

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF STUDENT ATHLETES

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# STATISTICS

- 21.8% of all respondents had had sexual intercourse with persons in positions of authority
- 8.6% of responding athletes experienced forced sexual intercourse in the sporting context
- Inappropriate Female-athlete Male-coach relations were the most commonly reported incidents

*Survey of Canada's high performance and recently retired Olympic athletes*

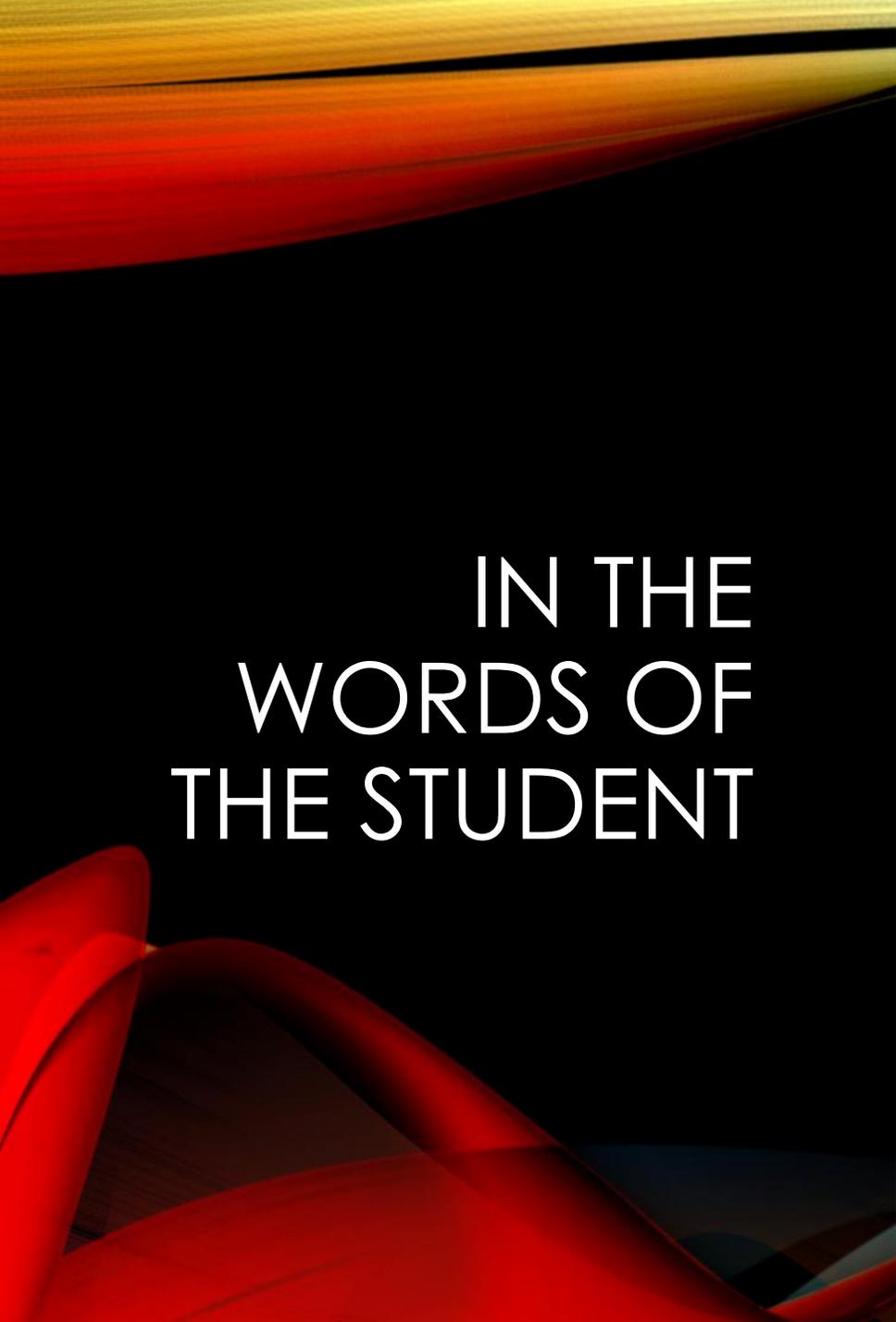
*Kirby and Greaves (1996)*

# HARASSMENT

- Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Can occur separately or be a part of abuse.
- Romantic and/or sexual relationships between coaches and athletes are regarded as an abuse of professional ethics, status and power.

# HARASSMENT

- Including “*Ragging*” denies people the right to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- On a personal level, harassment can affect a student’s health, athletic performance, learning and self-esteem. It can result in anti-social and violent behaviour, and personal & family problems.
- It contributes to low team morale, increases turnover of volunteers and staff, increases insurance and legal costs and tarnishes sport’s image in the community.



# IN THE WORDS OF THE STUDENT

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*Once when some male athletes were harassing a passing woman...*

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When the female athletes complained, the **coach** told them they were **too sensitive**.

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# HARASSMENT

- *Not everyone perceives behaviour the same way.*
- *There will always be a subjective element.*
- *This makes it difficult to clearly prescribe preferred norms of behaviour for coaches, athletes and other participants in sport.*

# GUIDELINES FOR BEHAVIOUR

- Would I do this or say this if my significant other were present? (for example, my spouse, partner, boyfriend or girlfriend)
- Would I say this or do this to an athlete if the athlete's parents were present?
- Would I want another person to do this or say this to someone I cared about, such as my son or daughter?
- Would I want to be seen on TV or in the newspaper doing this or saying this?
- As a male coach I am comfortable interacting with female athletes a certain way – for example, by giving them a neck rub or a hug. Would I be as comfortable interacting with male players, or other males, the same way?



## SEXUAL ABUSE

is the involvement of a child in sexual activities that the child cannot comprehend, for which the child is developmentally unprepared and cannot give consent, and that violate the law and social taboos of society.

AAP 1999

# SEXUAL ABUSE

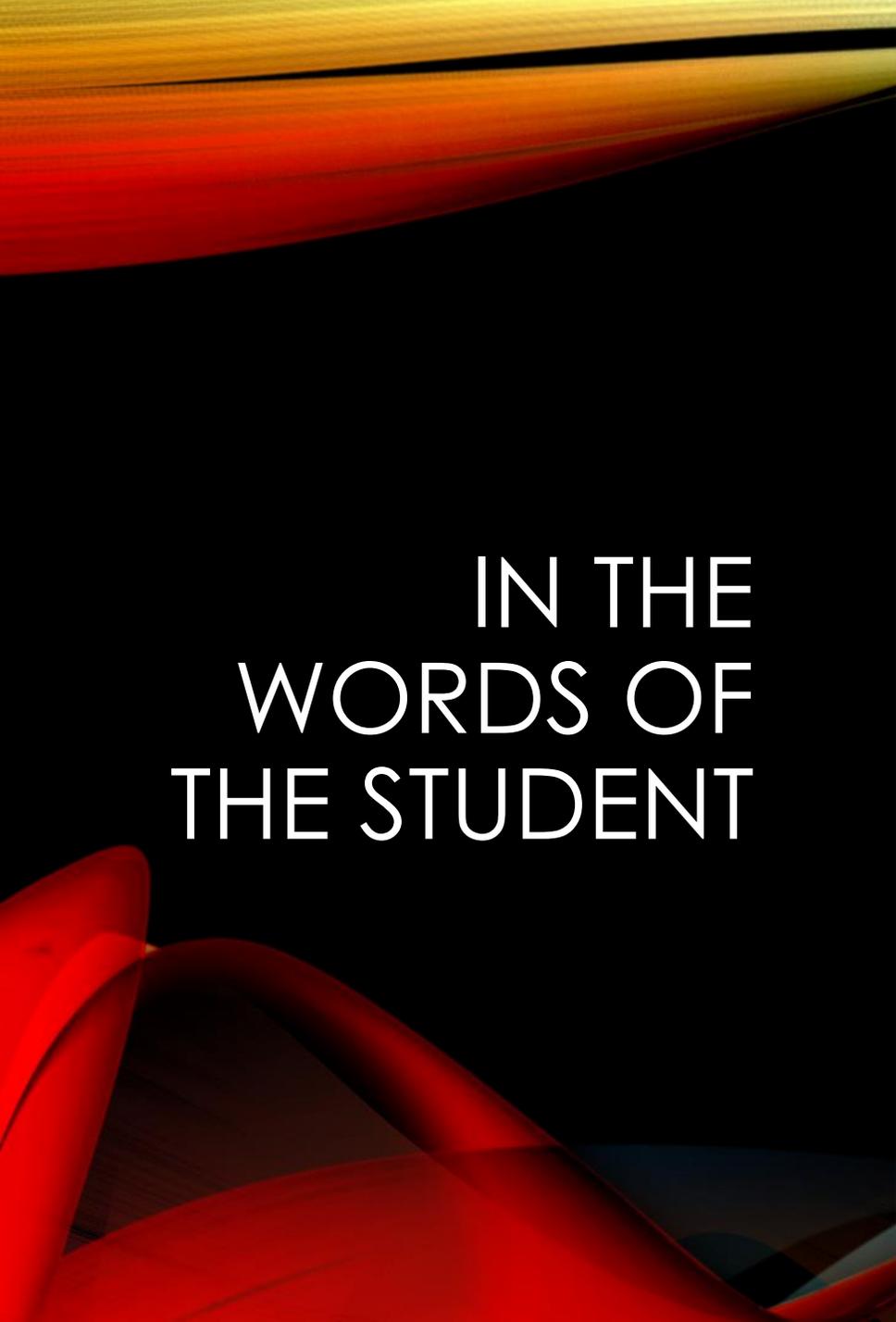
MAY BE

- TOUCHING- oro-genital, anal, genital
- NON-TOUCHING- voyeurism, exhibitionism, or pornography

# SEXUAL GROOMING

- Stage 1: **Target** the Victim
- Stage 2: Gain the victim's **trust**
- Stage 3: Fill a **need**
- Stage 4: **Isolate** the Child
- Stage 5: **Sexualize** the relationship
- Stage 6: Maintain **control**

**Dr. Micheal Welner**  
**Forensic Psychiatrist**



IN THE  
WORDS OF  
THE STUDENT

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When I was **13 years old** I had a swim instructor in his twenties.

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*He would repeatedly tell me **I was sexy.***

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He eventually got in trouble for messing with a preteen girl.

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He's not in coaching any more.

# SIA : STAGE OF IMMINENT ACHIEVEMENT

- Young people on the **brink of success** are often most vulnerable.
- Athletes may be more susceptible to the *grooming process* which precedes actual sexual abuse when they have **most at stake** in terms of their sporting careers, that is when they have reached a high standard of performance but are *just below the elite level*.
- Athletes at "**the stage of imminent achievement**" are those aiming for scholarships, sponsorships, and hopes of Olympic glory.
- Many fear losing these dreams if they *report a coach* or *sever an abusive relationship* that creates winning results.

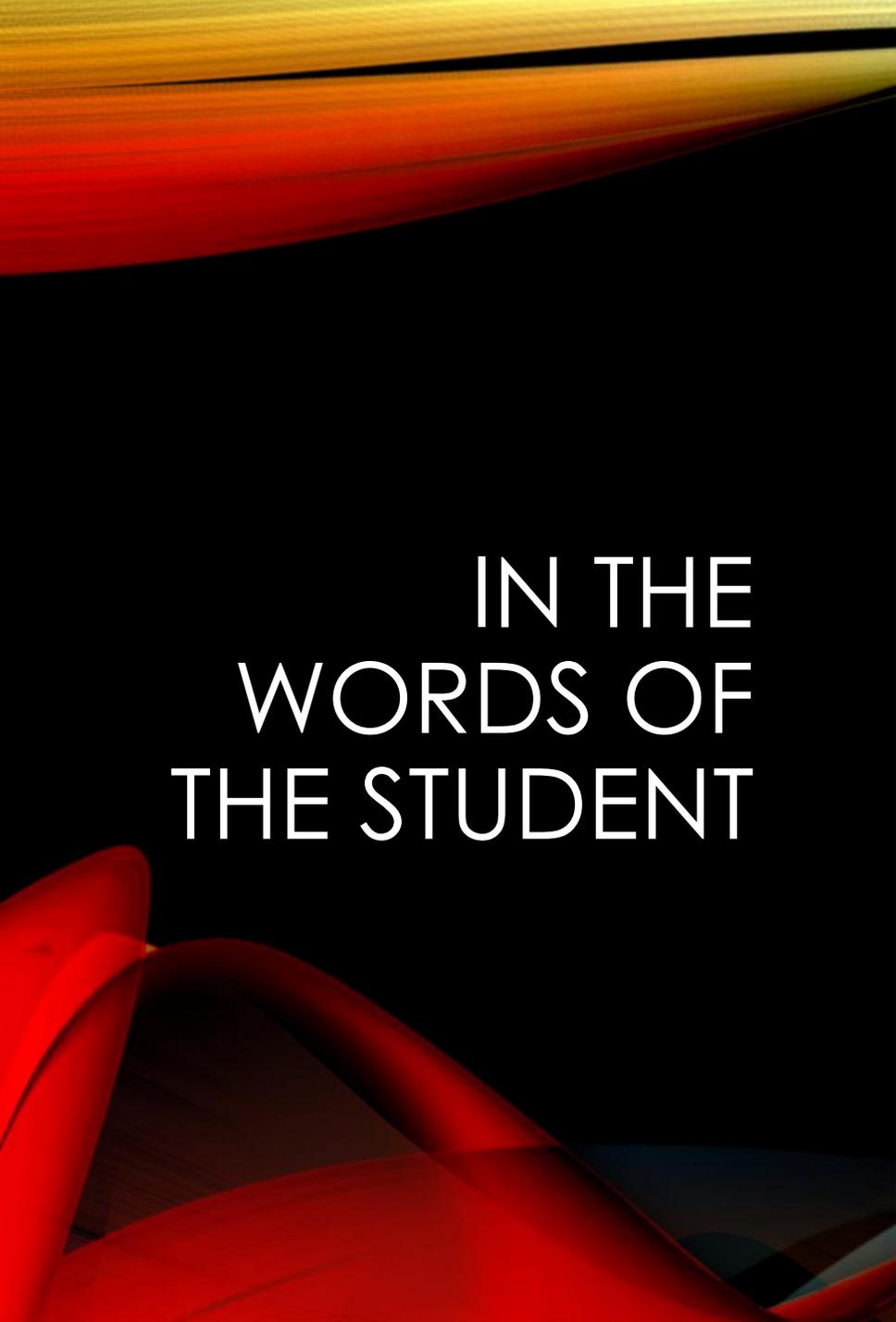
Professors Celia Brackenridge and Sandra Kirby

# SIA : STAGE OF IMMINENT ACHIEVEMENT

- CHRONOLOGICAL AGE:
  - based on DOB
  - Poor determinant of strength or physical development
  - POORLY correlates to puberty and sexual maturity
  
- SPORTS AGE:
  - *Novice, Competitive, Elite Development and Elite.*
  - reflect the increasing intensity of the athletic career pattern
  - a concept useful only within the sporting world

## SIA : STAGE OF IMMINENT ACHIEVEMENT

- Athletes whose SIA coincides with or precedes their age of sexual maturity are at **greater risk** of sexual abuse in sport than
- Those whose SIA or peak sport age follow their age of sexual maturity



# IN THE WORDS OF THE STUDENT

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boyfriend

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*If he doesn't want me on the team,  
**I'm out!** It was awkward,*

***I could not reject him.***

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I faked a boyfriend just to stop him from blocking me getting on the team.

# ABUSE / HARASSMENT IS NOT A PRIVATE MATTER



# BUILDING RESILIENCE

Characteristics of **resilience** such as:

- personality of the student athlete
- relationship to assailant
- **a caring adult figure**
- community well-being
- **access to social services and support**  
make a difference to outcome

Thomlison, 1997



# POLICY GUIDELINES

## WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTRATORS CHARGED WITH HIRING AND SUPERVISING COACHES

Officials who are responsible for the administration and oversight of coaches and athletic programs should:

# 1. FORMULATE A WRITTEN POLICY

that details appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

The policy should clearly define sexual harassment and explain the sanctions for sexual harassment.

While counselling for a coach or other athletic personnel may be appropriate in some circumstances, counselling is not a sanction.

Job descriptions for coaching staff and volunteers should address the issues of sexual abuse and sexual contact.

## 2. DEVELOP AND DISTRIBUTE CLEAR RULES

that prohibit coach-athlete dating and/or sexual relationships.

Periodically distribute these rules to coaches, other athletic personal and students.

These rules should specify the length of time that should pass after the cessation of a coach-athlete relationship before dating might occur.

The length of time specified should fit the age, social and psychological characteristics of athletes in the administrative setting

### 3. PROVIDE COACHES, ATHLETIC PERSONNEL AND STUDENTS WITH INFORMATION

training and continuing education

about how power, dependence, “love“ and sexual attraction can influence coach-athlete relationships.

Upper-level administrators need to **take responsibility** for organizing educational and training sessions for coaches, staff and students in cooperation with those persons whose responsibility is to handle sexual harassment for the school or college.

## 4. DEVELOP A COMPLAINT PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

Athletes should be given multiple opportunities to report cases of sexual harassment to neutral persons, e.g. guidance counsellors, school psychologists and school nurses.

Procedural guidelines should also recognize that, in addition to needing direction and assistance in order to process the complaint itself, victims may benefit from personal counselling.

Counselling is not a substitute for the complaint process

# OUR CHALLENGE

## **Lend a voice** to the issue of student athlete harassment / abuse

- Research
- Protocol Development
- Policy Guidelines
- Student Education

## **Fill the gap** between training and the demands of reality

- Specialist training for coaches, physicians, para-medical personnel, guidance counsellors, social workers, school administrators