um, you’re not supposed to take advantage of others. So I would say my upbringing helped me define parts of my morality decisions on whether sexual*
assault is permissible. So I would think that no, it isn’t something that should happen.

Michael: I’m a product of my upbringing and my environment.

In addition to comments such as these, Kelly’s mother gave her books on sexual assault as a teen. She also had talks with her mother after being assaulted when she an adolescent. According to Kelly, “She knows it was a really bad experience, but she, well, she was giving me advice for, you know, avoid people I don’t know, and to be safe.” Her mom was engaging in risk reduction behavior in teaching her daughter how to avoid potentially unsafe situations. Jason reflected that family and upbringing can make a difference in someone’s views, but his comments were more vague and less about his particular upbringing. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, Karen’s aunt was a survivor of sexual assault. As it was a highly publicized case, it garnered a lot of attention and victim blaming in local and national media. As such, Karen remembers discussions while growing up that victim blaming is never acceptable.

Media. The last major influence on how former student-athletes know what they know about sexual assault is the media. Media included social media (e.g., Twitter or Facebook), movies, news outlets (e.g., ESPN), television shows (both scripted and reality-based), articles and blogs on the internet, and books. Much of what is known from media could be categorized as upholding rape myths, like when Melissa said, “But I’ve seen movies and uh, there are some people just walking on the street, it’s night, you know, dark outside, and then somebody runs after them and they rape them.” However, some of the participants were able to point out how media upholds these misconceptions on their own. As Gail said:
I think the media, the media shaped what I know in terms of sexual assault being very much so male on female. And making the male the perpetrator and the female the victim. It always includes intercourse, um, or... intercourse/rape, those would be like, top of the list.

Michael was able to identify how the media treats survivors poorly, or in his words, “criminalizes victims”:

Well you see so many things where girls talk about rape and you see on the shows that everybody ignores them. So everybody thinks that you’re going to be ignored, so, “Why talk about it? ‘Cause I’m not gonna get help anyways.”

He followed that up with a comment that a television show such as Jersey Shore “kinda dilutes what the serious nature of it is.” James agreed, saying that “I think it’s not taken as seriously as it should [be].” He also noted, “The media has way too much power of this stuff,” citing the narratives of the Duke lacrosse scandal and the Jameis Winston case at Florida State.

Gina was upset by the way that media portrays sexual assault. She said, “Media and TV and movies make it look like, they desensitize it. And there’s a lot of rape, straight up rape, shown in our TV shows. And…it disturbs me every time [sighs].”

Lastly, Karen summed up the media’s influence as a “double-edged sword.” She said:

I think that it makes a lot more salient in, um, like in our conversations and life and it makes it...um. I think the media exposure to it is healthy because it gets people exposed to it and they start making their own opinions. But I also think that, at the same time, it can be over dramatized or, depending on the source, biased, so it...it kind of, like although it gets people talking about it and wondering about it, I think it puts certain ideas in people’s heads about it that might not necessarily be the truth.

Karen’s acknowledged that media coverage can be good. The more we see a topic on the news, online, on Facebook, the less taboo it becomes. However, as James said, the media does have a lot of power to shape the narrative and decide and how and what is shown to
viewers and readers. A lot of interpretation and education may be needed to ensure that we are moving beyond and rejecting some of the rape myths that are perpetrated through the media, as noted by participants like Michael.

Minimization and Sanitization of Sexual Assault

The last category in Participant Knowledge focuses a bit on how participants discussed sexual assault. On March 10, after interviewing Elizabeth, I wrote in my reflexive journal on this theme:

Just interviewed [Elizabeth]. Her answers were very much in line with sexual harassment—almost to point of exclusivity. This was different from previous participants who just included verbal and physical together under one big umbrella. I didn’t want to sound as though I was “correcting” her—I need to work on how to “correct” without making it sound that way—but after I’d asked ALL the questions, I did a “when you define it as this, it’s much more in line with sexual harassment and not assault, which is physical”.

It’s just occurred to me—I wonder if people include, and then focus, so much on verbal/harassment because it’s…sanitized. Easier to swallow and talk about?

The reflexive journal was key to processing themes and concepts as they came up in the interviews, as the data analysis process is ongoing and iterative in qualitative research.

After this journal entry, my mind was much more keen to how participants referred to sexual assault. Thus, I discovered there were three things they did that seemed to minimize, or almost sanitize, sexual assault. This was demonstrated in the ways they discussed sexual assault, in the ways they defined sexual assault, and in the ways they found it difficult to talk about sexual assault.

First, participants discussed sexual assault in ways that downplayed it or minimized it. As such, they often did not even say sexual assault. Instead, they used words or phrases such as “something happened” or “take advantage.” For example, when
discussing the role of alcohol and both parties as intoxicated, Julie said, “So, who, who’s the responsible party for something like that, you know?” She used the words “something like that” instead of “sexual assault” or “rape,” downplaying the gravity or refusing to acknowledge sexual assault in these situations. James used the phrase “guys yelling stuff at girls” to indicate sexual harassment, such as catcalling. Gina said, “Um, well, I’m trying to get to the point for example of, when alcohol is involved, and someone is taken advantage of because they’re not in a state of mind to make decisions about the consent.” Note that she did not say, “someone is raped” or “someone is sexually assaulted” but instead, “taken advantage of,” which is a less harsh phrase. Even Julie acknowledged that she struggled to call something sexual assault, saying, “But now that I’ve talked to you about what I really, what shapes everything that I think of is wrong, I guess, is the word that I’m gonna use, is wrong.” These situations also overlap with a theme noted above, that participants struggled to label something as sexual assault. But struggling—or even refusing, as in Julie’s case—to call sexual assault for what it is, means that knowledge around sexual assault is stifled as taboos flourish.

In addition to how they discuss sexual assault, as previously noted, most participants lumped sexual assault with sexual harassment in their definitions and descriptions. Michael was able to note the extreme range, from a dirty joke to rape, but still put both in the category of sexual assault. I did not draw attention to this combination of harassment and assault to participants during the first interviews when they provided definitions. However, Kim acknowledged that she put both under the same umbrella. When I asked her why, she said, “Maybe it’s because when I think, even say, sexual assault, there’s kind of…[it] sounds pretty much like the same thing. ‘Cause you’re
already feeling uncomfortable.” Equating sexual assault with sexual harassment can be a way of undermining the violent nature of sexual assault, as well as the serious, damaging and long-lasting effects of sexual assault.

Lastly, some participants noted the ways they found sexual assault difficult to discuss, which can lead to sexual assault being downplayed in society or not discussed often, creating a taboo. For example, Gina said, “This conversation is really hard for me” and mentioned how “uncomfortable” she was discussing sexual assault. Kelly, whose first language is not English, apologized a few times for struggling to find the right words in English to convey her thoughts, ending with, “It’s a difficult topic, too.” Paul told me how he rarely discusses sexual assault with his friends, saying, “I mean, yeah, it’s come up in, like, random conversations, if there’s something on the news, talk about that. But it’s not like a topic I try to bring up too frequently or anything like that.” When asked why not, he replied, “It’s, I mean…people don’t like to talk about bad things, unless it’s, like I said, like it’s on the news. Then it’s like something that’s going on. But I don’t know, I try to avoid…dark content like that.” However, Karen described how messy conversations about sexual assault can be, and how this impacts survivors. She said:

$I feel sad when I see, um, like, so many people talking about it and it’s obviously a serious issue, and people brushing it off like, “Oh, like, it must be her fault, right? Like, oh, she invited them over”—not just her, but like it kind of brought light to it all, right. People blame the person that’s been victimized because they think that—and like, that’s why I have trouble with consent doesn’t have to be verbal, and…it’s just like, messy, you know? It’s…it’s not…it’s sad that, that like when people are assaulted and they get blamed for it? That’s hard, that’s hard for me to deal with and understand because you don’t really know what goes on…you only have accounts of it. So, it’s just…it definitely, um, like a messy topic I think. And I think that’s part of the reason why people stay away from it. And why it makes people uncomfortable, because there’s not really yes or no, black or white, answers.$
Karen also noted how this messy and uncomfortable topic can make educations programs difficult to conduct:

‘Cause we talked about earlier, it’s such a messy topic, and I think people get uncomfortable, and even, to a certain extent, I get uncomfortable talking to you and it’s like, a very open conversation, so...I think it’s, it’s a hard thing to talk about. But it’s, I, it’s, I think they’d almost need to bring in someone, some sort of...I don’t know if expert is the right word, but I don’t, I know, it would be a hard topic to lead a conversation in...

When a topic like sexual assault is uncomfortable to discuss, it can make education even more difficult to effectively pursue. The next section addresses sexual assault within the context of athletics, including education programs. It also touches on prevention efforts, reactive measures, and department culture, among other topics.

**Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics**

The second theme, sexual assault within the context of college athletics, directly answers Research Questions 2 and 3. Research Question 2 asked, “In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?” with a sub-question on how sexual assault impacts student-athletes’ lives. Research Question 3 asked, “What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?” with a sub-question on the effectiveness of actions. Participants answers to these questions produced five areas of exploration: (1) *Athletic Department Culture*; (2) *Knowledge of Sexual Assault in Athletics is Minimal*; (3) *Programming by Athletic Department*; (4) *Sexual Assault Prevention is Bigger Than Athletics*; and (5) *How Does Sexual Assault Impact Student-Athletes?* Each of these areas is thoroughly discussed below.
Athletic Department Culture

Athletic department culture was highlighted in two ways. The first is through the actions taken by athletic departments, deemed to be either proactive (i.e., preventing sexual assault) or reactive (i.e., responding to sexual assault). The second is through the culture of each athletic department, as described by former student-athletes. Athletic department cultures are categorized in one of three ways: (1) Zero Tolerance Culture; (2) Checkbox Culture; or (3) Rape Culture. Athletic department actions are characterized below, as well as their cultures thoroughly explored and defined.

All athletic department actions can be categorized into one of two ways: proactive or reactive. Proactive efforts aim to stop sexual assault before it happens. This can happen in a variety of ways, either through education (e.g., bystander intervention) or through sending messages that sexual assault is not tolerated, should not occur, and will be punished (e.g., asking students to sign a code of conduct). Reactive measures are those taken after an assault has already occurred. This could be providing resources for counseling, such as a team psychologist. This can also include training certain staff or peer leaders on “disclosure response” techniques, such as trainers or team captains on how to react, respond, and support a survivor if he or she discloses an assault. In doing a numerical count during the coding process, it appeared as though athletic departments are taking just about the same (i.e., equal) number of both proactive and reactive measures.

Proactive. Athletic departments were found to be taking some very proactive steps in helping to reduce or prevent sexual assault. Many departments offered education programs. Some were about awareness and education—for example, defining sexual assault and consent—while others focused on prevention initiatives, such as bystander
intervention. Educating student-athletes on the issues varied by gender. For example, according to Nicole, “So we’re educated to protect ourselves. And think the boys are educated to protect themselves and the girls are educated to protect each other.” Nicole saw this as empowering for women and preventative for men. Kelly described the education she received as “those meetings about, like, getting involved sexually with people,” saying that she was taught how to communicate to reduce the risk of sexual assault. For example, she said, “If you don’t want to get close to anyone, you don’t have to. And it’s important to say no.”

Other proactive measures included specifically educating freshmen, as noted by Nicole and Paul. Others had coaches who worked to educate them to help reduce or prevent sexual assault. Nicole said, “Our coach really just educated us on, you know, positive relationships.” James remembered some risk reduction techniques offered to women, such as watching their drinks. And Gail was educated by a trainer, who warned them about recent incidents on her campus of women who were sexually assaulted after being drugged with horse tranquilizers. Julie said that signing a code of conduct “contract” ensured that athletes knew what the standards were, as well as the punishments they would receive if they violated this contract.

All of these actions by athletic departments were proactive in reducing sexual assault or preventing it. Reduction happened by educating women or victims on how to intervene or “watch out” before something happened. Prevention happened through a variety of education programs or being educated by someone close to the student-athletes, such a coach.
Reactive. If athletic departments were not proactively working to prevent or address sexual assault, they were seen to be reacting to incidents of sexual assault. These reactive measures seemed to be categorized in two ways, either reacting to a survivor or reacting to a perpetrator. The main reactions to survivors related to providing resources and/or other support after being assaulted. Many participants described people they could go to for support, such as coaches, trainers, or team or sport psychologists. Some participants suggested that athletic departments should provide training or education for these people on how to respond if someone disclosed sexual assault. Nicole even suggested educating captains on how to respond to a survivor, as teammates are often close. In addition, she said, “captains are good at crisis [situations].”

Many participants noted that they never needed any resources or support, as they were not survivors, but due to actions of the athletic department, they would know where to go if they or a friend were sexually assaulted. Citing the flyers and posters around the athletic department, James said, “I would know where to look” if necessary. Elizabeth said she did not pay much attention to the education she received, as she was not a survivor. But, she said presentations were effective to a certain extent as she was made aware there are resources available.

Beyond reacting to survivors, athletic departments were seen as reactive to perpetrators or incidents of sexual assault. Nicole spoke at length about AU’s response to a widely publicized case of sexual assault. She noted that the university immediately addressed the situation:

You know, [AU] kind of went the opposite direction when that happened with the [sport] team. Their season ended, you know, all the boys were immediately expelled. Like, it was definitely a guilty until proven innocent kind of situation.
And, you know, they all turned out to be innocent, and they sued the school. [AU]’s in a situation where they haven’t really been a part of cover-ups, they kind of, they kind of err it on the other way.

Nicole was the only person who told of actual punishments or response to sexual assault perpetrators. However, many participants noted that they expected their athletic departments to react in a punitive way if a student-athlete committed sexual assault. James said, “If there’s anything, you’re done” and “I think if that does happen, it will be severely addressed” with “severe consequences” for perpetrators. Paul said, “I would assume there’s…actions taken to their eligibility and stuff like that.” A few participants, however, believed their athletic departments did not do enough in reacting to sexual assault perpetration. Michael believed the punishments are not harsh enough. Nicole said that many universities may keep things “hush hush” and Jason said athletic departments have a vested interest to “cover their tail.” More on these themes are covered in athletic department culture below, but these are examples of how an athletic department may be reactive to sexual assault occurrence.

It appeared there were nearly equal numbers of both features, as approximately 18 to 19 each were discovered while coding. This “equality” indicates a somewhat balanced approach by athletic departments to be sources of prevention as well as support. However, as I show through the three cultures in the next section, it did not always seem “balanced” or that balance was present. Depending on the culture, some proactive and reactive elements were very present, somewhat present, or in the case of the Rape Culture, balanced only in the fact that nothing was being done on either side (preventative or reactionary).
Most participants had very little or no real knowledge of policies, rules, or procedures, but many did have a strong sense or assumption that the athletic department tried to prevent sexual assault, wanted to support survivors, and would take action against perpetrators. Not all agreed with this assumption of a supportive stance, however. Throughout data analysis, three types of athletic department cultures became evident: (1) Zero Tolerance Culture; (2) Checkbox Culture; (3) and Rape Culture. It is important to note that these cultures are based upon participants’ understandings and/or perceptions of the athletic department.

**Zero Tolerance Culture.** A Zero Tolerance Culture was demonstrated by an athletic department that took swift action against perpetrators, provided support for survivors, worked to prevent sexual assault through educating student-athletes, and created a strong message that sexual assault is not acceptable. Elements of the Zero Tolerance Culture were present at Atlantic University and Midwestern University, based on statements made by Nicole, James, Julie, and Paul (respective to their universities).

Nicole described AU as swift to take action against perpetrators. Before she arrived at AU, nearly an entire team was accused of sexual assault, and the alleged perpetrators were immediately punished by the athletic department, and then quickly expelled from the university. These young men were eventually found innocent, however, and the incident has haunted the university and the athletic department. Nicole described this, saying, “Their season ended, you know, all the boys were immediately expelled. Like, it was definitely a guilty until proven innocent kind of situation.” This action was recently demonstrated again early in 2015, when another male athlete was released from his team due to allegations of sexual assault. This swift action against perpetrators
counters the “appearance of respectability” as noted by Benedict (1997), who wrote, “To continually excuse criminal violence by troubled athletes…and the willingness of coaches to maintain scholarships for athletes with a clear disdain for the law serves the athletic program, but hurts the athlete and puts the community at risk” (p. 147)

In addition to swiftly addressing issues of sexual assault by the perpetrator, Nicole believed that the AU athletic department would immediately and adequately support survivors of sexual assault. She said:

But I think if I remember correctly, I think first and foremost, our athletic department, if it were a situation where a female was sexually assaulted, I think first and foremost, they would want you to be heard. They, I know, you would talk to your coach, you would go talk to the athletic director, you would go to student health, your trainer and your coach would go with you to student health. Your captains would be involved. It would be a very, very, uh…inclusive thing? I know anytime anything happened, in any situation, there was always like 10 people that were notified. There was the people who were like, made aware of the situation, everyone kind of knows the boat you’re in. Those would definitely be the first steps, you’d probably talk to your coach, you could talk to our sports psychologist if that’s something you wanna do. Um…you know, I think we would definitely be nurtured through the situation.

She also told the stories of two female student-athletes, one the victim of sexual assault, one the victim of stalking, and the immediate and overwhelming support from the athletic department. (Note: neither woman was assaulted by another student-athlete.) Nicole described the first situation:

I know that she felt very supported when she told people. There was zero victim blaming, there was zero, “Why wasn’t your door locked?” It was like, let’s prosecute this …and she kinda had to like reel it in, like, “I’m fine, I wanna focus on [sport],” like that.

In addition to athletic department response, the athletes themselves appeared to foster a culture of support for survivors. Nicole said, “I think that the student-athletes believe the
[current] stories, they believe what this girl is saying, and the reaction is, one, these poor women. Two, how could [player] do this to our university, to these girls? You know?”

Beyond swift action against perpetrators and support for survivors, Nicole outlined how the athletic department educated student-athletes. They received education during their freshmen year during a sexual assault-specific program. Further, the issue came up often in other education programs. Nicole said:

*There’s a meeting every month, and every meeting has a different topic. And sexual assault and all those things come up in pretty much every meeting... So I think that, like, it’s definitely addressed continuously after the initial, like, really um more intensive meeting.*

Lastly, Nicole spoke often about how the athletic department at AU strongly discouraged sexual assault (i.e., through education and actions against perpetrators) but also encouraged student-athletes to have healthy relationships and feel empowered. She said this about her coaching staff:

*You brought your boyfriend or girlfriend to meet your coaches, you know. We had one male coach who always liked to size them up and just like, really educating us on positive relationships. And even if she wasn’t having that conversation with you, she was definitely always having it with captains. Like, “Oh, I heard [female teammate] has a new boyfriend, what do we think about him? Do we like him?” Like, she was definitely asking other coaches, like if she saw the football coach, “What do you think about [male player], he’s dating one of my girls,” you know? Like, our athlete community’s definitely very, very close, so, um, your coach knew who your boyfriend was before you introduced them. You know, she knew more than we thought.*

She also said that female student-athletes “feel equally as respected as a student-athlete and valuable to the university as our” star male athletes. She continued:

*As an athlete, our university is shockingly very good at that, for how amazing our basketball team and program is and are, um, our university is amazing...Our athletic director is at volleyball games all the time, you know. He knows all of our names like he knows all of the basketball player names. You know? You feel equally valued as part of the university. It’s just, you know, we really feel valued*
and that value would allow us to feel like, “Hey my voice needs to be heard if something ever happens to me by a male student-athlete.” We wouldn’t be thinking like, “Oh well, [AU] only cares about our basketball boys, so how could I ever say anything?”

All of these things combined (i.e., swift action against perpetrators, support for survivors, education, and strong messages of empowerment for women) helped make AU a Zero Tolerance Culture in the opinion of Nicole.

The other university whose athletic department appeared to sport a Zero Tolerance Culture was Midwestern University. Comments from Paul, James, Julie, and Jason supported this assertion. For example, though none of them could recall an incident of sexual assault, they assumed perpetrators would be punished appropriately. For Paul, it was a vague recollection of the consequences for perpetrators. He said, “I would assume there’s actions taken to their eligibility and stuff like that. But I don’t know anything behind it.” I followed up by asking, “So as part of those meetings, there was never anything like, ‘Hey, if anybody does this, you’re gonna get kicked off the team’? They never said that?” Paul responded, “There probably was something like that, but nothing, nothing specific I could recall.” For James, the sense of punishment and consequences was more solid. He said:

And because we haven’t had a huge, you know, story on this, or you know, a huge incident where this has happened, you know, like I said, I don’t know if something happened within a team, but as an athletic community, we haven’t hear of a huge incident so I think, I think if that does happen, it will be severely addressed.

He later added:

But with this, it’s like, if there’s anything, you’re done. And that was it. [kind of lightly pounds desk with fist] And then it was, next topic. So there was no, “We’ll give you a warning, we’ll give you this,” it’s just...like I said last time, morally, you morally know that it’s just not tolerated.
Julie recalled signing a contract at the beginning of each school year. It outlined what student-athletes could not do, and she indicated that breaching that contract through committing something like sexual assault would be grounds for loss of scholarship money.

Participants who viewed MU as a Zero Tolerance Culture did not recall much about survivor support, likely because they did not need it. However, some of their recollections of prevention education was strong. They perhaps remembered only one program, but could recall its effectiveness (i.e., James and survivor story programming). But more importantly, many participants connected the programming to a strong message of a Zero Tolerance Culture. Describing the education he received, Paul said, “I know they try to take it pretty seriously, because it’s obviously a serious thing, so [they] try to keep everyone aware that it can happen and try to stop it, prevent it, as much as they can.” I asked him, “What is it that makes you think they take it pretty seriously?” He replied:

_Just the fact that they have the meeting is, makes it, stresses it that this is something that they take seriously. Because like I said, there’s only a couple of those every year, and to have one about that is um, like, really drives the point that this something they’re keeping a close on eye [on it] and stuff._

He also these programs are effective in conveying a strong message:

_Just the fact that they have the meeting is, makes it, stresses it that this is something that they take seriously. Because like I said, there’s only a couple of those every year, and to have one about that is um, like, really drives the point that this something they’re keeping a close on eye [on it] and stuff._

Jason said he knew sexual assault was not tolerated because, “That’s the underlying thing that they’re conveying in the trainings. Um…that the athletic department doesn’t tolerate that.” Similarly, James directly connected the strong message of zero tolerance to the
education he received. In his case, it was also due to the presence of the athletic director.

He said:

_Nah, I mean, I know, it’s a zero tolerance thing. Well, I mean...just through what, what is being said at these [meetings]. And what [athletic director] has said at a group meeting, it’s just very uh, what’s the word I want? [pauses] It’s just not tolerated. It’s like a thing where it’s, I don’t know, they say, “Oh, we don’t tolerate alcohol” and your first offense is a slap on the hand. But with this, it’s like, if there’s anything, you’re done. And that was it. [kind of lightly pounds desk with fist] And then it was, next topic. So there was no, “We’ll give you a warning, we’ll give you this,” it’s just...like I said last time, morally, you morally know that it’s just not tolerated._

He also connected this message of zero tolerance to the assumption of consequences for perpetrating sexual assault.

_Both Jason and Julie also mentioned a strong message of zero tolerance. Jason said, “I know that sexual assault is not tolerated. And it shouldn’t be.” Julie brought up the concept of mutual respect between everyone in athletics:_

_In general, everybody had a lot of respect for everybody. We were all there for the same reasons. We know our coaches worked hard, we know our athletic trainers worked hard, and everybody had this mutual respect. So I think if something like that were to happen, anybody in the athletic department would know that that is really wrong and there’s a zero tolerance for that whatsoever._

_She specifically mentioned how this message was conveyed among student-athletes:_

_So I think that it was just a mutual respect for what you were doing. You wanted people to respect you for what you were doing as an athlete and you did the same. ‘Cause you demanded that respect of everybody else. So that was my experience. I couldn’t tell you, for, like, an example of when somebody said, “You don’t sexually assault somebody” ever. Because I think that’s kind of, not an awkward topic to talk about, but when you sign a contract like that, like, you’re gonna behave in a manner that represents [MU] field hockey and [MU] athletics in a good light. So that’s kind of like one of the sentences you would sign for. So for anything like that you would assume it’s um, it wouldn’t be taken lightly by any means. Yeah._
While Julie made connections between the student-athlete contract, mutual respect, and potential consequences, James also cited team culture as a reason for zero tolerance. He told a story about team captains interfering when another teammate was believed to be punished too lightly for alcohol violations. He said:

*Our team was hard on each other. Like, we had one kid get caught for underage drinking and our coaches didn’t even discipline him, our captains did. It was just something that we knew was unacceptable and we went into Coach and requested a game suspension, I think it was a three game suspension, a series. And that was without any coaches’ influence or anything, just ‘cause our captains were, just had a good head on our shoulders. And we want to win, we don’t have time for that stupid shit, it was in the middle of the season too! This kid’s an idiot and he’s our starting third baseman. So yeah, we disciplined ourselves. But if something like [sexual assault] were to have happened, I have no doubt that a fight would break out, just ‘cause, like a physical fight, it’s just not, not tolerated.*

This strong message, which contributed to a Zero Tolerance Culture at MU, was seen throughout interviews with James, Julie, Jason, and Paul. In addition to strong messages, a Zero Tolerance Culture featured swift action against perpetrators, support for survivors, and education programs aiming to prevent sexual assault.

**Checkbox Culture.** The second, and most prevalent, culture demonstrated was the Checkbox Culture, in which the athletic departments were not actively against sexual assault or particularly “pro” prevention, but seemingly did what was necessary to reduce sexual assault, while supporting survivors. Further, they did not overtly support survivors, but provided referrals or resources when necessary. This is the type of athletic department that is simply checking a box, ensuring that it is meeting requirements set by their university or Title IX, but not actively taking a stand against sexual assault. Features of the Checkbox Culture were found to be present at Pacific University, Midwestern
University, and Western University, supported by the statements of Gina at PU; Amy, Kim, and Jason at MU; and Kelly, Melissa, and Elizabeth at WU.

When it came to education, many participants did not remember many presentations or the content of them. This is a perfect example of an athletic department doing a presentation to “check” the box requiring them to provide education. At PU, Gina said, “When they did presentations on that, it wasn’t monumental or memorable. So, I don’t feel like I really gathered everything or feel really educated on sexual assault.” She continued:

This sounds really bad to say, but I really don’t remember…I don’t really remember strong presentations along sexual assault, how to prevent it, um, how to identify it, things like that. What was monumental for me was my involvement with the [peer educator] group and I remember vividly and clearly from that organization, um, being trained on bystander intervention and things like that.

However, the bystander intervention training mentioned by Gina was only available to peer educators, and not the entire student-athlete population.

Gail only remembered being told by a trainer to watch her drinks and be careful about drug-facilitated sexual assault. Amy said, “Um…I don’t remember getting education” but noted that since she graduated in 2013, she is aware that MU is doing more comprehensive education. Also at MU, Kim said:

‘Cause I remember there was, there was different ones and I remember something about drug testing, there was something about alcohol, but again, I don’t know if I’m making it up right now or there actually was something about sexual assault. But I definitely heard about it.

Lastly, Elizabeth combined both education and support for survivors when said:

Uh, as far as I remember, we had some meetings with uh, with uh, some guys from the department that were making us aware of, uh, that there could be a sort of situation like that. And in case, we can always go and ask for help, but as I said
before, I’ve never experienced it. Probably [if] something happened, uh, [of] that nature to me, then I would probably seek some, uh, help.

Elizabeth’s comment that she would “probably” seek help was echoed by others when discussing support or resources for survivors. As none of the participants who attended Checkbox Culture universities experienced sexual assault while in athletics, their comments reflect an assumption that there is support for survivors. Melissa said:

_Uh, at the department, they really try to help you with every aspect of your life. There are nutritionists, there are athletic trainers, but also psychologists. So if you need help, you can make an appointment and just go and talk. And uh, you’re sure that they won’t tell other people. If you go there, you can talk to them and you know, you can trust them._

Kelly said:

_I mean, looking at [WU], I’m pretty sure they had someone specializing in these kind of cases, but I’m sure it happened. Or it might have happened. Like, they had dietician for us, if we needed one. They had psychologist for us, if we needed one. I’m pretty sure they had a psychologist...designed for this._

Beyond support for survivors, there was also an assumption of policies, procedures, or how to address sexual assault if it happened, but no one was quite sure what those policies might be.

Melissa said that sexual harassment was covered in a code of conduct, but sexual assault was not. However, it was unclear: “I think they used, they used, uh, the expression sexual harassment. I’m not really sure.” Kelly, who attended WU with Melissa, reiterated this uncertainty, saying, “I’m pretty sure they did, I’m pretty sure they had some kind of policy for these kind of events. But I, I don’t, I don’t know how it works.” Elizabeth, another WU student, said, “Well, probably yes, at some point it crossed it somewhere, but I haven’t really paid attention to it. I mean, um, maybe just because I never
experienced it, so that’s why I didn’t really focus on it.” Lastly, Amy was unsure of policies, but took a guess at how MU would react to sexual assault:

I’m not aware of what the policies are, of the, ‘cause I think it would go, I’m gonna assume of what I would think if I were to have gone through it, um, I think that it would go through conduct and it would be a separate thing, but with athletics being such its own entity, I don’t know if that would go through compliance...

Amy’s response was vague for perpetrator response. Kelly’s was more specific, but she still was making assumptions on how it would be handled:

I think, first of all, he would have meeting with his coach. And then probably a meeting with coach and psychologist, to discuss the problem, to see if it’s true, what he’s accused of. And then there would probably be some disciplinarily actions. So maybe like, uh...giving him redshirt, or preventing him from competing with the team.

Throughout conversations with these participants at PU, MU, and WU, there was a vague or assumptive attitude that sexual assault would be addressed in a punitive manner, and that resources were available for survivors. There was little recollection of education or preventative programming, though some. Combined, the Checkbox Culture was simply doing the bare minimum necessary to address sexual assault.

**Rape Culture.** The last culture was found to be one recognized as a Rape Culture. An athletic department exhibiting these traits was thought to be supportive of perpetrators (i.e., through lack of punishment) and created an atmosphere where imbalances between male and female student-athletes existed, leading to the entitlement or privilege of male student-athletes. These athletic departments were also seen as taking obviously ineffective or no efforts to educate student-athletes on sexual assault. Gail and Michael provided information on how MU supported a Rape Culture, while Rebecca indicated WU’s atmosphere supported sexual assault. It is important to note that none of
the study’s participants seemed to think that their athletic department was actively against survivors (i.e., retaliating against them).

Gail’s perception of MU characterized it as one that did not provide any education on sexual assault. She said:

*Well, [sighs] when I got your email, I was thinking, like, all of the people that I met, in four years at [Midwestern University], the nutritionists, the doctors, the coaches, the videos we watched, um, teaching us, how to be this grade A student-athlete at [MU] and represent this, this university with tradition, excellence, all of that. I cannot remember, for the life of me, taking one class or watching one movie about sexual assault. I don’t even want to say, like, I’m sure we did, ’cause I literally have no recollection of it. Um, so I, I don’t even remember learning anything about it.*

When I asked her if she knew of any policies or procedures, she said, “Definitely not, because I don’t remember even having a meeting about it and what *would* be the policies if something were to have happened.” While many other participants could recall having some sort of education, even if they did not recall the content or message, Gail was one to be certain she did not receive any education or training about sexual assault. If education was done at Rape Culture universities, these participants did not think it to be effective.

For example, Michael said:

*I don’t remember anything. I don’t remember seeing any um, examples of what sexual assault would be, or what harassment would be. Um, I think one of the things that they did it was like, one of the power points, somebody talking about “refer to this in the packet” sort of thing for specific examples or...I think that’s what happened. I really don’t remember ever seeing or hearing anything about this.*

Rebecca said the education she received was ineffective, particularly as the session she attended lacked the key audience of football players:

*It was also really annoying because we’d have these compliance meetings and it would be mandatory for us to go, but the football players would always somehow have an excuse not to be there, so it was like, actually a lot of female athletes in*
the audience, and not a lot of male athletes there, and we were getting this whole schpiel of like, no means no, and it was like very much like this um…very authoritarian, anti-sexual assault thing and it’s directed at the guys who would perpetrate it, and we’d be looking around, like, okay…this is good, we should have this conversation…

But very few male student-athletes, including football players, were in attendance.

Beyond lack of education, another feature of a Rape Culture is one that supports perpetrators. This could be through lack of punishment or keeping incidents of sexual assault quiet and away from the media. Michael had a unique experience while in college. His girlfriend, who was not a student-athlete, was sexually harassed by a student-athlete who not in a high-profile sport. Michael attempted to seek punishment for the male student-athlete harassing his partner, but no one took action, including his coach, the other athlete’s coach, or the athletic director. He said:

>You know, they made every effort to seem to try to dissuade it. As to whether or not anything ever got done, I mean, my situation was harassment, but even with something that was as easily as reprimand-able as it was, nothing was done. There was no follow up done, there was no justice done. Um, I think that they cover up—I’m not gonna say cover up, that’s kind of a harsh word to say, I think that they handle the situations that bring the most attention and the rest, they do things about them, I’m not saying they wouldn’t, but I don’t think that the punishments are as harsh or as swift given the situations…I think that, I think that it’s mostly damage control as far as reprimanding comes.

Despite the fact that most of their statements indicated MU to be a Checkbox Culture,

Amy and Jason did speak to the concept of keeping sexual assault quiet. Amy said:

>But with athletics being such its own entity, I don’t know if that would go through compliance, so I would imagine that’s how a lot of things get hush-hush really fast, because whenever you get in trouble, we’re always told the first contact is your coach. So before you call anyone else, you call your coach. Then they call [the athletic department]. Like, the athletic department needs to be the first to know. So that’s if you get a DUI or any of that. Um, so I’m not sure how they would handle it from there.
Amy’s statement reflected how she assumed response to sexual assault would happen through a comparison to other unsavory incidents. However, Jason’s statement was pretty clearly about sexual assault itself:

So, just logically, I think that if there was an issue it would first travel to the university? And then trickle down to the athletic department and then the athletic department would do their “oh shit” scramble and try and, you know, make sure that situation doesn’t get out to the public because they don’t want any bad PR. [Midwestern University]’s trying to cover their tail, more than anything. They’re really, I mean in my eyes, you could probably quote me on this, they’re, they’re interested in themselves and their lucrative money-making business of athletics, and they wouldn’t want anything to tarnish that, heaven forbid. So regardless of what’s in the best situation for the individual or the student, I think that they’re gonna deal with it in the best interest for themselves as the people making decisions get paid by [MU] and they wanna continue being paid by [MU], so I think they’re looking out for [MU], not [victims]...or whoever.

These statements by Amy and Jason indicated that Rape Culture athletic departments sought to limit bad PR by keeping incidents of sexual assault quiet. The last area to characterize Rape Culture departments is addressed by Rebecca.

Perhaps due to her education and research on feminist issues, Rebecca was able to note that even when an athletic department, like WU, took action, it is still a reflection of America’s response to sexual assault. She said:

The fact that we have an American culture that’s really, in some ways, a rape culture. Um, you know, I think that’s kind of the difficult thing with addressing these issues. You know, the athletic department in and of itself is a reflection of what is happening in the greater American culture. And um, so, these issues can get addressed within the athletic department, but they’re beating on the door of the department, constantly coming in from the outside as well.

She linked this to a significant imbalance between male and female student-athletes, in which male athletes were privileged, particularly if they played football. Rebecca said, “There was a sense that, um, the football players could get away with a lot. It was a pretty
consistent feeling of these guys are worth more on campus and the rules don’t apply to them the same way.” She continued:

*It was interesting. Particularly being a female athlete, there was a strange feeling like where the rules really applied to you, but they wouldn’t apply to the male athletes in the same way... So there was like, this, I would say, pretty consistent unspoken feeling of imbalanced privilege that way, where it was like, you’re part of this department, you’re an athlete, and you’re held, particularly in our sport, academically and in terms of compliance, you have to be top notch, but we can look the other way for the guys that are bringing us the revenue. Um, so that was my perception at that time, was this feeling that we were held to a pretty strict standard, and then there would constantly be this kind of turn a blind eye to some of the athletes.*

The “insane power imbalance” experienced by Rebecca was felt in abstract, but very real ways. She said, “I would say even though I didn’t, you know, personally experience [sexual assault]…it was this feeling of power being off.”

As noted in the literature review, a rape culture is one “that display[s] a high level of tolerance for violence, male dominance, and sexual segregation...[and]...lack[s] the social constraints that discourage sexual aggression or contain social arrangements that encourage it” (Crosset, 1999, p. 245). Thus, Rebecca’s assertion that power imbalances at WU contributed to feelings that sexual assault was not taken seriously connect with the literature. In short, to sum up a Rape Culture athletic department, this quote from Michael says it all. When asked, “What does the athletic department do to address sexual assault?” he said, “As far I know, nothing.”

All of the participants’ universities were found to have athletic departments that fit into one of three categories: Zero Tolerance Culture, Checkbox Culture, and Rape Culture. However, there is one outlier. Karen attended Ivy University, a Division I university in the Ivy League. As such, even though there is competition at a high level,
particularly in non-revenue sports, student-athletes are not given athletic scholarships. Further, according to Karen, the student-athletes are treated like “regular students” in that there are not separate tutors, academic advisors, “special treatment” by professors, etc. She noted that she had a short meeting on NCAA compliance each year, but that there were not other programs specific to athletes, such as alcohol awareness. Any such programming was done by the university for the entire student body population. Initially, IU was thought to be a Rape Culture athletic department, but considering these facts, it appears best to consider IU an outlier. While the other schools characterized by Rape Culture features provided education on alcohol or nutrition, or offered other athlete-specific services, IU did not do this. Thus, it remains the one university in this study that does fit any of the three cultures.

Knowledge of Sexual Assault in Athletics is Minimal

Beyond helping to describe the culture of the athletic department, participants shed light on knowledge of sexual assault in athletics. In a word, that knowledge is minimal. There is little known about the occurrence or incidence of sexual assault; policies, including response for survivors and response to perpetrators; and a general lack of educational programs. This section outlines occurrence and policies, based on participant responses to questions such as, “What does the athletic department do to address sexual assault?” and “What do you know about sexual assault within the context of athletics?” The lack of educational programs is addressed in the next section, which fully describes all themes related to education in athletics.

Occurrence. Very few former student-athletes had knowledge of sexual assault occurring within the context of athletics. Some examples of participant responses were:
James: But at [MU], we haven’t heard a ton about it throughout the athletic community, of something like that happening. Which is a good thing. Um...trying to think of any case...I know it happens at other schools and we hear about it. But at [MU], I can’t recall one moment where we heard of a certain athlete or even a certain team doing something like that. So...

Karen: No, I never heard about anything that happened...Um, looking back, I don’t, um, I never, uh, came across like a sexual assault case in the athletic department.

Julie: Honestly, I can tell you off the top of my head...zero. Like, actually, zero. So, um, like I’ve heard, ’cause I was friends with almost all of the, um, girls and boys teams that was at the [athletic complex], so like the field sports, like all those sports, um, at the [athletic complex]. I’m trying to think of any other sports. But like, yeah, mostly women’s soccer, women’s lacrosse, and obviously men’s and women’s, like certain sports we were better friends with than others, gymnastics, that kind of thing. So I can only speak for the friends that I had, and my team itself, I’ve literally heard of zero, anything like that.

Elizabeth: Um, in fact, I haven’t heard any, uh, situations that would actually fit to [the] definition of sexual assault. So I cannot really say anything that I’ve heard or experienced or anything kind of related to it.

Melissa: I’ve never heard of anything. But all my friends are mostly rowers, but also from other sports. I’ve never heard anyone saying there, there was some problems like that.

Of the 15 participants, nine indicated that they were unaware of sexual assault within the athletic department. A few other participants may have heard of rumors of sexual assault, but it was not something they were exposed to personally or knew much about. Here is how they characterized those rumors:

Jason: Yeah! You know what, I did. There was, there was something, there was something I heard. But I, I forget, like...[sighs] If you give me three scenarios, I might be able to pick it, but like I said, I’ve been removed from this for a while now and, but I do, I do remember hearing stuff. I mean, it’s a small community there and you hear things, you know?

Paul: Uh, I think I did hear at some point, like stories about lacrosse or a hockey player sexually assaulting someone. Not, not like...that’s all I can remember, just like a vague memory of hearing something like that.
Rebecca: *If I heard anything it would be very second- or third-hand rumors or like, you know, stereotypes about certain male athletes, but I have very little concrete experience with that firsthand at the school.*

However, despite saying she was unaware of sexual assault happening among student-athletes, in a different part of an interview, Rebecca told the story of a friend who was assaulted by a football player. It is important to note, however, that this story with the football player was told in the context of not labeling rape as sexual assault and of how ambiguous and blurry the lines of consent were for Rebecca and her friends while they were in college.

The last two former student-athletes experienced or knew of situations that included sexual harassment. Michael, as previously noted, discussed how his girlfriend was sexually harassed by another student-athlete. Amy told of feeling uncomfortable, bordering on sexual harassment, with a coach at the institution she attended prior to MU. In all, most participants were unaware if sexual assault was happening among or to student-athletes at their schools.

**Policies.** Most participants were unsure what, if any, policies were in place regarding sexual assault. Questions asked of them were open-ended to allow for a variety of responses. Often, I probed with follow-up questions to more specifically get at policies for reporting, how to treat survivors, how (or if) to punish perpetrators, but most people were still unsure what, if any, policies their athletics departments created and followed.

Many participants were unaware of any policies, answering questions in this area with statements such as this one by Jason, “I don’t know. I don’t know the policy. I have no idea.” Here are a few responses in answer to the question, “Do you know of any policies that address sexual assault?”:
James: *Nah, I mean, I know, it’s a zero tolerance thing.*

Rebecca: *No, no, I can’t say that I do.*

Gail: *Definitely not, because I don’t remember even having a meeting about it and what would be the policies if something were to have happened.*

Paul: *...No, no, not really.*

Sometimes this lack of knowledge would coincide with an assumption on what policies might be in place, or relied on the assumption that policies did exist, even if the participant was unaware of them. For example, Jason said:

*But I don’t know what their policies are. I, I assume that they have some stringent policies and I know that, like, we’ve given some trainings and stuff or the athletes but I don’t know, uh, I don’t know much more about it other than that.*

Kelly’s reply was similar. She said, “I’m pretty sure they did, I’m pretty sure they had some kind of policy for these kind of events. But I, I don’t, I don’t know how it works.” Similarly, Amy said, “I’m not aware of what the policies are, of the, ‘cause I think it would go, I’m gonna assume of what I would think if I were to have gone through it…” and she proceeded to outline her assumption of what she thought *may* happen if someone was caught as a perpetrator.

Nicole mentioned the unclear nature of policies at her institution, citing that cases are likely to be taken on a case-by-case basis:

*Um so I think it’s, there’s not really, right now any clear cut rules on like, what your athletic department has to do. You know, if you are or aren’t being, you know, accused from the school or from the police, you know? ...I think it’s, I think it’s really case-to-case on how you’re gonna deal with it.*

Paul mentioned that he was not sure what to do if someone was sexually assaulted, but he assumed student-athletes should “tell someone about it, tell like your coach or one of the people in [athletic academic services] or your advisor or something.” Lastly, Michael
believed some sort of rules must be in place. He stated this multiple times throughout his interview, saying things such as, “Oh, they certainly have policies. We get booklets and handouts and watch PowerPoints” and “I know there are policies, and I’d like to think that everybody should know what the policies are.” Even after attempting to resolve his girlfriend’s sexual harassment case, he said, “And having gone through it, I still have no idea [what the policies are].” There is an overwhelming lack of knowledge on behalf of these former student-athletes as to what policies are in place regarding sexual assault within the athletic department. This lack of knowledge on policies could be linked to the lack of education, which is fully outlined next.

**Programming by Athletic Department**

Participants were asked many questions, including probing questions and follow-ups, about their experiences with sexual assault education in the athletic department. Their responses told four narratives: (1) very little memory of education, and if so, it was not deemed effective; (2) memory of sexual assault education from other programs (i.e., alcohol awareness); (3) strong memory of programs on drugs/alcohol, compliance, etc. but little memory of sexual assault education; and (4) effective versus ineffective elements of education (to be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Five’s model education program). As noted often above, particularly in relation to Rape Culture and Checkbox Culture athletic departments, there was a strong theme regarding the lack of education on sexual assault, as well as its ineffectiveness. For example, Michael answered a question on education in this way:

> [sighs] There… I don’t remember anything. I don’t remember seeing any um, examples of what sexual assault would be, or what harassment would be, um, I think one of the things that they did it was like, one of the PowerPoints, somebody
talking about, “Refer to this in the packet” sort of thing for specific examples or...I think that’s what happened. I really don’t remember ever seeing or hearing anything about this.

Julie could not remember if she had received a program, but was certain she had not because she could not remember. She said:

Like if we would’ve had, um, like one of those mandatory things and it was a real person talking about his or her real story, about something like that, that would affect me more than a poster. So, um...I don’t remember any of them. So I’m gonna say no.

Julie could not recall a specific program on sexual assault. However, she did remember some programming on other issues, like drunk driving.

Julie’s recollection of educational programming on drunk driving, but lack of memory about sexual assault programming, was not unusual among participants. Many participants could cite very specific details or information from programs on topics such as compliance, drug/alcohol awareness, career development, nutrition, etc. For example, Rebecca recalled a presentation on drunk driving:

And he was this highly charismatic speaker that came and talked to the athletic department about drunk driving and that has still impacted me. I still really remember a lot of what he was saying...but we had never that version with sexual assault.

Michael remembered programs about drugs and alcohol:

They really enforced NCAA’s rules about, most of it was just about substance abuse. It was one of the biggest things pounded into our heads over and over and over again, but really just kind of touched on, don’t break the law...that’s kind of where it stopped.

Similarly, Gail assumed to have received education on sexual assault, but could not be as sure as some of the other education she received:

I can’t remember if we sat down and had a meeting about it, I’m sure we watched a video at some point, I think, but I don’t...I remember having meetings all of the
time about nutrition and compliance and, you know, not taking bribes, and this
that and the other thing, that pertains to that side of it, but in terms of sexual
assault, harassment, anything of that nature, like, I don’t remember anything.

Another example of this recollection of other programming but lack of remembrance of
sexual assault education came from Melissa, who described ongoing presentations for
athletes at WU:

It was, it was for athletes, we had to go, like, we had to participate in them. Uh, so
there were people coming, and that was, like, your kind of mentors, and they were
speaking about different things. Like, some of them were talking about, um how to
get into the transition from being an athlete to the real life. Or uh, how to save
money or how to find a job. Basically, about everything…I believe there was one,
um, that was specifically about, like, uh, sexual harassment, so I'm not sure if that
was the one, but [sexual assault] for sure, it came up.

The last example came from Rebecca, again:

We had a lot of mandatory meetings that were really big on NCAA compliance.
That was the big thing was like, these are the rules for, you know, how many
hours you could work and these are the rules for recruits for visits, and these are
the rules for, um, you know where and how you can participate in other leagues,
and like, um, it was a lot of the bureaucracy and red tape that we were getting
from the mandatory meetings and then every so often we would have you know,
optional meetings or things that were additional, career opportunities things like
that, but in terms of sexual assault, there was, all I can remember is just that one
meeting, which now that I think about that, that was over the course of me being
on the team for four years.

Participants struggled to remember education on sexual assault, even when they could
recall very specific details about education on other topics. The last narrative to be
discussed here regards sexual assault education in other programming.

Even if athletes were not receiving sexual assault-specific education, many
remembered hearing about sexual assault or learning about it through programs based on
other topics. Gina described learning about sexual assault at a program on alcohol
awareness:
I do remember alcohol awareness week presentations and that one stuck with me. The lady did talk on, it was involving sexual relations also. And, but all I remember was that, I remembered that everyone over-poured what a shot is and no one knew how many ounces is a drink. And that everyone thinks everyone is having sex with each other, but they’re not really.

Amy said:

*But there was no explicit conversation around sexual assault, it was just, be smart, stay with your friends. More conversations around alcohol abuse and more conversations around illegal substances, even like steroids, not necessarily marijuana, pills. But, so I think it’s more of those things, things that would get you caught that would affect eligibility.*

Lastly, Michael acknowledged that programming on sexual assault and education on other topics may be linked together, which is why they are presented together:

*It typically gets lumped in with drugs and alcohol, um, and those other kinds of abuses. So it seems like it is lumped in with, there are things that seem completely separate, while they might have some correlation, like these things happened with the influence of these specific things, I think that it should be a separate thing and um, it’d be easier to break them up anyways you’re not sitting there for an hour or two hours listening to these things.*

While it may be seen by educators as effective or convenient to lump sexual assault in with other educational topics, former student-athletes, such as Michael, suggested it might not be effective. The last element of education, effective versus ineffective programming, is more fully addressed in Chapter Five, during the discussion on how to create effective sexual assault education programs in the future.

**Sexual Assault Prevention is Bigger Than Athletics**

A few participants suggested that athletic departments are either ill suited or not responsible for preventing or addressing sexual assault with student-athletes. Some of these comments seemed quite cynical or hopeless, such as this one by Michael:

*I mean, I think the only way to prevent it is to sequester the athletes and have them scanned in and out of their building. I mean, and then it’s like a prison! And*
honestly, I mean, a lot of these kids, you're not gonna stop everybody, 'cause they just have this...persona about them, and this way that they don't really care who you are.

Melissa also agreed that it just might not be possible to stop sexual assault from happening:

Uh, I think it’s um, I mean, I don’t think they can prevent it. Because if it happens, it happens. They can just inform you and, uh, they can make you aware if something like that happens, if you’re looking for help, that’s the only thing. If you know there’s a problem, there’s something going on, you are just, I think, you become more careful… But nothing can prevent that, because, you know, they can’t control you or they can’t be around all the time.

This view of sexual assault prevention as hopeless or cynical is summed up by Rebecca, who suggested that athletic departments are merely reflections of society. American society, as a rape culture, will always be pushing back and/or undoing the efforts of athletic departments. She said, “I think that’s kind of the difficult thing with addressing these issues…So these issues can get addressed within the athletic department, but they’re beating on the door of the department, constantly coming in from the outside as well.”

Beyond a view of education efforts as hopeless or cynical, a couple participants noted that it may not make a difference or be the responsibility of the athletic department. James and Jason both suggested that background and family upbringing can do a lot to shape a person’s attitudes and actions. James said:

So it’s like, if these kids weren’t raised right, they’re not gonna listen to [MU] now that they’re, you know, 24. You know? So, these kids who are maybe, weren’t raised, you know, with two parents with heads on their shoulders and provided information and told you this was wrong, they’re not gonna be a 21-year-old kid, big-time athlete, listening to, you know, that’s why I said, some of these people come in and put slideshows up, “I’m not gonna listen to you.” …I don’t know. I just think that it all, it all stems back to the root. And where they were raised. And
I don’t think that it, as much as [MU] wants to inform and prevent this, if a kid’s gonna do it, a kid’s gonna do it.

Similarly, Jason said:

I don’t know, you could, you could keep telling someone something over and over and over again. If they don’t wanna learn it, they’re not gonna do. You know? Or, by the time you, by the time you’re about 12 years old, it’s a good chance that you’ve probably been taught a lot of the things of how you’re gonna live the rest of your life...just from being around your family, your parents, if you have a good home life. To understand right and wrong and a lot of things that...your judgments that you’re going to make when you’re 20 years old, 18 years old have probably already been formed. You know?

It may not fall on the athletic department to undo two decades of education and culture a person has already received. This attitude, combined with the cynicism and hopelessness mentioned above, point to participant opinions that sexual assault prevention is bigger than just what can be done by an athletic department.

**How Does Sexual Assault Impact Student-Athletes?**

The last section on sexual assault in athletics focuses on the impact to student-athletes. As none of the participants experienced sexual assault within the context of athletics, their answers were mainly assumptions that fell into two categories. The first explored the various ways survivors of sexual assault would be impacted, mostly in traumatic ways. The second focuses on how the status of being a student-athlete could affect men as perpetrators.

Many participants were able to articulate the trauma that is experienced by a survivor of sexual assault. Some were very explicit in their ability to name trauma, while others noted that the impact of sexual assault is clearly damaging. A few examples from participants:
Jason: Probably in a very negative way. Um, I mean obviously they’re gonna be scared, timid, whatever. I don’t know what your body’s natural reaction is other than fear. So probably nothing good is gonna come of that, I can’t imagine very much good coming from that.

Julie: I just think you would probably shut down, not trust anybody... Um, and just, like, I know for me, I would just curl up into a ball and not do my school work, not hang out with my friends, not talk to my parents, like, that kind of thing. I think you would probably kind of, you would have no self-confidence. You would have, you know, like you would feel like you have no control, that kind of thing, maybe.

Paul: Um, I mean, I’m sure that’s definitely gonna mess with their head, there’s gonna be some psychological impacts there. And especially if they don’t know what to do, that could be really distracting. Um, like, there could be a lot of different things that go into it, whether they don’t want to say anything ‘cause it could affect their, like if they’re trying to play, or that’s gonna affect, I don’t know... it’s not gonna be good.

While Paul hinted at the psychological effects as damaging to play, Rebecca pointed out that sexual assault trauma may be no different for a student-athlete:

I would say it impacts the life of a student-athlete, um, in a really damaging, very difficult way, in the same way it would impact any student or any individual. Um, so, you know, I think, in answer to that, I would think, how does that affect anyone, and the answer would be, you know, you are having the same level of trauma of someone who’s actually been through combat. You have PTSD potentially, you have difficulty with intimacy or processing or trusting people, um, every facet of how you are trying to move on as a human being can be affected, anywhere from how you decide to... um, socialize, how you feel safe, walking around alone in any context, how you believe in yourself, or your image of your own body could be affected, um, your self esteem could be really impacted, if you felt really sure of yourself, you could then be very, insecure or confused or very demoralized, um, so I think it has an extreme impact. And I think you can also feel very isolated. “Am I the only one going through this? Does anyone know how I’m feeling?” Or you could have um, a lot of feelings of blame.

Even though Rebecca, through her feminist research, may have more knowledge on sexual assault affects than the average person, most participants demonstrated some aspect of knowledge of the trauma faced. For example, Michael said:
Well I mean, you think about the classic rape victim mentality, “It’s my fault, I did something wrong.” Um, if you’re going to school…I guarantee that grades suffer. I guarantee that personal views suffers, whether it’s to the point of failing out, to quitting, to, you know, even suicide. It could end in those ways.

The last quote about trauma came from Kelly:

Whoa, I think there’s a huge influence on them. Because not everybody can, you know how everyone has different personalities? Not everybody can deal with a problem themselves, sometimes they don’t want to share and they hide it, and that’s when they, well, eventually, they will explode. And they will release their anger, or they will misplace it, on someone who doesn’t deserve it.

Despite a lack of training on these issues, and not remembering much through their educational programs, most participants understood that there is significant trauma related to surviving sexual assault.

For some former student-athletes, they assumed that the trauma of assault would take the shape of “all in or all out”—in other words, either dedicating all of their time, energy, and focus into their sport and/or their grades or completely shutting down. They saw this as coping mechanism. Nicole said:

You know, you kind of see two things. You either see someone bury themself in their sport. Um, or you see them kind of shut down and not be able to focus. It, it takes a really quick adjustment for you to be off your game...And either goes one way or the other. Either they’re so focused in practice every day, they have no time for no one who isn’t giving their best effort. You know, they can’t goof around at practice, they’re all business. They’re, you know, over-extending themself on that side. Or, you know, they’re having a lot of time trying to get the energy to do anything. You know, to do any school, to put in any extra effort to, you know.

Kelly responded similarly:

Well, for a classical person, I think it would probably lower their grades. I think it could go to the extremes, so you either have really low grades or really high, er, really good grades. ‘Cause you will try to concentrate on something other than what happened to you.
In addition to shutting down as an impact, many understood that the stress of being a DI student-athlete could amplify the pressure. Amy, Rebecca, and Nicole, the study’s three self-avowed feminists, also made a strong connection to festering trauma and the pressure of Division I athletics. Nicole said:

> You know, we have to be really focused, and um, really put together to be able to maintain the steady level of stress of being a Division I athlete, of being at a top tier university, of trying to represent yourself and your family at the highest level, and trying to be a social being. ‘cause that’s really important at our university...So, um, I think that it’s a lifestyle that is very easily, you know, very easy to drop all the balls that you’re juggling.

Amy more clearly connected the stress of athletics with PTSD, commonly experienced by survivors of sexual assault (Chen, et al., 2010; Zinzow, et al., 2010). When asked, “How does sexual assault impact the lives of student-athletes?” she said:

> I mean, concentration. Um, you have post-traumatic stress disorder, which affects your ability to perform on and off the field, or else on and off the water. It affects the way you engage with your coaches, especially if it’s a male coach and you’re a woman or vice versa. Um, it’s, you know, academically, that can affect your eligibility, so you may not be able to actually perform. Um, it can cause you anxiety, which can affect your performance. So all of those intergroup dynamics with coaches and staff and trainers and you know, a lot of our trainers help us with stretching or physical therapy, like, that can affect the way you that you interact. And I’m thinking about, like, if you’re a wrestler and you’re wrestling that contact can greatly affect your ability to perform the way that you need to, if that touching triggers something in the wrong spot. Um, so those flashbacks can really heighten that. Um, breathing’s important for conditioning, and so if you have panic attacks and you can’t breathe, you can’t get all the oxygen you need to perform. So, I think those are some examples.

Amy was able to tie in the direct effects of PTSD (e.g., anxiety, flashbacks) with how this could affect a student-athlete’s performance.

The last example of the DI level of stress came from Rebecca, who suggested that student-athletes may react differently to sexual assault because of their status as elite athletes. (More on this in Chapter Five.) She started off by describing the level of
pressure in her sport and that her coach made it quite clear on many occasions that his job was directly related to the performance of the team, thus creating a high stress environment to perform. She continued:

*I think, one of the things with athletes is, we’re very good at pretending nothing’s wrong. So that’s something, always training yourself to ignore the pain, ignore the pain. You don’t have an injury, you don’t have an injury. Just keep going, just keep going. You know, you just gotta suck it up and move on and I think that’s a really, that’s useful as an athlete, and it helps you get the job done and it helps you cross the finish line first, but it sets you up, when you’re going through something really difficult, I think it sets you up for having a harder time processing like, I really need help and this isn’t my fault and I can’t keep blaming myself for it and I really need someone to help me through this. I think specifically for athletes who are facing sexual assault, you know, if you apply that athletic mindset to it, it’s like, oh, it’s just a flesh wound, it doesn’t matter, it’s fine. Move on. Other things are more important, you know? So you just go into that tunnel vision where you couldn’t properly address it in the same way.*

Rebecca also noted that beyond the mentality of ignoring something like sexual assault, student-athletes face different time constraints that could impact their ability to deal with the trauma of sexual assault. She said:

*And also, you literally just don’t have the same time that other students have. You’re just going going going, 30 hours or more a week in your sport, and then going to your classes, going going going, you’ve got nationals, you’ve got this, you’ve got that. Any other extra emotional things that you’re going through has just got to be put on hold and then they catch up to you later. So then it’s like once you’re out of combat, it’s like, whoa, wait a minute, what was that? Or geez, I gotta rethink this, so I would, I would imagine for the athletes that they would have the same really traumatic feelings involved with being a victim of sexual assault and then on top of that, they would be in a situation, the same as someone who was, you know, in battle, after you go through something traumatic, you’re still in battle, and like, you don’t have time and thought to recover. Um, I think they have a harder time, with the nature of their schedules and what they’re doing, and with the nature of how psychologically demanding what they’re doing is, especially now, at the Division I level, you’re really competing at an Olympic level with how intense the sport really is.*
This answer from Rebecca is a good summary of the trauma experienced by survivors of sexual assault, as well as how it might impact the lives of student-athletes differently than non-athletes.

In addition to responding to survivor trauma, a few participants noted that sexual assault impacts student-athletes who may be accused of, or are perpetrators of, sexual assault. For most, this took the form of a punishment or some other consequence for their actions, like dismissal from the team. James said:

*Um, for the male athletes, I would just say that if something like this, we, we have a target on our head, and you know, even when we go out...so if we get into trouble for something like this, our repercussions might not be, you know, might not only be the law, might be something that kicks you off the team or kicks you out of the university, you know? So our consequences might be more severe than just, you know, the law taking you by the hand. So I think we've got way more to lose if something like that were to happen.*

Kelly, who said she unaware of the exact policies or procedures, took a guess at how WU would respond to a student-athlete who perpetrated sexual assault. She said:

*I think, first of all, he would have meeting with his coach. And then probably a meeting with coach and psychologist, to discuss the problem, to see if it’s true, what he’s accused of. And then there would probably be some disciplinarily actions. So maybe like, uh, giving him redshirt, or preventing him from competing with the team.*

Similarly, Michael was unaware of any specific policies, but assumed perpetrators would be punished. He said:

*As far as getting completely cut from a team, if it’s thought that you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, did the wrong thing, some schools could just say no, we’re not gonna mess around with it, you’re done. You’re just done right there, right then and there, which I think is a great idea. I mean, if you’re in a spot where it could be, you’re doing something really bad, you shouldn’t be in that spot in the first place.*
Many former student-athletes were aware that sexual assault could impact survivors from a trauma-centered way, and impact perpetrators through punishments, such as loss of playing time.

Interestingly, one outlier came from Paul, a volleyball player. In upholding a stereotype that only certain types of people, or certain types of athletes, commit sexual assault, he said, “Um, like I said, me specifically, and my team, I don’t really think it [sexual assault] does significantly at all, just because, I mean, as far as I know, there aren’t any situations where it even really comes into play.” However, Paul’s belief that only certain types of people commit sexual assault (and volleyball players are not one of them) is addressed in the next major section, *Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture*.

**Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture**

This section addresses the last question that was asked of participants, “What support is necessary from the athletic department to provide a sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes at [your school]?” There are two main objectives in this section, attitudes and actions. Both address the proactive and reactive features of athletic departments mentioned above. Proactive responses are in an attempt to change or prevent sexual assault before it occurs. Reactive measures are those taken *after* a sexual assault has already happened.

It is important to note that many participants seemed unsure of how to answer this question in the interview. For example, Jason said, after a long pause, “What’s necessary? I, I don’t know if I’m…[pauses]…qualified to make that call. I don’t know what’s necessary.” Some asked for the question to be repeated, particularly the women
for whom English is a second language. In many cases, their answers seemed to be reactive in nature, such as providing resources for survivors. However, I was trying to see what they thought was necessary to provide an environment in which sexual assault is not present (i.e., to prevent sexual assault). The first section, attitudes, specifically addresses a preventative approach.

**Attitudes**

Attitudes are the intangible, behind-the-scenes elements that can affect an athletic department’s culture. Two participants spoke directly to necessary change in departmental attitudes to effectively prevent sexual assault: Nicole and Rebecca. They spoke about empowering and valuing women in the athletic department. Nicole’s response came from the perspective of a student-athlete in a Zero Tolerance Culture. She said:

*I definitely think the women need to feel empowered. Um, and part of that is, that completely outside of teaching us to defend each other, is that you have to feel equally as respected as a student-athlete and valuable to the university as our basketball players. As an athlete, our university is shockingly very good at that, for how amazing our basketball team and program is and are, um, our university is amazing at, our athletic director is at volleyball games all the time, you know. He knows all of our names like he knows all of the basketball player names. You know? He is calling you in for meetings also, he like, like we definitely understand that our basketball team is the team making the money and that’s the team, that like, he’s probably a little more concerned with their success than ours, but, um, you know you feel equally valued as part of the university.*

Nicole spoke at length throughout the interviews about education and programming that empowered her and other female student-athletes at AU. She believed that sexual assault is prevented only when male and female athletes are equally valued, which she experienced, as noted above. She continued:
You know, your athletic director comes over, he says hi to everyone. It’s just, you know, we really feel valued and that value would allow us to feel like, “Hey my voice needs to be heard if something ever happens to me by a male student-athlete.” We wouldn’t be thinking like, “Oh well, [AU] only cares about our basketball boys, so how could I ever say anything?”

In addition to valuing and empowering women, Nicole discussed how attitudes around male athletes matter too:

*Our men definitely are instilled to feel that like, being [an AU] athlete is a privilege, not a right. Um, and that’s something that I definitely don’t think is at every university or a lot of them. And I think probably that it happens more at the schools where the football team is dominant, ’cause you have 100 guys walking around who are running the campus. But you definitely don’t see our male student-athletes walking around like, you know…they deserve to be here and they deserve all these things and I think sometimes that transfers into they deserve someone’s sexuality, um, but you know, I think both…our basketball coach and our football coach, are equipped at like, cutting someone down [snaps fingers] who’s getting too high. You know, cutting someone down, reminding them, that someone’s done it before you, and someone’s done it better than you, and you know, you have to work to hold onto this and it’s definitely a privilege and you’re not as special as you think you are. Um, so making the men feel that they’re not entitled to anything and they have to work for everything that’s there for them…So I think instilling those things as a person definitely transfers over into your life.*

Nicole’s experiences at AU show how a Zero Tolerance Culture can affect female student-athletes by helping them feel valued and empowered.

Rebecca’s experiences at WU, however, were quite different. Through analyzing her interviews, it was clear that WU was a Rape Culture. Rebecca spoke at length about the perceived imbalance between female and male student-athletes at WU, particularly football players. She suggested that very directive programming for male athletes was necessary, even suggesting Jackson Katz “just live at [WU] and talk to the football players.” Jackson Katz, according to his website, is “one of America’s leading anti-sexist male activists. An educator, author, filmmaker, and cultural theorist, he is internationally
recognized for his groundbreaking work in the field of gender violence prevention education” (Biography, 2015). Rebecca also suggested that, among other things, student-
athletes should take gender studies courses to help understand the problematic gender
differences. She said:

> Just like, it’s like you need people hitting it at a lot of different levels. And then also having guys who, like Jackson Katz, or even, like, Michael Messner, having them come in for the male athletes and really like, opening up their windows for it. I’m also for, I mean, I don’t know if this would ever get implemented, but I think that everyone should have to take a gender studies class. Everyone! Like, I don’t know why math is a requirement, foreign language, whatever. Like, gender studies, they just need to be happening, and they need to be happening with the athletes in particular.

While her suggestions were in the form of actions, such as education, her underlying point is that what is necessary to prevent sexual assault is a change in attitudes.

To change attitudes, however, action must be taken. To do this, to send a strong message that sexual assault is not acceptable, some participants suggested involving department or team leaders to help change attitudes. For example, Amy said:

> Um, to hear it from the top down, so having [athletic director] be at those presentations, or explain trends, or, um, I think, you know, he’s very respected in the community, so if he’s there, it’s important. Um, I think having maybe other prominent, well-known athletes come back and talk about it, being trained, you know, like, [former football player] is really big on campus right now. So if he came back and talked about, you know, being on a football team, and this being high, hypermasculinity, but we had to respect women and it’s important.

She also suggested other former football players, as well as high profile former female athletes, because these were people “who lived your life, was there, could kinda help start [the change]. I think that would be something that would be impactful.” Amy was not the only one to suggest “celebrity” role models in athletics. Rebecca agreed, saying the role
models of the institution need to step up. Referring to a former WU football coach who was “a god” on campus, she said:

I’m sure the current coach is also a god, but...it was like, [former coach] did, everyone would do. So it’s like the equivalent of [former coach] on campus needs to be the spokesperson for that. You know, taking the people who are leaders and educating them, too. Um, I think that’s a big step forward in educating the athletes.

Others suggested peer leaders within the athletic department or team captains as effective people to help create change in athletics. In addition to changing attitudes, Gail suggested that athletic departments need to inspire trust and open communication. She said:

I think an open communication system and trust between the athletes and administration, whether it’s—or superiors even. Whether it’s just, like, um, teammate to teammate but then there’s a trusted, open communication from the friend to like, the coach or the trainer or the athletic director or someone like that.

Gail’s suggestion of open trust and communication can be accomplished through a few actions, both proactive and reactive, to be discussed next.

Actions

Actions to create sexual assault-free environments for student-athletes must be those done with a proactive approach. However, most participants responded with suggestions that were reactive in nature. While only proactive approaches can truly prevent sexual assault, it is important to explore the reactive responses, as they will help create a Zero Tolerance Culture.

Proactive. First, the proactive suggestion most often noted was education for athletes. This was usually accompanied by the suggestion that the education is mandatory, more in-depth or longer in time frame, and tailored to specific teams, genders, and ages. Some examples of these suggestions are:
Nicole: *I definitely think you need to educate freshmen and probably continue to educate sophomores on like, what sexual assault is. And what consent is.*

James: *Well, knowledge, obviously. Providing information about what it is. I think that a lot of, a lot of students know exactly what it is, I think that they sometimes might not know what the boundaries might be...I think that is, that can prevent stuff like that, just providing certain scenarios and saying, “Okay if this happens, this is what you gotta do” [light fist pound on desk] or “this is how you take care of it” [light fist pound] or “this is how you ensure that consent is there, consent is not there” and, um, I think information is the biggest, biggest thing.*

Michael: *I think that it should have its own talk. It should be separate from everything else. I don’t think they should lump things together. I think that it should be just as important as everything else, because it really is. If you smoke weed one time, it’s not going to have a lasting effect on anybody. At least it shouldn’t as far as I know, if you get too drunk one time, it shouldn’t, the actual heart of the issue is sexual assault. It should be its own entity. It shouldn’t be referred to diagram G on page 137 for what classifies as sexual assault.*

Paul: *Uh...I guess, making, just keeping everyone aware, have that meeting every year.*

More examples of how sexual assault can be effectively integrated into athletics are provided in Chapter Five’s discussion on how to create an effective prevention education program.

**Reactive.** Most participants suggested some sort of reactive action to answer the question, “What support is necessary from the athletic department to provide a sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes at [your school]?” Reactive items help address a sexual assault after it has already occurred. Many suggested some sort of mandatory education for all athletes. However, when discussing it more, their comments leaned more toward response efforts, such as making sure survivors know where to go for resources. Some examples:

Nicole: *I think there could be kinda more of a direct, more clear information on what to do if you’re sexually assaulted. Like, who’s the person, who’s the first person you call?*
Rebecca: *I think really providing athletes, particularly those female athletes, the feeling that like, there’s a safe way that you can get help. And just making all the resources abundantly clear, over and over and over again.*

Elizabeth: *I think it’s kind of, making them more aware that they can really seek some support from the athletic department, from people from athletic department that this cannot be just, uh, hidden behind a door or anything like, left somewhere unsaid or untold or anything.*

Gail: *Um, what’s the word I’m looking for? Oh, referrals of like, external sources that can be used or personnel or, um. centers to go to, if they don’t want to be directly tied to the university.*

Paul: *But then also, really just stress like if you have been assaulted, have like a direct contact, like maybe like an anonymous thing to, like if you don’t wanna get it out there.*

As James said, an awareness of “who you can call” is critical in reacting to sexual assault. It is important, too, that those first responders—the people “who you can call”—for help are adequately trained. Many participants suggested coaches, trainers, academic counselors, or even team captains as people to turn to if one has been sexually assaulted (i.e., first responders). Ensuring adequate training and how respond in safe, compassionate, appropriate manner is critical. Many universities offer training, sometimes called disclosure response training or first response training, for staff members on campus who may be trusted people that survivors of sexual assault turn to in times of crisis.

Paul, who suggested the last reactive action, mentioned punishing perpetrators. He said, “I think the biggest issue to stop it is to, if it’s happening, people need to know about it and then we can make steps to I don’t know, arrest whoever did it or something like that.” This suggestion ties together both the attitudes and actions sections. As Gail suggested, open communication and trust is needed. Paul addressed this by saying,
“People need to know about it,” so that action can be taken. It is interesting to note that he did not mention punishment or consequences from the athletic department, but from the law enforcement system (i.e., “arrest whoever did it”). These reactive elements of punishment and appropriate support for survivors, while not providing a sexual assault-free environment, may still help create a Zero Tolerance Culture.

**Sexual Assault Prevention Paradigm for Athletic Departments**

This chapter detailed the findings from interviews with 15 former student-athletes, delineating their responses into three major themes: (1) **Participant Knowledge**; (2) **Sexual Assault Within the Context of Athletics**; and (3) **Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture**. **Participant Knowledge** included what they know as well as how they know it, including lengthy sections on the ambivalence and gray areas experienced by participants, particularly around defining sexual assault and consent, which are thought to be uncomfortable and “messy” topics. The second section provided information on what participants knew about sexual assault within their athletic departments, and found three main atmospheres to be present: (1) Zero Tolerance Culture; (2) Checkbox Culture; and (3) Rape Culture. These three cultures were shaped by educational opportunities, policies, and attitudes within athletics. Lastly, this chapter focused on creating change in athletics, and how participants thought attitudes and actions should be changed to foster an environment that is free of sexual assault.

These themes must now be shaped into a paradigm model to explain the arc of sexual assault knowledge and prevention in college athletics. The last step in grounded theory is to tell the story of the findings. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a paradigm model is essential to the completion of a grounded theory study. In order to
create a good paradigm, however, a researcher must create the “story line” of the study, combining the main themes and categories into one story.

Thus, the narrative for this story goes as such: The context (i.e., “setting”) for this story comprises two major elements, shifting views on sexual assault, as well as education received on sexual assault. Societal changes in how sexual assault is viewed (e.g., the 2011 DCL on Title IX, the FBI’s new definition of rape) plus cultural changes in how sexual assault is discussed (e.g., movies, social media) are combined to influence the shifting and changing views on sexual assault of each participant. These shifting views are added to the education they receive, be it through athletics, their educational institutions, or their families and backgrounds. Shifting views plus education equals a new knowledge of sexual assault, one that is not black and white. This knowledge includes multiple gray areas, such as unclear consent, varying definitions of sexual assault, and the problematic contribution of alcohol. This knowledge that sexual assault is not black and white contains a rejection of some rape myths and stereotypes, while continuing to uphold others. As such, this leads to the contention that there is a need for more nuanced education on sexual assault, as one size does not fit all (i.e., through age, gender, sport, and others). Lastly, if athletic departments embrace this story, acknowledge the multiple gray areas, and educate accordingly, they can help embrace a Zero Tolerance Culture, shedding the existing Checkbox Culture and Rape Culture that exists at some universities and helping to reduce sexual assault. The paradigm model for this story line can be found in Figure 2.
Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter illuminated what former student-athletes know about sexual assault in intercollegiate athletics. This section offers the findings in response to each research question. The first question was, “What do student-athletes know about sexual assault?” The first theme, Participant Knowledge, directly answered this question, broken into two sub-themes of What They Know and How They Know It. The second research question was, “In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?” with a sub-question asking, “In what ways does
the occurrence of sexual assault impact student-athletes’ personal lives, academic performance, and/or athletic performance?” These questions were answered by the second theme, *Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics*. This theme also answered research question three, “What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?” and its sub-question on the effectiveness of these actions. Lastly, research question four, “What support is necessary to provide an optimal, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes?” found answers in the third and last theme, *Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture*. Each theme’s findings are summarized in the next sections.

*Participant Knowledge* was characterized in two ways: *What They Know* and *How They Know It*. This theme answered the first research question. *What* former student-athletes know about sexual assault varied. Most participants lumped sexual assault and sexual harassment together when defining and describing sexual assault. Whereas sexual assault is the physical manifestation of nonconsensual action (i.e., rape), sexual harassment is the verbal manifestation of nonconsensual action (i.e., catcalling or an inappropriate sexual joke). In their descriptions, definitions, and scenarios, these two different ideas were often meshed together. Further, two participants, Julie and Amy, expanded their definition of sexual assault to include *all* violence against women, including stalking and domestic violence, as defined in Chapter One.

In addition to varied definitions of sexual assault, participants often experienced a shift in their perceptions over time. These shifting views allowed for broader definitions of sexual assault to develop. For example, Nicole said her definition of rape “got broader
and broader” during her four years of college as she learned more. These shifting views were experienced by a handful of the participants, though certainly not all of them.

Many participants were able to recognize the problematic nature of alcohol, particularly in regards to consent and college students. Literature supports the contention by participants that alcohol is highly prevalent in campus sexual assault (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck Clinton, & McAuslan, 2001; Krebs et al., 2007), with one estimating that more than 70% of victims were too intoxicated to give consent at the time of perpetration (Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Weschler, 2004). Some even recognized alcohol as a component of sexual assault. Though not a necessary component, as the interview question asked, alcohol was identified by some participants as nearly always present, or always present, when discussing sexual assault on college campuses. Beyond alcohol, participants were able to identify other components of sexual assault to be lack of consent, fear, and pain. The two most important elements of sexual assault, power and control (Kelly, 1988), were cited by some participants, and none suggested that sexual assault was about sex, lust, or desire, as is often imagined in public perception (Kelly, 1988).

In addition, many participants recognized the absence of consent as essential to sexual assault. However, their definitions of consent varied, including the fact that many participants did not even use the word “consent,” but instead used words such as “uncomfortable,” “unwanted,” or “unwilling.” Participants understood consent to be “blurry,” which led to another category in the findings, ambivalence around sexual assault issues. Many participants struggled with the “gray areas” of sexual assault, including perpetration factors and rates, alcohol, and consent (Foubert, Godin, & Tatum,
2010). These ambivalent, gray areas also meant that some participants had difficulty labeling sexual assault as such (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Pitts & Schwartz, 1997). For instance, Amy, when referring to her sexual assault experience from high school, said she still has a difficult time labeling it as rape.

The struggle to name sexual assault was evident through the ways in which participants gave scenarios. They were asked to provide a scenario or situation that constituted sexual assault. Many of these ranged from sexual harassment issues (i.e., flashing someone) to a stereotypical campus assault (i.e., two drunk people at a party). These scenarios, as well as many other statements by participants, contributed to the last two areas of *What They Know*, the acceptance and refusal of rape myths and stereotypes. For example, many rape myths persisted about the characteristics of perpetrators. James and Paul both gave statements indicating perpetrators of sexual assault to be unlike them, from lower socioeconomic areas, races, or mental health. However, according to Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997), “virtually all studies support the view that men who commit sexual assault are not seriously mentally ill” (p. 52). Further, they argued that high rates of campus sexual assault, where most students are upper or middle class, indicate that sexual assault is not relegated to only one social class (i.e., lower or working class), upholding the adage, “Sexual assault can happen to anyone.”

Participants identified a variety of influences on *How They Know* what they know. Many cited educational experiences at various levels, including middle school, high school, and college. At the college level, they received information on sexual assault through university programs or campaigns, as well as education programs through the athletic department. In addition, a few participants remembered learning about sexual
assault through courses in their majors, such as psychology or sociology. Lastly, a few participants noted educational experiences through work experiences post-college, as well as through their own reading and personal education on the subject.

Beyond specific educational opportunities, participants provided a range of experiences that influenced or shaped their knowledge of sexual assault. These include feminist experiences, experiences as a survivor, and the influence of peers, friends, teammates, and families. Lastly, participants said media was a major influence on how they know what they know about sexual assault.

The first theme, Participant Knowledge, answered the first research question on what former student-athletes know about sexual assault, as well as how they know it. These findings are critical in creating effective sexual assault education programs and are further addressed in the implications section in Chapter Five.

The theme of Sexual Assault Within the Context of College Athletics answered research questions two and three. First, this theme delineated the two ways that athletic departments addressed sexual assault: proactively or reactively. Proactive efforts aimed to stop sexual assault before it occurred. This happened in two major ways: either through education (e.g., bystander intervention training) or through sending messages that sexual assault was not tolerated (e.g., asking students to sign a code of conduct). Reactive measures were those taken after an assault has already occurred (e.g., offering counseling resources for survivors).

A major sub-theme in this section discovered three examples of Athletic Department Culture. The first, a Zero Tolerance Culture, was one that took swift action against perpetrators, supported survivors, educated its athletes, and provided strong
messages that sexual assault was not tolerated (i.e., a zero tolerance approach). The second, a Checkbox Culture, was not actively against sexual assault or particularly “pro” prevention, but seemingly did what was necessary to address sexual assault (i.e., one educational program for all athletes each year). As such, these departments seemed to be “checking a box” that required them to provide education but did not truly seem dedicated to preventing sexual assault or providing a safe environment for survivors.

Lastly, athletic departments that fit the model of a Rape Culture, were a reflection of American society as a whole. These departments were perceived to have an imbalance of power between male and female student-athletes that strongly privileged men. Further, these departments took little or no action to address sexual assault preventatively through education, or reactively through punishments. In fact, those characterized as a Rape Culture were thought to keep issues of sexual assault quiet or “hush-hush” so as not to tarnish the reputation of the athletic department. It is important to note that none of the participants seemed to think that their athletic department retaliated against survivors in any way.

These three cultures were influenced by findings in the sub-themes of Knowledge of Sexual Assault in Athletics is Minimal, Programming by Athletic Department, Sexual Assault Prevention is Bigger Than Athletics, and How Does Sexual Assault Impact Student-Athletes? As suggested by the first sub-theme name, most former student-athletes had minimal knowledge of sexual assault in athletics. This did little to address research question two, “In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?” Most participants said they were unaware of sexual assault occurring in the athletic department. Those who did remember incidents had vague recollections of
hazy rumors, without specific recall of information. This lack of knowledge around sexual assault occurring could indicate that it is not happening or, if it is, that it is not talked about openly or freely, which is discussed more in future research.

Other knowledge of sexual assault, such as procedures and education, was minimal as well. This included information on policies, including lines of reporting or resources for survivors. When policies were unknown, many participants guessed or assumed at what actions the athletic department would take, but admitted this knowledge was not certain. Many also indicated that they did not remember attending educational programs or did not remember much, if any, content from the sexual assault education.

This lack of knowledge about educational opportunities connected with the next section, *Programming by Athletic Department*. Participants had very little memory of educational programs, and if so, sometimes deemed them ineffective. The effective elements are discussed further in the implications section in Chapter Five. Additionally, former student-athletes said they strongly remembered programs on drugs/alcohol, compliance, nutrition, etc., but struggled to recall programs on sexual assault. Lastly, they were able to note that the topic of sexual assault sometimes came up in other education programs, but was not often addressed on its own.

This section, *Programming by Athletic Department*, as well as the earlier section, *Knowledge of Sexual Assault in Athletics is Minimal*, also answered research question three, “What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?” Another sub-theme, *Sexual Assault Prevention is Bigger Than Athletics*, also addressed research question three. In this area, participants commented on the fact that sexual assault prevention is either not the responsibility of the athletic
department or just not possible. Also in this section, participants expressed a certain amount of cynicism about sexual assault prevention. For example, Melissa said she did not think sexual assault can be prevented, as the athletic department cannot control everyone at all times. The idea that sexual assault prevention is not possible by athletic departments was only expressed by a few participants.

The last section for discussion here, *How Does Sexual Assault Impact Student-Athletes?*, answered research question three’s sub-question, “In what ways does the occurrence of sexual assault impact student-athletes’ personal lives, academic performance, and/or athletic performance?” Responses from participants indicated that survivors of sexual assault experience trauma, which may be heightened or amplified by the stress experienced as a Division I elite athlete. Participants also noted that perpetrators might be affected by sexual assault if they are caught and face consequences (i.e., removal from the team). Given the devastating effects of sexual assault, as acknowledged by many participants, there is a need to create change in the culture of athletics to reduce and prevent sexual assault. The last theme addressed the issues with providing a supportive, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes.

The last theme directly answered research question four, in which I asked participants, “What support is necessary to provide a sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes at [your university]?” Answers to this question fell into sub-themes of attitudes and actions, and both were delineated into proactive and reactive features, as already noted in *Athletic Department Culture*. A couple participants suggested that a change in attitudes was necessary to prevent sexual assault; namely, valuing and empowering women. Their suggestions and experiences were backed by the literature
suggesting that female student-athletes often felt frustrated that men’s sports teams received greater privilege, resources, or recognition (McMahon, 2004). Therefore, creating parity and equity between male and female sports was necessary, as well as removing the perceived entitlement from sports such as men’s basketball and football.

In order to achieve this change in attitudes, participants suggested involvement from the top down, such as through the athletic director attending meetings on sexual assault to send stronger messages that the topic is important. This is reflected in the literature as well. According to Davis and Jackson (2000), support from key athletic personnel (e.g., the athletic director, coach, famous former athletes) will help student-athletes “buy in” to the messages of zero tolerance. Other suggestions involved educating athletes and athletic department personnel differently. These ideas led into the suggested actions needed to provide a sexual assault-free environment. Many participants recommended mandatory education for all student-athletes, as some indicated that only freshmen or only peer leaders received education on this topic. More, different, and better prevention education was seen as the only proactive feature possible to create change.

Reactive actions, those taken in response to sexual assault, occur after an assault has already happened, which is not necessarily preventing it or creating a sexual assault-free environment. While the participants provided great answers for how to better support survivors or educate students, these reactive measures focused mainly on providing support to survivors through better education of trainers, coaches, and team captains on “crisis response.” In addition, some suggested that more and better awareness of resources should be available for student-athletes who experienced sexual assault.
These major themes, *Participant Knowledge, Sexual Assault Within the Context of Athletics*, and *Creating Change in Athletic Department Culture*, were combined to tell a story. This narrative arc was critical in creating the paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), *Sexual Assault Prevention Paradigm for Athletic Departments*, as shown in Figure 2. The paradigm contends that due to shifting views and varied education on sexual assault, it is no longer seen as a black and white issue. As such, student-athletes maintain some rape myths while rejecting others, leading to the necessity for a more nuanced approach to education. When student-athletes receive an education that is more complex than a “one size fits all” approach, athletic departments are likely to shed the environments of a Checkbox Culture or a Rape Culture. Thus, by embracing the characteristics of a Zero Tolerance Culture, they will help prevent sexual assault in college athletics. The implications of this paradigm model, as well as the entirety of the findings, are discussed further in Chapter Five.
Chapter Five: Implications

This study explored the ways in which former student-athletes understand sexual assault as well as their experiences and perceptions of the response and prevention to sexual assault within their athletic departments. In addition, this study’s purpose included *research as praxis* (Lather, 1986) in seeking to understand what former student-athletes know sexual assault to be. This knowledge can help provide insight into sexual assault education programs, which is discussed later in this chapter. One goal of this research was to learn more about what student-athletes know sexual assault to be, so that practitioners and researchers alike can work toward creating and/or implementing more effective programs, ultimately leading to the reduction and prevention of sexual assault within intercollegiate athletics.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the research process, followed by a summary of findings. Next, implications are discussed, concluding with the creation of a sexual assault education program to be utilized by athletic departments. Chapter Five concludes with limitations of this study and suggestions for future research in this area.

**Research Process Overview**

The research problem for this study was the importance of exploring the occurrence, as well as the prevention efforts, of sexual assault by utilizing a grounded
theory methodology. Qualitative methods helped to expose the “how” and “why” behind sexual assault knowledge in former student-athletes, as well as their experiences and perceptions of the phenomena in college athletics. Through interviews with 15 former student-athletes, this study painted a fuller picture of the culture of big-time athletics in relation to sexual assault response and prevention. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What do student-athletes know about sexual assault?
2. In what ways does sexual assault occur among or between the student-athlete population?
   a. In what ways does the occurrence of sexual assault impact student-athletes’ personal lives, academic performance, and/or athletic performance?
3. What actions (i.e., programs or policies) are taken within athletic departments to prevent sexual assault?
   a. In what ways are these effective or not effective?
4. What support is necessary to provide an optimal, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes?

These research questions were answered through a series of two interviews with 15 former student-athletes. The interviews followed a three-part design (Galletta, 2013). First, participants were asked questions about their sport experiences and background, followed by their knowledge of sexual assault. Questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix A) asked them to describe and define sexual assault, as well as inquiries on how they know what they know. What influenced or shaped their definition of sexual
assault? The third part of the interview focused specifically on participant experiences within their athletic departments, asking about occurrences, response, policies, and education programs.

Semi-structured interviews took place in person, over the telephone, or using Skype or FaceTime. All interviews were digitally recorded with the participant’s permission and then transcribed by me into Microsoft Word. Transcripts underwent a three-part coding for data analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 1998). At the completion of selective coding, a paradigm model was created, situating the final themes into a story line. Findings indicated three themes: (1) Participant Knowledge; (2) Sexual Assault Within the Context of Athletics; and (3) Creating Change in the Athletic Department Culture. The implications of these results is discussed next in this chapter, followed by recommendations for action, as well as future research.

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore sexual assault within the context of athletics by interviewing former student-athletes. The findings yielded three major themes around what student-athletes know about sexual assault, the culture of athletic departments in relation to sexual assault, and how change can be created to ensure a reduction of sexual assault. The implications of this work are two-fold. First, there are broad implications for considering what former student-athletes know about sexual assault and how they know it. Second, there are specific implications for how athletic departments can take action to reduce or prevent sexual assault from happening. The last
part of this section combines these implications, as well as findings on effective prevention efforts, into a model education program.

**Implications for Student-Athlete Knowledge**

First, it is clear from the findings that many factors influence student-athlete knowledge about sexual assault. The participants’ knowledge did not exist in a vacuum. Despite influences from the athletic department, student-athletes are also shaped by teammates and peers, family and background, personal experiences, educational experiences, and the media. While some participants did cite the athletic department, including its education programs, as something that shaped their definitions and views of sexual assault, not everyone did. This means two things. One, sexual assault prevention must be comprehensive; it cannot fall to the athletic department alone to educate student-athletes on sexual assault. The prevention education and messages can, and should, also be coming from university-wide campaigns, as well as in the classroom. Further, prevention education programs in the athletic department need to acknowledge that student-athletes might be receiving different and/or contradicting information about sexual assault. Programs and educators should be ready to address and challenge the varying information that student-athletes receive from the media, their parents and families, friends outside the athletic department, major courses, etc.

These varying educational factors, combined with shifting societal and cultural influences, indicated that student-athletes’ definitions of sexual assault are similarly shifting and are no longer black and white. Therefore, the gray areas and ambivalence around sexual assault displayed by participants indicated that some prevailing rape myths are still upheld by student-athletes (e.g., victim blaming), while others are clearly rejected
(e.g., only men can perpetrate against a female victim). There is a strong need, through educational programs as well as the attitudes and behaviors of those working within college athletics, to continue breaking down rape myths and stereotypes that are prevalent in society. Some are hopeful that this process is already happening. One of this study’s peer debriefers, a sexual assault prevention education coordinator for a large university, recently emailed me:

One of the things I was talking about with some others this week was that I can actually notice small indications of changing norms and attitudes about this stuff and how it feels like we're getting very close to a “tipping point” where the critical mass can help push us further in this work than we have ever been. Kind of exciting! (M. Bangen, personal communication, May 31, 2015)

Her words conveyed the excitement at learning that some participants rejected a number of rape myths and stereotypes, but there is still work to be done in the prevention education realm to break down rape myths and stereotypes.

Lastly, it is important to note from Chapter Four that three cultures were found to exist in athletic departments (i.e., Zero Tolerance, Checkbox, Rape). However, for those universities with multiple participants, their visions of how athletics addressed sexual assault varied. For example, based on descriptions from Melissa, Elizabeth, and Kelly, Western U was a Checkbox Culture, but Rebecca characterized it as a Rape Culture. Similarly, Midwestern U was suggested to be a Zero Tolerance Culture by James, Julie and Paul; a Checkbox Culture by Amy and Kim; and a Rape Culture by Gail and Michael. Further, Jason provided an array of statements that indicated his perception of MU fit squarely into all three cultures. These varied perceptions indicated that athletic departments are not sending the same message uniformly to all student-athletes. Given the ambivalence, gray areas, and shifting views on sexual assault found by participants, it
is critical that athletic departments provide a united and cohesive message to all student-athletes. One way to ensure that all involved with athletic departments (i.e., administrators, coaches, trainers, student-athletes) are on the same page is by committing to a stance of zero tolerance and adopting the model education program recommended in this chapter. In addition, this variance in perception of the same athletic departments lends itself to future areas of study, addressed in the last section.

**Recommendations for Taking Action**

The first recommendation for taking action is reactive; therefore, it addresses sexual assault after it has already occurred. As noted in Chapter Four, many former student-athletes were unsure of policies or procedures for responding to sexual assault, including support services for survivors. Further, they were unclear on who they could have turned to for resources or help if they had survived sexual assault while in college. Many of them assumed help was available from a sports psychologist or team psychologist (if the department had one) or an academic advisor. Others suggested that athletic trainers, coaches, or team captains would be ideal people to turn to for help.

Therefore, it is critical that those in a role of leadership or advisement are well versed on sexual assault response techniques, also known as disclosure response. According to Suarez and Gadalla (2010), “an important factor that discourages rape victims from reporting is the nonsupportive reactions that they often encounter after disclosing the assault” (p. 2011). The authors also noted that nonsupportive reactions may also contribute to the “post-rape trauma” experienced by survivors (p. 2011). Further, research by Sabina and Ho (2014) found that survivors are more likely to make an
informal disclosure (i.e., to a trusted person or friend) than a formal disclosure (i.e., to
law enforcement).

Thus, staff and key persons in the athletic department must be ready to respond to
sexual assault disclosure in appropriate, supportive ways. Many institutions offer training
to university faculty and staff, including those in the athletic department, and many
universities are also moving toward a “mandatory reporter” policy to comply with Title
IX (Flaherty, 2015). As mandatory reporters, faculty and staff are required to share
information on sexual assault occurrence with university administrators. Due to these
new policies, universities are already providing information to staff and faculty on how to
respond if a student discloses sexual assault, particularly around informing survivors of
their mandatory reporter status (Flaherty, 2015). It would behoove athletic departments to
seek out this training to both remain in compliance with university and Title IX
regulations as well as to provide the most supportive, appropriate response to survivors.

In addition to training on disclosure response, athletic departments may consider
adopting a public awareness campaign such as Start By Believing. Created in 2011 by
End Violence Against Women International, Start By Believing encourages a supportive,
positive response to survivors of sexual—in essence, start by believing. According to the
campaign’s website:

Start By Believing is a public awareness campaign uniquely focused on the public
response to sexual assault. Because a friend or a family member is typically the
first person a victim confides in after an assault, each individual’s reaction is the
first step in a long path toward justice and healing. Knowing how to respond is
critical—a negative response can worsen the trauma. (The Message, n.d.)

Start By Believing encourages people to respond positively to survivors of sexual assault
by saying, “I’m sorry this happened to you” or “I believe you,” instead of reacting
negatively or in a way that casts doubt or blame on the victim. Traditional victim-blaming statements are negative; for example, “Well, how much did you have to drink?” or “Why did you go home with him?” Those working in athletics, particularly as mandatory reporters, may worry about remaining “objective” and not presuming innocence or guilt of any party in a sexual assault. The *Start By Believing* campaign addresses this:

> The intention of the campaign is to start from an orientation of believing, and that does not necessarily mean saying the exact words, “I believe you.” The same purpose can be accomplished with alternative phrases like, “I’m sorry this happened to you.” The important issue is not the exact words that are used, but that the person is treated with compassion and respect, and the report is handled professionally - instead of communicating the message (either explicitly or implicitly) that I don’t believe you. Unfortunately, this is exactly the message that is all too often communicated by friends and family members, as well as responding professionals. (Can I Really Say That?, n.d.)

However, an effective launch of the *Start By Believing* campaign will not only affect those working within athletics, but student-athletes as well, who are the peers and friends that survivors may rely on.

In addition to key athletic department staff, some survivors may turn to peers for support. While sexual assault education programs may provide an element of response (i.e., how to help a friend), there is also room to further educate certain segments of the student-athlete population. For example, both Gina and Jason said they acted as peer mentors or peer educators at their respective universities. Gina said she received prevention education (i.e., bystander intervention) and Jason said he received training on how to talk with a survivor. He explained:

> I know it’s super serious, um, when somebody opens themselves up and shares something so personal with you like that. It’s uh, it’s obviously super serious and
super emotional and also traumatic. So you wanna be very, very cautious about how I handle a situation like that. I mean, like, obviously I’m super sympathetic.

Gina also said she served as a “liaison” peer mentor for her team, but could be a resource for student-athletes on other teams as well. However, she said, someone she had never met probably would not seek her out. Instead, she was trained to “be prepared to help the students I’m familiar with.” These two experiences aligned with a suggestion made by Nicole to specifically train team captains on disclosure response. According to Nicole, “by nature, captains are probably good at crisis,” and athletic departments should invest in providing them with more and further education on the topic of sexual assault response. Her comment to “let athletes know that if something ever happens, you can always call your captain because, you know, they’re trained in this” inspired the name for a team captain education campaign: “If something happens, call your captains.”

Educating team psychologists, coaches, trainers, and even team captains on sexual assault disclosure response is a critical reactive measure that athletic departments must take if they hope to create change. The next action-based recommendation, however, is proactive in nature. Combining all I have learned from the literature, as well as the findings from participant interviews, I have created a model education program to be adopted by athletic departments. This model program, titled A Zero Tolerance Approach: Sexual Assault Prevention Education for Student-Athletes (SAPES), could help athletic departments move away from Checkbox and Rape cultures and move toward one of Zero Tolerance.
A Zero Tolerance Approach: Sexual Assault Prevention Education for Student-Athletes (SAPES)

In order to create a strong, effective educational opportunity for sexual assault prevention and awareness, there are three main areas to consider for a model program, such as content and material (e.g., bystander intervention), learning strategies (e.g., case studies), and program logistics (e.g., location). The SAPES program incorporates these elements in six ways through the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How curriculum. This curriculum is influenced by both the existing literature and participant responses.

Who. It is critical to address who is educated in the SAPES program. In a word: everyone. It is imperative to creating and maintaining a Zero Tolerance Culture that all student-athletes attend mandatory sexual assault prevention educational programming. Mandatory education for all student-athletes was recommended by a number of participants. However, the previous literature as well as this study’s findings influence who should be educated in a variety of ways.

First, education programs should be sex-segregated. Research has found that men and women often possess significantly different attitudes on sexual assault, with men as more likely to uphold rape myths (Lee, Pomeroy, Yoo, & Rheinboldt, 2005). Thus, the content may vary based on educating men or women (more on this in What). In addition, some participants in this study indicated that being in the same room as the opposite sex impacted their ability to engage in sexual assault programming. For example, Julie said:

*And they sat us all in this room, and, boys and girls, and they wanted us to, um, they wanted us to run the conversation. And I’m like, I’m not fucking raising my hand and like tell you my experience in front of all of my peers so that they look at me and like, think, think, I don’t know, think differently of me that I don’t want*
them to think. So, I think, something like that is not ever going to work. Um, especially with boys and girls in the room.

Julie’s opinion that mixed gender education is less effective is backed by the literature (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Berkowitz, 2002; Breitenbecher, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Further, Amy suggested that, when possible, male student-athletes should be educated by men. This recommendation is also supported by the literature (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Koss & Rozee, 2001), which found that men often become defensive in the presence of women, thus mixed-gender programs are less effective.

Second, student-athletes should be educated in small groups. Many participants, including those from a Checkbox Culture or Rape Culture athletic department, remembered receiving only one or two education programs with a large group that often included the entire student-athlete body population. Participant responses indicated that larger groups were not conducive to learning. For example, Michael said that when 200 student-athletes are put into a room together, “everyone’s in the back, playing grabass on their phones.” Julie, who earlier mentioned the lack of engagement in a mixed gender setting, also noted that even a large group of only women was intimidating. She said:

But I also remember being with just girl athletes in the room and having the same thing happen and nobody—only a very few people raised their hands, but probably everybody could’ve raised their hands given their own personal experience with the things we were talking about, you know what I mean? But it’s like, I think that whole idea of group interaction with something like this, especially like, initially. It is never, ever gonna work.

McMahon (2004) found that student-athletes function in tightly knit communities according to team and that each team has its own identity or “family” atmosphere. These findings connect with Julie’s lack of comfort in discussing sensitive gender issues with athletes who did not belong to her team. Thus, it is recommended that participants are
educated in groups by sport/team, which ensures sex segregation, mentioned above, as well as smaller groups.

Segregation by team also allows for variance in programming based on sport. According to Jackson and Davis (2000), “it seems clear that the revenue-generating teams of football and basketball represent the highest probability of difficulties because they seem most prone to aggression and receive the greatest media and public attention” (p. 595). They continued: “Other potentially violence-reinforcing sports include lacrosse, wrestling and hockey” (p. 595). In what ways the programs would vary by sport team is covered more in depth in the How section.

Third, student-athletes should be educated by age or class rank, which was suggested by James and Nicole. James mentioned that while he attended multiple programs throughout his time at MU, the programs provided the same information for four years. He said:

_They were more like, you know when you take an introductory class and the first half is stuff you’ve already learned? That’s what that is. It’s an introductory class. So that’s why kids sit on their phones. It’s like, how many times have been through this in high school or in how many years you’ve been here?_

This is supported by Nicole, who attended AU. She said:

_Because your experiences, sexually, as a freshman are _way_ different than your experiences as a senior. And they’re like, all similar, but there are definitely nuances that all the freshmen are gonna understand and all the seniors are gonna understand._

She gave an example from her first year at AU, when she attended a healthy sex education class with her team. Referring to a senior captain on her team, Nicole said, “They can’t be giving me the same advice they’re giving her, because she’s like, an adult. And I am still a child. You know?”
The elements of *Who* include sex-segregation, small group education (i.e., by sport/team), education by class rank, as well as the key component, mandatory education for all. Combining these factors, it is recommended that athletic departments set up programs comprising single-sex teammates by class rank. For example, educating all freshmen female swimmers together, while the sophomores, juniors, and seniors each receive their own programs with varied content based on their age. In some cases, if the groups are small enough or the sports teams are familiar enough with each other, combining sports may be acceptable. This was suggested by Nicole, who said that the “ball sports” teams were familiar with each other as they practiced in the same facilities. Thus, for example, if there are only two freshman soccer players, they may also be educated with the three first year lacrosse players and the four freshman field hockey players. Educational content is addressed in the next section.

**What.** This section addresses the content and curriculum of SAPES (i.e., *what* the student-athletes will be learning). There are four critical elements to address in any comprehensive sexual assault prevention education program. The first is awareness of what sexual assault is and how consent is defined. These two areas were some of the most problematic for participants, who often lumped sexual assault and sexual harassment together, and struggled to use the word “consent” or define it. It is impossible to prevent sexual assault and educate student-athletes on it if they do not even know what it is. Further, many participants exhibited beliefs upholding rape myths in their scenarios by expecting a victim to fight back, resist, or say no, without the initiator asking for consent.
Beyond a basic awareness of sexual assault and consent, student-athletes must also attend healthy sex education programs. According to Herman (1984), healthy sex education is critical because “as long as sex in our society is construed as a dirty, low, and violent act involving domination of a male over a female, rape will remain a common occurrence” (p. 52). This is supported by the findings from the study’s three self-avowed feminist participants, Amy, Nicole, and Rebecca. Amy demonstrated the importance of sex education in understanding consent:

*I think students, college students in general, and society—so, along with student-athletes, it’s just like, it’s a hook-up culture, it’s just what you do, and, um, so I think it’s important for sexual education but a lot of people don’t understand what consent is and if you haven’t said no, then it’s a yes. And so, if no one’s explaining that, it’s important to know that an absence of a no is not a yes.*

She also said, “We suck at sexual education in the school system. Um, we teach abstinence, but I think if we could start introducing consent on, like adolescent sex and adult sex, completely different.” While the SAPES program is directed at college student-athletes, Amy makes the point that many students come to college without the knowledge of consent or sex education. This information is a key program component for first year student-athletes. Healthy sex education also prepares student-athletes for conversations around sex, leading to better awareness of sexual assault. As Nicole said, “It doesn’t matter what the conversation looks like, it matters that it’s being had.” She said it is important that student-athletes are aware of healthy sexual behaviors and attitudes, so they know that sexual assault “is not an occupational hazard of having sex and the hook-up culture.” This sentiment is echoed by Rebecca, who gave an example of a friend’s sexual experiences with the blurry lines of healthy sex attitudes, consent, and the hook-up culture. She said:
So those kinds of, my experiences, those are just, I could just keep going...with things, like one of my friends saying that um, she finally slept with a guy she was seeing. Like, “Oh, why’d you sleep with him, why did you have sex with him?” And she’s like, “You know, I was tired of saying no.”

These blurry elements of consent, healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors, and sexual assault are often blurred in the absence of sex education. This is a critical element in the curriculum presented in SAPES.

The third element of the SAPES curriculum, on what student-athletes should be learning, focuses specifically on women. Education provided to women as potential victims is considered to be risk reduction programming, based on the idea that the only person who can prevent an assault from happening is the perpetrator. However, women (and other potential victims) can take steps to reduce their risk of sexual assault. For example, James said, “Um, but yeah, for females, the biggest thing is not putting your drink down. Just little stuff like that can keep you safe from sexual assault.” However, Nicole saw this type of education in a more empowering way. She said:

Um, kind of like standing together and protecting each other and I remember that was kinda like the first time any conversation like that ever made me feel like anything but a potential victim. You know, and it kind of made us feel empowered.

This is supported by recent research, in which a program tested the efficacy of a rape resistance program for women at a Canadian university. The program provided female participants with the skills to assess risk from potential perpetrators, including acquaintances; to acknowledge dangerous situations; and to engage in self-defense (Senn, et al., 2015). Empowering women through risk reduction or rape resistance techniques should not go unnoticed by sexual assault prevention educators executing the SAPES curriculum.
The fourth and final element of the SAPES curriculum is bystander intervention. Bystander intervention programs educate both men and women to intervene before a potential sexual assault occurs. As potential witnesses, or “bystanders,” they are taught safe and effective ways to intervene in incidents occurring among friends, acquaintances, or strangers (Banyard, et al., 2007). However, to truly be a preventative measure, bystander intervention programs must take the approach

…that all members of the community have a role in shifting norms to prevent violence. These programs draw from a common literature on why and how bystanders intervene. The bystander model includes tools and ideas for action and strongly encourages each person to make a difference. (Gibbons, 2013, p. 5)

It is not enough to simply intervene by taking an intoxicated friend home. According to Berkowitz (2002), effective bystander intervention models aim to shift norms on what is acceptable behavior for potential perpetrators, as well as bystanders. These shifting views on acceptable societal behavior uphold the paradigm model presented in Chapter Four, in that both societal views and participant views on sexual assault behaviors are changing.

It is important to note that bystander intervention programs should not treat all men as potential perpetrators. According to Foubert and Newberry (2006), most rape prevention programs assume male participants to be treated as potential rapists, despite the fact that “programs assuming men to be potential rapists are unlikely to achieve desired outcomes” (p. 134). However, bystander intervention programs that aim to “influence men by appealing to beliefs they are shown to have about being potential helpers” are deemed more effective (p. 134). There are a variety of bystander intervention models, such as the Green Dot campaign and the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program, that are detailed and explored by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center
(Bystander intervention, 2014). Athletic departments that choose to implement the SAPES curriculum may choose a bystander intervention that best suits their needs.

**When.** The next component of the SAPES model program addresses *when* student-athletes should receive sexual assault prevention education. First, all incoming athletes should receive education, if for no other reason than as an orientation to the university, the athletic department, and relevant policies and procedures. But more importantly, it is critical to address sexual assault early in student-athletes’ careers (i.e., during freshman orientation) as younger student-athletes had more rape-supportive attitudes (Sawyer, et al., 2002).

Second, student-athletes should receive targeted sexual assault education. Anderson and Whiston (2005) demonstrated that “programs that included more than one topic appeared to be less effective than more focused programs, which may indicate that more in-depth programming produces better outcomes than sessions that cover multiple topics more superficially” (p. 383). Thus, sexual assault education should not be an add-on or afterthought to other programming, combined into an alcohol awareness program or crammed onto the end of a long NCAA compliance meeting. As mentioned in Chapter Four, participants found such tactics to be an ineffective element of education. For example, Michael said:

> It seems like it’s a lot of information to process at once because it typically gets lumped in with drugs and alcohol, um, and those other kinds of abuses. So it seems like it is lumped in with, there are things that seem completely separate, while they might have some correlation, like these things happened with the influence of these specific things, I think that it should be a separate thing and um, it’d be easier to break them up anyways you’re not sitting there for an hour or two hours listening to these things.
His last sentence touches on the last element of when SAPES programming should take place.

The more time devoted the sexual assault prevention education, the better. It is best, however, to provide programming over a long period of time. This ongoing education is known as saturation. “Saturation” provides ongoing prevention programs over a sustained period of time (e.g., programming once a week throughout the semester), where as “sprinkling” provides a one-time only prevention program (e.g., a presentation during first-year orientation). Research has consistently shown the effectiveness of saturation, particularly through semester-long programming (see Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Flores & Hartlaub, 1998). In addition to the saturation model of ongoing programming, male student-athletes may need a “higher dose” of programming (i.e., longer programs) than the general student body (Moynihan & Banyard, 2008). Shorter presentations made more often avoid the pitfall pointed out by Michael who said student-athletes will start to lose focus after “an hour or two hours listening to these things.” SAPES programming could therefore be presented in, for example, four 30-minute presentations with the football team, perhaps once a week for a month, instead of one two-hour presentation during the first week of school. Thus, it is recommended that a saturation model be implemented through SAPES.

Where. It is important to consider where SAPES will take place, paying attention to such things as the atmosphere, setting and environment. Participants did not necessarily address where sexual assault prevention education should take place. However, Jason combined many components of small groups, timing, as well as setting, when he said:
It’s tough in a large setting. Because, I would say, when you get that many people and they’re tired and hungry and wanna go home, their minds are probably in other places. And then, I would also say that, you get, you get one or two unruly people in the audience that wanna, wanna disrupt the learning event, and it, it’s just contagious. So, you’ve gotta be careful in the environment that you use.

There is not very much in the literature that addressed location for programming.

However, it is recommended that sexual assault education programs should be conducted in a space that provides more “authority” (e.g., a classroom) rather than one that is “comfortable” (e.g., a locker room or study hall) as it lends more credence to the program (Moynihan & Banyard, 2008).

**Why.** A Zero Tolerance Approach: Sexual Assault Prevention Education for Student-Athletes is a comprehensive model program that aims to reduce sexual assault in college athletic departments. It will help to create and maintain elements of a Zero Tolerance Culture, particularly preventing sexual assault through educating student-athletes and creating a strong message that sexual assault is not acceptable. As demonstrated by the Sexual Assault Prevention Paradigm for Athletic Departments, due to shifting views on and varied educational experiences with sexual assault, student-athletes’ views on sexual assault are shifting and it is no longer seen as a black and white issue. As such, there is now the necessity for a more nuanced approach to education. When student-athletes receive an education that is more complex than a “one size fits all” approach (e.g., a complex program like SAPES), athletic departments are likely to shed the environments of a Checkbox Culture or a Rape Culture.

**How.** The last element in the SAPES curriculum addresses how former student-athletes should be educated. Three main findings appeared in participant responses, which are supported by the literature. First, it is important to have educators who
understand the landscape of college athletics, particularly the different challenges faced by student-athletes (Davis & Jackson, 2000). These educators should be charismatic, able to engage with student-athletes, and seen as experts in the field. An example of an ineffective educator came from Rebecca:

_I remember too, whoever was leading it, it felt like someone who’d been a PE coach or administrative position or like, really doesn’t know what they’re talking about, so much. It wasn’t someone who was really charismatic or, like, it was someone from athletics who just, who didn’t know, they didn’t bring in a speaker._

Karen also suggested that, since sexual assault is such a “messy” and “uncomfortable” topic, it is important to have an “expert” discuss the issue with student-athletes.

Another example of an effective educator is a survivor. Of the former student-athletes who participated in prevention programs on their campuses, those who attended programs with survivor speakers had the best recollections. When describing a presentation by a survivor, James said:

_You know, a lot of athletes don’t take anything seriously, the baseball team, guys will sit on their phones and everything, but it seemed like during that program, everyone’s eyes were glued on her. It was an emotional thing for her and it was just, no one was talking, it was dead silent. And when she got done talking, everyone just stood up and filed out. It was not really an applause, everyone was just like, “Wow.”_

He also used the word “vivid” to describe her presentation on multiple occasions. Paul also told of a survivor speaking about her sexual assault. He said, “There was one, I remember, where they actually had a victim of sexual assault come in and speak…that one definitely had more of an impact because it was hearing a first person perspective.”

Even if participants did not attend a presentation by a survivor, like the ones for Paul or James, they suggested it. For example:
Amy: [People] like to connect with a human being. They like to see a person, they like to see and hear stories, you know, that’s why, like at church, you have testimonies. You know? It’s, we love to hear a story. And, so if it can be illustrated through that story [it will be impactful].

Karen: I think for me, personally, when, when you show a more personal side to it, it hits home. ‘Cause I was so detached, nothing had ever happened to me, or any of my close friends, and I wasn’t really thinking it was going to happen. Um, but like I said, as time went on, at school, and these stories would pop up, about people you know, or friends, or friends of friends, or whatever. You, you become concerned. And I think if they sort of made it more personal, and found a way to, like, make it hit home more. I think people would be more willing to listen. At least, at least I would anyway, personally.

Julie: Like if we would’ve had, um, like one of those mandatory things and it was a real person talking about his or her real story, about something like that, that would affect me more than a poster.

Rebecca recalled elements of another effective program about drunk driving, making an analogy to sexual assault programming:

And he was this highly charismatic speaker that came and talked to the athletic department about drunk driving and that has still impacted me, I still really remember a lot of what he was saying that, um, but we had never that version with sexual assault. So we never had someone who was really an expert or someone who was really articulate or who could have that charisma to connect with the athletes to talk about those kind of complex issues. Um, so I don’t think there was ever anything that we actually received that would be effective, that was actually getting through to the athletes.

Lastly, Michael suggested a survivor speaker, while acknowledging the challenges that may arise with this strategy:

Why don’t they put a rape victim in front of these athletes? Why don’t they have someone this has happened to, come and say, this athlete, this person, in this spot, whether it’s a swimmer or a cheerleader or a football player or a basketball player, any sport at all, it doesn’t matter...I know it’s, it’d be very difficult to find someone willing to speak on this matter, but I feel like it might have more an impact.

Many universities or local rape crisis centers have survivors who are willing to speak about their story. It is suggested that those implementing SAPES work with on-campus or
off-campus sexual assault response organizations to seek out a survivor story to incorporate into education.

If a survivor is not available to speak in person, a movie or video may supplement the rest of the curriculum. For example, *The Hunting Ground*, a 2015 documentary about sexual assault on college campuses, features the survivor stories of multiple men and women throughout the country. Clocking in at 90 minutes, however, *The Hunting Ground* may be too long to show in its entirety, though that would be most effective. Another video option is an episode of ESPN’s *Outside the Lines*, which tells the story of how the University of Missouri’s Derrick Washington, a football player, sexually and physically assaulted four women on campus. Two of them tell their stories in this 13-minute video that is readily available on YouTube. Survivor stories, whether in person or via video, are critical in engaging student-athletes in SAPES programming.

Another suggestion on how to engage student-athletes in sexual assault prevention education is through creating active learning strategies in place of passive lectures (Banyard, et al., 2007). This sentiment was echoed by James. In praising the survivor story presentation, he also criticized traditional presentations:

‘Cause it was just definition based. It was like, here’s a slide, here’s what you should and shouldn’t do…So it wasn’t as effective, it was like, here’s a number you can call and everyone’s just on their phones, you know, messing around or whatever. But hers [survivor story] was dialed in.

Amy suggested watching videos together and summarizing in small groups, then reporting back to the whole group. She also said education programming participants could act out various role play situations to help define sexual assault and consent. Similarly, James suggested case study scenarios to help student-athletes learn the material
in a more effective, engaging way. In addition to simply providing case studies or scenarios, it is also important to ensure those case studies and scenarios relate to the actual experiences of the audience of the program.

Case studies or scenarios were used in the education programs that Paul attended. However, his story illustrates the need for small group or team education, as he found the scenarios ineffective. Here is the exchange we had on this topic:

Paul: *Like, it could’ve been a meeting for the whole student population was the stuff that like felt was more in tune with us than like when they start listing specific examples, like, something that would happen to a football player, not a volleyball player.*
Kristy: Okay. I think I can guess, but what would be an example? That would be more geared towards a football player?
Paul: *Uh, I mean, just like, circumstances of examples they used. Like, certain parties that they would be at that, like, I would never see myself being in. Or just like, scenarios like, examples where like, I, I never see myself in that situation, so…*

When I probed further on the scenarios, he said:

*Yeah, it’s just like, they always say things like that or, this isn’t really towards sexual assault but I remember something, uh, I don’t remember what the meeting was about, and it was about using condoms and you have to be careful, like have your own, because girls might try to poke holes in it to, ‘cause you’re gonna be a millionaire someday. Like, right after you graduate. And I’m like, well, maybe farther down the road, but I’m not gonna be a millionaire after graduation, so…*

As stated by Jackson and Davis (2000), football and men’s basketball players face different scrutiny and public attention. Therefore, the education they receive should be targeted differently than the sexual assault prevention education received by someone like Paul, who did not see the scenarios related to being a millionaire upon graduation as relevant to him.

Engaging and expert speakers, such as survivors of sexual assault, combined with active learning strategies, are key to *How* the SAPES program should be implemented.
This complements the five other elements of the SAPES curriculum: (1) *Who* should be targeted for education; (2) *What* should they be educated on; (3) *When* should education occur; (4) *Where* should education take place; and (5) *Why* should SAPES be implemented. The last element, *How* they should be educated, provides a well-rounded curriculum for any athletic department to help create and maintain a Zero Tolerance Culture. The next two sections address limitations of this study and future research directions.

**Limitations**

This study provided an exploration of the ways in which former student-athletes understand sexual assault, as well as their perceptions of their athletic department’s response to occurrences and prevention. Due to the nature of qualitative research, generalizability was not feasible with the responses from this sample. What was learned from these respondents is genuinely helpful to the athletic departments studied, despite the fact that other athletic departments may not universally utilize their responses. However, it did provide pertinent insight on the kinds of questions that can elucidate the weaknesses of the current sexual assault prevention programming and direct future programming. Further, monetary constraints and time constraints did not allow for prolonged engagement in the field, often considered to be a mark of validity with qualitative data (Lather, 2007), despite other measures of validity.

Other limitations may include the memory and/or recall of participants. As I interviewed former student-athletes who graduated between 2009 and 2014, some of them may have experienced issues with remembering details about sexual assault during their time as intercollegiate student-athletes. For example, Rebecca attended WU from
2005 to 2009. Her first semester in college was nearly 10 years ago. However, the issue of memory is not necessarily bad. The fact that some participants, such as Rebecca, can recall specific details about some programming (i.e., the “charismatic speaker” on drunk driving), and cannot recall much about sexual assault, is telling in and of itself. This points to education that was not truly effective or long lasting if participants cannot remember it one, five, or 10 years later.

**Future Research**

As noted throughout Chapter One and the literature review, there is a definitive gap in the literature on sexual assault within college athletics. This study attempted to fill a gaping hole with a very small plug, but there are still three major areas of consideration for future research.

First, the question still remains whether or not male student-athletes perpetrate sexual assault at higher rates than their non-athlete peers. Criticisms addressed in the literature (Crosset, 1999; Koss & Cleveland, 1996) still remain, such as needing additional data, including qualitative; desiring more consistent methodology; and wanting stronger theoretical frameworks that do more than fall back on hypermasculinity and rape culture to explain male student-athlete perpetration.

Second, there is still a lack of understanding and knowledge about the occurrence of sexual assault within athletics. This might be addressed through quantitative methods, such a survey. Many universities are undertaking campus climate surveys to assess the occurrence of sexual assault at their institutions. It would be wise for these surveys to include a section on athletics, or for athletic departments themselves to administer their own version of a campus climate study. This could help address the lack of information
about how many student-athletes experience sexual assault and how many experience
peretration by another student-athlete.

Third, there is no information on how sexual assault impacts student-athletes,
particularly when combined with the stress of being an elite competitor at the Division I
level. If a student-athlete is assaulted, does he or she seek help? When? In what ways?
Does the experience affect their performance on the field or in the classroom? How might
these questions be answered differently if the perpetrator is a fellow athlete? These are
questions that remain, as none of the participants in this study characterized themselves
as survivors of sexual assault while competing as an athlete.


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Appendix A: Interview Protocol
Interview Notes v1

[Informed consent as approved by IRB] – Include purpose of the study!

With your permission, I would like to voice record the interview. I may also take a few handwritten notes. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Start recorder.

Part I/Interview I

1. Demographics
   a. Name
   b. Age
   c. Current city of residence
   d. Hometown
   e. High school, graduation year

2. I understand you attended [X] university. Tell me about how you came to play [sport] there.
   a. Probe for sporting experiences: how long played, other sports played, what levels, position, recruiting, etc.
3. When did you graduate/leave [X] university?
   a. If left before graduating, why?

4. What do you do now?
   a. Probe for information on current job.

**Part II/Interview I**

5. Please describe sexual assault.
   a. How would you *define* sexual assault?

6. Describe a scenario that would constitute sexual assault.
   a. Probe for other/more scenarios.

7. What are the necessary components of sexual assault?

8. What has informed your definition and knowledge of sexual assault?
   a. i.e., peers, campus education programs, TV/media, presentations in classes

9. What is your experience with sexual assault?
   a. Know a survivor?

**Part III/Interview II**

10. What do you know about sexual assault within the athletic department at [X] university?
    a. i.e., occurrence, response, policies

11. How does sexual assault impact the lives of student-athletes at [X] university?
    a. i.e., personal life, academics, athletics

12. What does the athletic department do to address sexual assault?
    a. i.e., programs, policies, posters, education
       i. Do you believe these are effective?
1. **How?**

13. What support from the athletic department is necessary to provide an optimal, sexual assault-free environment for student-athletes?

   a. i.e., services, resources, programs, policies, attitudes

14. Is there anything you’d like to revisit?

15. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

**Reminder: avoid WHY questions (Holloway & Jefferson, 1997)**

*Thank participant. Provide information and referrals.*