

Title: What is a girl worth?: Gender-Based Violence & Accountability in SportsWorld

How much is a little girl worth? How much is a young woman worth?...

Larry is a hardened and determined sexual predator. I know this first-hand. At age 15, when I suffered from chronic back pain, Larry sexually assaulted me repeatedly under the guise of medical treatment for nearly a year. He did this with my own mother in the room, carefully and perfectly obstructing her view so she would not know what he was doing. His ability to gain my trust and the trust of my parents, his grooming and carefully calculated brazen sexual assault was the result of deliberate, premeditated, intentional and methodological patterns of abuse – patterns that were rehearsed long before I walked through Larry’s exam room door and which continue to be perpetrated I believe on a daily basis for 16 more years, until I filed the police report.

— *Rachael Denhollander’s victim impact statement about Larry Nassar (2018)*

Introduction

After listening to over 200 victim impact statements, Judge Rosmarie Aquilina read a letter penned by ex-USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor, Larry Nassar, to the courtroom. After hearing the words of the women and girls he abused, Nassar wrote:

I was a good doctor because my treatments worked and those patients that are now speaking out were the same ones that praised and came back over and over. And referred family and friends to see me. The media convinced them that everything I did was wrong

and bad. They feel I broke their trust. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned
(Kalmbacher, 2018).

Nassar abused women and girls for over 25 years. But he's not the only abuser in this case. He was protected, or enabled as Guiora (2020) describes it, by SportsWorld (Author #5 2014) because, as he himself noted in the statement quoted above, he brought value to the organization. In short, he was worth more in the eyes of USA Gymnastics than the hundreds of girls he sexually abused. The leaders of USA Gymnastics that turned a blind eye, the detectives that covered for him, the administrators at Michigan State University that buried the accusations, and the coaches who failed to believe what their athletes were telling them, all contributed to the abuse of over 200 women and girls (Guiora, 2020). His case further highlights the role of complicit people and institutions (Guiora, 2020) in his "reign of terror" (Kaplan, 2022). Though the case of Larry Nassar is unique in its scope, it is not atypical of the systematic protection of an abuser by SportsWorld and is instead symptomatic of the ways in which gender-based violence (GBV) is handled in sports and sanctioned (or not) by the governing bodies that regulate the institution of SportsWorld.

As the title of the paper suggests, this paper interrogates "worth," specifically, the worth of the athletes, coaches and athletic staff whose talents build the economic, cultural and social value of SportsWorld and the relative value of the thousands of people they abuse, specifically through acts of GBV. As our empirical analysis will demonstrate, in the calculus of SportsWorld, players, coaches and staff have perceived value that is worth protecting at virtually any cost, even at the expense of the victims/survivors of their violence. And, though many of the cases that we utilize in this paper to illustrate GBV in SportsWorld involve men who perpetrate violence

against girls and women, the focus of our analysis is not gender, but rather the role that perceived value and worth play in accountability, specifically the imposition of sanctions in cases of reports of GBV. Though gender interacts in important ways with value and worth (see especially Author #3, 2022), some of the cases we analyze and others we highlight in this paper include those in which boys and men are the victims/survivors of GBV perpetrated by the men who coached them or provided them with medical care.

In this economy of value, GBV is constructed as minimally harmful. As the late Bobby Knight, legendary coach of the Indiana University men's basketball team once proclaimed, "I think that if rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it" (Moran, 1988). But it's not just that sexual abuse is minimally harmful. In the economy of believability, women and girls are not believable and therefore neither their bodies nor the harm done to them is valued (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). It is well documented that in our criminal and civil legal systems, accountability is tied directly to perceived value of the harm done, the person who harmed, and the person harmed (Authors #3 & #5, 2021, 2023; Baldus, et. al., 1983), and this is especially true in cases of GBV (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). Sailofsky extends this claim to the world of elite sports. As demonstrated by research conducted with professional sport administrators, Sailofsky (2023, 10) finds "that a player's talent level and/or productivity as a performer is important to how criminal behaviors are evaluated." In other words, an athlete's athletic ability prevails over their actions as perpetrators of GBV.

Thus, not only are victims not valued or believed, but perpetrators of GBV in the elite world of sports are not held accountable via the structures of accountability available in SportsWorld. In this paper, we interrogate and empirically document the role that SportsWorld plays in perpetuating GBV by enabling (Guiora, 2020) the abuse perpetrated by athletes, players,

and coaches. We focus our analysis specifically on examining accountability tools that exist within SportsWorld in cases of misconduct, including accusations of GBV and measure the level of consequences and sanctions levied by various institutions and governing bodies in SportsWorld. Further, we utilize the concepts of value and worth in SportsWorld to theorize these findings.

Literature Review

SportsWorld as an Institution

At its most basic level, sports are about entertainment and fun. Beginning in the early 20th century and escalating significantly in the first decades of the 21st century, the institution of SportsWorld has become increasingly monetized and commodified with enormous potential for economic gain for both individuals and organizations (Author#5, 2014). As (Author #5, 2014) argues, SportsWorld is more than games played among youth, collegiate and professional athletes, it also includes the constellation of entities that surround and support the world of sport, including the building of billion-dollar stadiums, luxury travel, and broadcast rights that come with lucrative contracts. Furthermore, SportsWorld is also an institution that intersects with other social institutions and is deeply embedded within both U.S. and global cultures. This is evidenced by the mainstreaming of certain sports and certain competitions. For example, in the United States there are sports traditions or rituals, such as watching NFL games on Thanksgiving Day or weekends, watching college football over the New Year's holidays, and gathering around the television, computer or tablet to watch women and men compete in March Madness basketball games each spring. Globally, every four years, people gather in person, in a pub, or around a streaming device to consume the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

Contemporary SportsWorld is a product of modern global capitalist expansion (Author #5, 2010a). One needs to look no further to see evidence of global capitalist expansion than the sport of American football, at both the professional and intercollegiate levels. More than twenty-five NFL football games have been played in the iconic Wembley Stadium in the United Kingdom since 2007. Intercollegiate teams have done so as well, along with boxing and wrestling. Baseball is also a global sport (Author #1, 2020, Janis, 2019). Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) illustrate this global reach through their analysis of the impact of FIFA World Cup at the micro and macro levels, economically, politically, socially, and in terms of GBV, specifically sex work.

In the United States (but also globally), the survival of professional sports organizations such as the Men's National Basketball Association (MNBA), National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Hockey League (NHL), and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), is tied explicitly to their market value, which is rooted in the individual player labor market value (Takahashi & Horne, 2011). As a result, athletes' performance plays a critical role in not just the success of their team, but also their popularity, and economic value. Though all players have the potential to bring value to their teams, we must acknowledge the gendered nature of their value. Specifically, male athletes who are perceived to bring value to their teams and franchises are rewarded with salaries that can climb into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Collegiately, this means that the “athletic department is the front porch to the university” in which revenue production of the university and its subsequent public image relies primarily on the success (i.e., winning) of the teams in their athletic department, namely, football and men's basketball. In other words, everything associated with the university in some way funnels

through the athletic department; college athletics serves as the entrance point of a university's perceived status. Not only do teams as well as individual athletes generate revenue for colleges and universities, but colleges and universities invest hundreds of millions of dollars into their athletic programs, far more than nearly any academic department; at even the "lowest" level conferences, athletic budgets can approach \$100 million dollars annually, more than 80 percent of which is paid for from the central operating budget of the university (Gaul, 2015).

The economic value of both teams and individual players and coaches, coupled with the huge investment by professional leagues as well as colleges and universities into their sports teams creates conditions such that they (both individuals and teams) must be protected at all costs. As a result, the misconduct of athletes, coaches, and other SportsWorld denizens at both the professional and collegiate level often goes unnoticed, gets ignored, or worse yet, is intentionally covered up.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify GBV as pervasive and a significant threat to public health. The costs associated with GBV are estimated to be 1.5 million dollars globally (UN Women, 2016). GBV includes both sexual and intimate partner violence (Author #3, 2022). While GBV is widespread and anyone can be a victim (Lawson-Freeman, 2023), girls and women experience significantly higher rates and men perpetrate the vast majority (90 percent) of GBV even when boys and men are the victims (Author #3, 2022; Leemis, R., et al., 2022). Worldwide, 33-50 percent of women experienced at least one form of GBV including sexual violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, stalking (Author #3, 2022; Leemis, R., et al., 2022), and street harassment (Kearl,

2010). In 2021, 2.7 million people living in the United States ages 12 and older experienced at least one violent crime with women comprising more than half (53 percent) of victims. Twenty percent of violent crimes committed in 2021 included domestic violence; more than half (52 percent) of reported domestic violence crimes involved intimate partner violence (Thompson & Tapp, 2022). In this wider landscape of GBV, it is no surprise then that GBV is common in SportsWorld. And, the costs of GBV in SportsWorld are both personal (the harm done to individual people) and economic (the costs of monetary settlements and covering up abuse). This paper interrogates the role that the economy of SportsWorld plays in enabling GBV by failing to impose available and relevant sanctions on abusers--athletes, coaches, and staff--accused of perpetrating acts of GBV in the elite world of sports.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in SportsWorld

The study of sport as an institution has its roots in history and philosophy (Coakley, 2021; Messner, 1992; Theberge, 2000). Some of the first sport scholars to study GBV focused on sport as a site for producing and reproducing masculinity (Messner, 1990, 2002; Messner & Sabo, 1990) and this framed their arguments about GBV in sports. As feminist inquiry (hooks, 2000) focused more specifically on not just the systemic but also the institutionalized nature of GBV, more scholars have turned their attention to the institution of sport as a site of inquiry (Author #3 & 5, 2019; Crosset, et al. 1996; Martin, 2016; McCray, 2015; Messner, 2016; Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009).

As we will highlight in this paper, GBV is prevalent in SportsWorld. This prevalence is shaped in part by structures of SportsWorld that are unique (Author #3 & 5, 2019) as well as by the simple fact that SportsWorld is an institution embedded in the same systems on which the

larger society is built, including white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, which as is widely documented, are the system roots of all forms of GBV (Author # 3, 2022; Bumiller, 2008; Sweet, 2021). As Author#5 (2014) has argued, SportsWorld is a mirror of society, so it is not surprising that just as in the general population, athletes are also involved in the criminal legal system (Berkeley Talks, 2022). Somewhat unique to SportsWorld are both its hyper gender-segregation (Author #3, 2022) and, as noted above, its economy of value. As such, it is not surprising that rates of GBV in SportsWorld are equal to or greater than that which occur in the larger society (Leal et al., 2015). For example, Morris (2014) found that rates of GBV that are perpetrated by men in SportsWorld are equal to or in some cases higher than rates perpetrated by non-athlete men of the same age. His analysis revealed that the *most common crimes* for which men in the NFL are arrested are for intimate partner violence (55 percent) and sex offenses (38 percent) (see Figure 1).

[Figure 1 about here: NFL Relative Arrest Rate]

Rates of GBV are not only apparent in professional sports, particularly in the NFL, but at the collegiate level as well. For example, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering (2016), authors of *The Hunting Ground* and director/producers of the award-winning documentary by the same name, found in their examination of rape on college campuses, that though college athletes represent approximately four percent of students on the typical campus, they account for 19 percent of those accused of sexual violence. Not only are athletes committing rape on college campuses at higher rates, but as Benedict (2010) highlights, there seems to be no accountability by the university or fans:

I've been investigating and writing about athletes and crime for more than 15 years. During that time, I've written four books on the subject and looked at more than 1,000 incidents involving college and professional athletes. So it takes a lot to raise my eyebrows. To some degree, I think that's true of most sports fans. We've gotten pretty accustomed to reports of athletes getting in trouble with the law. But 125 cases involving [college] basketball and football players in an eight-month span? That's more than one every other day. Seems to me like the problem is getting worse...Women were the alleged victims in at least 22 of the 125 arrests involving basketball and football players so far this year. That's almost 20 percent. Most of these -- 14 -- involved domestic violence.

But it's not just the prevalence of GBV in SportsWorld that is of concern, it's also the response of SportsWorld when an athlete, coach or other staff member, particularly if they have high status and thus high value, is the perpetrator. And this is especially the case when the abuser is an athlete (Benedict, 1999).

As our quantitative analysis coupled with discussions of individual cases will reveal, players' performance on the field, pitch, ice, or court, play a key role in the success of their team, their popularity, viewership, and profits. Professional athletes and coaches who are top performers are offered multi-year, multi-million-dollar contracts and/or sponsorship deals, and in the case of some high school and collegiate athletes, scholarships or Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) compensation. In order to protect their portfolio, college athletic administrators and professional sports organization owners or managers will safeguard their players or coaches even when they violate player code of conduct or ethics regulations or are accused, arrested, or

charged for a crime such as drug offenses, disorderly conduct, assault, or domestic violence. Anecdotally, the media is filled with examples of incidents in which college and professional athletes are not only *not* held to account in any way for acts of GBV, but investigative journalists detail the lengths to which teams, franchises, leagues and colleges and universities go to protect their members accused of GBV.

While cases of GBV in SportsWorld have been documented by journalists as they come to light, the unique data we analyze (see below Methods section for a detailed account of the data) in this study allows for a more systematic investigation of hundreds of cases of GBV in SportsWorld in every sport— both major and minor— at the college and professional levels. Utilizing a database that catalogs more than 400 cases of GBV in SportsWorld, this paper seeks to interrogate the level of accountability in cases of GBV in SportsWorld as a function of the “worth” of the accused— athlete, coach, or staff member. Specifically, we focus on consequences that are directed and controlled by actors in SportsWorld, and thus measured by internal sanctions, rather than criminal or civil legal sanctions. Additionally, we test for differences by organization/league (MLB, NFL, MNBA, NHL, UFC/Boxing/MMA, NCAA) and race in the rate and types of sanctions administered by organizations in SportsWorld.

Methods

The data for this paper comes from a database that catalogs instances of GBV in SportsWorld housed at the University of Delaware¹. Specifically, the database compiles data on cases in

¹ The Gender-Based Violence in Sport Database is housed at the University of Delaware’s Center for the Study & Prevention of Gender-Based Violence. The database can be found at <https://smithandhattery.com/gbv/>. On that page, there is an option to request the full database. After requesting the database, the database is emailed to the requester either as a csv or excel file. This database is built off of publicly available sources and as a result, permissions are not required.

which athletes were accused of perpetrating GBV, as well as cases in which coaches and staff were accused of abusing athletes or using their professional positions to abuse members of the public, as in the case of Jerry Sandusky at Pennsylvania State University (Kropp, 2014). Though some athletes included in the database are citizens of or play in other countries, the focus of the database is sport franchises (professional leagues and the NCAA) in the United States. The database catalogs cases of GBV that involve actors in SportsWorld that come into public view through local or national news reporting, or popular media, including news feeds, social media posts on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram. Cases are always verified by credible news sources and scholarly articles.

Data for this paper include incidents of GBV perpetrated by athletes, coaches, or athletic staff members across professional and collegiate sports (N=428). Each case cataloged includes the name, race, ethnicity, and gender of the perpetrator, date of the event, the sport they play or coach, the organization they play or work for, the type of violence, the accused's relationship to the victim, the number of victims, the organizational response (if there was one), whether they were charged or convicted, and if they continued to play or coach after the case was reported and investigated.

The database is not an attempt to catalog every case of GBV that touches SportsWorld. That would be impossible because many more cases of GBV occur than are officially reported, and even fewer make it into mainstream media. As such, the database cannot be used to establish the prevalence of GBV relative to other populations, nor can it be used to make broad generalizations to wider populations. That being said, analysis of the database can identify patterns, such as the distribution of cases by status (athlete, coach, staff), by rank (professional versus college), and by sport. The database can also be used, as we do in this paper, to examine

empirical data to analyze the types and presence of consequences for athletes, coaches and staff who are accused of GBV.

Independent and Dependent Variables. The independent variables utilized in this analysis includes the race of the perpetrator (e.g. Black, white, or other race), occupation (e.g. athlete or coach/staff), and organization/league (e.g. MLB, MNBA, NFL/CFL, NHL, NCAA, UFC/Boxing/MMA and Other sports). The dependent variables include the organizational response (e.g. no action taken, suspended from the team, released from the team, fired/resigned, or other) the number of victims/accused, and whether the perpetrator is a serial abuser (e.g. no or yes).

Analysis. Statistical analysis such as descriptive statistics, frequencies, cross-tabulations, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were utilized. Bonferroni post-hoc tests/correction for multiple comparisons was applied after implementing ANOVA. The Bonferroni post hoc test ($p \leq 0.05$) was used to compare means among the race or sport organization/league of perpetrators in the database and the number of victims for significance. Although slightly conservative, the Bonferroni correction was used in order to reduce a type I error (false positive) as well as to adjust the p value for statistical significance. The Bonferroni correction will further illuminate where statistically significant differences exist when examining independent variables with three or more values.

Findings

When examining the demographics of the individuals in the GBV database (see Figure 2), overall, 93.7 percent of perpetrators include athletes and 6.3 percent involve coaches or athletic staff. Nearly all perpetrators are male (98.4 percent) and 83.9 percent *were actively playing on a team during the time period in which they were accused of committing acts of GBV* whereas 16.1 percent were retired at the time of the incident. A majority (87.9 percent) of perpetrators play at the professional level and 11.7 percent are collegiate athletes, coaches or staff. Nearly three-fourths (72.4 percent) of athletes or coaches are Black, 20.1 percent of perpetrators are white, and 7.5 percent are of another race. Slightly more than half (51.9 percent) of perpetrators in the database play football (both at the professional and collegiate level) followed by basketball (19.4 percent), baseball (11.4 percent), boxing/MMA (4.0 percent), Auto Racing/NASCAR (3.7 percent), hockey (2.8 percent), and 13 other sports (6.8 percent).

[Figure 2 about here: Demographics of Perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence]

When examining the data on victim/survivors in the database (see Figure 3), half (50.0 percent) of victims are the perpetrators' current girlfriend, fiancée, or wife and 16.2 percent of victim/survivors are the perpetrators' child/children, mother of their child, or their former girlfriend, fiancée, or wife. The most common form of GBV by accused athletes or coaches is intimate partner violence (51.6 percent) followed by sexual assault (22.2 percent), assault (19.9 percent), rape (1.9 percent), murder (1.2 percent), and four other types of gender-based violence: sexual harassment, indecent exposure, verbal abuse, or kidnapping (3.2 percent).

[Figure 3 about here: Victims of Gender-Based Violence]

As the data in Figure 4 reveal, as demonstrated by our analysis of cases in which there was an accusation of sexual or intimate partner violence, organizational action (e.g. suspended, released, fired, etc.) was taken in half (50.8 percent) of the cases. Overall, in over three-fourths of the cases, regardless of whether the perpetrator was charged, arrested or convicted, the accused athlete or coach *was allowed to remain on the team and continue to work or compete*. Whether an athlete, coach, or staff was suspended, released, or fired also depended on the organization and the race of the perpetrator. For example, as shown in Figure 4, in UFC/Boxing/MMA fewer than one-quarter of cases were perpetrators held accountable and no action was taken by the league. Similarly, in the MNBA and NHL, only one-third (33.3 percent) of athletes or coaches who are perpetrators of GBV faced organizational consequences such as being released or suspended. In contrast, more than half of players or coaches in MLB (58.5 percent) and NFL/CFL (53.6 percent), and 61.2 percent in the NCAA were sanctioned in some way by the respective organization.

[Figure 4 about here: Organizational Response]

While Major League Baseball (MLB) did take action against athletes or coaches who were charged, arrested or convicted of GBV at higher rates (58.5 percent) compared to all other professional sports organizations (this excludes the NCAA), MLB also had the highest rate of allowing players to remain in or return to the organization and continue to work or compete (95.1 percent) following an accusation of sexual or intimate partner violence. For example, former Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer who was suspended for two seasons after serious sexual assault

allegations came to light had his suspension reduced nearly in half from 324 games to 194 games by an independent arbitrator (Harris, 2023). After serving his suspension, Bauer was then reinstated and went on to play in the Japan Central League and Japan Eastern League during the 2023 season. As documented in the database, MLB coach Bobby Cox was accused in 1995 of hitting his wife. While the police arrested him, charges were never filed because his wife refused to press charges (Fitzpatrick, 1995). Cox was never suspended nor was an investigation launched by MLB. Cox went on to manage the Braves for another 15 years. In 2006, Brett Myers, was arrested after abusing his wife outside a bar in Boston, Massachusetts. Myers pitched the next day and continued to play in the MLB for seven more years (Associated Press, 2006). Lastly, in 2021, police arrested Marcell Ozuna for assaulting his ex-wife (Wagner, 2021). While MLB suspended Ozuna for 20-games, fined him \$1.7 million, and mandated that he enters a diversion program, Ozuna played nearly a complete season in 2022 and 2023.

This pattern of accountability at the organizational level is also prevalent in other professional sports. Players such as Deshaun Watson (football), Ben Roethlisberger (football), Antonio Brown (football), Nick Kyrgios (tennis), Connor McGregor (MMA), Alexander Zverev (tennis), Sean Burke (hockey), and Brad Aldrich (hockey) continued to compete or coach after instances of GBV. Not only did many of these athletes and coaches continue to play, but our analysis revealed that many of those arrested, charged, and convicted are serial abusers; 18.5 percent of athletes or coaches in the database were arrested more than once for acts of GBV. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6, white perpetrators and coaches not only have a higher number of victims but are nearly twice (27.9 percent) as likely to be a serial abuser compared to Black perpetrators (16.1 percent) and perpetrators of another race (15.6 percent) (see Figure 8). Additionally, more than one-third (36.8 percent) of coaches and 62.5 percent of

staff are serial abusers compared to only 16.7 percent of athletes. Lastly, across sports, perpetrators in the NCAA not only had a higher mean number of victims compared to MNBA and the NFL/CFL (see Figure 7), but perpetrators of GBV in the NCAA had the highest rate of being a serial abuser (42.0 percent) compared to all other organizations (see Figure 8).

[Figure 5 about here: Mean Number of Victims by Race and Organization]

[Figure 6 about here: Bonferroni Post-hoc Correction: Mean Number of Victims by Race]

[Figure 7 about here: Bonferroni Post-hoc Correction: Mean Number of Victims by
Organization]

[Figure 8 about here: Repeat Perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence by Race & Organization]

Although white athletes and coaches in the database are more likely to have a higher mean number of victims and be a serial abuser, they are less likely to be held accountable by their organization (see Figure 9). For example, overall, action was taken against white athletes or coaches only 44.4 percent of the time. Conversely organizational action was taken against Black athletes or coaches and athletes or coaches of another race more than half the time (52.0 percent and 53.1 percent, respectively). When a white perpetrator was held accountable, they were less likely to be suspended or released from the team and more likely to be fired/resign or have other action taken against them such as a fine or having an investigation launched compared to Black perpetrators.

[Figure 9 about here: Organizational Response by Race]

Lastly, as shown in Figure 10, while white perpetrators were less likely to be charged (59.3 percent) compared to Black (81.2 percent) perpetrators or perpetrators of another race (75.0 percent), white perpetrators were more likely to be convicted. In short, these racialized patterns in organizational responses and consequences are reflected in the larger society wherein there are pronounced racial disparities in arrest, charging, conviction and sentencing (Author #3 & 5, 2021).

[Figure 10 about here: Legal Outcomes by Race]

Discussion

We make these claims here not by mere assertion, but with substantiation. This paper interrogates the presence or absence of accountability— as measured by sanctions internal to SportsWorld— in cases of GBV in order to theorize the relative value of athletes, coaches and staff compared to that of the victims/survivors who were harmed. In addition, our analysis was designed to tease out differences in consequences for accusations of GBV across leagues and the status (race, professional rank) of the accused. As analysis of the data reveal, organizational action was taken against an athlete, coach, or staff member who was accused, arrested, charged, or convicted of GBV slightly more than half (50.6 percent) of the time. Moreover, the vast majority of players, coaches, and staff (86.0 percent) who were accused of GBV were allowed to continue playing or coaching even if they had been sanctioned, arrested, charged *or convicted of a crime*. More specifically, for athletes accused of GBV, 86.9 percent continued to play and

nearly two-thirds (62.5 percent) of coaches continued to coach even after being accused, sanctioned, arrested, charged, or convicted for GBV. Furthermore, each of the staff members in the database, including Robert Anderson, Richard Strauss, Jerry Sandusky, Daniel Snyder, and Larry Nassar, who were collectively accused of harming hundreds of young people, continued to provide coaching or medical assistance to athletes *even after being accused of GBV and reported to their teams or organizations*.

In other words, even when leagues and colleges and universities knew about the accusations and even when they did impose sanctions, in the vast majority of cases they did not prohibit the athlete, coach, or staff member from continuing to work; leaving them with access to those proven to be vulnerable. We provide two illustrations from our analysis of the data, one from professional hockey and one involving college football, one involving a coach and one involving an athlete. These cases clearly demonstrate the value that organizations in SportsWorld place on athletes, coaches, and staff compared to the victims/survivors who had the courage to report and the failure of these same organizations to hold either the perpetrators or themselves accountable to providing a safe space in which to train and compete.

Professional Hockey. In 2010, Kyle Beach, a prospective player on the NHL Chicago Blackhawks reported that video coach Brad Aldrich invited him to his apartment for drinks, sexually assaulted him, and threatened his career to ensure his silence. The Blackhawks organization failed to follow through on the allegations and took no action until after the team won the Stanley Cup. More specifically, Blackhawks executives never reported it to the police and waited three weeks before looking into these allegations. During this time, Aldrich continued to work and even took part in the Stanley Cup championship festivities. Later that year Aldrich

“quietly resigned” with no repercussions. In October 2021, after investigators released their report on the (mis)handling of the sexual assault allegations, two Blackhawks executives, Stan Bowman (General Manager and President of Hockey Operations) and Al MacIsaac, resigned. The Blackhawks were also fined \$2 million (Kaplan, 2021). Since the allegations were not made public, Aldrich went on to work for the University of Notre Dame and then in 2012 worked as the Director of Hockey Operations at Miami University in Ohio. While at Miami University, Aldrich was accused of sexually assaulting a student and a non-student. While a national law firm, Barnes and Thornbub, conducted the investigation for Miami University and found the university acted “appropriately,” the law firm concluded that Miami University did not finish its background check nor did Aldrich provide any references with his resume-including his employment with the Blackhawks. Aldrich was again allowed to resign from this position. Not even a year later, in 2013, while serving as a volunteer coach at Houghton High School, Aldrich was arrested for molesting a 16-year-old player (Morrow, 2021).

College Football. Dick and Ziering (2016) investigated the lack of accountability and the suppression of sexual violence accusations against Florida State University freshmen quarterback Jameis Winston. At the time of the accusation in 2012, Winston was a rising star freshman quarterback on the Florida State University football team. Winston was accused of rape by Erica Kinsman, who was also a student at Florida State University. Though a rape kit collection identified Winston as the rapist, knowledge of the investigation was not made public for nearly a year, during which time Winston was awarded the coveted Heisman Trophy and led Florida State to the National Championship. Chris Smith (2013) at *Forbes* estimated that the profit generated by Winston for Florida State University would be in the tens of millions of dollars.

Several months after winning the National Championship, Winston and his lawyers finally agreed to an on-campus hearing that was conducted in an extremely unusual manner: Florida State University appointed a state judge to oversee the hearing, something that has never been seen in a conduct process on a college campus. After refusing to answer a single question, Winston was found not responsible for raping Erica Kinsman and proceeded to be drafted number one overall in the 2015 NFL Draft.

In January 2016, Erica Kinsman filed a civil lawsuit against Florida State University and Winston, resulting in a \$950,000 settlement for Kinsman. Despite the settlement, it is difficult to argue that the university's initial delay in investigating Winston and concealing this information from the public was unrelated to his role on the football field. In *SportsWorld*, this is typically known as the athletic justice system (Author #3 & 5, 2019) in which athletic departments handle GBV and other misconduct internally in order to protect the athlete and institutional image as well as the profits generated from this performance on the field. In the case of Winston, and other collegiate athletes, handling accusations internally often results in no meaningful sanctions against the athlete (or coach or staff member) who perpetrates the abuse. As noted above, the cost, however, of Kinsman's lawsuit, was borne by Florida State University.

As demonstrated in the Winston case, student-athletes are often able to face allegations of GBV without missing time from their sport. For example, not only do student-athletes often remain on their team, but they also continue to receive their scholarship, housing, cost of attendance and other economic and pseudo-economic benefits. Moreover, often the victims/survivors in these cases dropout or transfer, especially if their name becomes public, as Erica Kinsman's did (Dick & Ziering, 2016; Author #3, 2022). Taken together, these results demonstrate the organization's assignment of value to the accused as compared to the

victim/survivor. Winston continues to play in the NFL and amass tremendous wealth, whereas Kinsman, with no support from Florida State University, dropped out.

Overwhelmingly our analysis has revealed that there are few if any significant consequences for acts of GBV in SportsWorld. However, GBV in SportsWorld is shaped by many other factors including the type of sport played and whether the athlete, coach or staff member is at the collegiate and/or professional level of play. Most importantly, as our analysis reveals, GBV persists in SportsWorld and clusters in certain sports not so much because the athletes and coaches in those sports are more prone to violence, but because the foundational structure of collegiate and professional sports is economic value. In this model, athletes, coaches and staff who are contributing to the success of the team or franchise— in perception or in reality— will be shielded from accusations and consequences for their behavior even when those accusations involve significant violence and/or when the criminal legal system has levied charges and even a conviction. And, the relatively high number of serial abusers is a further indication of the unbelievability of or organizational resistance to believe victims/survivors (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023) and the devaluing of their lives and experiences.

Limitations and Future Direction

While this paper sheds light on the lack of accountability by organizations in SportsWorld, one limitation is that the database does not contain any distinct quantitative measure of value at the individual level, for example, number of games played, points scored, All-Star game appearances, championships won, and so forth. To advance this argument, researchers and those who manage the database should consider various ways to assign value to individuals in the database. We recommend following the lead of (Author #1, 2020).

In addition, the database does not include an exhaustive list of all cases/perpetrators. The data analyzed for this paper is a snapshot of the cases which includes 316 individuals and over 420 instances of GBV that were in the database as of October 2023. Due to the fact that the database is not static and is currently changing such that new cases are being added on an ongoing basis, the data presented in this paper is not a representative sample of all athletes, coaches, trainers, or athletic staff members who perpetrated GBV. However, researchers who maintain the University of Delaware's Gender-Based Violence in Sport database work to provide updates and maintain the database in a timely manner.

One of the major outcomes we explored in this paper includes the organizational response and the legal outcomes for perpetrators of GBV in SportsWorld. While the database captures whether a perpetrator was suspended, released, fired, investigated, or had no action taken by their organization, the length of time they were suspended is not included nor is there any indication if a suspension is with or without pay or other benefits. More so, the database currently does not track if there are other admonishments such as permanent records in a personnel or athlete file to track repeat allegations. Future research includes expanding the study to consider the length of the suspension in days, weeks and years which will allow for further analysis to determine if the duration of their suspension varies by a perpetrators' race, gender, status, organizational affiliation and/or value. Additionally, future research will explore the legal outcomes (e.g. charged and if charged were they convicted) for perpetrators of GBV in SportsWorld. As of now, the conviction variable is dichotomous (e.g. yes or no). Future research directions include coding the conviction and sentencing outcomes quantitatively which will create opportunities for more sophisticated statistical modeling.

Finally, as the data in the University of Delaware's Gender-Based Violence in Sport database revealed, GBV in sports is not randomly distributed, it is both gendered and raced, just as it is in the larger society. Despite the fact that there are some significant racial differences across leagues, the database doesn't currently contain measures of athlete, coach or staff value at the individual level. We can speculate, based on prior research findings (Author #5, 2010b) that a player's individual value or worth likely intersects with race in ways that shape consequences. We anticipate that one day the Gender-Based Violence in Sports database will contain this type of information to allow for this important analysis.

Conclusions

Journalists and scholars have long been critical of SportsWorld as an institution that, like other social institutions, is not simply entertainment, fun and games (Coakley, 2021; Dunning, 1990). The cases analyzed in the University of Delaware's Gender-Based Violence in Sport database demonstrates a dark underbelly in SportsWorld that includes rampant GBV. Further, our analysis revealed that despite league personal conduct and campus misconduct policies, the vast majority of athletes, coaches, and staff who perpetrated GBV faced minimal sanctions and were allowed to continue playing or working *even if they were convicted*. Our analysis confirms the findings of Sailofsky (2022), that there was no evidence of lasting impact on a player or coach's reputation, as not only did they continue to work, but many perpetrators gained enormous financial rewards for their work on the field, ice, or court despite their abusive behaviors. Additionally, the analysis of the cases in the database presented in this paper confirms the findings of Sailofsky (2023) that the decision to retain an athlete or hire him after he has been released, are rooted in his perceived value to the team. For example, Deshaun Watson was awarded a \$250 million

dollar guaranteed salary *after* being accused of sexual assault by over twenty women, serving a suspension of 11 weeks and being fined \$5 million by the league, and paying \$30-50 million dollars to settle civil lawsuits brought by the victims/survivors.

In conclusion, we return to the argument that opens this paper: what is a girl worth? Through the analysis of the cases in the database and both journalistic accounts and academic research, we have demonstrated that her worth is less than the perceived value of the athlete, coach or staff member who harmed her. As we and others have well-documented (Author #3 & 5, 2019; Freyd & Birrell, 2013) those who accuse an athlete, coach or staff member are often not believed (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023), are often times ignored, their accusations are rarely if ever investigated, and as in cases like that of Larry Nassar, Robert Anderson, and Jerry Sandusky (Guiora, 2020; Kropp, 2014; Moushey & Dvorchak, 2012), the abuse continues, unchecked, often for decades as dozens if not hundreds of athletes continue to be abused. Not only are actors in SportsWorld unwilling to impose any meaningful sanctions on those accused of GBV, their (in)actions signal the perceived value of the accused by allowing him to continue to compete or work and often be rewarded with lucrative contracts after the accusations are settled.

Inspired by the victim statement from Rachael Denhollander in the Larry Nassar case (Denhollander, 2019), we encourage fans and those in the SportsWorld to ask themselves, “How much is a young girl’s life worth?” Is their pain worth it to continue to root for your favorite team’s quarterback when he’s been accused of assaulting 26 women? Is it worth supporting institutions that ignore women’s reports of assault? Is it worth backing institutions that value a dollar over bodily autonomy? What is a girl worth?

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